

# **Islamic Perspective**

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## **Human Rights: Two Paradoxes**

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### **Abstract**

Human rights are defined and clarified internationally by member states of the United Nations, regional bodies and in most states' constitutions. Therefore, it might be expected that together these are the sources of peoples' understanding of the deep and profound significance of human rights. A paradox, I argue, is that the media play a bigger role in peoples' understanding of human rights. A second paradox is that we all live, respect, and nurture human rights in very small places, such as our communities, and in our relationships, but these places and relationships are often not pluralistic and diverse, which is at odds with the fundamental principle of human rights.

**Keywords:** Human Rights, US, Equality, Pluralism, Diversity

### **Introduction**

The premise of all the Human Rights Treaties, the International Labour Organizations' Conventions, and the Rome Statute, and the Kyoto Protocol, as well as regional human rights treaties, such as the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, is that human rights are universal (or apply to all peoples within a region.) For example the Human Rights Declaration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN uniquely highlights the Right to Peace.<sup>1</sup> The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Banjul Charter) emphasizes that political and civil rights are intimately connected with economic, social and cultural rights,<sup>2</sup> while the Organization of American States Convention on Human Rights ("Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica") emphasizes civil and political rights.<sup>3</sup> At the state level, most

constitutions spell out human rights, such as housing, education, social security, nondiscrimination, environmental protections, and the right to health care.<sup>4</sup>

Treaties (whether they are called treaties, conventions or declarations) are based on the premise that all ratifying states will uphold treaty provisions and pass enabling legislation. Some states refuse to do so, on the grounds of sovereignty. The United States consistently refuses to unconditionally ratify any human rights treaty, labor convention, or the Rome Statute, and the Kyoto Protocol. The U.S. contends that it has sovereignty in such matters. (Although, to be sure, the U.S. does not hesitate to ratify trade treaties!) A consequence is that when the U.S. government proclaims there is a human rights violation, it never admits that this violation is occurring in the U.S., but elsewhere. Moreover, Americans have only a vague idea what human rights are. That is, most Americans do not believe that hunger, homelessness, abuse of children, racism, and so forth, are human rights violations, but instead social problems. To give a balanced picture, it is fair to point out that the U.S. has laws that protect children, ban discrimination, and has laws and programs that advance the rights and wellbeing of the elderly. Besides, American nonprofits provide services to those in need, somewhat akin to what *Sharia* laws and customs require.

## Two Paradoxes: (1) The Media

I would like to make two assertions, both paradoxical. First, respect for the rights of *distant others* may be less a consequence of international treaties, conventions and declarations, and more a consequence of watching and listening to the media. For example, *Al Jazeera's* coverage of the military's heavy-handed treatment of slum dwellers in Brazil and the likely horrific environmental consequences were President Obama to approve construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Human rights "footprints" are all over these stories..

Now I do know that *Al Jazeera - English* has a human rights perspective (It even rolls out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a public service announcement!) Besides that, *Al Jazeera* always takes the perspective of the underdog, the exploited, the disempowered. It celebrates the cultures, languages, and religions of peoples everywhere. Other media (the BBC and National Public Radio) present stories that encourage listeners or viewers to be empathetic to victims of exploitation, and to highlight cultural differences, but to a far lesser extent than *Al Jazeera* does. The point here is that international treaties, conventions and declarations are less effective than the media in conveying the principles of nondiscrimination, the rights of the child, the prohibition of torture, the rights of

refugees, and so forth. The media bring suffering and exploitation to consciousness, and clarify differences in culture and customs.

But what is the role of international treaties, conventions, and declarations? Let me very briefly summarize the origin of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since it is the platform and axiomatic premise for all international human rights agreements. It was drafted soon after the United Nations was founded, in response to the horrific acts of Nazi Germany. Altogether, about 16,315,000 people were killed (many cremated), including Jews, Roma, Poles, disabled, and Soviet citizens. In the aftermath and with defeat of the Nazis, countries united to form the United Nations, and its Charter was approved 26 June 1945. One of its immediate tasks was to formalize human rights. Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the members of the small committee charged with drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>5</sup> It was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 by a vote of 48 in favor, 0 against, with eight abstentions (Soviet Union, Ukrainian SSR, Byelorussian SSR, People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, People's Republic of Poland, Union of South Africa, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

The UDHR ambitiously lays out universal individual rights, and while it does highlight civil & political rights, it also includes social and economic rights (such as right to social security and an adequate living standard), responsibilities to community, and the right to participate in the cultural life of one's community. Its Preamble highlights "the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family," and "[that man] may have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression."

Thus, this remarkable document not only affirms human dignity, equality and universal rights, it includes the right to rebel. Rebellion, as we know from Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, is complex owing to the intricate relationship between politics and religion.<sup>6</sup> But there is probably little question that what inspired civil disobedience and rebellion in these countries was not the UDHR but widespread powerlessness. The same could be said for anti-imperialist rebellions, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the civil rights movement in the U.S. All these are born on the ground – as People Power – in cafes, college campuses, in churches and mosques, now on twitter and cell phones. None probably evoked human rights. Instead, they grow out of collective grievances, widely shared: talk, talk, talk! The media has played no small role in these rebellions. They are broadcast around the world – by the media, twitter, YouTube, facebook. This brings us to our second paradox.

## Two Paradoxes: (2) Small Places

If the media bring to conscience the human rights of people thousands of miles away, how do we truly know that other people – Indonesians, Bolivians, Tibetans, Kenyans, Scots, Greeks, North Koreans, Chinese, South Koreans, Tunisians, Pakistanis, *indeed all humans* – are our equals and deserve the same rights as we do? This is a complicated question, but let me first start out by saying that there is considerable evidence that citizens of the great imperial powers of England, France, and Spain did not recognize the equality of people living in their colonies. White Americans did not recognize the equality of black slaves and indigenous peoples. *Equality is a new idea.* Globalization has helped to push the *Equality Paradigm* into peoples' consciousness. So have responsible global media.

Here we return to Eleanor Roosevelt. Ten years after she participated in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she delivered a speech to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in which she stated:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.<sup>7</sup>

This is a remarkable statement made by someone who helped to draft the UDHR, which is universal, for all people everywhere, and, indeed global. The truth of her “small places” insight lies in the intimacy it implies, and the fact that our deep understanding of humanity lies not in abstractions but instead our individual and collective experiences with human contact, human relations, and human communications.

The idea however, must rest on the assumption that these “small places” – neighborhoods, schools, colleges, factories, farms, and offices – are themselves diverse. That is, for example, people living in a white, affluent neighborhood will not learn what it is to be homeless, jobless, and hungry. Nor will they learn anything about Vietnamese, Burmese, Mexican, or African American culture. Human differences must be recognized just as universal humanity must be recognized.

It is useful to draw from the writings of philosopher Hannah Arendt in this regard.<sup>8</sup> She contends that cultural borders are both the spice of human relations and

the spur for ethicality in those relations. Cross-border exchanges for Arendt are the very source of human liberation, freeing humans to be both unique and different. She writes: Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”<sup>9</sup> Yes, it is no doubt the case that human rights are nourished in “small places,” as Eleanor Roosevelt maintained, but I contend that while these small places may foster ethicality, empathy, and reciprocity, these small places need to be diverse and pluralistic.

## **Intellectual Growth and Experiential Learning**

It’s the case that my resolve to better understand these intellectual puzzles played a role in my founding an NGO in February 2009: “The Human Rights Center of Chapel Hill & Carrboro.”<sup>10</sup> I bought an apartment in an impoverished community, home to undocumented workers and their families, and also home to many Burmese refugees and some African Americans. This would provide my students with the opportunity to learn the significance of why equality and dignity matter and why they matter deeply and profoundly. I also wanted them to not only draw from the wisdom of the Hannah Arendt that pluralism is the spur for ethicality, but to experience and practice this in a very small place, as Eleanor Roosevelt advocated.

It is also the case that the intellectual substance of the course on human rights I had been teaching was enriched for students as a result of their immersion in programs at the Center and through casual interaction with residents of the apartment complex. It is one thing to read the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and it is quite another to fully and deeply comprehend that everyone has “the right to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”<sup>11</sup>

It is important to understand where many American college students are “coming from.” Having grown up in affluent households in predominately white neighborhoods, students often reveal “class-ist” and even racist attitudes, which they believe are a consequence of their parents and other adult relatives were successful owing to their hard work and discipline, whereas people who live in ghettos or barrios are lazy and undeserving. Horrific inequalities in the U.S. are not only egregiously unfair; they also lead to condescension owing to great gaps in income between whites and minorities. At least subtly, classes on human rights and experiential learning at the Center provide immersion in not only equality but the rich textures of difference. To paraphrase a lead line of Al Jazaeera, “we know the similarities and we know

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the differences.” My students know the similarities, but they have also learned the differences. For the most part Hispanic youth are better football players than my students, and their dads better mechanics than my students’ dads. As trivial as this might appear, it is the beginning of appreciating the “differences” while recognizing similarities, if not equalities.

### Note

1. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Human Rights Declaration (19 November 2012).
2. African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Banjul Charter, 21 October, 1986).
3. Organization of American States. American Convention on Human Rights (18 July 1978)
4. Most constitutions can be found at University of Richmond School of Law, Constitution Finder: <http://confinder.richmond.edu/>. The U.S. Constitution is critically examined and compared with many other constitutions in Blau and Moncada, *Justice in the United States*
5. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948)
6. Khosrokhavar, *The New Revolutions that Shook the World*
7. Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1958. Speech given at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, United Nations, New York, March 27, 1958
8. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. pp 22-78 and 248-326.
9. *Ibid*, p. 8.
10. <http://www.humanrightscities.org>
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## **Hadith on Predestination An Evaluation and Reinterpretation**

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### **Abstract**

Most of the Muslim scholars and majority of Muslim masses stand confused over the question of predestination of human life and its end-result. The most predominant view of prefixed human destiny is that man is bound to follow the prewritten details of his life; and he does not actually have freedom to think, choose, and act on his own accord. Such fatalistic idea of life is consequent upon some traditions recorded in the name of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) by almost all the famous Hadith scholars, including al-Bukhari and Muslim. Apparently these Hadiths seek to convey a message that the life-span, sustenance, deeds, the position of being rewarded or condemned in the life hereafter are prefixed even before man's birth. Hadith commentators have tried to remove the confusion over the concept of predestination. Yet, the confusion remains in place. It seems the Hadith commentators who believe in the sanctity of the Hadith words have ultimately further endorsed the notion of fatalism. Possibly, if the Hadith wording is thoroughly investigated and tested against some highly reliable sources, the Qur'an, the well-known teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), and the sound reasoning, the current confusion may be removed. This paper represents a humble attempt to make authentic enquiry into the reliability of the main traditions on predestination, on the one hand, and reinterpret them so as to bring a harmony between the idea of examination of man on the earth and that of predestination. The purpose of this paper is not to discredit the works of Hadith scholars but to rectify the probable faults in their recording of Hadith.

**Keywords:** Hadith, Predestination, Reinterpretation, Al-Bukhari, Muslim.

## Introduction

Hadith works based on thematic classification of traditions such as al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, Muslim's *Sahih*, al-Tirmidhi's *Sunan*, Abu Da'ud's *Sunan*, al-Nasa'i's *Sunan*, and Ibn Majah's *Sunan* etc have included a chapter on predestination (*kitab al-qadar*). The commentators of hadiths recorded in this chapter extend a commentary which seems to be somewhat confusing, sending no unequivocal message on the concept of predestination of human life. The present article represents a humble attempt to evaluate the well-known traditions on the fore-written human destiny, on the one hand, and reinterpret them in a logical manner, on the other. The text of Hadiths on predestination has been reexamined by using three main criteria, the Qur'an, the highly authentic traditions, and sound reasoning. In the discussion the traditions quoted are basically in the words of al-Bukhari or Muslim. It is because others have recorded the same traditions with slight different wording.

## Prefixing Man's Destiny in the Mother's Womb Itself

'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud quotes the Prophet (s.a.w.) as having said: "Verily, one of you is gathered in the womb of his mother for forty days, then in the form of 'alaqah (leech) for the same period, and thereafter in the form of *mudghah* (chewed lump) for the same period. And then Allah sends an angel who is commanded to fix four things: 1) his sustenance, 2) his life span, and 3) his position as condemned or rewarded. Thereafter the spirit is breathed into him. By God, one of you---or a person---does the deed of those who are destined for the hell; when the distance between him and the hell is only an arm's length, the book overtakes him due to which he does the deed of those who are destined for the paradise and enters it. Likewise, a person does the deed of the people of the paradise until there remains the distance of only an arm's length between him and the paradise, the book overtakes him hence he does the deed of the people of the hell because of which he enters it".<sup>1</sup>

The chain through which this tradition has been narrated is this: Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik (d.227 A.H.) from Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj (d.160 A.H.) from Sulayman ibn Mihran al-A'mash (d.147 A.H.) from Zayd ibn Wahb (d.96 A.H.) from 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud (d.32 A.H.) from the Prophet (s.a.w.). All the four reporters (Hisham, Shu'bah, Sulayman and Zayd) after the Companion 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud are known as *thiqah thabit* (highly reliable), *thiqah hafiz mutqin* (perfectly authentic), *thiqah hafiz* (highly authentic), and *thiqah jalil* (respectably authentic) respectively.<sup>2</sup> This particular chain meets excellently the three main criteria, continuity (*ittisal*), integrity (*al-'adl*), and retentive memory (*al-dabt*). It is now to be seen whether the

text of this report fulfills the other two criteria, non-anomaly (*'adm al-shudhudh*) and non-deficiency (*ghayr al- 'illah*). It is to be born in mind that out of these five criteria of authentication of traditions developed by great hadith scholars the first three are applied to the chain and the last two mainly to the text. There is no denying the fact that the last two criteria are also, at times, applicable to the chain.

## **Evaluation and Reinterpretation**

The opening statement in the above report implies duration of the first three stages of human fetus in the womb of mother. The first stage, which has been mentioned anonymously in the report, is apparently *nutfah* as specified by the *Qur'an* (23:13). It lasts forty (40) days. The subsequent two stages, *'alaqah* and *mudghah* hold on for the same period each. The total period for the first three stages of embryo is thus one hundred twenty days i.e. seventeen (17) weeks. Information about embryological development is no longer a subject of speculation. Modern scientific discoveries in the field of Genetic Engineering have long provided all the minute details of embryonic and fetal stages. According to Genetic Engineering, the embryonic period enters the fetal period after two weeks. The above three stages as mentioned in the report constitute the embryonic period. If the modern scientific terms are used to describe the three embryonic stages, they are zygote (*nutfah*), blastocyst (*'alaqah*), and differentiation (*mudghah*). A brief description of the three stages may further reveal the matter. When sperm is deposited in the vagina, it travels through the cervix and into the fallopian tubes. A single sperm penetrates the mother's egg cell, and the resulting cell is called zygote (*nutfah*). The zygote spends the next few days traveling down the fallopian tube and divides to form a ball of cells, which continue dividing further. As a result, there forms an inner group of cells with an outer shell. This stage is called blastocyst (*'alaqah*). The blastocyst reaches the uterus (*rahim*) at roughly the fifth day, and implants into the uterine wall on about the day six. It adheres tightly to the endometrium (lining of the uterus), where it receives nourishment through the mother's bloodstream. The cells of the embryo now multiply and begin to take on specific functions. This process is called differentiation (*mudghah*), which produces the varied cell types that make up a human being. This stage is very critical stage of the human formation.<sup>3</sup> The scientific discovery puts the duration of the embryonic period as roughly two weeks, whereas the above report calculates it seventeen weeks. It is strange. How to affect compromise between the two claims?

One may easily raise doubt over the equivalence of scientific terms for the embryonic stages (zygote, blastocyst, and differentiation) to the terms used in the hadith (*nutfah*, *'alaqah* and *mudghah*). It may be suggested here that the terms used in the report represent the fetal period and not the embryonic period. The clear solution to this problem is available in the Qur'an.

The relevant ayat read: "*Indeed, We created man from quintessence of clay; then We placed him as nutfah in a firmly fixed place of rest (fallopian tube); then We made nutfah into 'alaqah; then of that 'alaqah We made mulghah; then We made out of mulghah bones ('izam) and clothed the bones with flesh (lahm); then We developed out of it a new creation (khalq akhar): hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best to create.*" (23:13-14)

From this Qur'anic statement, one may identify altogether six stages, three embryonic (*nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudghah*) and three fetal (*'izam*, *lahm* and *khalq akhar*). Semantically, *nutfah* refers to the seminal fluid, which when deposited in the fallopian tubes causes conception. *'Alaqah* literally signifies leech. This naming of the second embryonic stage is remarkable. At this stage the embryo really adheres tightly to the uterine wall just like leech sticks to a relevant surface. Scientifically, embryonic stage of this nature is called blastocyst, which, as mentioned earlier, adheres to the uterine wall, hanging from there. *Mulghah* denotes chewed form of a thing. Biologically, it is this stage of the embryo that produces varied cell types, which make up a human being. The Qur'anic statement (23:13-14) is in total conformity with what the modern biology says. The literal meaning of the embryonic terms, as stated in the Qur'an, also supports the scientific accuracy on the matter. To consider *nutfah*, *'alaqah* and *mulghah* as the stages of the fetal period, and not of the embryonic period is to discredit the Qur'anic statement.

Prof. Keith Moor, one of the pioneers of the IVF babies, admits the miraculous nature of the above Qur'anic statement. According to him, the stages of *'alaqah* and *mudghah* are so minute that they are completely invisible to human eyes; and that they can be observed only through microscope. He declares that these stages form the embryonic period. He is of the view that the Prophet (s.a.w.) or anyone else could not have made this Qur'anic statement (23:13-14) because of the non-availability of microscope or any other such tool. Microscope was developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, roughly a thousand years after the Qur'an's revelation. He acknowledges that the Qur'anic description of the embryonic stages is exactly the same as the modern scientific discovery says.<sup>4</sup> Keeping the Qur'anic statement and the scientific discovery in view, one may feel uncomfortable about the statement in the above report of al-Bukhari.

Most probably, one or the other reporter (not 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, a Companion) erred (*wahima*) in reporting the duration. Ya'qub ibn Sufyan (d.277 A.H.) was one of the most reliable authorities in hadith (*thiqah hafiz*).<sup>5</sup> He comments on the position of Zayd ibn Wahb (d.96 A.H.), the reporter who narrates the above report from 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, in these words: "There are many a deficiency in his reports" (*fi hadithihi khalal kathir*).<sup>6</sup> Al-Dhahbi (d.748 A.H.) protests this observation of Ya'qub and says: "He is not right".<sup>7</sup> Ibn Hajar (d.852 A.H.) has echoed the same sentiment.<sup>8</sup> But neither al-Dhahbi nor Ibn Hajar has advanced any argument to rebut Ya'qub's observation about Zayd ibn Wahb. This discussion is not to discredit the authentic position of Zayd ibn Wahb, but to show the possibility of mishandling of his reports by others. This message may be derived from the above observation. It seems that the mention of embryonic period as spreading over 17 weeks is a later insertion in the *hadith*. It, then, refers to a defect (*'illah*) in the above report hence the report is defective (*ma'lul*).

Muslim (d.271 A.H.) has recorded a tradition on the same subject on the authority of Hudhayfah ibn Asid al-Ghifari (d.42 A.H.): "I heard the Prophet (s.a.w.) to have said: Forty two days after the position of nutfah (zygote), Allah entrusts to it an angel who fashions it and makes its ears, eyes, skin, flesh and bones. He, then, asks Allah whether male or female. He writes what Allah determines. He, then, asks about its lifespan. He writes what Allah decrees. He, then, asks about its sustenance. He writes what Allah decides. The angel, then, goes out with the document in his hand. He does not add to what he was commanded nor he excludes anything from there".<sup>9</sup>

This tradition is no less significant than the one recorded by al-Bukhari. This is an authentic report. In one way, from the angel of chain (*sanad*), this has an edge over al-Bukhari's. In Muslim's chain there are two Companions, 'Amir ibn Wathilah and Hudhayfah ibn Asid. It is the former who is reporting from the latter. All the other reporters after 'Amir ibn Wathilah are reliable sources. This equally authentic report contradicts al-Bukhari's. As we have seen above al-Bukhari's report puts the point of human destiny after 17 weeks, whereas Muslim's only after 6 weeks. Muslim's tradition is in consonance with the above shown scientific fact. In such case of conflict between two equally reliable traditions, only one of them is to be accepted at the cost of the other. Rationally speaking, Muslim's report emerges stronger than al-Bukhari's. The former does not have any internal defect (*'illah*) and it is in agreement with the modern findings in the field of Genetic Engineering. Consequently, al-Bukhari's report appears to be strange (*shadhdh*) because it is in conflict with comparatively more reliable report of Muslim.

The second statement in the al-Bukhari's tradition is about the determination of four things of man. But only three things are specifically mentioned, the fourth one is missing from the report. The stated three things are his sustenance, his lifespan, and his position as rewarded or condemned. Ibn Hajar agrees that the mention of "deed" is missing from the list of four items.<sup>10</sup> He identifies the fourth item from two other reports of al-Bukhari, one from the chapter on Beginning of Creation (Bad'u al-Khalq) and the other from that on Unity of God (al-Tawhid). But there is once again an error in the report under "Beginning of Creation". One item (lifespan) is missing there. It mentions only three: deed, sustenance and the rewarded or the condemned.<sup>11</sup> The report under "Unity of God" certainly mentions all the four items.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, the fourth item is known from other reports but what about the position of the report in view? Does it not, then, become defective (*mu'allal*) and strange (*shadhdh*)? Badr al-Din al-'Ayni (d.855 A.H.) suggests that the item "deed" was not mentioned in the report as quoted from al-Bukhari's *kitab al-qadar* due to it being well-known.<sup>13</sup> One may retort back: Are the two items (sustenance and lifespan) out of the three items already mentioned in the report concerned not well known? Certainly, they are as well known as the unmentioned "deed". Al-'Ayni's argument does not go down well. It seems Ibn Hajar and al-'Ayni are both aware of this particular defect of al-Bukhari's report but they do not want to declare it strange (*shadhdh*) hence lame justification. Al-Bukhari has recorded the same report in four places, *kitab bad'u al-khalq*, *kitab ahadith al-anbiya'*, *kitab al-qadar*, and *kitab al-tawhid*. Out of these four reports only two (*kitab ahadith al-anbiya'* and *kitab al-tawhid*) mention all the four items, while the other two (*kitab bad'u al-khalq* and *kitab al-qadar*) state only three items. This situation is certainly that of strangeness (*shudhudh*).

There is a solution to this problem. In the above tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.), four words have been mentioned: (1) life, (2) sustenance, (3) rewarded, (4) condemned. The report says there are four items fixed in the mother's womb. And there are these four items. Hadith commentators are of the view that the third and the fourth items constitute only one item, not two. Is it correct? The reason for considering these last two items as one is the word "or" (aw). But if the approach of Ibn Hajar as quoted above is taken seriously that one or the other reporter erred in reporting the four items, the error might be in using the word "or" (aw) instead of "and" (wa). Most probably, some reporter knowingly or unknowingly replaced the word "and" (wa) with the word "or" (aw). With the word "and" (wa), the problem stands satisfactorily resolved. This suggestion is not mere wishful speculation; it is supported by other traditions recorded by both al-Bukhari and Muslim. According to

one such tradition, everyone after his/her death will be shown his/her reserved places in both the hell and the paradise with a view to justifying his/her earning a place either in the hell or in the paradise as a result of his/her deeds in the worldly life.<sup>14</sup>

The third statement of al-Bukhari's report in view explains that a person does evil deeds (of the people of hell) throughout his life but shortly before his death the destiny (*al-kitab*) overtakes him and begins doing good deeds (of the people of paradise) hence deserves the entry into the paradise; and that a person does good deeds throughout his life but shortly before his end the destiny overtakes him and he commits all evil deeds hence he is thrown into the hell fire. There seems to be a very apparent contradiction between this component of the report and the second one as mentioned above. According to the second statement there is only one destiny (*al-kitab*) prepared by the angel, which comprises four items, deed, sustenance, lifespan and the end result. This determination of four things suffice to conclude that man is bound to act in accordance with what was written while he was still in his embryonic or fetal stage of life. The third statement refers very clearly to one more destiny (*al-kitab*) made by the man himself. It is on the basis of this freedom that he chooses to act according to his preference. The fore-written destiny overtakes him at a later stage of his life and the person concerned starts doing deeds accordingly. No commentator of al-Bukhari seems to have realized this incongruity in the report. The first part of the tradition spells out about the fore-written detailed destiny, and the last part brings in the mention of the man-made destiny, which is ultimately dominated by the natural destiny. Here arises a very natural question: How did it become possible for man to act on his own for a considerable period of time in his life, and not in accordance with his fore-written destiny? Does the fore-written destiny take effect only at the last stage of man's life?

The concept of the natural destiny of man overtaking the man sends out a frightening message that the man stands coerced at the hands of unseen hands. It certainly hardly fits into the Qur'anic framework of man's position. The man is the in-charge of the earth (*khalifah*); he has been placed in a situation of test; and he will be rewarded or punished in accordance with his good or bad deeds: (1) "*Behold, your Lord said to the angels: I will create the inheritor of the earth.*" (2:30), (2) "*It is He who has made you the inheritors of the earth: He has raised you in ranks, some above others, so that He may try you by means of what He has bestowed upon you.*" (6:165), (3) "*If Allah had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community but [His plan is] to test you in what He has given you.*" (5:48), (4) "*Behold, We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put men to test—as to which of them are best in conduct.*" (18:7), (5) "*He who has created death as well as life, so*

*that He might put you to test—as to which of you is best in conduct.”* (67:2). Positions of *khilafah* and *ibtila'* require, to the extent of necessity, freedom of thought, choice and act. The end result is to be based on his performance. If the end result is fore-written, the ideas of *khilafah* and *ibtila'* stand ridiculed.

It is said that al-Bukhari's report does not represent predetermination of man's destiny in all its detail, but it reflects Allah's omniscience (all-knowing).<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly, Allah is omniscient; nothing is hidden from Him; the present, the past and the future are all in His eternal knowledge. The *Qur'an* has categorically mentioned it: “*And that Allah encompasses everything with His knowledge*” (65:12). The above report in view does not make indication at all to the knowledge of God. It rather uses the word ‘*kitabah*’ (writing). Did the Arabs of the *Qur'an*'s time use, even though metonymically, the word ‘writing’ in the sense of knowing? Certainly not. If the report in view said that Allah knew everything about the future of the man yet to be born, there was no problem in it. But the report describes the four items of man's life in a way that it looks like predetermination of human destiny, with man enjoying no freedom at all.

Ibn Hajar shares his research on the nature of al-Bukhari's report in view. According to him, this tradition has not been reported merely on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud but there are other companions like ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar, Abu Hurayrah, Anas ibn Malik, Hudhayfah ibn Asid etc. He managed to identify around forty different chains (*isnad*) through which this report has been reported. He also expressed his confidence that he could lay his hands on more sources of this tradition, if he went deeper in his search.<sup>16</sup>

He remains short of declaring the tradition in view as *mutawatir* (recurrent), but what he says leads ultimately to that conclusion. *Hadith Mutawatir* has two main classifications: literal (*lafzi*) and conceptual (*ma 'nawi*).<sup>17</sup> The report in view does not fall under the category of literal recurrence (*tawatur lafzi*). The reporting in all the available reports is not literally the same. Few examples may suffice to substantiate this conclusion. Al-Bukhari himself has recorded seven traditions on the same subject matter i.e. predetermination of human destiny.<sup>18</sup> Out of these seven reports four have been narrated on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud, and the rest three on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. The reports of ‘Abd Allah contain two versions. Two of them mention determination of four items but only three are counted therein. The narration of Anas has another variation. It mentions the determination of gender (male or female) in place of “deed”. Muslim has recorded around eight chains for the same tradition, two on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud, five on that of Hudhayfah ibn Asid, and one on that of Anas ibn Malik.<sup>19</sup> In the report of Ibn Mas‘ud the human

destiny is determined after one hundred twenty days pass over various embryonic stages, whereas according to the report through Hudhayfah ibn Asid it takes place only after forty, or forty two, or forty five days. The predetermined items in the reports on the authority of Hudhayfah vary from one another. In one version (Hadith No. 6667) the number of determined items are six, end result, gender, deed, effect, lifespan and sustenance. In another version (Hadith No. 6668) the determined items are only three: gender, lifespan, and sustenance. It is interesting to note that both these reports end with the statement: "There does not occur any addition or reduction in what was decided". Certainly, the two reports are contradictory to each other. In another version of Hudhayfah's report (Hadith No. 6670), the items determined are six: gender, physical nature (normal or abnormal), sustenance, lifespan, conduct, end-result (condemned or rewarded). Here in this report, one item (physical nature) is different. Does this situation refer to the unity in meaning or to the disunity in meaning? It is difficult to prove the continuity (*tawatur*) of al-Bukhari's report due to the variations in the other versions of the report. Logically, each report remains in the category of solitary (*ahad*) reports.

While interpreting al-Bukhari's report, neither al-Tibi, nor Ibn Hajar, nor al-'Ayni, nor al-Qastalani has talked about the implication of its message on one's faith. Most probably, they avoided saying anything on this matter because they asserted their view in their respective introductory notes to their commentary of al-Bukhari's *kitab al-qadar*. They have emphatically declared that neither jabarites nor qadarites are right in their belief; and that only the stand of *ahl-sunnah* is correct. Jabarites see the man's life absolutely predetermined. They claim that man enjoys no freedom at all; what he does is pre-ordained. Qadarites attribute to man freedom of thought, choice and act. They do not agree to the idea of fore-written destiny of man. *Ahl-Sunnah* find themselves in the middle path, avoiding both the extremes. They insist that there is a fore-written destiny of man but it does not adversely affect man's freedom to choose and act. It is not proper to be engaged here in the discussion as to which group holds the most valid attitude.

It has to be accepted that al-Bukhari's report in view goes against both *ahl-sunnah* and qadarites. It rather gives a shot in the arm of those with the fatalistic approach towards life. Some might suggest the total rejection of the report in view merely because it is replete with internal defects, on the one hand and it is in contrast with other more authentic versions of the report, making it strange (*shadhdh*). It is not reasonable. It seems appropriate to identify the errors in the report and rectify them in the light of all the available versions. A careful scrutiny may help scholars to recast the report. The suggested recast version of the tradition might be this:

“Forty two days after the stage of *nutfah*, Allah entrusts it to an angel who fashions it, and makes its ears, eyes, skin, bones and flesh. He, afterwards, in accordance with the command of Allah determines its gender (*dhakar* or *untha*), its lifespan (*ajal*), its deed (*‘amal*), its physical feature (*sawiyyun* or *ghayr sawiyy*), its sustenance (*rizq*), and its disposition (*shaqiyy* or *sa‘id*). By God, a person performs good deeds throughout his life, but at a time close to his life-end the destiny (*al-kitab*) overtakes him and he begins doing evil deeds until he dies hence he enters the hell. Likewise, a person does bad deeds throughout his life but shortly before the end of his life the destiny (*al-kitab*) overtakes him and he begins doing all that ultimately leads him to the paradise”.

This carefully remolded form of the tradition of *kitab al-qadar* stands in need of highly rational and universally acceptable interpretation.

*Nutfah* (zygote) refers to the beginning of conception. Roughly six weeks after conception the fetus undergoes rapid growth, and the baby’s main external features begin to take form. Eyes, ears, skin, bones and flesh etc. start growing at this stage. According to the modern scientific discovery in Genetic Engineering, the first six weeks of the fetus are very crucial; formation of human organs take place during this period.<sup>20</sup> It is, then, during this crucial period that Allah determines man’s destiny. The gender of the baby is determined. Whether it is male or female, it is decreed in the womb of mother. Physical features of the baby are also established in the fetal stages. If it is born handicapped, it is because it was formed like that during pregnancy.

Now it is to be understood how and in what form the *ajal* (lifespan), *rizq* (sustenance), *‘amal* (deed), and *shaqiyy* or *sa‘id* are conditioned. Human lifespan is governed by certain divinely decreed rules. According to them, man, at times, lives a long age and, at times, lives a very short life. Man has hardly any control over this dimension of his destiny. Yet, man has been granted certain privileges to prolong his life. Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.214 A.H.) records a tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.) on the authority of Rafi‘ ibn Makith: “Good deed expands life and charity work saves from tragic death”.<sup>21</sup> Al-Tirmidhi (d.97 A.H.) has recorded a tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.) on the authority of Sulayman: “Nothing but good deed extends the lifespan”.<sup>22</sup> *Rizq* (sustenance) may not necessarily mean fixed amount of livelihood. It may be taken as the area of interest, ability and propensity towards certain particular economic activities. That is why people have different abilities in the economic field. Some people are highly intelligent by birth, and some are mediocre. Thus the people earn their livelihood on the basis of their respective aptitude. One may not deny the role of man in his economic life. The amount of wealth may increase and, at times

may decrease. It is easy to understand. A person gets a job with specified salary. When his employer finds him hard working, very honest, regular, punctual, and more productive, he rewards him by affecting his promotion and increase in the salary. On the contrary if he finds the employee irregular, lazy and non-productive, he may either fire him or demotes him decreasing his salary. In the same way Allah may also increase or decrease the amount of sustenance of man keeping his performance in view. Once the Prophet (s.a.w.) prayed for his personal assistant, Anas ibn Malik: "O Allah! Increase him in wealth and children, and bless him for what you have already bestowed upon him".<sup>23</sup> The 'amal (deed) denotes mental, physical and moral abilities to think, to decide, to choose, and to act. That is why people differ from one another in their intellectual and physical abilities. The Prophet (s.a.w.) taught his people to pray to Allah in these words: "O Allah! I seek thy refuge from evil hearing, evil sight, evil speech, evil thought, and evil desire".<sup>24</sup> This advice of the Prophet (s.a.w.) conveys a message that man has a certain freedom in his choice of act, and in order to act rightly he seeks the help of Allah. Almost all the *hadith* works contain a chapter entitled "kitab al-Da 'waat" (Chapter on Invocation to God), which consists of a number of *ahadith* encouraging believers to seek Allah's help to abstain from evil deeds and to do good deeds. It substantiates the idea that man has freedom of thought and action to the extent that he can easily demonstrate his position as human being.

The concept of determination of *shaqiyy* or *sa'id* may not necessarily be in the sense of condemned or rewarded. *Shaqqa* literally means, according to al-Firozabadi, harshness (*shiddah*) and difficulty ('usr).<sup>25</sup> *Shaqiyy* is the one who is very hard and harsh in his natural disposition. Such person easily gets infuriated. He is short as well hot tempered. The term *shaqiyy al-qalb* signifies a person who is hard hearted. The word *sa'id* originally means happy. A person who is of happy temperament is *sa'id*. Such person meets and behaves with other smilingly and merrily. These two words may be deemed as the expression of man's natural temperament. *Shaqiyy* is hot tempered and *sa'id* is cool-minded. These two terms also refer to human behaviour. Abu Da'ud (d.75 A.H.) has recorded a tradition on the authority of Abu Hurayrah: "Verily, Allah has taken away from you the pre-Islamic criteria of superiority based on the ancestral pride. There are now only two people, believer who is God-conscious and transgressor who is hard-hearted".<sup>26</sup> It is evident from this tradition that the people stand divided into groups on the basis of their conduct. Those who fear Allah and submit to him are believers; and those who reject the message of Allah and do not stand in awe of Allah are transgressors. In the *hadith* the word *shaqiyy* has been used as opposite to *taqiyy* (God-conscious). *Shaqiyy*, therefore, will mean a person who out of his harshness rejects submission to Allah. These two categories of people

could be seen everywhere in every society. The notion that the two terms (*shaqiyy* and *sa'id*) refer to the predetermined position of man either as condemned or as rewarded runs counter to the *Qur'anic* declaration. In *surah Hud* (11) *ayah* 25-100 describe story of the people of Noah, '*Ad*, *Thamud*, people of Lot, people of *Madyan*, Egyptian Pharoah and his people. The conclusion of these stories has been given in 11: 101-109. Three statements in this concluding remark are noteworthy. The *ayah* 11:101 reads: "*It was not We who wronged them but they wronged their own souls...*", and the *ayah* 11: 105-106 reads: "*Among those are condemned (shaqiyy) and rewarded (sa'id). Now those who will have brought wretchedness upon themselves (al-ladhina shaqu) will be in the fire....*". These three *ayah* (11: 101, 105 & 106) hold the wrongdoers responsible for their ill fate. Their position as condemned and rewarded was determined only on the Day of Judgment. When Adam was sent down to the earth to begin his life, he was assured of the guidance from Allah in these words: "*There shall certainly come unto you guidance from Me: he who follows My guidance will not go astray (yadillu), and neither will he be unhappy (yashqa)*" (20:123). Here the unhappiness (*shaqawah*) is consequent upon rejection of the guidance hence the happiness (*sa'adah*) upon acceptance of the guidance.

The last part of the tradition in view speaks about the domination of the destiny (*al-kitab*) over man, due to which he will deserve either the paradise or the hell. Apparently, the tradition informs that a person known as pious will be forced by the destiny to perform evil deeds so as to justify his entry into the hell; and that a person known for his bad deeds will be coerced into acting righteously so as to let him enter the paradise. If the meaning of this statement is the denial of freedom to man, it will surely contrast with the divine attribute of justice. The corollary of Allah's justice is that man should be rewarded or condemned on the basis of his performance. Most probably, the destiny (*al-kitab*) signifies the general rules of guidance and misguidance, reward and punishment. The guidance or misguidance are both dependent, to the extent of necessity, upon man. It is the will of man, which takes initiative to accept or reject God's message. The *Qur'an* says: "*By it He causes many to stray and many He lead into the right path; but He causes not to stray but the iniquitous*" (2:26). The dominance of the destiny over the man means the human life is governed by the eternal divine rule of righteousness and evildoing. A person who performs good deeds may not necessarily be sincere in his approach. His good deeds might be all mere show hence the general impression about is that he is a pious man. His insincerity will not remain hidden from the eyes of the people around him for long. He will get exposed one or the other for his insincerity and hypocrisy. Ultimately, his insincerity will cause him to enter the hell. Human destiny reads that

the insincere person will be punished. A person who performs bad deeds may not necessarily be an insincere person. He might be sincere and God-fearing in his heart but the circumstances forced him to do all the things evil. That is why he appears as a man of hell. Since he is sincere and wish to do only good things, he will be helped Allah to give up his bad deeds and do only what is good. Thus, due to his sincerity and concern to do good the destiny will guide him how to fulfill his wish, and, then, good deeds will take him to the paradise.

### **Predestined Role of Man**

“A person asked the Prophet (s.a.w.) whether the people of paradise are recognized distinctly from those of the hell. When the Prophet (s.a.w.) replied in the affirmative, the questioner asked as to why, then, the actors should act. Upon this the Prophet (s.a.w.) answered: Everyone acts what he has been created for or what he has been facilitated for”<sup>27</sup>

The chain of this report is this: Adam ibn Abi Ayas (d.221 A.H.) from Shu‘bah (d.160 A.H.) from Yazid ibn Abi Yazid al-Rishk (d.130 A.H.) from Mutarrif ibn ‘Abd Allah (d.220 A.H.) from ‘Imran ibn Husayn (d.52 A.H.). All the narrators of this tradition are highly reliable.

### **Evaluation and Reinterpretation**

Ibn Hajar says that the question was about the angels’ or any one else, whom Allah has informed about the symptoms of the people of the paradise and those of the hell.<sup>28</sup> It is mere surmise with no substantial evidence to prove its accuracy. The learned commentator read this far-fetched idea under the impact of theological debate that was going on during his time between various groups of theologians. He claims from a group other than qadarite and jabarite. That is why he has to come up with an explanation, which surely contests the belief of others and substantiate the view of his own group. If one objectively looks at the question asked by the questioner, as quoted in the above report, one may not read what the author of *Fath al-Bari* deciphers. It seems the questioner wanted to know whether the people could be recognized on the basis of their acts as to their final fate. The answer given by the Prophet (s.a.w.) was in the affirmative. The Prophet (s.a.w.) meant to say that the people of the paradise look different from those of the hell on the basis of deeds. The second question asked by the questioner might not have been what al-Bukhari has recorded i.e. “Why should, then, the actors act?” The question recorded by Muslim

seems to be more pertinent and intelligible: “What should, then, be the act?” Al-Bukhari’s recorded question leads to one direction and Muslim’s to another one. According to the question recorded by the latter, the questioner wanted to know as to what kind of special deeds might make someone distinctly destined for the paradise. It is quite strange that Ibn Hajar does not find any difference between the question quoted by al-Bukhari and that by Muslim. He has read the same message in both of them. The Prophet’s (s.a.w.) answer to the second question has also become the subject of controversy between the version of the report recorded by al-Bukhari and that by Muslim. In al-Bukhari’s version the narrator is uncertain as to which word was used by the Prophet (s.a.w.). In Muslim’s version the narrator does not express any doubt. Muslim’s version is preferable to al-Bukhari’s because Muslim’s wording get referred to in al-Bukhari’s report.

When the Prophet (s.a.w.) said that everyone is facilitated towards his/her act, he actually explained the Qur’anic statements: (1) “*And He inspired it as to its wrong and its right*” (91:8); (2) “*So he who gives in charity and fears Allah, and testifies to the best, We will indeed make smooth for him the path to ease. But he who is greedy miser, and thinks himself self-sufficient, and gives lies to the best, We will indeed make smooth for him the path to misery*” (92:5-10). In these *ayaat* Allah vividly states that man has been equipped with the capability of doing either of the two categories of act, evil and good; and that the man’s preference is honored: if he wants to act rightly, he is helped further to continue in that cause; if he chooses to act what is evil, he finds the path smooth for him. Whether the right act or wrong one, it is man’s own choice. To claim that man is forced to act what is predetermined for him is to challenge the Qur’anic statements as quoted above.

Ibn Hajar has quoted in his commentary of this tradition the dialogue between Abu al-Aswad al-Dawliyy and ‘Imran ibn Husayn as recorded by Muslim. The latter asked the former how he viewed the people’s act and their effort in it; whether the thing has been predetermined and predestined or the people’s act represents their choice of acceptance or rejection of their prophets’ message. The former answered that the thing has already been predetermined. The latter, then, commented that it would be an injustice to man. Upon this the former got trembled with sheer horror and said that everything was the creation of Allah and is in His control; and that He would not be questioned for what He did but rather they would be questioned. The latter, then, expressed good wishes for the former and said that he did not mean what he asked but he was testing his understanding. Thereafter the latter narrated a tradition: “Two people from the tribe of Muzaynah came to the Prophet (s.a.w.) and said: The people make effort in their life. Is it what has already been predetermined

or the people's fate will be decided in future in accordance with their acceptance or rejection of their prophets' message. The Prophet (s.a.w.) answered that the thing has already been predestined and its confirmation is available in the Book of Allah".<sup>29</sup>

This report recorded by Muslim sends a message that the mission of all the prophets is meaningless. It did not play any role in guiding the people. Whether the people act rightly or wrongly it is as per the human destiny already written. This message is in conflict with the Qur'an. There are a number of *ayaat* that make it crystal clear that the prophets were raised one after another to show the man right path; and that the fate of man depends on his reaction to prophet's message. Few *ayaat* will suffice to substantiate the significance of the prophets' role in making human destiny:

- (1) "*Messengers were raised as the givers of the good news as well as the warners in order that mankind should have no plea against Allah after the coming of Messengers*" (4:165).
- (2) "*O mankind! Verily, there has come unto you the Messenger with the truth from your Lord. So believe in him, it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, then certainly to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth*" (4:170).
- (3) "*Who receives guidance receives it for his own benefit; who goes astray does so to his own loss*" (17:15).

These *ayaat* clearly show that the arrangement of sending the Messengers to the humanity was to teach them as to what was right and what was wrong; and that it is man's own choice which takes him either to the gain or to the loss.

In the above-mentioned dialogue, Abu al-Aswad is reported to have said: "Allah will not be asked but the people will be asked". This is true. But how will the people be questioned if they acted precisely in accordance with the predetermined destiny. They can be questioned only when they were given certain freedom to choose and act. In the absence of freedom, questioning the man and considering him responsible for his act is but injustice. The above report claims that two people from Muzaynah tribe asked the Prophet (s.a.w.) about the position of human act, whether it is predestined or the man holds freedom to choose from the path shown by Messengers. The way the question has been put forward demonstrates that it cannot be from the simple Arabs. The question is purely philosophical. Arabs of the time of the revelation were not theologians. It seems that certain people with vested interests thrust their own question into the mouth of innocent Arabs so as to give it credibility.

In the Muslim's report, as quoted above, the Prophet (s.a.w.) is said to have cited the *ayah*: "*And He inspired it as to its wrong and its right*" (91:8) as a confirmation of predetermined human destiny. It is unimaginable that the Prophet (s.a.w.) quoted this *ayah* to prove what it does not do. The *ayah* (91:8) tells us about the capability

of man to do freely both the good and the bad. This inborn ability of man is God-given.

It is noteworthy that the above report of Muslim is not available in any other sources of tradition including the other five books of Hadith literature. A solitary tradition, which is entirely in contrast with the Qur'an is unreliable.

## **Fate of Non-Muslims' Children**

The Prophet (s.a.w.) was asked about the fate of the disbelievers' children (who died while they were still innocent). The Prophet (s.a.w.) answered: "Allah knows what they might do".<sup>30</sup>

Al-Bukhari has recorded this tradition through two different chains: (1) Muhammad ibn Bashshar (d.252 A.H.) from Ghundur Muhammad ibn Ja'far (d.194 A.H.) from Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj (d.160 A.H.) from Abu Bishr Ja'far ibn Iyas (d.126 A.H.) from Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d.95 A.H.) from 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas (d.68 A.H.); and (2) Yahya ibn Bukayr (d.231 A.H.) from al-Layth ibn Sa'd (d.175 A.H.) from Yunus ibn Yazid (d.159 A.H.) from Muhammad ibn al-Shihab al-Zuhri (d.125 A.H.) from 'Ata' ibn Yazid (d.107 A.H.) from Abu Hurayrah (d.59 A.H.). All the narrators of these two chains are highly reliable.

## **Evaluation and Reinterpretation**

Al-Bukhari has recorded the above tradition also in *kitab al-jana'iz* through two slightly different chains. Ibn Hajar claims that the objective of al-Bukhari was to rebut the claim of Juhmites that Allah did not know the deeds of humans until they performed them. He further maintains that this tradition strengthens the stand of *ahl al-Sunnah* that Allah knows the nature of the non-existent act if performed.<sup>31</sup> Here once again it seems that the theological issue that was debated among Muslim theologians made its way in the tradition attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.).

One version of the above report says: "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: At the time of their creation, Allah knew what they were going to do". This gives rise to another debate. Certainly, Allah knew about the future of His creatures. To put the matter easy, let us name the creature as Mr. A. When Mr. A was created, Allah knew the nature of thoughts and acts Mr. A was going to perform in future until his death. Supposedly, Mr. A was expected to live a life of disbelief and ingratitude hence he was going to get his abode in the hell-fire. But Mr. A died even when he was hardly two years old. Thus he could not do what was in the destiny and what Allah knew.

Undoubtedly, the knowledge of Allah is absolutely perfect; there is no deficiency in His infinite knowledge and wisdom. If Mr. A did not live a full life and could not perform in accordance with the knowledge of Allah, it simply means that what Allah knew was not perfect. It is blasphemy to think about Allah the Almighty in this way. It is the theologians who made the matter very complicated. Unnecessarily, Muslim philosophers raised this kind of issues which merely confuse the simple mind. If Mr. A died in his innocent age, it was precisely in accordance with Allah's knowledge and plan. He knew that Mr. A would not live long and he would not get the opportunity to do good or bad. The children of non-Muslims are not to be held responsible for what their elders did. Their death in their childhood is to be considered as the death of innocents. It is hard to believe that the Prophet (s.a.w.) answered philosophically to a very simple question about the fate of the non-believers' children if they died at the innocent age.

In his nocturnal journey to the heaven (*mi'raj*) the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) saw Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the paradise along with the children including those of the disbelievers who died in their innocent age. Later on when the Prophet (s.a.w.) mentioned it to his followers, they felt surprised over the entry of the dead children of non-Muslims into the paradise. The Prophet (s.a.w.), then, confirmed it. Historically, the Prophet's (s.a.w.) ascension to the heaven took place while he still was in Makkah and the question asked about the fate of the dead children of non-Muslims was asked in Madinah. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas and Abu Hurayrah are two sources of the above report. As for the latter, he met the Prophet (s.a.w.) in Madinah; whereas the former was hardly two or three years old at the time of migration to Madinah. Then the question about the fate of non-Muslims' dead children was asked only in Madinah, long after the event of *mi'raj*. The Prophet (s.a.w.) had already been taught in his heavenly journey that the dead children of disbelievers will enter the paradise. Why did he, then, not provide clear cut answer to the question, the answer of which he already knew. He should have said that they would enter the paradise. The answer of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as quoted in the above report is doubtful. The Prophet (s.a.w.) should have said what has been attributed to him.

Al-Nawawi (d.676 A.H.), commentator of Muslim's work finds Muslim scholars having three different approaches towards the fate of non-Muslims' dead children: (1) they will go to hell due to their fathers being therein, (2) scholars are uncertain, and (3) they will enter the paradise. The learned commentator declares the third view as the right one. To support it, he, among other things, refers to an *ayah*: "And We never punish until we have sent a Messenger" (17:15).<sup>32</sup> If al-Nawawi has so clear

stand on the matter, what was, then, the problem for the Prophet (s.a.w.) to have the same?

Al-Bukhari has recorded another tradition of the same nature as the above mentioned one in his book's chapter on predestination. The people said: O Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.)! What do you say about the one who dies in his immature age? The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: Allah knows better about what they might have done if they lived until mature age.<sup>33</sup>

Al-Bukhari has not given its chain. Although this report with different wording is available in other places where the complete chains have been given, the chain less report here betrays general Hadith-quotation rule. It is strange vis-a-vis al-Bukhari's own strictly careful approach.

Since the message in this report is similar to the Hadith No. 5, there is no need to repeat the explanation once again.

## Predetermined End Result

'Ali reports: We were sitting with the Prophet (s.a.w.). The while he was nudging the ground with his stick, he raised his head and said: 'For every one of you a place either in the hell or in the paradise has been predetermined'. Upon this someone retorted: O Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.)! Shall we not, then, resign to the fate? The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: No, you have to act because each one of you is facilitated towards his destiny. The Prophet, then, read the ayah: "*As for him who gives in charity and fears Allah, and believes in the best, We will make smooth for him the path of ease*" (92:5-7).<sup>34</sup>

The chain of this report is this: 'Abdan 'Abd Allah ibn 'Uthman (d.221 A.H.) from Abu Hamzah Muhammad ibn Maymun (d.168 A.H.) from Sulayman al-A'mash (d.147 A.H.) from Sa'd ibn 'Ubaydah (d. uncertain; after 100 A.H.) from Abu 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd Allah ibn Habib (d.70 A.H.) from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d.40 A.H.). All these reporters are highly authentic.

## Evaluation and Reinterpretation

The same report with slight variations is available at eight more places.<sup>35</sup> All these versions have been quoted mainly through three authorities: Sa'id ibn 'Ubaydah from Abu 'Abd al-Rahman from 'Ali. The main variation among these versions of the report is in the first statement of the Prophet (s.a.w.). Out of nine versions only three refer to it as "For each of you a place in the paradise or in the hell has been predetermined". The remaining six versions contain this statement: "For each of you

a place in the paradise and a place in the hell have been reserved". The above-mentioned version of the report from *kitab al-qadar* refers to the predetermination of a place either in the paradise or in the hell. It means the end result of every human being has already been decided in the eternity. It has already been discussed at length in the interpretation of the first tradition of *kitab al-qadar* that such predetermination is injustice to man and his position as *khalifah* on the earth (2:30). There is no reason for taking this statement attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) as correct. What has been reported in other six versions—"reservation has been made in both the paradise and the hell"—seems to be quite reasonable. Man has been told time and again in the Qur'an that their bad deeds will take them to the hell and their good deeds to the paradise. For example: (1) "Yes! *Whosoever earns evil and his sin has surrounded him, they are dwellers of the hell; they will dwell therein for ever*" (2:8 1). (2) "*Whosoever does an evil deed, will not be requited except the like thereof; and whosoever does a righteous deed, whether male or female and is a true believer, such will enter paradise, where they will be provided therein without limit*". (40:40).

In the light of the Qur'anic clarification, the statement that the every one has been given his place in both the paradise and the hell seems to be correct. It is unto the man to act and deserve accordingly either the paradise or the hell. The statement attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) in the above report of *kitab al-qadar* may not be accepted as correctly reported as it is in absolute contrast with the Qur'an and other equally reliable reports on the matter.

The questioner's question whether they should resign to the fate indicates to his misunderstanding. He might have thought that the places in the paradise and the hell have been reserved hence one will certainly get his place, whether he acts or not. The Prophet's (s.a.w.) answer proves the misunderstanding of the questioner. The Prophet (s.a.w.) emphatically said: "No, you must act because each of you is led smoothly to the end result". This statement of the Prophet (s.a.w.) does not mean that the man is bound to act in accordance with his predetermined fate. Since the Prophet (s.a.w.) quoted certain *ayaat* (92:5-7) to confirm his view, there does not remain any confusion in place. The said *ayaat* explain that the path of man is made smooth according to the choice of man. One who believes in the unity of God, does good deeds, fear Allah and takes care of the less fortunate people around him, his path will be made smooth leading to the paradise. Likewise, one who rejects the message of Allah, does not act righteously, and does not help others, his path will be made smooth leading to the hell.

In the three versions of the report (Hadith Nos. 1362, 4948, and 4949), this statement has been attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.): "One who is from among the

rewarded (*ahl al-sa‘adah*) will be facilitated to act righteously; and one who is from among the condemned (*ahl al-shaqawah*) will be facilitated to act sinfully". There is no indication in this saying that the two positions, the rewarded and the condemned, have been predetermined in the eternity. Those who take the initiative towards righteous life are the *ahl al-sa‘adah* and those choose to lead an iniquitous life should be considered as *ahl al-shaqawah*. There is complete conformity between this understanding and the *ayaat* (92:5-7) as quoted by the Prophet (s.a.w.) in the above report.

In two versions of the report in view (Hadith Nos. 1362 and 4948) there is a statement attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.): "And if not, human soul has been written as the condemned (*shaqiyah*) or the rewarded (*sa‘idah*)". This statement is taken as a proof for the predetermined human destiny. Although it appears like that, it may also be interpreted otherwise. Keeping the Qur’anic statements concerning the doomsday, the Day of Judgment, which have generally been mentioned in the past tense, it may be said that the man is certain to be either among the rewarded or among the condemned through his acts. This is definite as if it has already been done. There is no denying the fact that the application of the past tense, at times, is for confirmation and to show the certainty of the matter.

## Companion of the Hell

During the expedition of Khaybar the Prophet (s.a.w.) said about a combatant who claimed to be a Muslim that he was a dweller of the hell. In the war that man fought bravely and got seriously injured. The people approached the Prophet (s.a.w.) and informed him about that particular man’s bravery and his serious injury. The Prophet (s.a.w.) once again confirmed his position as a dweller of the hell. Some Muslims felt uncomfortable with this. In the meantime when the pain of the injury became unbearable, the man killed himself by thrusting an arrow into his neck. Some people rushed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) and said: O Prophet of Allah! Allah has confirmed your statement. He committed suicide. Upon this the Prophet (s.a.w.) asked Bilal to announce: "None but the believer will enter the paradise; and Allah, indeed, makes the iniquitous support Islam".<sup>36</sup>

The chain of this report is this: Hibban ibn Musa (d.233 A.H.) from ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak (d.181 A.H.) from Ma’mar ibn Rashid (d.154 A.H.) from Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn al-Shihab al-Zuhri (d.125 A.H.) from Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyib (d.100 A.H.) from Abu Hurayrah (d.59 A.H.). All these narrators are highly authentic.

The same report has been recorded by al-Bukhari in *kitab al-maghazi*. That report is also on the authority of Abu Hurayrah. But there is a slight change in some names of the narrators.<sup>37</sup>

## **Evaluation and Reinterpretation**

It seems that the brave combatant in the Muslim army, as mentioned in the above report, was considered a true believer but when he committed suicide, it was evident that he was not truly a believer. The true believer keeps maintaining his Islamicity until the last moment of his life. He cannot do anything which is prohibited in Islam. The unlawfully tragic end of the combatant speaks volumes of his insincerity towards Islamic life. Had he been a true believer he would never have killed himself simply due to the acute pain of the injury. When the Prophet (s.a.w.) informed about the position of that man as the dweller of the hell, his followers were surprised as they found that man apparently serious in his dedication to Islam. They came to know the truth only when that man showed his immaturity in his association with Islam.

Generally, the message derived from this tradition is that the combatant was a Muslim but he turned iniquitous before the end of his life and thus entered the hell because he had been destined to be doomed. It may not be correct derivation. The announcement the Prophet (s.a.w.) made through Bilal removes the curtain from the hidden reality. Bilal made the announcement: “None but the believer will enter the paradise; Allah, indeed, makes the iniquitous support Islam”. That man was basically an iniquitous, a non-serious person in his belief and an untrue Muslim. That is why mere his association with Muslim society and army could not save him from the hell. He fought bravely not because he was very sincere towards Islam but because he was an Arab. Arabs of the Pre-Islamic era were by nature very brave. They loved war and they loved to die in the battle field. The person concerned supported Islam to show his valor and warlike chivalry. It is the law of Allah that he lets Islam supported by both Muslims as well as, at times, by non-Muslims.

The above tradition declares that only the faithful will enter the paradise. A faithful is always faithful until the last breath of his life. One’s faith is reliable only when it continues remaining in place until the end. This is also true that a sincere believer will be helped by Allah to die with faith. The main role is of the man. He has to make his utmost endeavor to remain sincerely faithful throughout his life. The Qur'an invites believers to remain faithful until the last moment of his life: “*O you who believe! Be conscious of Allah with full consciousness and do not let the death overtake you but in the state of Islam*” (3:102).

## Conclusion

The traditions on predestination as recorded by reliable Hadith sources are generally replete with textual problems, even though very few of them suffer from deficiency of chain of narrators. Some of these reports are in such a terrible conflict among each other which may not be overcome with any explanation. It is to be accepted wholeheartedly that there occurred errors in reporting on the part of one or the other reporters in the chain of these traditions. The logical preference of one particular tradition on the matter to the other one makes the issue of predestination clear. The reinterpretation of the preferred traditions sends the message that man is free to choose and act to the extent of necessity for his position as a responsible being. As for the preordained end result of man's acts as shown in the traditions quoted above, this is also the result of the misreading and misreporting of the words of the Prophet (s.a.w.).

## Note

1. Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Al-Jami' al-Sahih* (Dar Ihya' al-Turth al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1400 A.H.), vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, Hadith no. 6594.
2. Ibn Hajar, Ahmad ibn 'Ali, *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 2, p. 325 (Hisham); vol. 1, p. 338 (Shu'bah), p. 319 (Sulayman), and p. 270 (Zayd).
3. Please, visit <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002398.htm> The title of the article is "*Medline Plus Encyclopedia: Fetal Development*".
4. Khan, Israr Ahmad, *Qur'anic Studies: An Introduction* (Zaman Islam Media, Kuala Lumpur, 2000) p. 22.
5. Ibn Hajar, *Taqrib*, p. 385.
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7. Al-Dhahbi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Mizan al-I'tidal fi Naqd al-Rijal* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 107.
8. Ibn Hajar, *Taqrib*, p. 270.
9. Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih* (with al-Nawawi's commentary, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 8, Kitab al-Qadar, p.409, Hadith No. 6668.
10. Ibn Hajar, 'Ali ibn Ahmad, *Fath al-Bari* (Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 2000), vol. 11, p. 588.
11. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 2, Kitab bad'u al-khalq, p. 424, Hadith No. 3208.

12. Ibid. vol. 4, Kitab al-tawhid, pp.395-396, Hadith No. 7454.
13. Al-‘Ayni, Badr al-Din, ‘Umdat al-Qari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Dfar al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2001), vol. 23, p. 225.
14. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 1, kitab al-Jana’iz, Hadith No. 1308; Muslim, *Sahih*, vol. 9, kitab al-Jannah, Hadith No. 7145.
15. Hamzah Muhammad Qasim, *Manar al-Qari* (Maktabah Dar al-Bayan, Damascus, 1990), part 5, p. 307.
16. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 11, p. 583.
17. See for detailed information: Al-Khayrabadi, Muhammad Abullais, ‘Ulum al-Hadith: *Asiluha wa Mu’asiruha* (Dar al-Shakir, Malaysia, 003), pp. 119-120.
18. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 2, Kitab bad’u al-khalq, p. 424, Hadith No. 3208; Kitab ahadith al-anbiya’, p. 451, Hadith No. 3332; vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 208; Kitab al-tawhid, pp.395-396, Hadith No. 7454. These reports are recorded on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas’ud. And for the reports on the authority of Anas: vol. 1, Kitab al-Hayd, p. 119, Hadith No. 318; vol. 2, Kitab ahadith al-anbiya’, p. 451, Hadith No. 3333; vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 208, Hadith No. 6595.
19. Muslim, *Sahih*, vol. 8, Kitab al-qadar, pp. 407-411. Reports of Ibn Mas’ud are under Hadith Nos. 6665-6666; those of Hudhayfah ibn Asid are under Hadith Nos. 6667-6671; and that of Anas ibn Malik is under Hadith No. 6672.
20. Please, refer to the Note No. 3. The website as referred to there is to be visited for this information.
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22. Al-Tirmidhi, Muhammad ibn ‘Isa, *Al-Jami’ al-Sahih* (Dar Ihya’ al-Turth al-’Arabi, Beirut, 1995), vol. 4, p. 448, Hadith No. 2144.
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24. Abu Dawud, Sulayman ibn al-Ash’ath, *Sunan* (Dar al-kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996), vol. Vol. 1, Kitab al-Solat, hadith no. 1551.
25. Al-Firozabadi, *Al-Qamus* (Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-’Arabi, Beirut, 1997), vol. 2, p. 1705.
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27. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 208, Hadith No. 6596.
28. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 11, 599.

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29. Muslim, *Sahih*, vol. 8, Kitab al-qadar, pp.414-415, Hadith No. 6681.
30. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 209, Hadith Nos. 6597-6598.
31. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, vol. 11, p. 229.
32. Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim* (Dar al-Ma‘rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 8, pp. 423-424.
33. Ibid. vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 209, Hadith No. 6600
34. Ibid. vol. 4, Kitab al-qadar, p. 210, Hadith No. 6605.
35. Ibid, vol. 1, Kitab al-jana‘iz, p. 418, Hadith No. 1362; vol. 3, Kitab tafsir al-Qur‘an, p. 324, Hadith No. 4945; p. 325, Hadith No. 4946; p. 325, Hadith No. 4947; pp. 325-326, Hadith No. 4948; p. 326, Hadith No. 4949; vol. 4, Kitab al-adab, p. 131-132, Hadith No. 6217; Kitab al-tawhid, p. 417, Hadith No. 7552.
36. Ibid. Kitab al-qadar, p. 210, Hadith No. 6606.
37. Ibid. Kitab al-maghazi, p. 136, Hadith No. 4203.

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## Alternative Discourse on Human Rights

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### Abstract

This essay is to deconstruct the mainstream disciplinary discourse on human rights which has been shaped within the parameters of modern secularization. It seeks to accomplish this undertaking by shedding light on a less debated possible alternative reading of human rights idea. The author believes that this alternative, primordial and *totally other*<sup>2</sup> perspective on the issue can be exemplified by Allama Jafari's understanding of human rights in terms of metaphysics and democracy.

**Key Words:** Human Rights, Allama Jafari, Democracy, Metaphysics, Deconstruction, Alternative Perspective.

### Introduction

Today the idea of human rights is globally appreciated as the major achievement of the total course of human history. Many global, international, national and local institutions, associations, organizations, assemblies and gatherings owe their existence to this very idea. Let say the matte this way, we were witnessing the emergence of a new gigantic business at the turn of century that could justly be seen as the X of all political, economical, social and cultural equations in every corner of the globe; *the industry of human rights*.

On the one hand, as James Griffin (2008: 2) argues, "The secularized notion [of human rights] that we were left with at the end of the Enlightenment is still our notion today, at least in this way. Its intension has not changed since then: *a right that we*

*have simply in virtue of being human.*" The hegemony of this secularized notion has evidently resulted in the monopolization of ethos and the postmodern rebirth of barbarism in international scale. On the other hand, although there is a massive literature and a dynamic scholarship on human rights (see for instance: Andrew Vincent (2010), Abdulaziz Sachedina (2009), James Griffin (2008), Michael J. Perry (2007), Lars Binderup and Tim Jensen (2005), Marie-Béne dicte Dembour (2006), Joseph Runzo (2003), Muhammad Zafarullah Khan (1999)) it is still imbued with a conceptual nostalgia. It is indeed among the *grundbegriffe* of human discourse that is sorely plagued with modern depletion of meaning. Laconically speaking, the more we read and hear of the idea the more our minds become enchanted about it. Some may object that the idea of human rights is a far clearer concept than what you suppose it to be and does not need more sophistication. Needless to say, the understanding of idea that I seek to touch upon here is not the commonplace one framed within the atmosphere pestered by media and politics.

These being said, this essay assumes that the *grundfrage* "what is human rights" has not yet been sufficiently answered. The fact that supports this basic hypothesis is the lack of a global consensus<sup>3</sup> on the bugbear of human rights. Then we need to seek a ground upon which the idea could be both locally and globally secured. Obviously, this involves us in a metaphysical undertaking that would also "*set [us] straight [back] on the track*<sup>4</sup>".

## **Human Rights: The Legacy of Auschwitz?**

Though "human rights" as a *humane* idea studded with such respectful and sympathetic feelings that seem to make it unrivalled in human treasury of ideas but it is also circumscribed by grievous moments and memories of history. To state the matter otherwise, although the idea has been (re)introduced<sup>5</sup> into *Geisteswissenschaften* as a remedy for sufferings that the man has undergone through during the first half of the twentieth century the darkest moments of total course of human history due to modern barbarisms of technocrat world but it is accompanied with the painful repercussions and recollections of the brutalization exemplified by Nazi gas chambers in Auschwitz. Here I am not to provide the reader with a historical sketch of the rise of the idea of human rights. It suffices us to know that the current scholarship of human rights grounding the contemporary mainstream discourse of the issue has its origin in Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's initiative in preparing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948 (see Sussan Muaadi Darraj 2010).

After the WWII, the global atmosphere was ready for an epoch-making change that could reunite humanity and set it on the path of eternal bliss and prosperity. But human beings being lost in the devilish games of politics, in Santayana's words, were destined to repeat their past fatal mistakes as they never remember them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains the highest ideals of humanity as its own leitmotifs including equality, fraternity and global peace. Unfortunately, these highly respected humane ideas have been incorporated into a covenant which lacks a determinate metaphysics and hence nullifies the very notion within the context of which it has been emerged; democracy. No doubt, this international covenant only pushes forward the corporate ambitions worldwide. What it ignores is *human right* otherwise it should not have been utterly silent in the face of global violations of basic human rights. Now we need to ask why a covenant representing the global aspirations of many generations of humanity is doomed to failure. In his work entitled *Human Rights in a Comparative Encounter: Islamic versus Western*<sup>6</sup>, Allama M. T. Jafari<sup>7</sup>, contemporary Iranian social philosopher, seeks to answer this very question. The author represents a phenomenologist who makes sincere efforts to fathom his subject of study as a *phenomenon* beyond the preexisting epistemic structures from a hermeneutical point of view. This is the very intellectual property that helps him to avoid being entrapped in national and religious prepossessions. Surprisingly, as a Shiite authority and an Iranian philosopher reared in a Turkic rich ethnic context inheriting an undeniable historical and civilizational background, Allama Jafari thinks that the idea of human rights is more penetrable for American people than any other nation

Since the people of American society come from different ethical origins and nations, it could be said that understanding the idea of human rights in contemporary times, has been easier for American society than any other society (Jafari 2006: 23).

Indeed, this very intellectual attitude is also the main source of inspiration of Allama's judgments of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then the Azerbaijani philosopher briefs his critical mind on the Declaration in the following words that I see them as orchestrating a phenomenologist's encounter with an internationally appreciated covenant that is supposed to save human future:

Although the immediate approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights spurred public admiration and even some scholars declared it as the ultra-significant achievement of the United Nations, but the simply achieved global consensus on *Declaration* was not by accident, because the countries gathered in General Assembly were well aware that the ratified declaration is not legally binding. To this very reason,

General Assembly defined it as a common ideal the actualization of which is desirable and according to Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the then head of UN Commission on Human Rights: "Declaration is not a treaty or an international agreement, but it is an expression of inalienable rights of humanity the fulfillment of which is desirable for all people around the globe."

To put the matter otherwise, the Declaration is a means for *deceiving* and *fooling* public opinions of the world and playing them around with its approval; something that has no practical value (ibid: 45).

I shall not here turn to Allama's comparative discussions on Islamic and Western understandings of the idea of human rights and merely hone in on the core of Jafarian primordial understanding of human rights in terms of metaphysics and democracy. It is of course noteworthy that this is my reading of Allama's book and others may have other impressions of the book.

## **The Rise of Human Rights**

For Allama Jafari the idea of human rights grounded in human unity and harmony is not a modern intellectual achievement and it should be approached as a primordial idea firmly implanted in human perspective throughout the long course of history. Allama contends that this historical background of human unities could be sought for through the colossal cultural and intellectual heritages of human societies documented and kept in libraries:

The idea that all human individuals have many grounds for equality, harmony and unity despite their egregious physical, mental, natural and cultural differences has a long history. This consequential theory has been warmly received by keen-sighted scholars and true reformists both in the Oriental and the Occidental communities. Those who find themselves unable to touch the truth of this theory through personal probes and investigations could be benefited from the intellectual heritages of different cultures and nations – which are easily available in general libraries (ibid: 10).

The primordiality of this human harmony as the grounding basis of the idea of human rights lies in the very primordial nature of humanity shared by all human individuals that drawing on an African writer Allama believes it to be expressed in "universal conscience" of humanity. "This primordial faculty", Allama writes

Could be the one factor, we can use as a baseline for constructing a definition of human being. This sole factor may lead us to numerous other shared characteristics among human beings which bind them into one legal system, i.e. qualifying them as *Homo sapiens*. In other words, if we could fathom human beings in terms of "conscience", "practical reason"

and "primordial nature [al-fitra]", we will realize "the delicate philosophical ideas and the exalted religious beliefs", are united like indissoluble streaks of diamond within the profusion of archaic coal stones to create the unbounded resource of "subtle human intellectual delicacies" - the hidden treasure. Today even, most of the debates concerning human unity are founded on the same premises and are carried on with the same sense of factuality, novelty and emergency.

On the other hand, if we are to conceive the idea of "a human being" with the self-centered notions and despotic ambitions that certain philosophers have entertained in the past, and some may even continue to enjoy in the future, the idea of human unity will instantly bubble into air as it has never existed. "Human unity" does not exist for the self-centered and/or despotic mindsets, as they cannot treat themselves equal to others. They may agree to the fatal principle: "I am the end and the other people are merely my means!" Such beliefs lead to usurping of noble ideas like "conscience", "practical reason", and above all, pure "primordial nature" of the human beings. According to such mindset, therefore, it is impossible to find two human beings [whether men or women] who could be harmonized together to extent that they should be unconditionally put into the same category based upon their concrete conditions "as they are" (ibid: 11).

Although this kind of primordialism à la Allama Jafari may seem utopian and totally other for those who breathe within the modern secularist intellectual atmosphere but the philosopher himself emphasizes that this is not an unrealistic utopianism; rather it is the pure reality. Drawing on Rumi, *mutatis mutandis*, let say the matter this way, we need to sell our old glasses and buy a new one to see this pure reality. Only true scholars are able to behold the world from this perspective and take on such a Perseus like undertaking as Allama states

Needless to say, ordinary persons could not handle this adventurous task, but we need a team of experienced and seasoned anthropologists and other social scientists who have a firm knowledge in all aspects of human existence and human nature. The scholars who would be able to ponder and speak openly about the ramifications of human desires, human ambition, human lusts and interests, and their collective impact upon the individual and social life, which would inevitably forecast happiness and prosperity or degradation and annihilation of any society.

Perhaps it is much easier for a layman than a scholar, to claim perfect understanding of human nature. Nothing uncommon or to brag about; it is their common sense, which leads them to egoistic beliefs that they know each and every aspect of human existence. They can easily trace the history to relate to "is-ness" and "oughtness" of human nature; choosing an era, they can remarkably well inform you about the use, misuse, and abuse of human rights in that particular period and may even correlate it with present practices to predict the end of times. Every one of us has listened to such stories, and we have formed our personal ideals and preferences about necessary duties, rights, obligations and

freedoms, still we are in constant search for appropriate behaviors and codes of conduct to ascertain ourselves as ethical beings. Therefore, without being enchanted with "that's it and there is no way out of it", we should use our deliberate efforts to delve in historical data again to review our ideals and practices. We need to make a revised sense of "a human being as he/she is" and "human being as he/she ought to be" by a run on analysis of necessary human qualities and shared human characteristics. Only after successful completion, of this healthy enterprise, we would be able to claim proper understanding of rights, obligations, duties, freedom and exceptions, and then we may declare proudly: "Yes! We did it." (ibid: 11-12)

## Human Rights Rebalanced

We now need to turn to the question steering the lines of this essay. Why do institutional efforts like occidentally oriented Universal Declaration of Human Rights made in support of the highest ideals of humanity are doomed to utter failure?

As a philosopher and an heir of Socrates, Allama holds that every sound epistemic encounter needs to ground itself on a definite set of definitions of some basic concepts. I term this *the condition of metaphysicality* which secures the truth-grounds of an epistemic system and makes it epistemologically justifiable and semantically meaningful. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lacks this condition as it does not provide any designation of its grounding concepts including human being and right. In this regard Allama argues,

It was very appropriate the preamble which sketches the motives for preparation of the *Declaration* to have been preceded by a thorough study of human nature so as to become clear who or what is this "human being" the declaration is about? Whether s/he is the very creature that prophets has described to us and said: s/he is a being of distinguished stature and primordial nobility who has been created by Divine Knowledge and heads toward a highest goal which is only achievable through a competition in "goodness" and "perfection", unless human being divests herself/himself of this primordial status and rights and revolt against Divine Will? Or s/he is the creature as defined by Hobbes and Machiavelli as a *lupus* whose being is void of any primordial value? And to state the matter differently, human being has no value bestowed to her/him by a supernatural Being, and thus is naturally a selfish and deceiving being whose only logic in a nutshell is: "I am the goal, others are means!" (ibid: 48)

The condition of metaphysicality in this sense simultaneously reveals the imperativeness of normative considerations of human nature as every right whatsoever – even in a secular society – is endowed upon the individual due to her/his primordial or acquired merits and nobilities. Therefore we need to demonstrate the nobility that qualifies human being to be awarded by some set of inalienable rights.

Allama contends that this is an ultra-significant consideration that has not been taken into account in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is among the issues that Allama Jafari focused on his lecture delivered in a conference held in Manila on June 1980 on the relevance of occidentally grounded human rights for the Asian and Oceanianic countries. There he elaborates on this issue in the following words:

The motives of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as sketched in its preamble is the necessity of recognition of inalienable human rights so as to keep her/him away from disregard and contempt and to realize freedom, justice and global peace upon inherited dignity of human family and their equal rights. It is needless to say that the realization of such human ideals unavoidably needs human inherited dignity to be demonstrated, while academic circles around the globe not only have not taken a correct philosophical and scientific step toward the demonstration of human primordial stature, but sadly the theory of Leviathanism, on the one hand, and the project of despiritualization of humanity due to cultural prostitution and baseless analyses of the foundations of human history, i.e. tripartite stages of excessive positivism, on the other hand, are becoming even more powerful as time goes on. (ibid: 48-49)

Being despair of academic inattention to the onto-anthropological relevance of human rights, Allama seeks to substantiate the primordial stature through which the man becomes competent to enjoy certain inalienable rights by resorting to revealed religions including Islam:

While human being from Islamic point of view along with those of other revealed religions, and according to revealed verse of "*And surely we have honored the children of Adam, and we carry them in the land and the sea, and we have given them of the good things, and we have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom we have created*" (Qur'an, Chapter 17: 70), has primordial dignity and great potential for intellectual and spiritual evolution. According to this view, recommending and ordering all human societies to observe human inherited dignity is totally logical. This is why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for being changed into a *global culture*, needs first of all to demonstrate human primordial status, and to save humanity from the swamp of Machiavellianism, Leviathanism and utilitarianism and bring her/him back to her/his divine stature (Jafari 2006: 49).

Allama articulates the steps needed to be taken in the path of realization of this metaphysical agenda as follows:

It was indeed up to the *Declaration* to have demonstrated this issue in the preamble, or at least to have assigned this duty to the scholars of human sciences like psychologists, philosophers, moralists, theologians<sup>8</sup>, political and legal scientists and neutralist historians, since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* does not represent an ethnocentric system of legal codes that addresses human beings in terms of their cultural

and religious differences. The addressees of this declaration are different nations and peoples of heterogeneous cultures, religions and historical backgrounds who are told: you must accept and respect this set of rights disregarding your nationality, ethnicity, cultures, and historical backgrounds and above all your national privileges and powers. Then it is not possible to convince people to turn a blind eye to their religious, cultural and historical heritages.

It is to this very reason that continuous efforts should be made to inform the politicians of the necessity and value of such an intelligible rights and freedoms, because the sense of necessity of codification of such a set of rights does in fact notify all legal, economic and political pioneers to be aware that shoulder to shoulder with those rights securing natural coexistence of human beings human souls have also rights for themselves that must be observed by governing bodies of human societies if they are to govern human beings and not some spontaneous and unconscious things. One of the biggest obstacles in the way of "mutual understanding" between nations is the disappearance of unity of human life's dimensions that has also resulted in the absence of this consecrated quality within the society itself. That is to say, separating the moral dimension of life from its legal dimension and setting this latter in turn apart from social dimension which is itself thought to be detached from political dimension and conceiving these four dimensions isolated from scientific dimension and taking these latter five dimensions totally distinguished and separated from philosophical and ontological dimension of life and depicting all these dimensions as isolated moments which have nothing to do with religion which has resulted in human self-alienation.

This compartmentalization has been declared to be desirable for a narrow scientific perspective, and thus has enervated and seared the sense of interdependence, integrations and unity in "Intelligible Life"<sup>9</sup>. Then we say that to the same degree that analytic method of knowledge is significant in human life so is necessarily important the synthetic method and we could demonstrate by them – used in an integrated fashion – the basics of unity of human souls and make them ready for reception of universal rights. (ibid: 52-53)

There is still an even more significant onto-anthropological consideration the negligence of which has sorely made the *Declaration* morally irrelevant,

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has turned a blind eye to virtue and the normative dignity of human beings and no concession has been recognized for virtuous and pious people in this declaration. However, Islam regards this concession necessary for encouraging people for intellectual and spiritual evolution and reaching to proper social positions. The concession that is given to virtuous people does not violate other individuals' rights; as more sympathetic, intelligent and conscious individuals in all societies are taken to be more competent to hold some significant social positions, Islam has also reiterated on the imperativeness of this concession in a very straightforward fashion:

*O you men! surely we have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable*

*of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is knowing, aware* (Holy Qur'an, Chapter 49: 13).

To avoid these hazards and the like<sup>10</sup>, Allama claims, we need to relocate and understand the idea of human rights in a democratic fashion as it embodies one of basic ideals of democracy. Being described as the embodiments of global human ideals though, such international covenants as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are merely mediums for globalization of secular values and corporate ambitions. If they are to be received as the articulation of global ideals of humanity they need to represent the ideas that are agreed upon by the *majority* of people living on the terrestrial.

Since the majority of people populating the earth are among the believers of three great Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Allama states, any universal declaration of human rights must be issued in accordance with the values embraced by the followers of these three revealed religions. Moreover, Jafari claims, the major goal of holy prophets was to make people attentive to this *magnum veritas* that they should communicate with each other in the spirit of fraternity and not only must everyone see themselves members of the same whole but also they need to accept that if they embark upon the path of intelligible life their souls will be related with the divine soul in a way that sun rays are dependent upon the sun. No higher unity than this would be conceivable for humanity. (ibid: 65)<sup>11</sup>

## Note

1. I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people who inspired me by reviewing and reading the draft of this essay. I am really obliged by Professor Judith Balau from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for her warm reception of the paper as an embodiment of an alternative game in the town. Professor Dustin Byrd from Western Michigan University greatly inspired me with his profound critiques. I have replied to some of his objections in some endnotes of the essay but do not think that they can do the justice to Dustin's provoking critiques. I hope to have enough vision to write a book on the basis of these provocative and fundamental questions. I am also greatly indebted to my friend Dr. Hossein Nabilou from Erasmus University Rotterdam for reading the draft and proposing suggestive comments.
2. As Prof. Dustin Byrd has mentioned in his critiques, in many schools of theology and philosophy, including the Frankfurt School's "critical theory of religion," the term "totally other," is directly associated with negative theology: it is the phrase that attempts to articulate the *bilderverbot* (image ban), that can be found both in Judaism and Islam. In

negative theology, the divine is the “totally other” - whatever can be said about the divine in positive language is not what the divine is – it is the “totally other.” I have resorted to this term to relocate the alternative primordial encounter with menschenfragen which does not function within the previously posited disciplinary framework of theorization but it has its own perennial *weltauffasung*. In the spirit of Allama, I believe that the idea of human rights as a modern intellectual and civic achievement lacks a determinate metaphysical basis and this has shrouded it in a halo of nonsense. "Totally otherness" of this perspective alludes to the fact that it cannot be framed and understood within the parameters of current disciplinary point of view.

3. If you take The UN Commission on Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Noble Peace Prize, and other international covenants, institutions and prizes as echoing the global consensus on the *ousia* of human rights and the necessity of supporting pro-human rights activities both locally and globally you are unfortunately one of the victims of mainstream medias led by corporate inhuman ambitions.
4. "We are only going to set you straight on the track, if your carriage stands on the rails crookedly; driving is something we shall leave you to do by yourself." Ludwig Wittgenstein MS 117 237: 6.3.1940
5. The idea of human rights is not a modern epistemic breakthrough but it is indeed a primordial concept that had been buried (and is still so) under the heavy dust of modern oblivion of metaphysics.
6. Happily I have already translated this work of Allama Jafari into English and Professor Seema Arif from Central University of Punjab edited it and it is now in press.
7. see: Jafari, M. T. (2011), *Intelligible Life*, translated into English by Beytollah Naderlew and edited by Seema Arif, Xlibris, USA; Beytollah Naderlew (2012), *Allama Jafari on Global Future of Religion*, Islamic Perspective, volume 7, pp. 41-56; Miri, Seyed Javad (2010): *Reflections on the Social Thought of Allama M. T. Jafari*, University Press of America, New York; Miri, Seyed Javad (2012): *Alternative Sociology of Allama M. T. Jafari*, London Academy of Iranian Studies Press, London.
8. Some may object that theology could not be aligned with *Geisteswissenschaften* as it has an essentially different subject matter and follows another train of methodology. Allama Jafari's conception of religion is very idiosyncratic in the sense that he defines it in a dialectical fashion according to two basic concepts of *life* and *humanity*. Religion, life and humanity constitute an ontological concatenation each part of which is conceptually and actually dependent to other parts. Thus Allama's humanocentric conception of religion makes the latter a matter of human significance. For more detailed discussion on Allama Jafari's humanocentric conception of religion see: Beytollah Naderlew (2012), *Allama Jafari on Global Future of Religion*, Islamic Perspective, volume 7, pp. 41-56.

9. See Jafari, M. T. (2011), *Intelligible Life*, translated into English by Beytollah Naderlew and edited by Seema Arif, Xlibris, USA.
10. There are several critical assessments conducted by Allama in his book of Universal Declarations of Human Rights and its Islamic counterpart but their whole review needs a book.
11. I see this endnote as an epilogue to my essay and hope to answer some would be critiques along with those that have been posed by Professor Byrd. Allama's reading of a positivistically grounded idea would be fathomed as a surrealistic interpretation within the current parameters of *Geisteswissenschaften*. But surrealism, in my mind, has always reinstated an already lost aspect of moribund reality. As Lacan found his alternative route to psychoanalysis and revolutionized the field let us to embark upon an unbeaten path that needs to be grinded away by the mallet of philosophy that Alain Badiou terms as *grand style*. Grand style tries to embrace the totality of human intellectuality which flies with two wings of matheme and poesis. This hammering shall recover the repressed alternative perspectives precipitated in human unconscious by the monopolization of the secular. I think we need to deinstitutionalize and thus refresh the prosaic discourse of human rights through being good adherents of spontaneity who defy any form of bad faith in Sartrean sense of the term. Let once again reopen our eyes to the light of truth and expose our minds to its enlightenment

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## **In Pursuit of Meaning**

### ***A few words on relativism***

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### **Abstract**

As one of the most controversial approaches in Translation Studies, relativism holds that observations of textual meaning are relative to particular perceptions and that 'any' translation of meaning is fundamentally unstable. This notwithstanding, texts and cultural expressions have meanings independent of the interpreter's opinions, a fact which has been ignored by relativist theories. This research draws upon the Western and Islamic theories of interpretation to challenge the relativist approaches to text interpretation in Translation Studies.

**Keywords:** hermeneutics, relativism, context, accessibility of meaning, multiplicity, the law of contradiction.

### **Introduction**

We will – probably always – be concerned with close reading and asking of a text 'What does this mean'? That's what this paper ultimately is about. For this purpose, it's important to understand some literary, hermeneutic, and philosophical theories because these theories illuminate some basic assumptions we have about the world,

and illuminate some of the basic mechanisms that work in our world to generate what we call ‘meaning’.

Relativism, as one of the most controversial approaches in Translation Studies, forms the central idea to be examined in this paper. The principle of uncertainty frames the underlying foundation of the relativist approaches to meaning, which will be discussed accordingly.

The paper will go on to present some criticisms leveled on two extremes, i.e. on the one hand, on relativism, with its over-emphasis on context, and on the other hand on structuralism with its use of languages as if meaning were fixed and stable.

As language users, translators want language to work both ways. To find an alternative, therefore, this study examines some theories and hypotheses in the Western and Islamic traditions. It will review the historical underpinnings of the problem and tries to reach a solution to the chaos and skepticism caused by the relativist approaches to (source) text interpretation.

## A. Relativism

Perhaps one of the most confusing twentieth-century approaches in Translation Studies has been *relativism*, which generally stresses that *observations of textual meaning are relative to particular perceptions*. In linguistics, relativity is:

A term used to identify an influential view of the relationship between language and thought...which asserts, in its strongest form, that language determines the way people perceive and organize their worlds. This view (of ‘linguistic determinism’) was first expounded by the German ethnologist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835): in the twentieth century it came to be known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (Crystal, 2008, p. 411).

In epistemology, relativism is the argument that “one cannot judge between forms of knowledge that have radically different grounds of validity” (Barker, 2004: p. 176). Relativist theories of interpretation hold truth to be a changing concept, a concept “relative” or “subject” to particular perceptions. For Rorty (cited in Barker, *ibid*), “the notion of truth refers at best to a degree of social agreement”. Barker, however, along with many other scholars, believes that “relativism is a self-defeating argument” because the very statement ‘all truths are relative’ must itself be held to be “relative to the domain of its utterance”. Also, “to say that ‘all truths are relative’ is universally true is a contradiction in terms” (*ibid*).

In translation studies, relativism is of some historical backgrounds. According to Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002, p. xii), source texts have been manipulated to create

the desired representation. For Bible translations, governments would support translations of national epics, socialist regimes would underwrite translations of social realism, ... “all for their own purposes pertaining to ideology and cultural power” and for the translator’s commitments of political and ideological nature, commitments other than one to the source text and the author. The actual result is manipulation of source texts, less unified meanings in the translations and more chains of meanings and pluralities, meanings which have been extended “in directions other than those inherent in the source text” (Tymoczko 1999, cited in Gentzler and Tymoczko: *ibid*, p. xviii).

Poststructuralism, postmodernism and pragmatism have all been accused of relativism. This is so because they all reject the validity of universal truth-claims. They argue that no universalizing epistemology is possible because all truth-claims are formed within discourse so that all truth is culture-bound. (See Barker, *op. cit*, p. 176)

Relativist approaches destabilize essentialist notions of language and translation. In them, the relationship of translator to author and source text is not that of fidelity. Gentzler (*op.cit.*, p. 195), discusses deconstructive strategies and “the role of power in Foucauldian terms, showing how contemporary theories of translation challenge privileged concepts of sanctity of the source text and the originality of the author”. The result, then, is interpretability of the source text, which, as a result of erasing any sense of access to an original, provides plurality of meanings, and thus any contradictory meaning derived from the source text is possible; plurality and indeterminacy of meaning, therefore, are the confusing results of relativist approaches to translation.

Critics of relativism also argue that rejecting the possibility of a universal knowledge in favor of accepting its culture-bound character leads to the problem of incommensurability. That is, without a ‘meta’ or universal language one culture cannot talk to or understand another because their foundations of knowledge are radically divergent. (See Barker, *op.cit*, p. 176)

According to Pym (2008, p.1), “The underlying principle of uncertainty can be seen as framing the ruling theoretical approaches to translation”. The general problem with indeterminism remains, however, its inability to explain the common illusions by which translators actually translate. What post-modern approaches provide for truth in general and for meaning in particular is a type of over-analysis (or over-thinking) which paralyzes (through a vicious circle) the outcome on the search for the original meaning. Indeterminacy says we cannot be sure of communicating anything; here, there would be such a drastic uncertainty that would exclude the possibility of

stable knowledge and destroy all attempts at communication. Under the modern micro-narratives, decision on meaning is treated as over-complicated, with too many detailed options, so that a determinate choice is never made. The translator might be seeking the optimal or ‘perfect’ solution upfront, and fear making any decision which could lead to shaky results, when on the way to a better solution.

Post-modern theories of truth hold that truth is relative to particular perceptions asserting that there are no real attributes to entities and thus treating conceptualization as grounded in the subjective bias of the individual. Critical discourse analysis, for instance, holds that a single reality can be presented or interpreted differently by those who have religious/ideological and political perspectives. This relativist view to ‘meaning’ can be traced back to ancient Greece and the business of sophists. The term sophist refers to one who does wisdom; one who makes a business out of wisdom. For Sophists there were no ultimate truth and everything was a “matter of perspective”; so they were called sophist which meant “a person who reasons with clever but fallacious arguments”. Hence, the word sophism originally refers to their practice. (See Rahimi and Sahragard, 2007, pp. 1-22)

The relativist view towards meaning in the post-modern theories reaches where the notion of *simulacra* replaces the concept of reality. *Simulacrum* is “a representation without an original that it copies. Simulacra don’t mirror or reproduce or imitate or copy reality: they *are* reality itself”. “Simulacra, as signifiers with no signifieds, produce what we know as ‘reality’ … A simulacrum creates a passive subject who takes the simulation as the only necessary reality”. (Baudrillard, cited in Klages, pp. 170-171). When the image is “more ‘real’ than any other ‘reality’, where there is only surface but no depth, only signifiers with no signifieds, only imitations with no originals”, Baudrillard says, “we are in the realm of hyperreality” (*ibid*, pp. 171-172).

## B. Structuralism

On the other extreme, theories which favor *determinacy* of meaning seek for universal and unchanging truth regardless of the context or situation. A structuralist perspective to language, for instance, holds that all languages are made of units that combine according to the rules to make meaning or sense. Here, claims to truth are evaluated in terms of universal or impersonal criteria, and not on the basis of race, class, gender, religion, or nationality. Such a *reductionist* quest for ‘universalist’ or ‘timeless’ truth becomes problematic when the construction of ‘universality’ serves to mask or erase important differences, between cultures, time periods, and belief systems.

This kind of analysis of the source text has obvious limitations, as it seems the goal is to reduce the text to some basic-bare-bones structure alone, which may not seem like a very productive or useful way to analyze literature. For those of us who are used to reading literature in order to interpret complex webs of meaning, this kind of structuralist analysis is overly reductive and has proved a longstanding threat to and a source of 'deviation' (Beheshti, 1998, p. 82) in the interpretation of source texts.

### C. Relativism criticized

Criticisms have been leveled on both of the two extremes. On the one hand structuralism has been historically used for the purpose of forcing a specific ideology and in the hands of the mainstream of power; on the other, over-emphasis on context (individual, temporal, spatial, etc.) and the role of individual opens the way for discursive practices by means of which agents of distortion, or more technically "spin doctors" can fabricate or spin unreal narratives to distort realities. (See Rahimi and Sahragardi, op.cit. pp. 1-22)

The relativist theories of interpretation end in a situation where the cost of indeterminacy of meaning seems to exceed the benefits that could be gained. Relativism is simply irrationalism because, if all is relative, the statement denies itself (See Barker, op.cit. p. 176). Also, if nothing is fixed (normative) then there is no reality, and everything is meaningless. The ruling concept of "death of the author" provides a misconception that no interpretation of the source text can be objectively true or false, but can only be judged relative to an arbitrary standard, such as a parochial culture's beliefs.

Now, what happens if we accept, along with Heidegger and quite a few others, that we do not have access to any intention behind an utterance? If we do, we can only produce interpretations of whatever a sign stands for, and those interpretations will be further signs, which will then be subject to further interpretations. At no point can we be sure our intention corresponds to anything that was there before the sign was produced (the speaker's idea, for example). Thus, signs will "grow", as Peirce puts it, potentially in an unlimited way. For example, if we look up a word in the dictionary, we will find that the "meaning" is a set of different words. We could then look up the meanings of those words, and so on *ad infinitum*, until the dictionary is exhausted, the language itself would have changed, and we would have to start again. The end result, therefore, can be phrased as paralysis by analysis, if not a vicious circle, in contrast to structuralism (the other extreme) and its pursuit of universals (i.e. which makes a fatal decision based on hasty holistic judgments; or a holistic determinate meaning). (See Pym, op cit, p. 16)

Relativism is also believed to destroy any possibility of distinguishing between a subjective and a universally valid interpretation. Emilio Betti (Cited in: Rahimpur-Azghadi, 1998, p. 52), among other scholars, argues that “texts and cultural expressions have meanings independent of the interpreter's opinions”, a fact which has been ignored by relativist theories.

To name but a few, and as far as translation studies is concerned, relativist approaches to translation are faced with the following criticisms (See Pym, *ibid*):

- The relativist theories have not proved of much use to translators.
- The relativist theories lead to a lack of rigor, in that, clever critics can locate any meaning in any text whatsoever, proving nothing but their own cleverness.
- Indeterminism is of no consequence. It should nevertheless concern any search for certainty.
- These theories are merely oppositional. They simply assume all others to be “essentialist”, “prescriptive” or “authoritarian”. In this sense, simple opposition seems extremely reductive.

On the other end of the extreme, structuralism favors rigid systems over shifting systems, as it favors order over chaos, predictability over unpredictability, stability over shakiness. In linguistic terms, traditional philosophy likes a single solid connection of signification, one signifier connected to one signified- better than ambiguity or multiplicity of meaning, where one signifier could have more than one signified, or vice versa. However- and this is a very important exception- Derrida's '*play*' is precisely what makes literary language, especially poetic language, possible, since a single word can have more than one meaning. What we call '*literary*' are texts within which language tends to operate loosely, with lots of play. Non-literary texts, by contrast, use language as if meaning were fixed and stable. (See Klages, *op.cit.* p. 11)

## **D. So what?**

As language users, translators want language to work both ways. We want language to be a stable structure so that words have definite meanings: when I say 'Pass the salt', I want you to know what I mean without having to interpret my words. And we want language to have lots of play<sup>1</sup>, to be ambiguous, so that we can have multiple meanings for a single word. That's what makes puns and poetry possible.

After all, how can that practical reality become compatible with the idea of indeterminism? Even with full awareness of indeterminism, how should translators translate? Western thought fails to respond to criticisms directed towards relativism.

## E. In search for an alternative

According to epistemological holism, a single theory cannot be tested in isolation. A test of one theory always depends on other theories and hypotheses. Likewise, in the quest for meaning, there are an indeterminate number of possible explanations, as many as have been offered by the various literary and philosophical theories of interpretation. As a result, first and foremost, we'll examine the applicability of Western and Islamic theories of interpretation. While the Western theories have some overlap and dialogue with modern hermeneutical theories of *tafsir* (exegesis), they seem to be apparently distinct in tradition, which will be investigated in this study.

### a) Relativist theories of interpretation: historical underpinnings

Writings on the subject of translating go far back in recorded history. Much of the theory of translation has proceeded on translation of sacred texts. Indeed, “in western Europe the translation of the Bible was to be- for well over a thousand years... the background of conflicting ideas” (Munday, 2008, p. 7). Islam, too, as one of the three major world religions, along with Judaism and Christianity, has plenty to say on theory and practice of translation and text interpretation. Islamic legal theory, for instance, relies heavily on Quranic interpretation.

In view of new hermeneutics, everything is a “matter of perspective”. Quine (1960: 27, as cited in Pym, op.cit. p. 2) believes that one source can give rise to many different renditions, all of which may be legitimate and yet they “stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence relation however loose”; this can lead at times to contradicting meanings. In Islamic thought and in Christianity, however, the simultaneous existence of any two contradicting interpretation is logically refuted. Johnson says in “The Law of Contradiction” (Johnson, 2012, Para. 8):

I'm troubled when terms like *paradox* and *antinomy* are bandied about by Christians without sufficient explanation. Neo-orthodoxy built a whole theology of contradictory ideas by labeling every incongruity a “paradox”. But be warned: when the neo-orthodox use the term *paradox* they are actually speaking of *real contradictions*. Their whole system is designed to accommodate those contradictions. Thus they have baptized irrationality and labeled it Christian. But it is not true Christianity.

Western thought fails to respond to criticisms directed towards relativism. This notwithstanding, relativist theories are finding their ways into the non-western scholastic dominance. Such imitation of the Christian thought is not in line with the Islamic principles of interpretation. According to Yasrebi (1998, pp. 201-2), the following problems made Christian scholars to look for solutions:

- a. **Religious ambiguity in Christianity:** Some of the basic principles of Christianity are ambiguous; that is to say, human intellect is unable to perceive and acknowledge them. Included among such notions are Trinity and the existence of the Son of God, in which the concept of Son is ambiguous. Johnson (op.cit), among others, believes that “The Trinity is certainly difficult (no doubt impossible) for the human mind to fathom”.
- b. **Reportive character of sacred texts in Christianity:** Both the Old and New Testaments are reportive; that is to say, unlike the Quran, they are not direct revelation from God to the prophet but a report by individuals, unknown for the Old Testament and known for the New Testament.
- c. **Inconformity of the Church’s teachings with scientific accomplishments:** The Church rejected any scientific achievement that was against its doctrines; Galileo’s example was a case.
- d. **Limited practical instructions in Christianity:** Christianity did not embrace enough instructions for its followers in order to guide them in their lives. Naturally, therefore, the Church was obliged to initiate, codify and change the principles of religion over time to meet its needs and to satisfy the needs of its followers, a fact which paved the way for religious and philosophical pluralism.

The new theories of interpretation were therefore designed to solve the above problems. Hermeneutics was introduced by those who meant to save Christianity, and to this end sacred texts were submitted to the will of individuals who had this concern. As “it was impossible to change the words of the Scriptures to meet the needs of the audience, all changes had to be imposed at the level of meaning, and this is ‘hermeneutic proper’ which takes meaning to be subordinate to [and constructed by] the cultural and mental context of the author and reader” (Yasrebi, op.cit. p. 203). That is perhaps why, Spinoza challenges the idea that scripture is the divine law and instead takes it as a ‘creation’ of the ‘imagination’ (Rutherford, n.d., p. 19) of the prophets.

Unlike Christianity, Islamic jurisprudence and rules of interpretation do not allow for the simultaneous contradictory interpretations of the same text. While religious interpretations of the Quran stand a long term accusation of being structuralist,

knowledge of *ta'wil* or the esoteric meanings of the Quran has proved a long standing problem in this respect. Knowledge of *ta'wil* refers to knowledge of the meaning of a verse beyond its literal meaning.

Allameh Tabataba'i (1975:87) believes: "At the beginning of Islam it was commonly believed by some Sunni scholars that if there was sufficient reason one could ignore the outward meaning of Quranic verses and ascribe to them a contrary meaning. Usually the meaning which opposed the outward, literal meaning was called *ta'wil*, and what is called *ta'wil* of the Quran in Sunni Islam is usually understood in this sense." (Allamah Tabataba'i, 1975, p. 87). However, this idea does not hold any longer, and the law of contradiction can explain why.

The law of contradiction says "two mutually incompatible propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense" (Johnson, op.cit.). The *law of contradiction* means 'X cannot be non-X'. A thing cannot 'be and not be' simultaneously. And nothing that is true can be self-contradictory or inconsistent with any other truth. All logic depends on this simple principle. Rational thought and meaningful discourse demand it. (Also See Mebah Yazdi, 1998, p. 14).<sup>2</sup>

Until a little more than a hundred years ago, the law of contradiction was almost universally accepted by philosophers as a self-evident truth. Francis Schaeffer attributed the decline of 20th-century society to the demise of the law of contradiction. He suggested that when philosophy abandons this principle it sinks beneath "the line of despair" and ultimately makes suicide the only viable course of action. (See Schaeffer, audio available online)<sup>3</sup>.

Scripture<sup>4</sup> along with the Quran<sup>5</sup> very clearly affirms the law of contradiction. Lots of well-meaning scholars, however, seem to operate with the misconception that revelation is somehow exempt from the law of contradiction. But Titus 1:2 tells that "God . . . cannot lie." Therefore even God's Word must be in harmony with the law of contradiction. "One clear, unresolvable contradiction would be enough to destroy the trustworthiness of the whole. That's why the enemies of truth are so eager to try to prove that God's Word contradicts itself". (Johnson, op.cit.)

If we overthrow the law of contradiction, literally anything might be true. Black might mean white and hot might mean cold and everything would mean nothing. This type of thinking seems merely affable and benign, yet it destroys the very concept of truth. Many discard the law of contradiction precisely so they can declare truth 'falsehood' and make righteousness 'evil'. Therefore, as Johnson holds,

the notion that truth might be inconsistent with itself is one of the most popular but pernicious misconceptions held by the unbelieving men and women of our age. It is a concept hostile to truth and fraught with deadly danger. That's why it is absolutely

crucial that we who believe every word of God is true must oppose irrationality with every fibre of our being. (ibid)

Now, if Islam does not approve of contradictory meanings of a single verse, what about the different exegeses that have been provided by Muslim scholars? The point is that Quran interpretations are only different at the “vertical” level; that is, they do not nullify one another but each is at a different level in terms of completeness and perfection. Those of the exegetes/readers “who have reached a more perfect level of existence are possessed of a more upright knowledge of the secrets of religious teachings and instructions, a degree of knowledge which does not invalidate the truth of their prior knowledge” (Yasrebi, op.cit p. 206). Multiplicity of interpretations in this sense, therefore, exists at the vertical level where there are layers of meaning, known as polysemy in linguistic terms. This stands in contrast with Quine’s contention which allows for contradicting meanings (at the horizontal level).

Given the above, there are two approaches towards multiplicity of meaning or ‘play’ (in the words of Derrida). First are the layered meanings which stand in a vertical (hierarchical) relation to one another, with the inner meanings confirming and complementing the outer. The inner meaning of the text does not eradicate or invalidate its outward meaning. Rather, the esoteric meaning acts like the soul, which gives life to the body. This typology of ‘multiplicity of meaning’ has not to do with relativism and has to be distinguished from contradictory meanings. In this latter typology, which has no way in Islamic principles of interpretation nor in true Christianity, the law of contradiction explained above is violated. Indeed, “*tafsir* [in the sense of finding the meaning of the source text] can be mistaken with *tatbiq* (adjustment and manipulation of the source text meaning according to the will and expectations of the reader)” (Yasrebi, ibid, p. 207).

In *tafsir*, we look for signifieds by means of signifiers. Once the interpretation is over, what remains is compatible with the text itself. In *tatbiq*, however, what matters is not interpretation of the text itself. The purpose, here, would be to ‘adjust’ the text according to the standards we borrow from elsewhere; i.e. some criteria exist to which we are committed, and we read the text with a view to matching the interpretation with such criteria. Here, indeed, what we are doing is ‘omission’ and ignorance of the source text merely because we are under no commitment to the text, and we are to honor some other commitment be them ideological or else. What is implemented here is sacrifice of the words and rules of language for this so-called commitment. (See Yasrebi, ibid, p. 207)

Here, one has to distinguish between ‘implicit’ information from information which is simply ‘absent’ is the communicator’s intention; Gutt (1991, p. 83), in his

relevance theory, borrow the concept of absent meaning from Larson (1984, p. 42) and stated that “only unexpressed information which the communicator intended to convey qualifies as implicit information”. In an unduly free interpretation, therefore, the reader, translator or exegete attaches value to the absent information and makes explicit that information which was not intended to be part of the communication.

Scriptures were thus affected by human intervention. Naturally, as they were bound in time and place, they were to be revisited for other times, places and cultures, and justifications, rather than truth, were hence presented to people. According to Putnam (1981, p. 55), “Truth cannot simply be rational acceptability for one fundamental reason; truth is supposed to be a property of a statement that cannot be lost, whereas justification can be lost. The statement ‘The earth is flat’ was, very likely, rationally acceptable 3000 years ago; but it is not rationally acceptable today. Yet it would be wrong to say that ‘the earth is flat’ was true 3,000 years ago; for that would mean that the earth has changed its shape’.

As a consequence, different versions of truth are acknowledged in postmodern religion. Rituals, beliefs and practices, for instance, can be invented, transformed, created and reworked based on constantly shifting and changing realities, individual preferences, myths, legends, archetypes, rituals and cultural values and beliefs. Individuals who interpret religion using postmodern philosophy may draw from the histories of various cultures to inform their religious beliefs - they may question, reclaim, challenge and critique representations of religion in history based on the theories of postmodernism, which acknowledge that realities are diverse, subjective and depend on the individual’s interests and interpretations.

By contrast the true Path, in Islam, is only one. God declared in the Quran:<sup>6</sup>

*And (know) that this is My path, the right one therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will lead you away from His way; this He has enjoined you with that you may guard (against evil).!*

And as the text of the Holy Quran was not a report, the prophet had no power to fabricate a single word. (The Quran, 69: 44-47)<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Quran has historically served as a ‘touchstone’ for assessing the truth and accuracy of other reports, based on which the accuracy of religious narratives and other sources is evaluated. There is only one version of the Quran “... and if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy”<sup>8</sup>.

### b) Multiplicity of meaning and Islam’s perspective

- 1- Indeterminacy of meaning: the Skeptic nature of relativism has imposed the idea that all language is ambiguous. In everyday communication, however,

people speak and are understood by others without their intention being misinterpreted. Language is aimed at ‘understanding and sharing intentions’. The example of “Pass the salt” is clear evidence. You are sitting at the table and ask your partner to pass the salt. Teachers teach to be understood; they don’t teach for students to get the lesson not as the teacher intends but as they themselves wish. Indeed, students cannot attribute to the teacher what s/he has not presented; if so, it is a sign of failure in the communication. And we see at schools and in our daily life that this is not the case all the time. Teachers teach and students learn because indeterminacy of meaning is not an absolute rule. To approve of freedom of interpretation is like relativism a contradiction. Those who argue for freedom of interpretation should allow their audience to interpret their words however they wish, perhaps to replace ‘freedom of interpretation’ by the opposite!

As we said earlier, relativist theories ignore the fact that texts and cultural expressions have meanings independent of the interpreter’s opinions. For effective communication, you say, you write, and you teach to be understood, and the minimum is the your ‘core’ intention which you would like to share with your audience. (See Betti, Emilio; cited in Rahimpur-Azghadi, op.cit.)

The same rule applies to sacred texts for Divine communication; the Wise Creator never sends down a word to perplex His creatures. He even sends with His Words a prophet to teach them. “***The Beneficent God; Taught the Quran. (The Quran, 55:1-2)***<sup>9</sup>

As a result, one has to doubt over the inaccessibility of the divine message. It is part of Mulla Sadra’s philosophy that “the presence of God in man and the absorption of man in God are possible due to the nature of the divine act of creation”. On the basis of the *hadith qudsi*<sup>10</sup>. ‘I (God) was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known; so I created creation in order that I may be known’ (Moris, 2003, p. 57-58).

It would be vain if a Wise Creator of words provide a text and make it inaccessible to its audience. God, as the Creator of the Quran, knows that the Book can be interpreted differently, and even is open to paradoxical interpretations; so, as a Wise Creator, He must have provided human beings with valid means and tools for them to reach His intention, and to not fall in the trap of conflicts and the loop of relativism. That’s why, in Islam, ‘accessibility’<sup>11</sup> of the meaning of the Quran is not rejected.

Accessibility in mind, yet a materialistic attitude fails to grab the wise intentions behind the divine words. Man has other powers beyond his physical senses. To illustrate the type of epistemology required for interpretation of divine texts, it is necessary to tell the story of the “blind men and an elephant”.

The story has been widely used to illustrate a range of truths and fallacies.<sup>12</sup> At various times it has provided insight into the relativism, opaqueness or inexpressible nature of truth, the behavior of experts in fields where there is a deficit or inaccessibility of information, the need for communication, and respect for different perspectives. Rumi, the 13th Century Persian poet and teacher of Sufism, included it in his *Masnavi*.

In his retelling, ‘The Elephant in the Dark’, some Hindus bring an elephant to be exhibited in a dark room. A number of men touch and feel the elephant in the dark and, depending upon where they touch it, they believe the elephant to be like a water spout (trunk), a fan (ear), a pillar (leg) and a throne (back). Rumi uses this story as an example of the limits of individual sensory perception:

*The sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand. The palm has not the means of covering the whole of the beast.*

*The eye of the Sea is one thing and the foam another. Let the foam go, and gaze with the eye of the Sea. Day and night foam-flecks are flung from the sea: oh amazing! You behold the foam but not the Sea. We are like boats dashing together; our eyes are darkened, yet we are in clear water.*

It is important to note that rather than considering humans as the blind touching the elephant, Rumi calls them not blind but some people in the dark, which have no candle to be able to see the truth. Contrary to what relativists believe, Rumi *does* present a resolution to the conflict in his version, “the candle”; he thus ends his poem by stating “*If each had a candle and they went in together the differences would disappear.*” Therefore, a ‘positivist’ epistemology is not sufficient to reach the original meaning or the meaning intended by the author. Senses alone fail to verify the truth of the original because not all the phenomena in this world are material and capable of being captured by the senses alone. Language and communication requires knowledge beyond rules of grammar and linguistic plays. This notwithstanding, inability to understand some phenomena is not a sufficient justification for rejecting its very existence. The candles are the prophets as according to the Words of God they have been sent “*as ... a light bearing torch*”<sup>13</sup>. God “*taught the Quran*”<sup>14</sup> to the Prophet by revelation and he transfers this knowledge of the Quran to *awliya*’ (saints) and they to their followers.

- 2- Freedom of interpretation and death of the author: As said earlier, post-modern theories of interpretation are founded upon relativism and freedom of interpretation. New Criticism argues that authorial intent is irrelevant to understanding a work of literature. From our point of view, however, one cannot attribute to a text any meaning one wishes. As a rule of law, any right to freedom is basically respected as long it does not interfere with and deprive others of their rights. It is the matter of ‘ought’ and ‘ought not’, terms borrowed from Hans Kelsen, the 20<sup>th</sup> century jurist and philosopher. (See also Dini, 1998, p. 328)
- 3- As for the reader’s presuppositions, while they are a factor in his understanding of the source text, the question is “to what extent should the reader allow his expectations to interfere? Should he read with bias, or should he have an impartial reading? Should he look into the text to extract what he wishes? Or should he limit his bias to the extent possible?”<sup>15</sup> As narrated from Imam al-Musa al-Kadhim (pbuh) “When you ask a question, empty your heart to be able to understand” (Sheykh Saduq, n.d., vol. 2, p. 334)<sup>16</sup>. It seems that to render an objective interpretation of a text, one has to limit one’s personal bias to be able to understand it. This is not far from the idea of ‘critical reading’.
- 4- For that part of language which offers multiple meanings such as puns, let us take the hardest example: the Words of God! We’ll have to talk a little philosophy then.

In Islam, there is a mystic approach towards interpretation of holy texts which has similarities and differences with the hermeneutics offered by western thinkers. ‘Subject positions’ and the relative understanding of the individual are discussed in this Islamic perspective. The concept is stages in the ‘Arc of Ascent’ (*Qaws al-Su'ud*). In the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra:

The presence of God in creation through the hierarchy of His self-disclosures (*tajalliyat*) from the divine Names and Qualities to the archangelic, angelic, psychic and physical realms constitute the cosmogonic arc of descent (*qaws al-nuzuli*) and man’s conscious and active participation in the divine knowledge through his return (*ruju’*) journey to God by ascending through the various levels of being within himself, represents the arc of ascent (*qaws al-su’ud*). If the arc of descent represents the process of creation or God’s manifestation of Himself to Himself through the hierarchy of grades of being extending from the immutable, archetypal realities (*al-a’yan al-thabitah*) to the engendered existents (*al-a’yan al-mawjudah*) then, the arc of ascent or man’s spiritual journey of realization through the various levels of being

contained in him, retraces and recapitulates the divine act of creation. Spiritual realization or the re-integration of the various levels of being in man in the spiritual journey to God, complements and completes the divine act of creation. (Moris, op.cit.)

In our present discussion, and as far as meanings of the divine texts are concerned, meanings are descended at several stages from their original stage of creation. From *alam al-jabarut* (the Realm of Power) meanings are sent down to *alam al-mithal* (the World of Representations) and then to *alam al-nasut* (Realm of Humans) and to *alam al-tabi'ah* (the physical world). Meanings are filtered based on the levels of existence, in the arc of ascent and the arc of descent. Accordingly, in the descent of existence and meanings, there exists a relation between the level of existence and the meanings at that level, a relation which does not exist at other levels. Simply put, meanings at each level vary from one level of existence to another. "Both meanings and individuals move between the different levels of the arc (ascent-descent) and every level of meaning is in direct relation to the individual's level of existence in the arc" (Yasrebi, op. cit. p. 217). Human as *al-kawn al-jâmi'* (all-comprehensive engendered thing) can be central to this ascent and descent. In his existence, meanings are descended from *lahut* (Realm of Divinity) to *nasut* (Realm of Humans), from the divine level to the human level. Under such circumstances, the divine truth finds features of the realm of *nasut* (Realm of Humans) and become worldly or at the level of worldly beings, so to speak. Thereafter, human beings can, in proportion to their transcendence, find the meanings of the divine text in a range of the most outer layer (revealed for the ordinary humans) to the innermost layer (the meaning at its divine level). (See Yasrebi, op cit, p. 218)

The innermost level of meaning or the comprehensive knowledge of the being of man is merely potential in individual man and is only actual in the Universal Man. In view of Moris:

The Universal Man is one who is fully conscious and cognizant of the true nature of man and his central position in creation. The station of Universal Man is only attained after all traces of separative existence or of 'otherness' borne of the experiences and consciousness of the individual human ego or *nafs*, are removed or divested from man's being. The Universal Man who lives in God and through God knows by God and through God ('*arif bi Allah*). The station of the Universal Man is exemplified by the prophets (*anbiya'*) and saints (*awliya'*). Prophet Muhammad is the prototypic model of the Universal Man in Islam. The central doctrine of divine Unity (*al-tawhid*) finds its complement in the doctrine of the Universal Man (*al-insan al-kamil*). If creation is the manifestation of the One in the world of multiplicity, then the Universal Man who is the highest symbol of the One in creation, is the being in whom multiplicity returns to Unity. The goal of creation

– the manifestation of the One in multiplicity and the return of multiplicity to the One - is fully realised in the Universal Man. (2003, op.cit.)

Given the above, descent of meaning is in direct relation to the levels of existence for each human being, such is their interpretation of the text. “Linguistic and historical context, therefore, seem irrelevant” (Yasrebi, op.cit., p. 218)

## Conclusion

Relativism is believed to destroy any possibility of distinguishing between a subjective and a universally valid interpretation. Texts and cultural expressions, however, have meanings independent of the interpreter's opinions, and this is what this paper was mostly concerned about.

As regards translating a text, with full awareness of relativity and indeterminacy of meaning, how should translators translate? Western thought fails to respond to criticisms directed towards relativism; this study was an attempt to offer an alternative. It drew upon Islamic thought and true Christianity, for this purpose, and offered some evidence in favor of ‘accessibility’ and ‘translatability’ of the meaning of Divine words.

‘Subject positions’ and the relative understanding of the individual were discussed and some philosophical discussions were provided borrowing the concept of stages in the ‘Arc of Ascent’ (*Qaws al-Su'ud*) from philosophy of Mulla Sadra.

It was ultimately concluded that the innermost level of meaning or the comprehensive knowledge of the being of man is only potential in individual man and is actual in the Universal Man.

## Notes

1. ‘Play’ in the words of Derrida; for our purposes here, it is synonymous with indeterminacy/multiplicity of meaning.
2. According to Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, “nothing that is certainly true can be inconsistent with the Quran; what matters is the degree of certainty and the validity of the scientific and philosophical theories [that we use as the benchmark]. This means that we should neither mistakenly take a doubtful indication as a certain argument nor a doubtful scientific theory as a certain law of nature”.
3. “Before Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, man had a basis for truth. Now, modern theology is Under the Line of Despair and shows an absolute dichotomy between God's truth and modern man's truth”. See: Francis Schaeffer, “Modern Existential Theology (The Fifth Step in the Line of Despair)”;

audio available online at: <http://www.mache.org/store/products/audio/728/modern-existential-theology-fifth-step-line-despair>

4. First John 2:21, for example, is explicit: "No lie is of the truth." Many other passages, such as 2 Timothy 2:13, ("[God] cannot deny himself") either assume or reiterate the law of contradiction.

5. ...فَمَاذَا بَعْدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ ....

*"...and what is there after the truth but error...." The Quran (10:32)*

6. The Quran, (6: 153)      أَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَإِنْ يَعْمُلُوا السُّوءَ فَنَفَرُوا بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ذَلِكُمْ وَصَاحِبُكُمْ يَهُوكُمْ تَقْتُلُونَ

7. ...وَلَوْ تَعْرَلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضُ الْأَقْوَابِ إِلَّا لَخَلَّتْ مِنْهُ بِأَكْيَمِينَ ثُمَّ أَعْلَمَتْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتَيْنَ، فَمَا مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَخْلَى عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ

*And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand, Then We would certainly have cut off his aorta. And not one of you could have withheld Us from him*

The Quran (69: 44-47)

8. The Quran, (4:82)      ... وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عَنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوْ رَجَأُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

9. The Quran, (55:1-2)      الرَّحْمَنُ، عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ

10. A Hadith where the Holy Prophet ascribes a word or act to God, saying that He had commanded him thus. Such a statement is other than the Qur'anic revelation.

11. To access the text meaning, there are some filters, and shadows, which have to be removed; there are filters which interfere from the very moment an idea comes into mind until it is produced and transferred to the audience; there are also filters which block effective communication. But we will save discussion on the different types of filters in the processes of encoding and decoding for another article.

12. جنگ مفتاد و دو ملت همه را عذر بنه. چون نایابند حقیقت ره افسانه زندد

"Excuse all the *seventy-two nations* at war. They did not see the truth, and took the road of fable";

13. يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا . وَدَاعِيًّا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا (احزاب: 46-45)

*Prophet! surely We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner, And as one inviting to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving torch.*

14. The Quran, (55:1-2)

15. Dini, ibid: 329

16. إِذَا سَأَلْتَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ فَقُرِئَ عَلَيْكَ لِتَفْهَمَ

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## **Iranian Sociology and the Selective Translation of Theories of Secularisation**

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### **Abstract**

We can classify the theories of secularisation in two major categories. The first group of thinkers believes in a *radical break* between tradition and modernity. They take the view that secularisation means the end of the religious world view. The other group of thinkers belongs to those who want to see modernity as the *continuation* of the religious past in a new guise; among them are Carl Schmitt and Karl Lowith. It seems that we cannot find any major reference to the second type of theses of secularisation among Iranian sociologists. This article strives to explain some historical and theoretical roots of the problem of 'selective translation' of theories of secularisation

I tend to see it as a problem which comes out of the first confrontation of Iranian intellectuals with modern Europe. After that confrontation, Iranian intellectuals found themselves at the centre of a political struggle against religion. Because of that political project, it was impossible for them to ask question about both 'legitimacy' and 'theological roots of modernity'. To find historical roots of this political project, we have to reconstruct that specific European academic sphere with which the first waves of Iranian intellectuals confronted. In this way, I want to emphasize on the role of the specific anthropological-philological theories. Those Iranian intellectuals used to assume that Iran and India were the ancient homelands of European races.

Hence, the concept of 'authentic ancient Iran' played pivotal role in the process of identity constitution for those first Iranian secular intellectuals. They went to Europe with an important question in mind, i.e. a question about the causes of the rise of the West and the decline of the rest. The combination of this question with those theories led them to the mentioned political project against religion. By pushing religion into the position of defendant, they tended to ignore the very theological roots of modernity itself.

**Key Words:** Secularisation, Sociology, Theology, Iran, Intellectuals.

## Introduction

What are we talking about when we talk about the process of secularisation? From one perspective, we can classify theses of secularisation into two major categories. The first group of thinkers believes in a *radical break* between tradition and modernity. Max Weber is one of them. He takes the view that secularisation means the end of the religious world view. The other group of thinkers belongs to those who want to see modernity as the *continuation* of the religious past in a new guise. Among them are Carl Schmitt and Karl Löwith.

Looking at the established academic sociology in Iran we can understand that the second type of theses of secularisation, which tends to see this process as a kind of *continuation*, were swept under the rug. None of the main texts of the recent type of theses have been translated into Farsi<sup>1</sup> and one cannot find any reference to these theses in Iranian sociological journals<sup>2</sup>. How can one account for this? This article strives to discern the logic behind the way that Iranian intellectuals (and particularly sociologists) decide to include or exclude some theories of secularisation. In this way I am trying to put forward an historical answer to explain the causes of this phenomenon which I tend to call the ‘selective translation’ of theories of secularisation. I will state the idea in five sections.

## What do I mean by the second type of theses of secularisation?

The discussion about the role of theology in modernity started with a historical debate over ‘the legitimacy of the modern age’, which was a debate between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg. Blumenberg wrote “The Legitimacy of the Modern Age” (1966) in response to Löwith’s “Meaning in History” (1949). Löwith believed that modern philosophies of history are based on theological structures. In his interpretation, these philosophies are nothing but secular versions of the Christian salvation story<sup>3</sup>. While Blumenberg was thinking that by accepting the dependence of modern philosophies to traditional religion, at the same time we are acknowledging that modernity is illegitimate. Illegitimacy in his point of view means defining modern hopes as misconceptions of some religious ideas. But Blumenberg believed that modernity contained legitimate hopes<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding Löwith’s point of view, for him historical breaks even in the radical forms are not a kind of ‘jumping’ into the new forms of socio-historical relations. Everything new comes from old materials which the departure defines itself in its very opposition. Amos Funkenstein believes that: “The ‘new’ often consists not in

the invention of new categories or new figures of thought, but rather in a surprising employment of existing ones.<sup>5</sup>”

The point is that for example after a political revolution everybody can see and understand that something breaks down. It is obvious that something has changed radically. And exactly because of this we call it a ‘revolution’. But the important task is to show the very unchanged patterns of action. The pre-revolutionary modes of behaviour do not disappear suddenly from the first day after the revolution.

Philosophers of history (e.g. Condorcet, Voltaire, Hegel, and Marx) wanted to forge meaning *for* history and *in* history. They posed some philosophical questions as ‘necessary’ questions. Questions about ‘the universal knowledge’ for Vico (1694-1778), the role of ‘saviours’ for Marx (1818-1883) or ‘the final purpose of history’ for Hegel (1770-1831) were in fact Christian questions<sup>6</sup>. In brief, modern philosophies of history, in Löwith’s point of view, have extended and deepened the image instituted by Christianity<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, the dependence of modernity on the religious past is the pivotal idea of the second type of theses of secularisation. Knowing this, we have to return to our question. Why there is not any reference to these second types of theses of secularisation in Iranian sociology?

## First and Second Waves of Iranian Intellectuals

The hypothetical answer is that Iranian intellectuals and sociologists are afraid of asking question about the very theological roots of modernity. We have to search for the main causes of this fear in a specific experience of the first and the second waves of Iranian intellectuals. What was that experience? After defining the first and the second waves of intellectuals, I will concentrate on their specific experience of modernity, in Europe.

Ramin Jahanbegloo discerns four stages for historical development of modern intellectual mind in Iran<sup>8</sup>. The first wave starts with Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), a *Qajar* prince, and his defeat in a series of battles with Russia. Pierre Amédée Jaubert (1779-1847), a French diplomat and ‘orientalist’, reported his dialogue with Abbas Mirza. Jaubert says that Abbas Mirza as the crown prince was very anxious. He could not understand the reason of his defeat, despite his courage and intelligence and military capabilities of his forces. Abbas Mirza clearly stated that he was unable to recognize the reason for Iran’s failure and the advancement of Russia, Britain and France. He said:

“You, the foreigner, see this army, this court and all these instruments of power. But do not think that I am a happy man. More is the pity! How can I be so? Like furious waves

of the sea, which collapse against the firm rocks, all of my attempts and valour has defeated against Russian army. [...] What is that capability that made you superior and dominant? What are the reasons of your progress and our perpetual weakness? You know the art of governing, art of being victorious; you know the art of using all of man-made tools; while it seems that we are sentenced to ignorance. [...] oh foreigner, tell me what should I do to revive Iranians?<sup>99</sup>"

The important thing here is Abbas Mirza's articulation of the problem. This is one of the first articulations and acknowledgements of the ignorance about the real causes of the rise of the West and decline of the rest among Iranians. The history of Iranian intellectuals after Abbas Mirza is the history of constant negotiation with the West to find an answer for that question. Intellectuals started travelling across the Europe and translating thoughts and sciences. The first group of Iranian students had been sent to the Western Europe by Abbas Mirza himself.

There is one technical point here. It is not enough to say that Iranian intellectuals visited Europe, because European civilization was not a homogenous or monolithic. Europe has changed during these years after Abbas Mirza and each wave of intellectuals had a dialogue with a specific, unique Europe. We have to reconstruct 'their Europe' or Europe in their mind, to understand their conception of modernity.

Europe for Abbas Mirza was an ambiguous and victorious entity. But for the second generation of Iranian intellectuals who had experience of living there, Europe was something slightly different. The specific generation I want to deal with is the generation of 'romantic nationalism and pseudo-modernism'.<sup>10</sup> That is the generation of intellectuals after 1923 at the time that Reza Shah gained control of power in Iran. Among this generation are Sadeq Hedayat, Ahmad Kasravi, Mojtaba Minovi, Gholam Hossein Sedighi and many others.

To return to the above mentioned question, I think that the specific experience of this second wave of intellectuals played an important role in the constitution of the mentality of the next generations of intellectuals about the relationship between modernity and theology. The next step is to try to reconstruct 'their Europe', or the Europe in their mind.

## The Aryan Race Hypothesis

The second generation of Iranian intellectuals went to Europe at 1920s and 30s. That was the Europe at the time of the prevalence of specific linguistic, anthropological theories. At that time the 'Aryan race hypothesis' was popular. It was based on Sir William Jones's philological theory. The idea was that "Sanskrit had strong grammatical and verbal connections with Greek and Latin."<sup>11</sup>"

Before the eighteenth century traditionally the Hebrew language was considered as the ‘original’ or ‘mother language’ of the Europe. Firstly Voltaire attacked this religious idea of originality in 1792. He was deeply impressed by Chinese civilization. Voltaire “wished to challenge the biblical tradition” by showing Chinese civilization as a more advanced civilization than the histories mentioned in the Old Testament<sup>12</sup>. He raised China against Egypt which was mentioned as the root of Hebrew language in the Old Testament. Consequently, for a while, China replaced Egypt.

By Jones’s Aryan race hypothesis, this time India and Iran replaced with Egypt and China, and Sanskrit replaced Hebrew, as the source of European originality.

“After that, India became the Mecca for the European scholars of the nineteenth century and later. Schopenhauer claimed to be the child of India and a Buddhist. Nietzsche connected himself to Persian and claimed he was a follower of Zarathustra. Hegel believed the source of all wisdom was in India.<sup>13</sup>”

Max Müller expanded this language family of Aryan race to Persian, Armenian, Slavonic, Greek and German<sup>14</sup>. He also combined that hypothesis with a racial and biological idea. He and other anthropologists, archaeologists and historians had a pivotal question about the role of physical characteristic of a particular race in the constitution of their language and culture. As the first consequence they privileged the race over the language. Then they distinguished between original and non-original races. That means some races are pure and original while others are not. And we can understand this priority by the tool of language. Darwinism in that time helped the expansion of this idea.

As the second important consequence they came to believe that lingual/racial classifications are the basis for the national distinctions. That means that a country belongs to a pure race, pure blood and pure language. This was the very idea behind the idea of a homogenous nation-state.

As an orientalist Edward Browne (1862-1926) tried to study Farsi. He tended to see Iranians as a pure nation and their language as the ‘direct offspring of their ancient language.<sup>15</sup>’ If Farsi has evolved in a straight line, then Iranian identity would also have developed along the same line, and even the present political regime could be seen as a legitimate heir of the past glorious kingdoms. One should not be surprised by the fact that this European point of view was adopted as the official ideology of Pahlavi dynasty. The Pahlavis portrayed Iran as a homogeneous country to legitimize their authority. They wanted to represent themselves as the legitimate successors of

the glorious ancient past. Needless to say, this is absurd. Iran, as many other countries, is a mixture of radically different languages and cultures.

## Romantic Nationalism and Pseudo-Modernism

The first and the second generation of Iranian intellectuals had one question in mind. It was Abbas Mirza's question. 'What happened in the West and what happened to us? Why are the Europeans always victorious but we are not?' But the answer of the second generation of intellectuals to the question was entirely different.

At the time they started to negotiate with Europe the Aryan race hypothesis was at its very peak. Then 'their Europe' was a Europe which was looking for its authenticity and originality in ancient India and Persia. These Iranian intellectuals confronted with their imaginary forgotten authenticity. The answer to the question of Abbas Mirza became transparent. The formulation of the answer was simple: Firstly, we had an authentic superior essence in common with the 'developed countries' (*Mamaalek-e raghiy-e*). Secondly, that essence was illuminated once upon a time in ancient Iran. Thirdly, this authentic self destroyed and became forgotten after the Arabs' triumph.

The best example of this formulation is the story of "The Blind Owl" (*Boof-e Kour*) by Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951). As Tavakoli notices, for Sadeq Hedayat and his romantic contemporaries "the active remembrance of an antique past often served as a scenario for the making of a modern future."<sup>16</sup> The 'ethereal woman' with the 'ethereal beauty' in the story of "The Blind Owl" refers to that ancient authenticity. The protagonist of the story falls in love with the illusion of that woman. But at the end he finds that the ethereal being is actually his disloyal wife (*Lakaateh*; the symbol of the contemporary *Iran*) and that he himself is one of those evil people whom he had always hated (*Rajaaleh*; the symbol of contemporary *Iranians*). That story cannot have a happy ending. At the end he killed his wife and truly became one of those evil people.

The same is for the historical drama of "Maziyar" by Hedayat. Mojtaba Minovi (1903-1976) wrote a long introduction for this drama. The introduction and drama are full of outrageous insults and racial prejudices against Arabs<sup>17</sup>. For these writers, Arabs (or as he called them 'people of the sand and lice') are responsible for Iranian current decay and neglect of the ancient past<sup>18</sup>.

However it is important to mention that this sheer racism and anti-Semitism was limited to cultural aspects and did not lead, or had no opportunity to lead, to a political fascism, just like what happened in Germany and Italy at the same time<sup>19</sup>. But it

contained anti-religious and anti-Islam sentiments. For these intellectuals, Arabs were carriers of Islam, which soon became the national religion and threw the ancient national wisdom out of the picture. Islam for them was nothing but the ideology of Arabs.

In my view with this specific experience of the second wave of Iranian intellectuals, for the first time, being Iranian became opposite of being Muslim. Before that time these two sides of Iranian identity were not contradictory. But after this moment, religion was viewed as if it was guilty of corrosion of Iranian identity.

The fundamental question that Abbas Mirza asked, about the roots of the rise of the West and the decline of the rest, is still alive today, even though it has been answered in many different ways thereafter. But one particular answer which pushed Islam in the position of defendant had a formative role for the attitude of Iranian intellectuals and specifically Iranian sociologists. After that answer, intellectuals in Iranian academia found themselves at the centre of a political project, the final goal of which was, and still is, to redefine the role of religion in society.

## Conclusion

By pushing religion into the position of the defendant and promoting the gap between nationality and religion through participating in a political project against religion, Iranian intellectuals started to go down a one-way road. The end of this road was a dogmatic view which did not allow them to ask any question about the role of religion in the very constitution of modernity itself. As I mentioned above, the first category of theses of secularisation amounted to those thinkers who believed in the '*radical break*' between tradition and modernity. The point is that the idea of the '*radical break*' has an *ideological function* for Iranian intellectuals in their political project.

By seeing the *continuity* between theology and modernity and by translating the second type of theses of secularisation, that political project will become hollow and meaningless because it is based on the dichotomy of religion vs. Modernity. By destruction of this rigid separation, one cannot put religion in the permanent position of being guilty. In that case one needs more complicated definition of the role of religion in society.

Consciously or unconsciously Iranian sociology as the heir of the Iranian intellectual tradition always missed the theological roots of modernity and religious roots of the modern social thought. I would locate responsibility for this ignorance with that political project which wants to put religion in the position of defendant.

## Note

1. Examples include: “Funkenstein, A. 1986. Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century. Princeton: Princeton University Press” & “Löwith, K. 1949. Meaning in History. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press” or “Milbank, J. 2006. Theology and Social Theory. London: Blackwell.”
2. More than this one cannot find even a reference to this point of view in non-academic journals or intellectual discussions; e.g. *Mardomak* is a Persian cultural/political website. In February of 2011 it published some interviews and articles about the “Iranian version of secularisation.” In one page *Mardomak* suggested some books for further reading. But none of those suggested books related to the conception of *continuity* between theology and modernity. It even suggested “the Legitimacy of the Modern Age” by Hans Blumenberg which is a philosophical/historical response to Karl Löwith’s “Meaning in History” but the writer simply preferred to forget the other side of the argument. See: [http://mardom.linksfa.com/story/five\\_books\\_on\\_secularism](http://mardom.linksfa.com/story/five_books_on_secularism) [Accessed 20/05/2011]
3. Löwith, 1949. p. 3.
4. Blumenberg. 1966.
5. Funkenstein, 1986, p. 13-14.
6. c.f. Brague, 2007.
7. Löwith, 1949.
8. Jahanbegloo, 1384 [2005-6 A.D].
9. Jaubert, 1347[1967-8 A.D]. Pp. 136-137.
10. Katouzian, 2008. P. 9.
11. Vaziri, 1993. P. 21.
12. Lowith, 1949. P. 106.
13. Vaziri, 1993. P. 22.
14. Müller, 1862. Pp.136-176.
15. Vaziri, 1993. Pp. 104-105.
16. Tavakoli-Taraghi, 2008. P. 108.
17. Nafisi, 2011.
18. c.f. “Demon, Demon” (*Div, Div*) by Bozorg Alavi (1904-1997).
19. Katouzian, 2002. Pp. 89-90.

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## **Rereading Genealogies of Sectarian Conflicts of Shiism and Sunnism**

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### **Abstract**

Many years ago the American sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that when a problem is not only confined to an individual's life but it touches upon the lives of many others too then that is not a personal problem but a social problem. In other words, when a problem hits as many as possible at the same time then we cannot talk about it as though it is only a personal problem. On the contrary, we should then realize that the problem has got various different dimensions and it has turned into a multifaceted social problem which should be seen in a wider historical context. The problem of Shiism and Sunnism and conflicts in the region which have taken sectarian dimensions seem to qualify to be considered in the Millsian sense as a social problem with tremendous global reach.

**Key Words:** Shiism, Sunnism, C. Wright Mills, Social Problem, Fundamentalism

### **Introduction**

Many years ago the American sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that when a problem is not only confined to an individual's life but it touches upon the lives of many others too then that is not a personal problem but a social problem. In other words, when a problem hits as many as possible at the same time then we cannot talk about it as though it is only a personal problem. On the contrary, we should then realize that the problem has got various different dimensions and it has turned into a

multifaceted social problem which should be seen in a wider historical context. (Mills, 2000) The problem of Shiism and Sunnism and conflicts in the region which have taken sectarian dimensions seem to qualify to be considered in the Millsian sense as a social problem with tremendous global reach. In other words, the sectarian conflicts have the capacity to flame the whole region (and the entire Muslim World) and they would not be comprehensible if we do not take into consideration the historical currents which have made these conflicts possible today.

## **Sectarian Conflicts Revisited**

There are, at least, two broad views in regard to existing conflicts between Sunnites and Shiites. The first view is that there are no substantial differences between these two groups and if we see conflicts between them they are fabricated and inserted by colonial and imperial forces from without. The second view is that there are substantial differences between the Shiite interpretations of Islam and the Sunnite interpretations of Islam. The first position is called the external perspective which projects all the ills in the Muslim world to external elements and factors without looking at social, political, cultural, religious, economic, educational and theological issues which could shape the contours of human reality in a fundamental fashion. The second position is called the internal perspective which ascribes all the ills in the Muslim world to subjective domains of human existence without realizing that the human mind does not operate in a vacuum but it is shaped and formed as well as re-formed within the parameters of society which itself is part of a wider world systems at a given time in the course of history of humanity.

To put it differently, it is not deniable that the Muslim world is a cultural reality that has lost its political significance as it had before the arrival of colonial armies from Europe. From a western perspective colonialism is a historical past which students of humanities and social sciences read when they pass their history lessons but from a non-western point of departure, colonialism is a legacy that Muslims are still wrestling with its disastrous consequences today. However it would be a mistake to reduce all the ills which have encompassed the region into external factors such as Imperialism, Colonialism, and Western Interventionism. By traveling around the Muslim world for the past twenty years I have come to realize that the problems which we are encountered by, are not exclusively of external nature. On the contrary, they are rooted in the soil of our own cultural mores, ideas, belief-systems and worldviews. We need to deconstruct the two major concepts of Shiism and Sunnism. It would be a mistake to consider these terms as ideologies in the way we talk about

Socialism versus Liberalism or Conservatism versus Anarchism. Today these terms have become a way of drawing national or ethnical identities among Muslims around the world as religions have also become identity labels. A critical approach to these concepts may assist us to understand that they have not been understood always in this fashion. On the contrary, by a cursory look at history in the Muslim world we can find instances that these concepts were not identity-labels of national or ethnical kinds. For instance, the pretext by which the master of Abu Reyhan Biruni was killed at the hands of Mahmud Ghaznavi in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was his Shiite inclinations. But in the 10<sup>th</sup> century to be a Shiite did not mean that Abdul Samad Hakim followed an Imamite school of jurisprudence as most Shiites do today. On the contrary, it meant that Abdul Samad Hakim and Abu Reyhan Biruni were ardent followers of 'Aghl' (Intellect and Reason) in their scientific pursuits. In other words, they disagreed with Asharites in matters of religion, philosophy, worldview, science, politics, aesthetics and all that matters in human life. Today, we have lost touch with the ontology of truth and instead have become interested in the politics of identity and hence Shiism and Sunnism are not anymore perspectives which could assist us in finding the truths of religion and a roadmap which could demonstrate to us how to erect a sane society. In other words, by the triumph of the Asharite ideology the role of 'Intellect' has lost its pivotal role in the constitution of self and society in the Muslim world and people came to believe that revelation enables us to do without reason as well as intellect. Of course, this has been the case in most areas of the Muslim world where Algazel's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* marked a major turn in their worldview. (Marmura, 2002) Although Algazel was an Iranian but his ideas did not fare very well in Iran due to the efforts of an Avicennian philosopher, i.e. Khajeh Nasir Tusi who happened to be from the same region as Algazel in Khorasan. In other words, the Shiite interpretation of religion came to be very much in favor of reason in contrast to the Sunnite perspective which came to be Algazelian since 12<sup>th</sup> century onward. But this is not the whole story as the Shiite world after the establishment of the Safavid Empire came to be struck by a literalist movement which came to be known as Akhbarite, i.e. those who argued that we should keep the boundaries of religion within the parameters of hadiths which have come to us through the infallibles. In other words, the dynamic of life should be frozen within the boundaries of Naghl or tradition in its pristine form. Although they were defeated by another school which came to be known as Usulites (or those who accept the role of reason next to other sources of Islamic Tradition) but the spirit of literalism put its indelible scars on the Shiite mind as did the Akhbarism in the Sunnite contexts. (Dinani, 2012)

## Modern State and Esoteric Interpretation of Religion

However, the disasters which came to encompass the Muslim world was not confined only to the precious realm of intellect but by the dawn of modernity and establishment of system of the nation-state the significance of Sufism declined too. For the reason that the state in the modern context does not allow vigilantly any parallel loyalty to the one which is provided by the Leviathan. In other words, the idea of modern state is built upon submission to the will of the sovereign and in one realm two or several sovereigns cannot live side by side. The Sufi orders are established on the idea of 'Vilayat' or 'Spiritual Authority' which conditions those who follow the Master to submit to the authority of the Pir. Nevertheless in the Muslim world in which despotism is not only a political reality but also a cultural phenomenon the modern dictators could not tolerate any competitor who could possibly mobilize the masses against their ruthless rule. Thus Sufism as a substantial way of life did depart from the public square and this paved the way for fundamentalist interpretations of religion in the absence of reason and love. In other words, Sufism was not only an esoteric interpretation of religion but it was also the historical reservoir of how to coexist with others who may not share the same belief-systems as ours. (Schimmel, 1983) For instance, at the door of Abul Hasan Kharaghani's convent was written

*... whoever enters this convent ... do feed them ... and do not ask about their faiths ... for, if they deserve life by the Almighty ... certainly they do deserve to have a piece of bread ... at the table of Abul Hassan ... .*

This approach to the 'other' bred a sense of libertarian spirit in the fabric of Islamic civilization which were widespread across the Muslim world prior to modernity. In other words, the internal factors minimized the role of intellect in the Muslim world and the external factors such as modern system of state rooted out the institutions of Sufism across the Muslim World. For instance, there are many stories about how Kemal Ataturk and The Young Turks demolished Sufi shrines across Turkey or how Sufi orders have been under pressures in Iran then and now. To put it differently, if we agree that philosophy is the manifestation of reason and Sufism is the expression of Peace and Love then how would we interpret their departures from the public life?

## Fundamentalism as a Modern Phenomenon

It seems that fundamentalism, extremism, sectarianism and all excessive movements in the region are due to absence of reason and love which have paved the way for

emergence of one-dimensional interpretation of religiosity. Needless to argue that Muslims seem to insist upon ‘visible religiosity’ in their societies and the political expression of this will is called Political Islam or Islamism. However, this insistence should be balanced by a democratic inclination and the dilemma lies in the absence of democracy which inflames extremism among Muslims. Many think that Islamism is equal or synonymous to Islam but this is only a solipsist illusion. Islamism is a modern ideology which has been constructed on modern basis by serving the new ‘church’ that is called ‘state’. There is no doubt that the future of the Muslim world belongs to Islamism and all other forms of governance (Royalism, Autocracy, ...) are doomed to disappear but the burning question is what form of Islamism is desirable and more in tune with democratic spirit of social organization?

Among many Muslim scholars there is a xenophobic attitude towards the West. But this phobia has been clad under the mantle of a literalist religiosity and religious Puritanism which makes it a hard nut to crack. Since the early days of encounter between Muslims and Europe majority of Muslim intellectuals attempted to distinguish between European science-technology and ideologies by arguing that the former is of universal character (i.e. welcome) and the latter of local nature (i.e. unwelcome). In other words, in overcoming *historical lag* many of intellectuals and religious scholars encouraged kings and governments to transfer science and technology from Europe but beware of ideological contamination which has to do with value-sphere. However it was not clear if all aspects of values embedded in western philosophical and intellectual traditions were of parochial nature, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it is argued that it is not settled whether aspects of presumed universal science and technology are universal as a matter of fact.

To put it differently, it is argued that science as a paradigm is a particular vision of reality and it would be a grave mistake to equate it with knowledge in its universal sense. On the other hand, it is not certain that all aspects of western philosophical traditions are of ‘occidental’ character due to the fact that reason (and even to a higher degree intellect) are not either oriental or occidental in nature. To put it otherwise, human intellect is a universal faculty which is neither western nor eastern but while rooted in the soil of society it transcends all forms of contingencies. Having said this, I would like to argue that all that is western should not be considered as parochial or irrelevant for us or vice versa, i.e. all that is eastern should not be considered as relevant. This is to argue that all these ideological traditions are human endeavors for organizing human society in accordance to accumulated human wisdom (based on experiences on the earth) and reason as well as intellect. If this argument is valid then easternness or westernness cannot stand as the criteria of acceptance or refusal.

Moreover all ideological or philosophical streams in Europe or West are not of similar origins or orientations. On the contrary, the differences between them are serious and any attempt to reduce them into insignificant differences is epistemologically mistaken. For instance, in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, one can witness that not necessarily all socialists were democrats or all liberals considered democracy as a blessing. There are ample evidences which show how they fought against each other and used all their political muscles in destroying democracy or democratically-inspired traditions. Because, democratism is based on a universal principle which is rooted in the soil of all axial religions, i.e. a doctrine of social equality or the right of all people to participate equally in the running of their own society. Liberalism as an ideology was against this egalitarian political orientation as the culture of liberalism favored capitalism represented by bourgeoisie over against people who were uprooted peasants (as a new labor force). Socialism as a more progressive ideology did not favor democratic principle either due to its own utopian ideals which resulted in Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism or the Soviet style of governance or Communist style of etatist ideology in China. In other words, it took more than a century for Europeans to realize that egalitarian principle is of inalienable importance in running the affairs of society as without institutionalizing this principle the state shall become either totalitarian or run the risk of being hijacked by tyrannical politicians. To put it differently, the source of power is people and they are its sole legitimator which should be realized through consensus. Now in the Muslim world, Islamism is faced with these dilemmas, i.e. to accept democracy as a universal principle or shut it down on the basis of being a western ideal and against ‘our religion’, ‘our tradition’, ‘our national character’, or ‘our heritage’. In my view, these are excuses for those in power who do not desire to share it with people and in doing so they attempt to escape accountability and transparency. Islamism is one of the most progressive ideologies in the Muslim world provided it is interpreted within the frame of democratic spirit. Otherwise, it would turn into one of the most despotic ruling systems due to its relation with Islam as a meaning-system which is claimed to be of revealed origin. In other words, other forms of governance such as monarchism, royalism, autocracy, dictatorship and military junta are not ideal options before Muslims who insist on having *visible religiosity* in the public square.

## One Problem and Many Dilemmas

However the burning question is why Islamist scholars cannot overcome these dilemmas in despite of their liberational theological stances. In other words, why do

revolutionary thinkers of Islamist orientation tend to become autocratic rulers or choose to support autocratic policies under the banner of Islamic State? What are the fundamental reasons which turn Islamist activists and scholars who mostly have been struggling against tyrannical monarchies, despotic rulers, and other oppressive forms of governments into ardent supporters of totalitarianism? I think by turning into politics in order to explain political dead-ends in the context of the Muslim world we may not reach a substantive conclusion as our political problems are not solely of political nature. If they were solely of political nature then the overthrow of Pahlavi dynasty, for instance, would have changed the problem of despotism but it did not. On the contrary, the repressive forms of governance were not removed by the removal of the Pahlavi dynasty but it became more complex and the Iranian social life in its totality came under the *panoptican surveillance* of the post-revolutionary state machinery which is equipped by an ideological apparatus- that is able to condition masses even internally. In other words, the question which needs to be analyzed is not of political nature but the culture of politics in the Muslim World should be scrutinized if we desire to overcome autocracy. To put it differently, Islamism as a progressive political ideology needs to have a frame and that frame is the cultural context which has shaped the fabric of Muslim society for the past five thousand years. For example, by removing Monarchism the revolutionaries were not successful in removing the autocratic cultural elements which made despotism possible in Iran for such a long time. The Islamist thinkers and scholars brought novel approaches into political landscape due to their engagements with socialism, modernist trends, liberalism and other novel approaches of modernity but they did not succeed to transform the cultural mores or habits. To change the cultural mores we need more time and it is not certain that they could be transformed very easily. On the contrary, there are plenty of evidences that cultural mores resist over against transformational forces. The overthrow of monarchy created a political space where Islamism took the state power but soon autocratic interpretations pushed democratic inclinations to the margins under the pretexts of puritanism, jurisprudentialism and other undemocratic inclinations which only served the *culture of intolerance* and *autocracy*.

Autocracy is not only a political model of government but a cultural pattern which is deep-rooted in the Muslim societies. One of its aggressive expressions is intolerance mode of being at the individual level and despotism is its social expression at the political level. This is not confined solely to sociopolitical level but intolerance and autocracy creep into all corners of human life and shape contours of culture. In the Muslim World, religion plays a pivotal role as the collective

unconsciousness of Muslims is conditioned by mythological and theological indices. To put it differently, religion in the context of the Muslim world has been interpreted within authoritarian paradigms which have not only created intolerant cultural patterns but also autocratic political institutions. The birth of Islamism has not changed these deep-rooted forms of life as revolutions tend, in despite of their claims, to change regimes of governance rather than cultures of governance. Cultural transformations may take centuries to occur unless revolutionaries are conscious about historical contingencies which have inhabited within patterns of mores, habits, attitudes, and other invisible dimensions of culture. Then one may see different productive approaches in things that matter for the improvement of human life. Literalism and legalism have silenced the gentle voice of reason in regard to religion which is used in its ideological form as a meta-narrative. Any critique of literalism is silenced culturally (and since the inception of Islamism even politically) under the legalistic pretext of violation of alleged principle of *divine boundaries*. What is the way out of this quagmire?

Religion is an ethics of being but when it is turned into politics of being then many other factors come into play which overshadows the spirit of religion as revelation. Historically religions have fallen in the hands of kings and rulers who run empires and now use them for security of their respective states or safeguarding what is termed as *national identity*. I agree that religions could produce these side-effects but these are only by-products of religion and should be treated as such. If these are taken as *raison de'etre* of religion as such then we are not talking about religion as a *covenant* between humanity and God anymore. On the contrary, we are faced by new forms of social organizations which could be either useful or harmful. Islamism is premised upon religion as a form of social organization and as such is far from being a paradigm which is concerned about *ethics of being*. It is simply a form of politics. However it is born in an autocratic form of culture which could breed counterproductive forms of life provided Islamist scholars realize that autocracy is not the true spirit of 'our religion'. On the contrary, the authentic spirit of 'our religion' could be egalitarian form of social organization which should be established through *consensus*. Otherwise Islamism would turn into another form of despotism as various forms of monarchism turned into despotic form of governance, even monarch was initially supposed to be a shepherd who leads the herd from various forms of perils, risks, dangers and hazards. If that happens then the whole region shall be turned into a vast battleground where all is permitted by the name of 'religion', 'sect', 'ideology' and other forms of idiocies. Last but not least, our problem is that we have lost our forefathers' traditions but we have not yet learned modern traditions.

In other words, sectarian conflicts, extremist violence and excessive acts of brutalities demonstrate clearly that we do not know how to live with each other and with our differences in love, peace and harmony. As Rumi says:

Love asks us to enjoy our life	For nothing good can come of death.
Who is alive? I ask.	Those who are born of love.
Seek us in love itself,	Seek love in us ourselves.
Sometimes I venerate love,	Sometimes it venerates me. (Arberry, 1991)

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## Book Review

***The Manifesto of the Critical Theory of Society and Religion: The Wholly Other, Liberation, Happiness, and the Rescue of the Hopeless*, Rudolf J. Siebert, Brill, Leiden, 2010, 1843 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-18436-7.**

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Books of five hundred pages look awesome and hard to approach. The more so does this three-volume work, with its imposing title. It discusses a heavy load of social and religious thought exceeding 1500 pages—add over 250 pages for Bibliography, Name- and Subject Indexes. Yet, the work's subtitle as well as the chapter-titles and the numerous headings in the text are appealing at first glance. The front cover-image suggests a kind of sociological plot. It is a picture of a colorful chessboard, containing in every brown or black square a miniature statue of figurines and apparently historical personae. One gets the impression that a puppet in a crimson flying robe, contrasting with the dark background and standing on top of a timepiece, is pulling the strings. The puppet is bogus. An ugly hunchback-puppeteer is not in the picture (*The Manifesto*, p. 380). History and society are not always what they look like. What is persistently described in so many pages is what the powerful do to society for good or ill.

Open *The Manifesto*. It is a workout of exceptional social-scientific writing by an uncommon author. It constitutes an account of what 20<sup>th</sup> century Humanity was like and what it continues to be. This is *The Manifesto*'s main theme. Its subtheme is human suffering. The fiery author relentlessly describes the worst ordeals of this span of time, the “slaughter bench of history,” the horrors of the World War II, the second Iraq war, the so-called war on terror, the sordid practice of torture, the city slums and asylums in highly developed countries, as well as instances of personal unhappiness. However, suffering does not end in despair. A glimmering of light and hope reappears time and again.

If uncommon and exceptional, what are the qualifications of Siebert's social science? The telling features are: the author's literary and scholarly style that combines narration and dialectical discourse; its content: the stuff of social and religious thought the author has been feeding on for a lifetime; and the ethically and religiously committed author himself.

Most book reviews track the development of scholarly content. A detached, cold overview of Siebert's work would miss much of its qualities. An uncommon work merits an unusual review. Let us follow the main points.

## Literary style

At times, *The Manifesto* resembles tragedy and drama writing, which owes much to personal experiences. A pertinent example is a happenstance encounter with an old Jewish lady, who got an order in April 1942 to report to the Nazi Headquarters, a huge building not far from teenager Siebert's high school, he frequented by bicycle. As 'destiny' would have it, the chain of his bike had derailed and refused to get in place. Pushing his bicycle, he neared the grandmotherly woman, carrying two heavy suitcases she had to put on the walkway every now and then to rest. He offered her to take care of the luggage. On arrival at the building, a young, good-looking SS Officer scolded him severely for carrying the bags of a "Jewish pig." The SS man promptly reported the case to the Gymnasium's Director for stern punishment. Yet, because the Nazi director got drafted in the army, it never took place. His Deputy, a Christian-Protestant humanist, too near-sighted to fit in the army, quietly dismissed the case.

The author could have told this uneventful if shocking event in half a page or so. Instead, he chose to dramatically enact it on a stage as it were, letting the old lady with the Yellow Star of David on her black coat, repeatedly appear on the scene in two consecutive chapters (pp. 981-2; 984; 988; 995; 996-7; 1002; 1015; 1039).

The first chapter in question (chap. 21) introduces the near-impossible question that Jewish intellectuals (exiled before the war) set themselves, trying to find a shade of religious meaning to the horrible reality that unfolded at Hitler's many death-camps. Then, from picture to picture, the author follows, so to speak, a meandering road throughout the recent history of modernity: the emergence of bourgeois society; the ideas of the French Revolution; the rise of German nationalism; the Eichmann trial and its moral and religious meaninglessness; the production of Zyklon B gas from a pesticide invented by a Jewish chemist during WW I; Hitler's concordat with Rome and their common stance against Communism; the cooperation of Catholic officials with Hitler—at least half of the fifteen government officials who decided the

*Final Solution* were Catholics (p.1035).

This is the dark abyss that a great country let itself slide into, a country that saw itself as the greatest nation on earth (*Deutschland über Alles*), with an inflated sense of their homeland community—for many a sense of pride and euphoria perhaps. The citizenry were unable to see the black clouds gathering at the horizon. Later, when losing the war, when Hitler killed himself April 30, 1945, when they got the news from Auschwitz and learned the many names of the places where Jews were exterminated, the people must have been dumfounded. It must have dawned dreadfully on the author what he had helped the old Jewish lady for, the more so because, at that time, he had been involved in the Catholic Youth Movement guided by the pastor of the parish with which his family was likely on intimate terms (Siebert, 1993). Surviving Germans could not but feel enormously sad and guilty, even without personal involvement. For sure, they could not have known what happened off stage. As says the author, most Germans were not Nazis (p. 1032), but resisting them would have been their own “final solution.” They had to fight.

Initially, teenager Siebert had been drafted to be part of a FLAK unit, targeting warplanes. At seventeen, he became an infantry Lieutenant. With his unit he fought the incoming tank division of General Patton north of his hometown, near Frankfurt, at first with some success, but it got almost totally destroyed and he found himself on top a wooded hill, alone with two fatally wounded comrades, who asked for a priest. Late at night, he was able to get one from the nearby village, as well as to take the old man back to his parish house. It was thereafter, when crossing a country road that a team of three SS men on a three-wheel motorcycle spotted him, a soldier without his rifle, a sure sign that he was a deserter. Immediately, they started the paper work for his execution. If his General, whom Lieutenant-boy Siebert new personally, had not happened to appear almost miraculously on the scene, he would have been shot and hanged on a tree.

This early life-and-death experience probably lies at the bottom of the author’s concern about incomprehensible violence that multitudes of people have to undergo without any fault of their own. Gradually, he understands that it is not only fascist dictators who are behind great misfortune and injustice—even in high school he developed an early interest in philosophy, after a happenstance introduction to Hegel. Indictments of political and corporate misdoing appear at numerous places throughout the work. Therefore, one understands that the author’s motivation for this kind of research extends far beyond scholarly ambition. Yet, scholarly interest too is a condition *sine qua non*.

## Scholarly style

*The Manifesto*'s most uncommon characteristic is its dialectical theorizing. Dialectical reasoning engages both the subject and the objective world. Seen concretely, realization of sociocultural change involves subjects (ways of thinking) as well as social structures. Past evolution always affected outdated ways of thinking and social structures to be thrown into the dustbin of history. In other words, when squarely focusing on the past, one sees that specific ways of thinking and praxis are definitely discarded, or in dialectical language "determinately negated," not in a theoretical way but as a matter-of-fact. Concrete realities, as it were, cancel each other out. Most importantly, this true-to-life way of social evolution and historical development is the basis of critical theory.

In plain words, and different from most books on social science, theoretical discussion with the heaping up of arguments and quotes from related literature, is not the author's approach. His dialectical mode of discourse suits best longitudinal sociocultural evolution and discussion of antagonist interconnections within historical development. The author's working definition of critical theory says that "...modern civil society [is] an antagonistic totality of non-equivalent processes" (p. 11). If there are 24 types of antagonisms as summed up in Appendix F (pp. 420-2), it means that historical, social change is not easily grasped. Likewise, how exactly change is effected, is not easily understood in mainstream sociology, which is characterized as structural functionalism. Sociologists, like Parsons and his followers, understood societies as well defined, almost machine-like systems, amenable to categorization of actors, collectivities, roles, cultural and instrumental orientations, and so on (Parsons, 1951: 142-50; [1937] 1968). Those authors ran into serious problems when social change intensified in the late 1960s and beyond. Moreover, *The Manifesto* recurrently points to the specific problems of positivism and conformism. The former reifies objective reality and the latter closes its eyes in serving the powers that be (pp. 276-9).

Yet, the how and why in *The Manifesto* are not totally clear either. The author maintains that: "Critical theory is not systematic" (p. 332). Evidently, history cannot be understood as a system. According to *The Manifesto*, history reveals itself as an "open dialectic." The relations among antagonisms (e.g., the religious and the secular) are never closed (p. 99). Nothing is ever totally closed or fixed—neither political structures, nor forms of art, or religion or philosophy and science (pp. 452-5).

A more practical facet of non-systematic, dialectical theorizing is repetitive discourse. Blunt or sheer repetition is never the case in *The Manifesto*, but situations,

topics, themes and subthemes as well as theses or propositional formulations are partial; they are recurrently and continuously discussed. Nothing can be defined once and for always. Collective social reality resembles recursive experiences. Therefore, illustration follows upon illustration. Also, it can be said that repetition is integral with narrative discourse. It is always concrete instances of antagonisms that are examined. There are so many, the world over. However, there is a downside to the narrative, repetitive style of *The Manifesto*. It is tough to summarize. But then again, the totality of human, sociocultural reality and thought about it is exceedingly hard to grasp, too.

A last, remarkable point of scholarly style concerns quotes and references. Direct quotes are rather rare within the text. Instead, the author paraphrases what his sources say, carefully acknowledging them with many references. Almost every page has three to four lines with ten to fifteen references in brackets. Ten to fifteen lines of references are not exceptional. In a few instances, the greater part of the text consists of references; e.g., the section: "From Modernity to Post-modernity" and the following one on the notion and the meaning of the wholly Other or *Theos Agnotos*; these have almost five pages of references (pp.1538-44; cf. also 1557-8, 1568-70). To be able to do so, the author seems to have pooled them in archives, for half a century, ordering them according to specific topics and themes. Further, the importance of the referred to authors is demonstrated in an appendix, having fourteen pages of fundamental quotes from twelve 'resource authors.' One third of those quotes are chosen from Horkheimer and Adorno, who provided seven each.

## Content of discourse

*The Manifesto's* momentum derives from Enlightenment thought, a plethora of writings and intellectual wanderings of German philosophers, from I. Kant, F. Schelling and Hegel to Schopenhauer, Marx, Freud, and of literary authors such as Goethe and H. Heine and religious authors like P. Tillich, J.B. Metz, H. Küng, and J. Ratzinger-Benedict XVI, as well as scores of recent writers and philosophers. A special place is given to the Frankfurt School of Social Thought, founded by the non-conformist Jewish philosophers: M. Horkheimer, Th. Adorno, W. Benjamin, E. Fromm, and several others. In the 1930s, the latter were concerned with discovering the root causes of WWI. and of the rise of German nationalism (chap. 1). After WWII, their sole task was to express "anamnestic solidarity with the innocent victims of Fascist society, who had died under unspeakable pain, agony, anguish, and misery" (p. 961). For themselves, they endeavored to find some relief and inner peace about

the enormous injustice that befell the European Jews. Inspired by biblical, Messianic beliefs, and following a kind of mystical inclination, they contemplated the reality behind and above all human misfortune, “the wholly Other [who] appears after God disappear[s] in the guilt, *the meaninglessness*, and death in the disintegrating hellish world of antagonistic society....” (p. 103; emphasis added). Solace could be found in the “longing for the wholly Other,” the nameless and imageless Divine, the Absolute, the Unconditional. Such a totally different ‘being’ would imply that “...the murderer [does] not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately” (p. 868). Its ‘existence’ would mean that those horrible cases of violence do not determine the meaning of human life.

Accordingly, religion and faith are central to *The Manifesto*. That is, though not unrelated, the focus is not on religions as institutions or organizations, or religious communities, or ritual and religious tradition. What is focused on, is religious ideas, forms of spirituality and religious ideals (religious ethical humanism), in short, religious thought.

As a special inheritor of German philosophy as well as biblical thought, the author embarked on a life-long quest: establishing critical thought on society and religion. He devotes his academic career to fight the varieties of extant social thought connected with forms of domination, exploitation, and injustice. Their names are the following: capitalism (as a system of exploitation), Nazism and Communism (brown and red fascism), nationalism, neo-fascism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, theo-conservatism (fundamentalism) as well as positivism in science and dogmatism in religion. Those specimens of social and religious thought are not discussed one after the other. They too appear on-and-off stage as it were. The author examines them, alternatively focusing on the manifold links and complexities of socio-political, economic, as well as religious thought. With respect to religion, the author is persistently looking for ways in which it could provide clues for countering the bad ‘isms,’ while at the same time endeavoring critical religious thought, envisioning an alternative future for religion. The better part of *The Manifesto* may be summarized as Humanism, the reconciliation of all social antagonisms. To understand the author’s primary goal more fully, it should be useful to look at the books’ overall content and its ordering.

### **Buildup of *The Manifesto***

Lengthy books usually organize their subject matter in several parts, each one with its own title. *The Manifesto* is not segmented in that manner. It has twenty-eight

consecutive chapters, ending with a long Epilogue (130 pages). If titles were provided to each volume, capturing its general content, the following might do.

Volume One: Prologue. The first chapter shortly introduces the *status quo* of the critical theory of society, as initiated by scholars of the Frankfurt School of social thought. This first chapter can be seen as a pre-prologue, introducing all components of critical theory formation. In other words, it has fifty-eight short sections on all themes, ideas, aspects, and concepts that appear in the whole work concerning thought on religion in connection with sociocultural realities. The following eight chapters elaborate on the same subjects, beginning with an account of the neo-conservative or neo-liberal economic thought that arose after WWII. Concrete discussion follows with numerous short sections of occurrences and happenings on the world stage. The more important sections concern discussions of the critical theory of religion and theory formation as such, the investigation of the earlier models of philosophical thought in order to discover ways of reconciliation between the religious and the secular, and the discussion of a new model: the possibility of foreseeing the future of religion.

Volume Two: Religion and Society. It discusses the internal and external linking between religious ways of thinking with social thought and social practices. The focal chapters of this part discuss the powerlessness and irrelevance of religion in socialist, liberal, and fascist societies. The most painful cases of helplessness of religion come about in the regimes of brown and red fascism, but liberal capitalist societies are no exception. By way of example, within two successive chapters (chaps. 19 and 20), the author inserts at various places several episodes of how early German immigrants failed in the New World. He documents the latter situation with diary notes of working-class German immigrants of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of them forebears of his spouse. They enthusiastically made the big step but actually landed in New-York slums, moving from one tenement house to another. One mother of a family spent the last eighteen years of her life in an asylum for the mentally ill—the author visited related institutions around New York. The evildoers in liberal capitalist societies, so to speak, appear mainly back stage. Occasionally, they are typified in the metaphorical terms: “the acid rain of modernity,” the idolatry of capital,” “the capitalist *tsunami*” (respectively pp. 253; 1030; 1033). More matter-of-factly, liberal capitalist societies are characterized by “the antinomy between the rich and the poor classes,” actual discrimination between the haves and the have-nots (p. 1101). The last chapter of volume II further elaborates on various views of critical religion, named “religiology.”

Volume Three: Prewar Germany; Reconsideration of religious thought. First, in

two chapters, the author returns to the early situation of his home country, describing anti-Semitism, Zionism, the Jewish-German tragedy, and the country's development leading to its socialist revolution and Nazism. The final four chapters of the work recapture and reconsider religious thought and the author's "dialectical religiology," again with its typical, numerous sections on pivotal as well as *ad hoc* key words—roughly calculated, there are over one thousand of them in *The Manifesto*. The Epilogue is the final-final part of the work. The first paragraph, just one sentence, announces its program, a summing-up of the potentials of religion contained or suggested in twenty-two dialectical links between religion (including particular forms of religious thought, mythology, and theology) and social, secular thought (including morality, ethics, art, rationality, humanism, and personal and social problems: the topics of evil, terror, and death). To complete this sentence, the author adds: "...and the identification of what is missing in profane late modernity: God, freedom, and immortality (the title of the Epilogue); the X-experience, the Eternal One; the wholly Other" (p.1445). Follows the forever, concrete elaboration with the author's typical mini-size sections.

Symbolically speaking, the Epilogue is the last act of a long Greek drama play with the final narration of the protagonist (the author) together with interludes of the Chorus that represents the many voices of religiously or otherwise inspired authors. All these voices express the potentiality of a relatively new religious inspiration, the ideas and ideals that are intended to challenge and conquer the impossible: the meaninglessness of death itself, in particular, "administrative murder," "genocide," the still festering wars of today, as well as the mostly unrecognized, inherent evil and injustices that are mediated by capitalist, neo-conservative, neo-liberal political thought. The voices also speak of hard to imagine hope. Of course, like Greek drama, the goal of *The Manifesto* is not entertainment as is theatre today. Greek drama, enacted in the city stadium, where almost the whole population gathered for an annual festival—lasting several days—represented the tragic dispositions of the human psyche, with which the audience could identify. At its end, there was no handclapping, no cheering (Sophocles, 1947). The author's own, (shortened) last sentence of his *opus magnum* runs as follows: [T]he negation of negation, the death of death, the stage of reconciliation belongs to *faith*, mediated and supported by dialectical reason (p.1574; emphasis added).

The author's ultimate aim as a social scientist is to capture the tendencies present in 20<sup>th</sup> century and those of extant societies that he summarizes as alternative futures of religions and societies in relation to each other. These are discussed in terms of "probability, possibility, and desirability" (pp. 355-6).

To interpret the author's conceptualization of alternative future I and II, these concern what a well known sociologist describes as the "institutional dimensions" of modern societies: "capitalism, industrialism, surveillance, and military power," which he evaluates idealistically as evolving respectively towards "a post-scarcity system," "the humanization of technology," "a coordinated global order," and "demilitarization" (A. Giddens 1990: 55-78). In sharp contrast, *The Manifesto* focuses on the degenerative, regressive tendencies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western positivistic, technocratic, socialistic, or fascist societies, that might consolidate and even worsen those tendencies into the alternative Future I: the totally administered society, and alternative Future II: the militaristic society. Religion in those societies can only exist as subservient to those in political and economic power.

Alternative Future III is *The Manifesto*'s core thesis. All three alternatives appear at many locations in all three volumes, but, as in chap. 1, reference to alternative Future III roughly outnumbers those to I and II, three times to one (cf. pp. 8, 9, 11, 12, 31, 33, 34, 45 vs. 3, 34, 54). Future III is characterized by the reconciliation of personal sovereignty and universal solidarity and a friendly and peacefully living together of all people (pp. 314-24; 354-5). It affects the reconciliation of genders (p. 531) and social classes (p. 967). It creates "the City of Being, of non-damaged, creative and happy life... living labor would be liberated from the domination of dead capital... all murderous prejudices would be dissolved...and the *Lex Talionis* would be superseded by the Golden Rule... p. 1031)." In future societies, religion may survive as "...a post-theistic, critical, a-dogmatic and non-authoritarian religion..." (p. 1107). All in all, societies evolve in a longitudinal fashion and religion is reinvented in the process. Before attempting a short assessment, let us focus briefly on the author.

## The author

'Acknowledgements' at the outset of books invariably are formal statements about indebtedness to a number of colleagues. As such, those declarations do not reveal anything about the author him/herself. The case of *The Manifesto* is different. It has two. The initial one, at the start of the study, expresses the author's gratitude to his family, to the student-parish priests, professional friends, and colleagues who cooperated with him in a series of courses and lectures abroad. The second much longer version is an appendix at the end of Volume One, elaborating on the initial statement. In fact, it is a full-length article, intimate in tone (23 pages). After a note on the importance of gratefulness, the author delivers a fond remembrance to his

spouse, "Margie and her good life." He lost her to cancer after twenty-five years of marriage (with seven children). She was a colleague to him, too. Together with her, he set-up of his special course "The Future of Religion" in Dubrovnik, Croatia, which is still going on, together with another one at Yalta, Crimea (on the Black Sea). Further, his children get one page of appreciation and encouragement, three sons and four daughters, as well as his fourteen grandchildren, listing all their names and what he thanks them for (pp. 391-4). After his family, the critical theorists of society and religion come in second place for special thanks (pp. 394-6). Then follow his colleagues and students of the author's courses abroad (pp. 397-9). Typically, the largest part is reserved for his most cooperative academic friends (pp. 399-410). Finally, the members of the student parish, at Western Michigan University, the author's home base, receive their share (411-13).

From these special considerations and expression of affect, one feels that the author is intimately involved with all of them. One gets a similar impression from his whole work. 'Involvement' is the word that sums-up the author's life that includes the joy of love, friendship, partnership, together with sympathy and deep compassion with the unlucky, or duped, or innocently killed scores of fellow human beings, he cares for with "anamnestic solidarity." Thus, affect—subdued emotion—is not absent in the many pages of *The Manifesto*. It is also sensed in statements and descriptions, often using a series of each other reinforcing adjectives, nouns, and verbs. The image of *The Manifesto*'s author is one of a passionately philosophical as well as a passionately religious humanist, a humanist *tout court*.

If anything else could sum-up the author's sincerest thought, his love and his faith, as well as the misfortune in his family, it may be "a rose in a cross." This image surfaces at several places in *The Manifesto*. It originated from an inspiration by Dante Alighieri and Martin Luther, which Hegel interpreted as "the Rose of Reason, or of the Divine Logos" pp. 25; 28; 392). In Hegel, a Rose symbolizes the possibility of overcoming the negativity of suffering, transforming it into "creative negativity." The author used the same image as a decoration of Margie's tomb monument (p. 392). He had it carved onto the upper part of lump of brown-reddish rock, somewhat curvy and smoothly polished, which stands like a human figure near the top on a grassy and a little wooded hill-slope, used as a burial ground that looks more like a small out-of town park area than a common walled-in graveyard. The author has added his own name and date of birth beneath the bio data of his spouse.

## Assessment

For present purposes, *The Manifesto* seems to have nothing to quarrel with, except that, once in a while, one encounters a glitch or an over-packed long sentence containing a break in its train of thought, indicated with hyphens—dashes would be much clearer. Our remaining task is to sum-up and to sketch the pictures of the subject matter that came into view, and to shortly evaluate their qualifications. Does *The Manifesto* truly constitute ‘exceptional social-scientific writing’?

In a word, *The Manifesto*’s three primary pictures concern a painful part of recent European history, perennial religion, and Western societies in development. First, the author erected sorrowful monuments of evil, the worst that ever befell humankind, a series of Guernica-like images that stand black and tall over the arid landscape of the human mind, silhouettes of genocide-rage, vicious wars, and never ending feats of exploitation, all in the name of nocuous and mindless ‘isms.’

Second, religion is the author’s sweetheart. He fell in love with the world religions. Yet, religion as a social existence draws serious blame. As such, religion tends to be tied up with the *status quo* of societal arrangements and politics, obliterating its critical function. A core problem of religion is its conceptualization of the Divine. All its concepts, names, and imagoes are as inappropriate as useless ciphers. For its beneficial side, a specific role of religion is providing solace for suffering and strength in overcoming the severest problems of life: the meaninglessness of death and extreme evil; in the author’s language: “the rescue of the hopeless.” This goes by the name of theodicy. “Could God be justified” after Auschwitz? “There has been no adequate answer” at the time, “and there is none now” (p. 1017). Yet, every calamity caused by atrocious human cruelty or that occurs at the hands of nature “intensifies always anew the yearning for what is wholly Other” (p. 1020); that is, a Divine Existence, totally different from what the senses can verify or human minds can think of. Its ultimate legitimization is faith and the most meaningful action is following the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you would like them to treat you” (p. 33; Mathew 7,12).

A dual picture of society and religion comes in third place. It is the image of the alternative future III, where the religious quest and those of the secular world—including the “expert cultures”—are reconciled. The surprise is that not historical religion but the makings of society are of greater importance. The author apparently suggests that rehashing culture and reinventing societies seems to be the condition for having sound religious institutions that do not play ongoing secular games.

[T]he critical theory of society...anticipate(s) ... and prepare(s)...the dawn of a post-European, post-bourgeois, post-capitalistic, post-liberal, post-

modern, post-theistic paradigm: global alternative Future III—a society which would be driven by the longing for the wholly Other, and motivated by its new expressions, and in which personal autonomy and universal solidarity would be reconciled (p. 1028).

Clearly, the author is confident about the soundness and validity of his “religiology,” as well as the desirability of Alternative Future III, but he knows that it is not likely to be realized soon, if ever. He insinuates that the ultimate goal of humanity is far-off and the road leading in that direction—along paths of dialectical evolution—will be immeasurably long and uncertain, as the results of “negative dialectic” and “the negation of negation” imply (p. 731). Yet, as did the earlier critical theorists, he does not give up hope. Just as Greek and Roman intellectuals at the beginning of the Christian era could not imagine that a new religion would conquer Europe and even parts of the whole globe (p. 1557), what is still hidden in the dark tunnel of the future, might, one day, shine on Humanity.

Could the critical theory of religion and society make a difference? Presently, it merely moves at the periphery of the social sciences, but it stands to gain for its soundness and decisive optimism. *The Manifesto* indeed constitutes ‘exceptional social scientific writing,’ one masterpiece among the best examples of scholarship in town. It is a reader-friendly marathon-book. Where the branches of mainstream social science and sociology are partial, either this or that, *The Manifesto* focuses both on objective and subjective reality, praxis and thought, the past and the future; it involves both rationality and affect, reason and emotion, heart as well as mind. *The Manifesto* evaluates and incorporates into “religiology” the best of both idealist and materialist philosophical thought. Guided by dialectical reasoning, it steers clear of moralizing and unfunded value judgments.

An additional important point is that the author firmly respects other branches of sociocultural and religious studies, expecting help from them for establishing the critical theory of religion and society (pp. 397-9). Also, he schematized *The Manifesto*’s conceptual framework apparently in the fashion of mainstream social science, outlining it in five Appendixes (pp. 414-23): a five-fold world model, a categorization of the forms of human action, a heuristic model of the world religions, modern civil society’s 24 antagonisms, and finally, three types of alternative futures. In the latter, only the definition of the religious Future III is couched in a sociologically uncommon wording: “The open dialectic of the religious and the secular.”

To end this review with a personal note, I have learned much from *The Manifesto*, from those three foreground-background pictures, about the dimension of evil, the

potentiality of religious thought (including the mysticism of the Wholly Other) and future expectations for Humanity. In the review, I have inserted something like a guess or two, and a few snippets of interpretation here and there that reflect my knowledge of sociology and social studies. From my own limited perspective, I would like to argue that phenomenological inquiries and, in particular, value studies could contribute to the same humanitarian goal as that of *The Manifesto*. Similar to the latter's brand of social science, studying values must start from actual human conditions; it must engage both subjectivity and objectivity, thought and praxis, affect and reason. Pinpointing social evil, *The Manifesto* excels in sociocultural criticism. Its strongest point appears to be its multi-dimensional, longitudinal approach of study, the quality and excellence of which probably is the hardest to achieve.

## Note

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***Muslim Portraits: The Anti-Apartheid Struggle.* Vahed, Goolam (compiler). 2012. Durban: Madiba Publishers. Illustrated pp. 387. ISBN 1-874945-25-X.**

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Though efforts have been made by social scientists to write up the social history of Muslims in (certain parts of) South Africa, little has been done to offer informed insights into the lives (i.e. biographies) of individuals who had been intimately involved in the anti-apartheid liberation movements. It is therefore refreshing to observe that attempts have been made to produce detailed biographies of South African Muslim personalities that have been involved in the struggle. So far the public has seen (and hopefully read) Ismail Meer's *A Fortunate Man* (2000), Ahmed Kathrada's *Memoirs* (2004), Imtiaz Cajee's *Timol: A Quest for Justice* (2005), Zubeida Jaffer's *Love in the Time of Treason: The Life Story of Ayesha Dawood* (2008) Haroon Aziz'z *Life of Social Justice: Biography of R.A.M Saloojee* (2010), Barney Desai & Cardiff Marney's (slightly edited and illustrated) *The Killing of the Imam* ([1978] 2012). These texts are indeed inspirational works that should be made compulsory reading within Muslim educational institutions in particular and the South African educational institutions in general so that lessons can be drawn from how these individuals understood their religious tradition within an apartheid context.

Thus far these writings have helped to fill some of the glaring gaps about the contribution of Muslims towards dismantling the apartheid system, other (biographical and autobiographical) manuscripts – as far as is known - are still in the making and they will confidently make an added input on this subject. But as the public awaits the completion of these manuscripts and their eventual publication, they have to in the meanwhile be satisfied with the compilation of Goolam Vahed's - a University of KwaZulu Natal historian - *Muslim Portraits*; a publication that appeared towards the end of 2012. It is a timely album of pen portraits that complements the co-edited text by Rashid Seedat and Razia Saleh titled *Men of Dynamite: Pen Portraits of MK Pioneers* (2009); the only difference is that the latter did not restrict itself to the eleven Muslim personalities only but it also included individuals who hailed from other ethno-religious communities. Nonetheless, Goolam Vahed's assemblage gives the reader a bird's eyview of a selection of individuals that were in the vanguard of the struggle and who were leading members

of, among others, the African National Congress, Pan African Congress, the Transvaal & Natal Indian Congress, and Unity Movement.

Being a selection of pen portraits implied that a number of others were inadvertently excluded and this was indeed unfortunate to say the least. The collection of sketches, for example, did not have a write up of any of the following significant individuals: namely, PAC's Yasien Mohamed (not to be confused with the University of the Western Cape academic), Qibla/PAC's Yusuf Patel, ANC's Ashraf Forbes, ANC's Faker Salie, ANC's Fatima Adam, and former Robben Island inmate Sedick Isaacs. Even though Faisal Suliman, the Durban based South African Muslim Network's (SAMNET) chairperson, pointed out in his introduction that the list was 'by no means exhaustive, nor ... representative...' (p. 11), this reviewer is of the opinion that SAMNET should have produced a much more comprehensive text instead of having confined itself to this selection; if SAMNET had targeted an inclusive and wide-ranging project (with perhaps a team of two to three compilers), then it would certainly have avoided this and other pitfalls. Be that as it may and despite its shortcomings, Vahed's compilation has inserted names of individuals on the anti-apartheid map that would otherwise have been forgotten or would not have been recorded at all.

For the record, Vahed was tasked by SAMNET to identify and compile a reasonably representative list of Muslims that were involved in the struggle. SAMNET realized the need for such a contribution a while ago and embarked on this project with the financial inputs of a few generous donors that appear on the publication's Acknowledgment page (p.6). However, when this Muslim NGO pursued this interesting and indeed commendable project, it naturally encountered one specific dilemma and that was how to define the word 'Muslim' within the broad South African anti-apartheid framework; the basic reason for the predicament was premised on the fact that quite a number of individuals (such as Yusuf Dadoo and Kader Hashim) who participated were leading members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Unity Movement (UM). These were organizations that distanced themselves from religion and in fact rejected the role of religion in the public arena; and in most instances they looked down upon anyone who expressed belief in God. Now to overcome this quandary and to avert possible theological squabbles, SAMNET opted to define the word loosely. Faisal Suliman, SAMNET's chairperson who – instead of the compiler - wrote the 'Introduction' (pp.9-11), stated that, "We have taken Muslim here to be an identity and not a reflection of the levels of piety of the individual activists or the extent to which they observed certain rituals" (p.10). Even though it is not an adequate definition and taking into account the fact

that there were individuals who did not wish to be identified with Islam or Muslims, it may be regarded as a fairly workable definition; and as a result of SAMNET's broad interpretation, the compilation selected and inserted all those individuals that were born and nurtured in a Muslim household.

Vahed, who is known for having published informative historical texts, should have been given the opportunity of writing the introduction of this collection of portraits since he was the one responsible for bringing this collection together. After Faisal Suliman's, SAMNET's chairperson, introduction, it was followed by two 'Forewords'; the first was written by Ebrahim Rasool (pp. 12-13) and Ahmed Kathrada (pp.14-15). What the publicated sorely lacked was the absence of a user-friendly index. In addition to this, a few errors/mistakes unfortunately also appeared; for example, the date '1968' is incorrect and it should probably be '1978', 'Wider' should be replaced by 'Wieder' on p. 126, 'wer' should have been 'were' on p. 152; the one preposition 'of' should be deleted on p.181, 'World Conference on Religion and Peace' instead of 'World Conference of Religion and Peace' (p.187), 'Venter' should be 'Visser' on p. 303, and the word 'iniciiated' should be intiated on p. 326. Vahed included in this publication as many appropriate photographs to accompany the portraits and this, to a large degree, enhanced the publication's presentation.

The compiler extracted information from websites such as South African History Online, written/extant biographies, published obituaries, and other sources. While some individuals had reasonably detailed write-ups about themselves, other lesser-known figures did not have much information; hence the unevenness in the coverage. When one flips through the pages of this interesting compilation, one notes that at the end of the portraits the sources have generally been acknowledged; in very rare instances, however, there were no sources mentioned (see p.154, p.168, p.170, p.329, p. 333, p.349, p.362, and p.381). Although the compilation consists of 101 portraits of well-known and less known figures, one of the entries (namely, Cassim Kikia and His Illustrious Brothers pp. 195-198) contains pencil sketches of more than one individual. The entries followed an alphabetical order; it opened with an entry that offered a portrayal of the unknown Farid Ahmed Adams (pp. 17-18) and it concluded with a pen sketch of the well-respected Zakeria Yacoob (pp. 385-387) who recently retired from the legal bench.

One interesting observation is that as one browses the contents pages (pp. 3-5), one is struck by the groups of families that were heavily involved in the struggle. When one travels to the 'Transvaal' (now Guateng) the Cachalias (pp.51-62) stand out as leading TIC and ANC members, and when one moves to the Cape the name of the Gool family (pp.128-136) looms large. And when one shifts to Kwa-Zulu Natal

the Meer family (pp.222-246) featured prominently in both the NIC and ANC. Apart from identifying the families, it is also fascinating to note the coterie of sisters and brothers that made their mark in these organizations: there were, for example, Aziz & Essop Pahad (pp. 294-298), Mo & Yunis Shaikh (pp.350-355), Zuleikha Asvat & Amina Cachalia (pp. 40-41 & pp. 51-53) and Fatima Seedat & Rahima Moosa (pp. 346-347). In addition to these families and siblings, there were also a number of individuals whose participation in these organizations was critical and in the main well-recorded. From among the famous personalities that Vahed included were Dr. Yusuf Dadoo - the SACP ideologue, Professor Fatima Meer - the University of Natal academic, and Imam Haron – the religious leader of a small Cape Muslim organization.

Vahed's compilation undoubtedly made an important contribution by weaving the Muslim inputs onto the larger South African anti-apartheid socio-political history canvass. Although on the surface it seems to only contain a random list of independent portraits, a closer look informs one that the various portraits connect with one another in more ways than one. For the social historian this publication bears much information from which to draw upon; particularly when s/he decides to write the South African Muslim community's social history using anti-apartheid politics as one of the key entry points. The text is informative, instructive and educative and it is therefore hoped that it will cause SAMNET to produce a second volume that would include all those who were unintentionally left out in this particular volume. More importantly, however, this volume should be viewed as a basis for further biographical research so that the Muslim contribution can be better understood and appreciated in the years ahead. Perhaps SAMNET along with AwqafSA, which saw to the publication of Haroon Aziz's earlier mentioned text, should join hands to work towards the publication of various texts on Southern African Muslim history and personalities; a joint project such as this would give this ever-growing and vibrant community - despite all its shortcomings – a much needed face-lift.