

WORLD THOUGHT IN TRANSLATION

Critique *of* Religious Discourse

NAQD AL-KHITAB AL-DINI

NASR HAMID ABU ZAYD

Translated by JONATHAN WRIGHT

With a Scholarly Introduction by

CAROOl KERSTEN

Critique of Religious Discourse

World Thought in Translation

A joint project of Yale University Press and the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University, *World Thought in Translation* makes important works of classical and contemporary political, philosophical, legal, and social thought from outside the Western tradition available to English-speaking scholars, students, and general readers. The translations are annotated and accompanied by critical introductions that orient readers to the background in which these texts were written, their initial reception, and their enduring influence within and beyond their own cultures. *World Thought in Translation* contributes to the study of religious and secular intellectual traditions across cultures and civilizations.

Series editors

Steven Angle

Andrew March

Ian Shapiro

Critique of Religious Discourse

Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Translated by Jonathan Wright

With a Scholarly Introduction by Carool Kersten

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS

New Haven and London

This publication was made possible in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

Introduction and English translation copyright © 2018 by Yale University.
Originally published as *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* in 1990 by Dar al-Thaqafa al Jadida.
All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Yale University Press books may be purchased in quantity for educational, business, or promotional use. For information, please e-mail sales.press@yale.edu (U.S. office) or sales@yaleup.co.uk (U.K. office).

Set in Adobe Caslon Pro type by Newgen North America.
Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017942336
ISBN 978-0-300-20712-5 (hardcover : alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992
(Permanence of Paper).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

**Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Introduction to His Life and Work,
by Carool Kersten, 1**

Critique of Religious Discourse, 23

Introduction, 27

1. Contemporary Religious Discourse: Its Strategies and Intellectual Premises, 34

First: The Strategies Used in the Discourse, 48

Conflating Ideas and Religion, 49

Explaining All Phenomena by Reference to One Starting Point, 53

Reliance on the Authority of Tradition and the Early Muslims, 59

Intellectual Dogmatism, 66

Dismissing the Historical Dimension, 74

Second: The Intellectual Premises, 81

Divine Sovereignty, 81

The Text and Nass, 106

2. Tradition Interpreted or Colored: A Reading of the Project of the Islamic Left, 136

Interpretation: The Linguistic Sense and the Technical Sense, 138

Coloring: A Tendentious Reading, 141

Productive Readings, 144

The Islamic Left and the Priorities of Religious Discourse, 148

The Past and the Present: The Root and the Branch, 163

Tradition: A Construct of Consciousness or a Historical Construct, 173

Tradition: Rebuilding or a Fresh Coat of Paint, 183

The Texts: Interpretation or Coloring, 199

Syncretism: Success and Failure, 212

3. Reading Religious Texts: An Exploratory Study of Types of Meaning, 226

Notes, 273

Index, 291

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

An Introduction to His Life and Work

Carool Kersten

It is not often that a relatively obscure academic specializing in the literary study of sacred scriptures comes to the attention of audiences beyond that of the select and erudite company of his or her peers. But this is exactly what happened to the author of this book, the late Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943–2010). When, in the early 1990s, a dispute about his promotion to full professor at the University of Cairo exploded into a full-blown political scandal, it did not just turn him into a scholarly *cause célèbre*; sadly, it also eventually forced Abu Zayd into exile abroad. His advocacy of subjecting the Qur'an to rigorous scholarly investigation using innovative methods and techniques of textual criticism and discourse analysis

used in literary studies was considered anathema by Islamist activists, driving them to persecute the beleaguered scholar by declaring him an apostate and—adding insult to injury—petitioning the court system to forcibly divorce him from his wife, the noted professor in Romance languages Ibtihal Younis. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case: In 1992, members of the terrorist group al-Gamā‘ā al-Islāmiyya had murdered the writer Farag Foda; two years later, another religious fanatic almost fatally stabbed Naguib Mahfouz, the doyen of Egyptian literature and the first Arab Nobel Literature Prize Laureate. Therefore, the couple, electing not to find out what the consequences of the verdict would be, opted for asylum abroad. Rebuilding his academic career in Europe, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd has since been recognized internationally as a scholar who has made pioneering—and controversial—contributions to move the study of the Qur’an and of the wider Islamic intellectual legacy forward.¹

In this he has not been alone: Abu Zayd is part of a group of contemporary intellectuals from the Arabic-speaking part of the Muslim world known as the *turāthiyyūn*, or “heritage thinkers.” This strand of Islamic thinking developed in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the traumatic outcome of the 1967 war between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries.² It ran chronologically parallel to the Islamic resurgence (*al-saḥwa al-islāmiyya*), which also emerged in the wake of what had been for the Arab world such a disastrous confrontation. Although both have turned their gaze on the Islamic past, interpretations of Islam by the *turāthiyyūn* form a counter-narrative to the puritanical religious revivalism and uncompromising politics of the Islamists, who felt encouraged by the revolution in Iran and the ongoing military resistance

of the Afghan *mujahideen* to the invading Soviet Army. They became further emboldened when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was assassinated by members of a violent Islamist cell after he signed a peace treaty with Israel. Islamist organizations, including the mass movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, rally around the slogan *al-Islam huwa al-hall* ("Islam is the solution"), presenting it as a total—and totalitarian—way of life. By contrast, the heritage thinkers have a very different comprehensive understanding of Islam. Instead of presenting Islam as a political instrument, they celebrate it as a civilization with important and wide-ranging intellectual, cultural, and artistic achievements that should inspire Muslims to reassert themselves. For that purpose, the heritage thinkers encourage a critical examination of the Islamic legacy: interrogating dominant discourses, challenging the hegemonic orthodoxy, and protesting the repression of so-called heresies. In this they are helped by a double intellectual genealogy: intimate familiarity with the Islamic tradition combined with solid knowledge of the advances made in the humanities and social sciences in the Western academe.

Pioneered by intellectuals like Zaki Naguib Mahmud and Mahmoud Amin al-Alem, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd belonged to a younger generation that rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, which also included the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, his Egyptian colleague Hasan Hanafi, and the French-Algerian historian of Islam Mohammed Arkoun. Except for Arkoun, who writes mainly in French and English, the works of the others are almost exclusively available in Arabic and therefore are by and large unknown to the wider public without knowledge of that language. The present integral translation of one of

Abu Zayd's books is a long-awaited initiative in unlocking this part of the intellectual legacy of the Muslim world by finally making it available in English.³

The Life Story of an Exilic Intellectual

Originating from the village of Quhafa near Tanta in the Nile Delta, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd was the archetypal son of Egypt. He was raised in a pious peasant family, although his father was not a farmer but a shopkeeper. In line with family tradition, Nasr was sent to the Qur'an School, the *kuttāb*, which offered basic religious instruction revolving around memorizing the Qur'an. A talented pupil, Abu Zayd had by the age of eight mastered the Qur'an and become a *hāfidh*—a person who knows and can recite the whole text by heart. In his autobiography, Abu Zayd relates how this experience taught him the appeal of recitation, because the written text can't quite capture the aesthetic, let alone the sensory, aspects of the Qur'an. Turning the Qur'an into an acoustic work of art also affirmed to Abu Zayd that "a religion without the physical experience of ritual is no more than a mental construct."⁴ However, he also ventures the opinion that this may contribute to an explanation for the fear harbored by many Muslims regarding text-critical engagements with the Qur'an—a worry Abu Zayd never shared.

Abu Zayd's later education did not follow the conventional trajectory of modern Egypt. By the time he had memorized the Qur'an, he was too old to be enrolled in a state primary school.

Also his father did not want him to continue a religious education, since it could potentially take up to the age of thirty to earn the highest credentials from Al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo. So instead, Nasr Abu Zayd completed his primary education at a private Coptic school, which was not considered that unusual, because—on the village level, anyway—relations between Muslims and Copts had always been cordial. Only in 1956 did he enter a secular state school, where he quickly passed the junior high school exams. However, Abu Zayd's father rejected his ambition to prepare for the state examinations that could secure him admission to university in order to study humanities—more specifically, Arabic. With his father insisting that his son learn a trade, Abu Zayd began training as a radio technician. When his father died just a year later, the fourteen-year-old now faced responsibility for looking after his mother and four younger siblings. After scraping through three years of training, in 1960 he was hired by the Ministry of Communications, where he would work for the next twelve years.

Not wanting to give up on his dream of studying Arabic, Abu Zayd continued to read voraciously. This also included the works of Sayyid Qutb, the chief ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood who was executed by the Nasser regime. His childhood membership in the “Young Lions,” the Brotherhood's scout movement, and his general sympathy for the movement notwithstanding, Abu Zayd never joined the Brotherhood. While he developed doubts about the hardening of Qutb's viewpoints, in particular the totalitarianism underlying his principle of *hākimiyya*, or “divine sovereignty,” Abu Zayd maintained that Sayyid Qutb had only written books and therefore had not committed any crimes deserving the death penalty.⁵ The Muslim Brotherhood's harsh methods also

dampened Abu Zayd's enthusiasm for the Free Officers Movement and their 1952 Revolution. Given Nasser's growing autocratic tendencies and the increasingly repressive nature of his regime, Abu Zayd claims that he was therefore not surprised by the crushing defeat of 1967 but admits that the psychological blow was devastating to him too.

Meditating on the impact of the war, Abu Zayd notes that everybody began looking back at the Islamic past: Not just the Islamists who saw the era of the *salaf sālib*—the “pious ancestors” consisting of the first three generations of Muslims—as a golden age and the benchmark for all Muslim conduct. Intellectuals too became very much preoccupied with the Islamic heritage. However, it was only the Islamists who managed to connect with the people. The alternative political course set by the new president, Anwar Sadat, enabled them both to spread and to deepen their influence in Egyptian society—further aided by huge financial support from Muslim Brothers who had gone to the Gulf States to make their fortunes after the 1970s oil boom and by the petrodollars of the monarchies that were hosting them. The intellectuals, meanwhile, failed because they displayed the same arrogance toward the common people as the political elite. According to Abu Zayd, instead of patronizing the people, the task of intellectuals is to act as translators between cultures, demonstrating that the key principles of human rights and democracy are shared values. Abu Zayd further unpacks these observations in the first and second parts of *Critique of Religious Discourse*, respectively.

In spite of not receiving any support from his superiors, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd refused to give up his ambition of becoming an academic, and in 1968 he enrolled as a regular student at Cairo University's humanities faculty. After a year of general studies,

Abu Zayd opted to major in Arabic. Looking back on his undergraduate years, he judged his third year as the most rewarding, due to the influence of Hasan Hanafi, his Sorbonne-trained philosophy teacher.⁶ Having recently returned from Paris, instead of using his lectures to dictate his notes for students to write down verbatim, Hanafi encouraged debate and classroom discussions. Although a friendship bloomed, teacher and student would later sharply criticize each other's ideas. Abu Zayd's own focus remained literary rather than philosophical. Also, he continued to be fascinated by the language of the Qur'an. First kindled in the *kuttāb*, at university his interests in literature and in the sacred text mutually reinforced each other. This dialectical relation also informed Abu Zayd's decision to write his master's thesis on the Qur'anic metaphor in Mu'tazilite thought. The Mu'tazila were a theological school emerging in Iraq during the Abbasid Caliphate that used reason inspired by classical Greek rationalism.⁷ The selection of this particular topic enabled Abu Zayd to remain associated with the Department of Arabic Studies and to put the Qur'an text under the spotlight of literary criticism, rhetoric, grammar, structural linguistics, and the newly developing field of semiotics—the study of signs.

For his doctoral studies, Abu Zayd wanted to investigate what kind of theory of interpretation should be applied to the Qur'an. He approached this question by switching the angle from rationalist Mu'tazilite theology to the mystic Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE), a peripatetic Andalusian who is regarded as the key exponent of philosophical Sufism (sometimes referred to as “theosophy”). After obtaining a scholarship through the Ford Foundation, Abu Zayd studied for two years (1978–79) at the University of Pennsylvania. When preparing his research, he had

been searching for an accurate English translation of the Arabic term *ta'wīl*. To distinguish it from the historical-philological and lexicographical preoccupations of another type of Qur'an commentaries called *tafsīr*, it is often rendered as "allegorical exegesis" or "esoteric exegesis."⁸ It was his former philosophy professor, Hasan Hanafi, who provided the answer: *ta'wīl* is best likened to hermeneutics.⁹ Abu Zayd set out to study its history from classical Greek philosophy to the modern contributions by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, branching out into the structural linguistics and anthropology of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss before exploring Heidegger's existentialism and the phenomenological hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur.

In the university library, Abu Zayd also came across the work of the Japanese scholar of Islam Toshihiko Izutsu (not Toshiba, as Abu Zayd's autobiography erroneously has it), whose writings on the Qur'an would become instrumental to what Abu Zayd emphatically identifies as his most important book: *Mafhūm al-Nass*.¹⁰ After returning to Egypt, Abu Zayd completed his doctoral thesis on the hermeneutics of Ibn Arabi in 1981—shortly before Sadat's clash with his political opponents, the ensuing mass arrests in September of that year, and Sadat's eventual assassination a month after that. In the wake of further security crackdowns and an utterly changed atmosphere at the university, Abu Zayd seized the opportunity of a visiting professorship at the University of Khartoum, teaching there every year for a few months. He found working with Sudanese students such a rewarding experience that he later dedicated *Mafhūm al-Nass* to them. The book was largely written during a four-year stint (1985–1989) at the University of Osaka in Japan.¹¹ Although he never succeeded in meeting Izutsu in person and never managed to learn the Japanese

language, Abu Zayd characterized his experiences in Japan as his “course in semiotics.”¹²

Back in Egypt, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd continued to teach quietly as an associate professor at Cairo University and became *de facto* head of the section of Qur'an and Hadith Studies in the Department of Arabic. It was Abu Zayd's application for a full professorship in the summer of 1992 that set in motion a chain of events that not only led to the eruption of an academic scandal when the university senate sided with a minority report advising against his promotion but also eventually spiralled into a full-blown juridical and political controversy as wider attention for Abu Zayd's writings incited Islamist activists to bring charges of apostasy against Abu Zayd to court. Parallels have been drawn with the case of the Qur'anic studies expert Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah in the 1940s and that of Taha Hussein, one of Egypt's most famous men of letters from the twentieth century, who in 1926 was fired from his position at Cairo University because of a book on pre-Islamic poetry.¹³ However, Abu Zayd has underscored an important difference: In the case of Taha Hussein, the university leapt to his defense—but that did not happen with Abu Zayd.

According to Abu Zayd, it was a Friday sermon by Abd al-Sabur Shahin, the author of the negative assessment report, that caused the media to get wind of the affair and draw wider public attention to his writings. Shahin not only accused Abu Zayd of disrespecting Islam but called him an atheist and a communist as well. In the spring of 1993, Abu Zayd learned that a case had been brought against him on the basis of the principle of *hisba*—a Islamic juridical instrument according to which a third party can file charges with the court against someone if it considers it in the public interest.¹⁴ The plaintiffs reasoned that, since Abu Zayd's

analyses of the Qur'an were in conflict with Islamic doctrine, he was an apostate and that he could therefore not be married to a Muslim woman. Therefore, they petitioned the court to pronounce a forcible divorce. After two years of court proceedings, on June 14, 1995, the appeals court ruled that the marriage of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Ibtihal Younis would be dissolved. In the intervening time, Abu Zayd—since promoted to full professor anyway—had continued to teach at the university and live in Cairo under police protection. Conscious of the risks entailed by this verdict, Abu Zayd decided to take up the invitation of the Dutch Arabist Fred Leemhuis, then the director of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, to become guest professor at the University of Leiden, where he later also held the prestigious Cleveringa Chair, before becoming extraordinary Professor of Humanism and Islam at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht.

Along with the publicity surrounding his controversial promotion and court case, the move to Europe expanded the attention for Abu Zayd's writings and ideas beyond the select audiences of Qur'anic studies specialists, taking them also outside of the Arabic-speaking parts of the Muslim world. Abu Zayd was able to continue visiting Arab countries, such as Jordan, Syria, and Tunisia, but since the late 1990s, his work has commanded particular interest in Indonesia. There he has become part of what I have elsewhere called an "Arab Quartet" of heritage thinkers whose ideas have become influential in the largest Muslim nation-state in the world.¹⁵ During one of these visits, Abu Zayd contracted an infection that eventually resulted in his untimely death, on July 5, 2010—just five days short of his sixty-seventh birthday. He passed away in Cairo, during one of the discreet visits he had recently begun making to the country of his birth.

The Place of Abu Zayd's Ideas in the World of Contemporary Arab Thought

The *turāthiyyūn*, in particular the professional philosophers among them, have a great interest in reviving the Islamic legacy of rationalist thought, such as the tradition developed by the School of the Mu'tazila (which is actually theological rather than purely philosophical) and the ideas of Ibn Rushd, better known in the West as Averroes, who can be considered a "proper philosopher" because his contributions and interests went far beyond the provision of religious doctrines with rational underpinnings. For that reason, some have even referred to heritage thinkers as "Arab Averroists."¹⁶ Not an academic philosopher but an Arabist and literary scholar from his postgraduate studies onward, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd demonstrated a more catholic approach, not only engaging with Mu'tazilite thought but also exploring the esoteric theosophy of Ibn Arabi—interests shared by his teacher of philosophy, Hasan Hanafi.

Speaking as a linguist and philologist specializing in Qur'anic hermeneutics, Abu Zayd explains in his *Critique of Religious Discourse* that—since Muhammad is not the author of the Qur'an—he must be considered the first exegete. Thus, it is the Prophet himself who has broken ground for a continuous process of interpretation.¹⁷ Abu Zayd also refers to interpretation as "the other side of the text."¹⁸ Aside from the lexicographical preoccupations of the *mufasssirūn*, the practitioners of orthodox *tafsīr*, Abu Zayd distinguishes three "dominant streams" of Qur'an commentary: Mu'tazilite Scholasticism, mystical exegesis, and "Shi'ite hermeneutics in all its varieties which have maintained close mutual relations with the Mu'tazila, on the one hand, Sufism, on the

other.”¹⁹ The full flourishing of these three strands of thought was short-lived, because by the tenth or eleventh century, the influence of exegetes who adhered to the literal meaning of the text began to carry more and more weight. Abu Zayd is quite adamant that this literalist rather than literary tendency, which can be traced back to Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), dominated until the modern era—especially as a result of the interventions of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and his successor Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) as well as the political success of the chief ideologue of Salafi Islam, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) in what is now Saudi Arabia. As a result, the Mu‘tazila quickly lost its authority and was relegated to the periphery, its legacy only preserved by certain strands of Shi‘ite theology; for their part, Sufi exegesis took refuge in poetry. It was not until the nineteenth century that the Egyptian reformist Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) gave new impetus to Qur’anic exegesis and to a modernizing of Islamic thinking in general. However, in Abu Zayd’s opinion, he remains an ambiguous figure. On the one hand, Abduh took inspiration from both Sufism and the Mu‘tazila; on the other hand, largely due to the influence of Rashid Rida, chief executor of Abduh’s intellectual legacy (1865–1935), he comes across as someone who would hesitate to choose between genuine interpretation of a text or simple explication of the meaning of individual words.²⁰

Aside from this interest in the history of different Islamic epistemologies in relation to Qur’anic exegesis, Abu Zayd’s preoccupations with the terminological difficulties surrounding *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* in his first two books articulate a desire to act as a translator between cultures.²¹ Throughout *Mafhūm al-Nass* but also in a section on interpretation in *Critique of Religious Discourse*, Abu Zayd returned to these two terms to make an emphatic distinction be-

tween the mere explanation of words in the text (*tafsīr*) on the basis of transmitted traditional learning (*riwāya*) and interpretation (*ta'wīl*) using human intellect (*dhīhn, dirāya*), which resemble the modern philosophical discipline of hermeneutics.²² At the same time, Abu Zayd also maintained an appreciation and respect for the endogenous methods of exegesis developed within the Islamic tradition, even if his purpose was to align them with the methodological and theoretical advances made by Western scholarship in the human sciences.

When he calls the Qur'an a literary text, Abu Zayd is not reducing it to its poetic elements alone. The Qur'an is a religious text with a spiritual, moral, and juridical content and a variety of functions, including that of an acoustic work of art. However, as a complex linguistic construct, it can be subjected to scholarly investigation on the basis of literary-critical and text-analytical methods. Already before enrolling in university, Abu Zayd had read the work of the early Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah, and the latter's mentor, Amin al-Khouli, all of whom were interested in the aesthetic dimensions of the Qur'an, which resonated strongly with Abu Zayd's own understanding of the scripture as both a text and an acoustic piece of art. With the benefit of hindsight, Abu Zayd could have anticipated what lay in store for him when he decided to do something similar in his later life. Both al-Khouli and Khalafallah got into trouble with the religious establishment when the latter applied al-Khouli's approach—built on the work done before him by Muhammad Abduh and Taha Hussein—in his doctoral thesis "The Art of Narration in the Qur'an." There is also an irony in Abu Zayd's collision with the same type of critics who had sought to destroy the academic and personal reputations of these two pioneers of Qur'anic Studies through text criticism and

discourse analysis. Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue inspiring Abu Zayd's most hostile detractors, had himself started as a literary critic engaged in studying the artistic dimensions of the Qur'an. Signaling this in his autobiography, Abu Zayd notes however that—in comparison to the erudition of al-Khouli and Khalafallah—Sayyid Qutb's writings on the subject were “impressionist” at best.²³

As already mentioned, when engaging with the work of Ibn Arabi, especially his monumental Qur'an commentary, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (“Meccan Revelations”), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd had to confront the question of finding an accurate translation for the term *ta'wīl*. By linking this term to modern hermeneutics, he discovered that Ibn Arabi and he inhabited the same world, “the world between the reader and the text.”²⁴ In *Maḥbūm al-Nass*, this would bring Abu Zayd to the proposition that, while Arab-Islamic civilization could certainly be characterized as a “civilization of the text” (*ḥadārat al-nass*), this was not a complete and wholly accurate definition, because texts in themselves do not create the learning, knowledge, and culture of which a civilization consists: It is only because humankind stands in a dialectical relationship (*jadl*) with worldly reality and because humans are in dialogue (*ḥiwār*) with (revealed) texts that—through these interactions—knowledge is produced and a culture can emerge. Knowledge production resulting from the direct interpretation of a civilization's foundational text, in this instance the Qur'an, belongs to the realm of the religious sciences, while indirect interpretations constitute the domain of the other (worldly) sciences.²⁵

Moreover, the complex dialectical relationships that Abu Zayd identifies between revealed text, reality, and culture, together with his interest in the communicative dimensions of the revelatory re-

lationship between God and man, which he tried to map in what he later called a “humanistic hermeneutics,” also brings back the author into Abu Zayd’s hermeneutical exercise.²⁶ This, and the dialectics and dialogism informing Abu Zayd’s conceptualization of the relationships tying together author, reader, and text, also heralds the return of reception theory.²⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd’s hermeneutics has already been the subject of academic research, but this has been largely conducted from the perspective of Islamic studies as a field of academic inquiry. The scholars involved have signaled Abu Zayd’s readings in philosophical hermeneutics, structural linguistics, and semiotics, which provided him with the necessary methodological toolbox for his own literary investigations of the Qur’an and the overall scholarly approach of the Islamic heritage.²⁸ However, so far no attempts have been made to relate his work to the generic field of literary theory and criticism. Taking into consideration Abu Zayd’s unequivocal observation that “literary studies, revolving around the notion of the text, are the guarantor for realizing a ‘scholarly approach’ with which we can overcome the ‘ideological orientation’ that dominates our culture and our thinking,” I suggest that there is a parallel with, for example, the work of the literary theorist Terry Eagleton.²⁹

In his widely read *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton shows how reception theory has helped to reconnect the highly formalized and closed systems of structuralist analysis with the contextualized approaches of hermeneutics through the work of, among others, the Soviet-Estonian semiotician Yuri (Juri) Lotman—a key source for Abu Zayd’s hermeneutics. To make his case, Eagleton begins with Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1935), which he presents as the final chapter of his phenomenological mediation between “sterile positivism” and “indefensible

subjectivism.”³⁰ As I have discussed elsewhere in the context of the phenomenological ambitions of Abu Zayd’s teacher, Hasan Hanafi, *Crisis* was a major corrective of the latter’s earlier phenomenology, which had had the ambition of salvaging the kind of certainties articulated by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*.³¹ As Eagleton points out, “dissimilar though [phenomenology and structuralism] are in central ways, both spring from the ironic act of shutting out the material world in order the better to illuminate our consciousness of it.”³² New ways to pry open these closed systems were developed in semiotics and phenomenological hermeneutics.

Eagleton has demonstrated how the phenomenological trajectory extended into Heidegger’s often dark existentialism and Gadamer’s skeptical *Truth and Method*. Abu Zayd would share Eagleton’s appreciation for the phenomenological hermeneutics started by Heidegger. They recognized the role of language in the production of meaning and, simultaneously, the importance of practical social interests in formulating theoretical knowledge in order to accommodate historicity.³³ However, hermeneutics also came from another direction. Combining the earlier contributions by Schleiermacher and Dilthey with Husserl’s concern for meaning as an intentional object, E. D. Hirsch continued to subscribe to a prelinguistic understanding of meaning as a constant, identical to authorial intention, while using the term *significance* for the ways literary works (which for Abu Zayd also includes revealed texts) can affect “different people at different times” and thus “vary throughout history.”³⁴ Whereas the distinction between meaning and significance is a valid one, Eagleton posits that the distinction is not as absolute as presented by Hirsch, which Eagleton

characterizes as “authoritarian and juridical” because it sees meaning in terms of “private property,” as belonging to the author.³⁵ Abu Zayd’s hermeneutics subscribes to Eagleton’s challenge that this is a false parallel, because “meanings are not as stable and determinate as Hirsch thinks, even authorial ones—and the reason they are not is because, as he will not recognize, they are products of language.”³⁶ Also, Hirsch overlooks that the very reconstruction of authorial meaning by hermeneuticians is affected by their own “historically conditioned frames of meaning and perception.”³⁷ According to Eagleton, Hirsch was trying to throw up a line of defense against what he regards as Gadamer’s complete relativism in fine-tuning the ways in which meaning and its interpretation are bound linguistically and historically. To Gadamer, “all interpretation is situational, shaped and constrained by the historically relative criteria of a particular culture” and “all interpretation of a past work consists in a dialogue between past and present.”³⁸

Although Gadamer was as important to Abu Zayd’s hermeneutics as Izutsu, it nevertheless shares some of Eagleton’s reservations.³⁹ Eagleton is very critical of Gadamer’s assumption of a single major tradition, calling it a “grossly complacent theory of history,” without the “possibility for critically challenging that authority” because its justification is “outside the arguments of reason.”⁴⁰ Evidently, this resonates strongly with Abu Zayd’s criticism of the hegemony of Ash‘ari orthodoxy at the expense of Mu‘tazilite rationalism, Sufi hermeneutics, and certain strands of Shi‘ite theology.⁴¹ To challenge the notion of a permanently fixed tradition, like Abu Zayd, Eagleton too turns his attention to structuralism and its almost exclusive focus on the linguistic production of meaning. As the merits of structuralism, Eagleton lists its

“remorseless *demystification* of literature” and the “emphasis on the ‘constructedness’ of human meaning,” which make it impossible to attribute to literature an “ontologically privileged status.”⁴² Also, “the fact that structuralism offends common sense” is regarded favorably, because the rejection of the continuity between reality and our experience of it allows the undermining of “the ideological security of those who wish the world to be within their control.”⁴³

The hard structuralism Saussure developed between 1907 and 1911 only came to delayed prominence in the 1960s when it gained new currency through the joint efforts of Prague school linguist Roman Jakobson and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.⁴⁴ It was in particular Jakobson who further developed Saussure’s static model focused on the objective structures of signs called *langue* (as opposed to actual speech or *parole*) into a more sophisticated theory of communication. Instead of three elements—sign, signifier, and signified—he distinguished six elements: addresser, addressee, message, shared code, contact or physical medium, and context. Although the Prague school was predominantly occupied with the functional structures governing literary expressions, there was with the introduction of this last element at least an acknowledgment that what counted as a literary artifact was also a matter of social and historical circumstances.⁴⁵ Eagleton credits the Prague school with opening the way for merging structuralism with new fields of investigation. Paralleling the way Husserlian phenomenology was transformed into hermeneutics by Heidegger and Gadamer, the closed system of structural linguistics provided the building blocks for newly developing and increasingly sophisticated fields called semiotics (or semiology) and narratology, first pioneered by the American Charles Sanders Peirce.⁴⁶ Unable to sustain the neglect

of authorial intentions or to continue its disregard of the role of the reader, self-contained structuralism found itself open to criticism by figures such as Émile Benveniste and Yuri Lotman.⁴⁷ Central to Abu Zayd's understanding of semiotics, Lotman is singled out by Eagleton as the one who reconciled texts as "systems of systems" or "relations of relations" governed by contrast and difference, with a stratified and contextual understanding of meaning.

According to Eagleton, reception theory and semiotics can connect structuralism and hermeneutics. Reception theory also played a key role in restoring the reader and a qualified acknowledgment for the relevance of intentionality. It evolved out of the "reception aesthetics," developed in the late 1960s by Wolfgang Iser at the University of Constance, advocating a dynamic understanding of the process of reading as "a complex movement and unfolding through time."⁴⁸ Not unlike Heidegger and Gadamer's pre-understandings, readers bring certain expectations and beliefs with them to their assessment of texts, expectations and beliefs that are then modified as they start reorganizing elements of the texts by excluding, foregrounding, or concretizing certain elements. Reading is thus neither a straightforward linear movement nor a mere cumulative affair, but a complex activity carried out on many levels through which assumptions are shed, beliefs are revised, and more complex inferences are made, thus forming new anticipations. This is not a random process. According to Iser, it involves strategies and the application of repertoire, which in turn require a firm grasp of the codes (rules that systematically govern the ways in which meaning is produced), which leads back to structuralism and semiotics. The train of thought developed in Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* is echoed in Abu Zayd's elaborations of a humanistic hermeneutics.

The Place of Critique of Religious Discourse in Abu Zayd's Oeuvre

Looking at Abu Zayd's scholarly output, his monograph-sized studies can be grouped into several categories. First, there are his publications on leading figures and schools of thought from the Islamic tradition. These consist of the published versions of his master's dissertation on the Mu'tazila and his PhD thesis on the hermeneutics of Ibn Arabi, as well as on the namesake of one of the four surviving Sunni Schools of Law, Imam al-Shāfi'ī (767–820 CE).⁴⁹ Next are his elaborations on text criticism and discourse analysis, in which he applies the findings of structural linguistics and new specialisms, such as semiotics, to the study of the Qur'an, as well as the wider corpus of traditional Islamic learning. These include *Systems of Signs*, *The Problematic of Reading and Tools for Interpretation*—and Abu Zayd's magnum opus *Mafhūm al-Nass*. Finally, in the wake of his tribulations of the early 1990s, Abu Zayd became increasingly concerned with the issue of knowledge and power. Aside from synthesizing text-critical studies with intellectual and political history, this category also includes two studies on the position of women: *Woman in the Discourse of Crisis* and *Circles of Fear: Reading the Discourse about Women*.⁵⁰

I consider the present work an analysis of the discursive formations governing the intellectual landscape of the Muslim world as the hinge connecting Abu Zayd's earlier historical-philological and text-critical studies to the more engaged writings of his later career, such as *Thinking in the Time of Anathema* and *Text, Authority, Truth*.⁵¹ *Critique of Religious Discourse* was written at the same time as his grand finale in Qur'anic Studies; in fact, the notion of “religious discourse” features already in the introduction to

Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ, which he had entitled “Religious Discourse and Scholarly Method.”⁵²

I began this introduction by describing Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd as an expert from the highly specialist—and therefore somewhat arcane—field of academic inquiry engaging in the text-critical examination of the Qur’an, who then expanded his work to interrogating the wider discursive formations that make up religious thinking in the Muslim world. Although wider attention to Abu Zayd’s work may have been triggered by the sensational aspects of the controversy that befell him, it is fitting that one of his more accessible works has now become the first monograph-sized translation into English.

This page intentionally left blank

Critique of Religious Discourse

This page intentionally left blank

To the memory of the late Abdel Muhsin Taha Badr, a model of integrity and probity, candor, and clarity and above all a model of commitment to the values of reason, justice, and freedom. It may seem that he has left our world, but in fact it is our world that has abandoned the values that Abdel Muhsin Taha Badr and his predecessors represented. Whatever the case may be, Abdel Muhsin, the torch is still aflame, defying the winds.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

The rise of the Islamist movement, a phenomenon that Islamists call the Awakening, has attracted the attention of academics of various disciplines and of diverse opinions and outlooks. They have taken many different approaches and have come up with contradictory results. Interpreting the phenomenon has sometimes been mistaken for trying to justify it. Since it would be difficult to give an exhaustive account here of the broad outlines of the research that has been done, it must suffice to indicate the main trends and attitudes. The first and most prominent approach is that of the state's official religious establishment as represented by al-Azhar and by certain men of religion who are usually classified as "the

religious opposition.” Those who take this approach think that the phenomenon is positive overall, that is, as far as its meaning and significance are concerned, although they think that the movement might need some guidance and counsel. In the first chapter of this book we discuss this approach by treating it as part of the phenomenon itself, since the two of them are based on the same intellectual constants and rely on the same strategies for producing their discourse.

The second approach treats the Islamist phenomenon as the cultural manifestation of a new reality that rejects subservience and Euro-American hegemony. This approach usually adopts a theory of “specificity” based on isolationism, introversion, and self-sufficiency, and it ignores the fact that one cannot escape from the shackles of subservience and hegemony solely by reverting to the *umma*’s cultural origins—origins encapsulated in the single word *Islam*, as if the *umma* had not already had a long life prior to Islam, a life in which it produced civilizations and fashioned cultures that were themselves “origins.” Besides, the origins that define the character of the *umma* and shape its historical identity are not stable, static, passive, or suspended in a vacuum in such a way that they can be summoned up and put on in the same way that people change their clothes. The representatives of this approach are numerous, and most if not all of them have made contributions that have been influenced by what they have read in one aspect or another of modern European culture. They belong in varying degrees to the political and intellectual left in the general sense that includes Marxists, socialists, and Arab nationalists. We are not interested in those representatives of this second approach who have retraced their steps and moved from the Islamist left to the Islamist right and have made their intellectual, social, and

political choices once and for all. The second chapter is therefore an interpretation of the Islamist left's project as it appears in the writings of Hassan Hanafi in general and in his encyclopedic work *From Doctrine to Revolution* in particular. Since the Islamist left offers a reading of Islam that is different from that of the religious right and has a lively perspective on the intellectual heritage in Islam, the discussion in this chapter naturally focuses on the strategies used in that reading and the legitimacy of its interpretation.

In the third chapter we move, by necessity and logic, from reading the intellectual heritage to presenting problematic aspects of reading the religious texts themselves—aspects that have not previously been presented scientifically and objectively. This presentation may help, in one way or another, to provide guidelines for the old and yet continuing polemical controversy on the part of those who reject the legitimacy of the slogan “Islam is the Solution,” which is the third approach in dealing with the phenomenon of the Islamic revival. This approach competes for prominence with the first approach—the approach of the official religious establishment, even if it does not receive as much coverage in the media. This third approach is not a by-product of the Islamist revival or merely a negative response to it: It is an approach that is rooted in modern thought, and the most prominent representatives of it may be the “advocates of enlightenment” who are now known by the name *secularists*, a name that is sometimes meant to stigmatize them as infidels, atheists, or heretics, with the implication that these people serve foreign interests and are traitors to their countries and to the wider Arab nation.

It would not be a digression here to recall the well-known fact that the battle that raged over Taha Hussein's book *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jābili* (*On Pre-Islamic Poetry*)—a battle that almost led to

bloodshed—was not an intellectual, cultural battle over pre-Islamic poetry, which was the subject of the book. The battle was over the ideas that Taha Hussein proposed in the course of his book, hesitantly and diffidently, as an interpretation of certain religious texts connected to historical events. The evidence for this is that in the second edition of *On Pre-Islamic Poetry*, the author omitted only the lines that referred to the Qur'an and that discussed the extent to which it could be seen as a source for historical events. It was not a battle over poetry. It was a battle over whether to interpret religious texts through the instruments of human reason based in history, rather than by metaphysical thinking steeped in superstition and myth. Because the battle was fierce and the social forces that have a stake in controlling superstition and myth are vicious, the enlightenment discourse has been suppressed. The battle broke out again, at least on the academic level, when Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah submitted his doctoral dissertation on narrative art in the Qur'an to the Faculty of Literature in Cairo University. Some of the academics on the examining committee thought that the dissertation, by distinguishing between historical facts and the stories in the Qur'an, contravened the truths of the Qur'an and the shari'a. The dissertation was rejected, and a decision was taken to deprive the supervisor, Sheikh Amin al-Khouli, of the right to supervise any further dissertations pertaining to the study of religious texts.

So the battle is in fact an old battle in modern thought, not just a battle over how to read or interpret religious texts but an all-out battle on all social, economic, and political fronts. It is a battle that the forces of superstition and myth fight in the name of religion and in the name of adherence to the literal meaning of religious texts. The forces of rational progress sometimes try to

challenge myth and superstition on their own ground, but because the conflict is usually waged with the strategies of ideological polemics before anyone even attempts to bring about any scholarly awareness of the nature of the religious texts or how to read and interpret them, the religious discourse usually triumphs over the rational discourse at this polemical level. Now the time has come to escape this trap and rid ourselves of our complex about interpreting and counter-interpreting the texts by defining the nature of religious texts and the strategies by which they produce meaning. This is the exploratory project that the third chapter attempts to take on. It is a project that is still in its formative stages, and it will need much honest and diligent effort for it to reach fulfillment and take off on a sound scholarly basis.

If anyone still has doubts about the value of challenging religious thought in its various forms through research, analysis, and inquiry on the grounds that religion is an authentic and essential component of this *umma* and must therefore be a fundamental element in any renaissance program, they should not take religious discourse at the face value of the ideas that it preaches and propagates. They should understand the slogans in the context of the political positions adopted toward questions of development, social justice, and economic and political independence. The recent massive act of fraud¹ that was done in the name of Islam and that may be unprecedented in the history of humanity could not have achieved what it achieved unless the ground had been prepared by a discourse that consecrates myth and superstition and does away with reason. The myth was that piety brings *baraka* and yields abundant profit. Not only ordinary people and illiterates have fallen into the satanic clutches of this myth but educated and cultured people, scientists and economists as well. It does not matter

whether the incentive for them to fall into the trap was faith or greed, since both possibilities imply they had lost their powers of reason and logic, including purely self-interested reason.

There is no disagreement over the fact that religion, and not only Islam, must be a fundamental element in any renaissance project. The disagreement is over what is meant by religion: Does it mean religion as it is presented and practiced in a self-interested ideological form by both the right and the left, or does it mean religion after it has been analyzed, understood, and interpreted in a scholarly manner that eliminates myth and retains the impetus that religion provides toward progress, justice, and freedom? Secularism is in essence no more than the real interpretation and scholarly understanding of religion and not, as its denigrators claim, a form of atheism that separates religion from society and life. Religious discourse deliberately, cunningly, and maliciously confuses separation of church and state, that is separating the political authority from religion, with separating religion from society and life. The first separation is necessary, and Europe has already achieved it, emerging from the darkness of the Middle Ages into the wide-open spaces of science, progress, and freedom. The second separation—separating religion from society and life—is an illusion propagated by religious discourse in its campaign against secularism, to underpin the accusation of atheism. Who has the power to divorce religion from society or life, and what force could carry out such a decree if it were issued? The objective that religious discourse seeks to achieve through this cunning and malicious obfuscation is patently obvious, and no one can fail to see it—to ensure that those with an interest in achieving the obfuscation can combine the power of religion with the power of the state, political authority with religious authority. On top of all that,

they claim that the Islam that they advocate does not recognize or accept any priesthood. But the wonders of religious discourse do not cease. The discourse contradicts itself and speaks to us about Islamicizing the sciences, the humanities, and the arts! Did the medieval church in Europe do more than that?

The three chapters presented here have already been published separately. The first chapter was published in Cairo in October 1989 as the eighth book of the occasional series *Qadāyā Fikriyya* (Intellectual Issues), under the title *al-Islām al-Siyāsī: al-'Usus al-Fikriyya wa-l-'Ahdāf al-'Amaliyya* (Political Islam: Intellectual Foundations and Practical Objectives). The second chapter appeared in 1990 in issue 10 of the journal *Alif*, which is published by the American University in Cairo. The third and last chapter began as a lecture given in March 1990, the tenth in a series of lectures given every year to commemorate Abdel Aziz el-Ahwany, and was then published in the periodical *Qadāyā wa Shahādāt* (Issues and Testimonies), no. 2 (Damascus, 1990). Although they were published separately, the chapters have in common not only the fact that they deal with the same subject, religious discourse, but also the fact that they are a vital part of a larger schema, the schema of reason in its struggle against superstition, justice in its struggle against injustice, and freedom in its struggle against all forms of slavery, oppression, and exploitation.

Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd
Giza, June 1990

1. Contemporary Religious Discourse

Its Strategies and Intellectual Premises

This study takes as its subject the totality of religious discourse, without taking into account the distinction, which is well established in the media, between a “moderate” discourse and an “extremist” discourse. In fact the difference between these two types of discourse is a difference of degree rather than a qualitative difference. The evidence for this is that there is no obvious difference between the intellectual premises of the two types of discourse and the devices that they use. It is evident that the two types of discourse are identical in being based on invariable basic elements in the structure of religious discourse in general—basic elements that are not susceptible to debate, dialogue, or compromise. At

the heart of these elements are two essential components that this study will discuss: text and divine sovereignty.¹

In the same way that the two types of discourse are identical with respect to their intellectual premises, they are also identical with respect to the strategies that they rely on when they explain concepts and when they try to convince others and win over followers. The discourse has multiple strategies of a diversity that matches the multiple ways in which the discourse is presented, and yet there is a common denominator that can be detected and analyzed, especially if we exclude from our analysis the strategies used in oral communication and restrict our analysis to intellectual and rational strategies that are found in all or most of the ways it is presented. This study looks at what it sees as the most important strategies used in this discourse, the strategies that expose the ideological aspect of this discourse, that is, the aspect that unites moderation and extremism, on the one hand, and religious jurists and preachers, on the other. We can summarize these strategies in this way:

1. conflating ideas and religion and ignoring the gap between subject and object;
2. explaining all phenomena by reference to one starting point or prime cause, as with social or natural phenomena;
3. reliance on the authority of the early Muslims or of tradition, after converting the classical texts (which are secondary texts) into primary texts, which in many cases enjoy no less sanctity than original texts;
4. intellectual dogmatism and refusal to accept any intellectual diversity, except on details and peripheral matters rather than fundamentals;

5. dismissing or ignoring the historical dimension, as is clear from the practice of lamenting a golden age that could equally be the period of the first four caliphs or the caliphate of the Ottoman sultans.

Before we enter into the core of our subject, we need to illustrate some aspects of the way in which moderation and extremism share the same intellectual premises, through the media “dialogue” that the security authorities in Egypt began to organize and supervise after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. Anyone who followed this dialogue at any stage, either through the broadcast media or through the newspapers, will realize immediately that it is an impossible dialogue—a dialogue of the deaf or, in some cases, a dialogue between a voice and its own echo. A university professor, the dean of one of the humanities faculties at the time, took part in one of these episodes, and when one of the leaders of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Groups) confronted him and asked him maliciously what was meant by the three verses on divine sovereignty in the Table chapter of the Qurʾan, the professor answered firmly and dogmatically: “Yes, only God has sovereignty.” He repeated this three times, then added after some hesitation, “but . . .” and started to enumerate the evidence for piety in Egyptian society. He was so eager to prove that Egyptians are proper and religious Muslims that he claimed that at Friday prayers he led hundreds of students in prayer in the faculty mosque, forgetting—may God forgive him—that Friday was a holiday and the security people did not let the students onto campus on Fridays. His claim also assumed that his faculty, or any faculty for that matter, had a mosque big enough to hold hundreds of students.

So there was consensus on the principle of divine sovereignty, and the professor did not hesitate to endorse that principle. The hesitation appeared when it came to saying that society was infidel, which might imply that the political authorities and the ruler who ran the affairs of that society were also infidels. The same or a similar attitude recently recurred in the phrasing of a statement issued by a group of religious scholars, after the events at Ain Shams of 1985. It was striking that the statement dealt with only two of the big issues that *al-Gamāʿat al-Islāmiyya* raised in their discourse: denouncing people as infidels and the use of force to enforce public morals. On the first issue the statement said that no one had the right to denounce anyone else as an infidel. On the second issue it said that the right to use force to enforce public morals was restricted to the ruler in the context of society at large and to the head of the family within his jurisdiction.² The statement contains a phrase that is simultaneously highly significant and highly dangerous as far as the concept of divine sovereignty is concerned. The phrase also reflects the attitude of the religious scholars toward the political authorities, an attitude that reflects the basis of their disagreement with the extremists. The statement said, "The officials do not dispute any of God's commands or deny any of the principles of Islam." The wording is deceptive because it condemns and exonerates at the same time. On the surface it exonerates the officials and is directed at the general public, but in reality it condemns the officials. The negatives give the impression that the scholars are asserting, by negation, that the rulers are innocent of the accusation made by the Gamāʿat, but in reality the wording denies that the rulers are infidels only in order to suggest that they do in fact disobey God's injunctions. They may not

overtly dispute commands or principles of Islam, but at the same time they are clearly not enforcing them.

So the difference between the “moderates” and the “extremists” lies in whether they accuse the ruler and society of being infidel, although we will soon discover that the difference is marginal and not substantial, as the statement above suggests. And the difference over the use of force to enforce public morals is a difference over timing, over when to apply force, not over the principle itself. Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the scholars who put his name to the statement, said in an interview with *al-Sha‘b* newspaper, “Paganism was the greatest abomination, and what did the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, do about it? He didn’t destroy any of the idols around the Kaaba, which we pray to, until he was sixty-one years old, in other words two years before he died. The Prophet tried to put an end to abominations by speaking out, and he was preparing the community for the use of force against abominations at the first available opportunity, and that opportunity arose with the conquest of Mecca.” While this point of view believes in prudence, patience, and gradualism through waiting for the opportunity to arise, another writer who is representative of the moderate school of thought wrote an article in the same newspaper entitled “Vice Must Be Prevented by Force,” and in it he went so far as to say that there was consensus among the early religious scholars that the duty to campaign to promote virtue and prevent vice is not conditional on permission from the ruler, because how could such a requirement be necessary when, in some cases, the ruler and some of the people in whom the ruler has placed his trust might themselves be the targets of such campaigns?

In his article the writer does not rely only on the authority of early religious scholars. He conflates opinions and speculation with Islam itself and states with certainty, “This is the essence of the moderate Islamic position. . . . If Islam is the starting point and the point of reference, then Islam does not condemn violence in itself. Islam is not hostile to violence in principle, but it does set conditions and rules for the use of it.”³ In this type of “moderate” discourse we can see some of the strategies of religious discourse that we referred to earlier and that we will discuss in detail later. They are:

Conflating human thought and Islam

Dependence on the authority of early Muslims and of tradition

Intellectual dogmatism

Although the statement by the religious leaders refrained from denouncing the rulers and society at large as infidels, it also refrained from denouncing the ideas of the young Islamist activists as infidel. That is the only difference between this statement and a statement that was issued earlier by the official religious establishment and signed by Sheikh al-Azhar and that provoked some severe and sharp reactions from moderates and extremists alike. It is clear that the statement by the religious scholars was designed, at least in part, to reduce the tension provoked by al-Azhar’s statement, though it also benefited the political authorities, at least in the eyes of the general public, by giving the impression that the religious scholars were rallying behind them. That’s why the political authorities, represented in this instance by the minister of religious

endowments, made sure that some prominent opposition figures put their names to the statement. Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali took part, and Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi told *al-Sha'b* newspaper that he was hastily summoned from Qatar. This may explain why the religious scholars presented themselves in the statement as “neither the scholars of the government nor the ideologues of the police.” It also explained why they—especially al-Ghazali and al-Qaradawi—were not happy with the outcome of the statement. In his comments to *al-Sha'b* newspaper, al-Qaradawi said, “It alone is not enough to resolve the issue. Some young people who are described as extremists may even interpret it as serving the government and as an excuse for repressing all Islamist activities and all Islamist organizations in the name of attacking extremism.”⁴

The Azhar statement, which reflected the thinking of the official religious establishment, responded to the accusation of heresy by making the same accusation in reverse. “Islam is truth and justice,” it said. “It is not just words without deeds. The destructive deeds that have been reported (in the newspapers) portend a threat to society. Acts are to be judged by the motives behind them, and al-Azhar calls for a firm and just stand against this sedition in the name of religion, because Islam dissociates itself from it and from those who practice it. ‘A great fire may arise from the smallest spark,’ so society as a whole should be on guard. It should purge its mosques and its clubs of people who say malicious things or incite iniquity or call on others to disobey the government.”⁵ Responding to denunciation as an infidel by making the same accusation in reverse corroborates our argument that the difference between moderation and extremism is a marginal difference and not a political difference. It is a disagreement over the range of application of a principle, not over the principle itself, just as the disagreement

over the principle of enforcing public morals by the use of force was a disagreement over the timing or the right circumstances, and not over the principle itself.

Along with divine sovereignty and a particular attitude toward texts, the practice of denouncing people as infidels is in fact a basic element in the structure of religious discourse, both moderate and extremist. Ultimately it is overt in the discourse of the extremists, covert and latent in the discourse of the moderates.

Denouncing society and the government, indeed all societies and governments on the face of the earth, as infidel began in the contemporary Arab world in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, based on the concept of divine sovereignty, and a large part of Qutb's thinking was in effect a reaction to what the Muslim Brotherhood at the time saw as the monopolization of power and sovereignty by the army officers of the 1952 revolution.⁶ Since we will later turn our attention to analyzing the concept of divine sovereignty and explaining aspects of it, what concerns us now is that denouncing others as infidels remains a principle that is inherent in contemporary religious discourse, sometimes latent and sometimes overt, depending on whether those speaking are near to or far from those in power.

So even if the time and place were a surprise, there was nothing strange about one of the religious scholars who helped write the "moderate" statement saying in a television program that he had performed a special prayer to thank God for the military defeat of June 1967. The explanation that the sheikh offered had nothing to do with the sound religious notion that God should be thanked for the bad times we face as well as for the good times. On the contrary, the sheikh explained that he thanked God and prayed to Him because "the communists" had been defeated and abandoned

by God.⁷ It requires no effort whatsoever to see that this phrase “the communists” was a reference to the Egyptian government in the 1960s. Communism, from the sheikh’s point of view, meant atheism, and of course, again from the sheikh’s point of view, a victory by Israel, the state of the Jewish People of the Book, over the atheistic communists was a reason for believers to rejoice and celebrate. It is not our intention here to discuss whether the sheikh’s theory was right or wrong. What matters is that the sheikh denounced the rulers of the time as infidels, although, like their successors in the 1970s and 1980s, they “do not dispute any of God’s commands or deny any of the principles of Islam.”

So there is nothing strange about this position, even if, as we said earlier, the time and place were a surprise: The remarks were published in the highly influential mass media controlled by the state, which saw itself as an extension of the regime that the sheikh was denouncing as infidel. Since everything broadcast by this media outlet was known to be carefully censored, it is not difficult to conclude that officials “approved” of everything that was said. The surprise with respect to timing was that the state made its accusation of disbelief, articulated through one of the state’s “moderate” clerics, at the same time that the state was beginning to mobilize its clerics and its media to eliminate “the disease that has almost destroyed the body of the nation,” as the Azhar statement put it. And if accusing others of being infidels was part of the structure of religious thought as a whole, as it clearly was, it was also part of the state’s ideology, either to justify its economic and social policies or to deal with its rivals in the opposition. We have not forgotten that President Anwar Sadat used this ideological weapon extensively, in his speeches and interviews, against all his political rivals, regardless of their opinions or their affiliations.

But in his enthusiasm to say how happy he was at our defeat, the moderate sheikh, Mohamed Mitwalli el-Sha'rawi, forgot or perhaps deliberately neglected to give us a ruling on the fate of those who were killed in that war—were they “martyrs” for whom one could legitimately seek God’s mercy, or were they just “the dead” of an atheistic and infidel regime on whose graves believers such as him had the right to spit? And why was the sheikh suddenly throwing himself and his ideas into the maelstrom of politics, which he had always avoided? “Whenever he was asked a political question he declined to respond. I remember that the editor of one Egyptian weekly magazine asked him in a famous interview what he thought of the Camp David agreements. His response was that he didn’t talk about politics. It is my belief that his complete refusal to deal with political matters was incompatible with his vocation as a sheikh and with the views of most contemporary Islamist movements, which say that Islam has both spiritual and worldly implications and does not recognize any disconnect between religion and politics. Apparently the great religious leader thinks that religion and politics can only be separated when he is asked an embarrassing question.”⁸ His refusal to engage in politics might appear to be a form of dissimulation intended to maintain his status and authority, but on top of that it represents deep implicit support for the state.

Just as the moderates and the extremists agree on these two basic elements—denouncing others as infidels and imposing public morality by force, they also agree, despite the superficial disputes between them, on many secondary issues, or issues that some of the moderates claim are secondary. For the moment we might cite the attitude they all take toward literature and the arts. Many young people from *al-Gamā'āt al-Islāmiyya* go so far as to prohibit

singing, music, and especially any form of representation. They see theatrical performances as a kind of reprehensible distraction. The moderate sheikhs do not think that Islam is opposed to high art and literature and say that bans should only apply to art and literature that arouses the instincts and addresses the sensual and material aspects of humanity. Art and literature critics might agree in part with this formulation—the part about arousing instincts—and exclude anything that falls in that category from the field of art and literature. As for addressing the senses, that cannot be a criterion by which to judge art, because it is a criterion that in reality means denying and excluding all visual arts, in other words banning them through the back door, because all of those arts depend on sensual effect in performing their aesthetic functions.

The visual arts, along with the arts of singing and music, pose a real problem in all religious discourse because the discourse insists on literal adherence to secondary texts, but that problem should not exist for literary texts in a discourse that is supposed to be based on a text that is a “miracle” of a distinctly literary nature. Religious discourse still wages endless battles, however, with literary texts that cannot possibly be said to “arouse instincts” or “address the senses.” One of the most recent of these battles, and simultaneously one of the oldest, is the battle over the novel *ʿAwlād Hāratina* [translated into English as *Children of Gebelawi*] by Naguib Mahfouz, which was confiscated and banned in Egypt more than forty years ago. After the author won the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Swedish Academy cited *Children of Gebelawi* in its statement on the award, some people hoped that al-Azhar would reconsider the decision to ban the book. But the “moderates” spoke out in protest and in condemnation of such demands. In *Hādha Dīnunā* [*This Is Our Religion*], his column on the back

page of *al-Sha'b* newspaper, Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali made threats, quoting the Qur'an against those behind the demands. "If you repeat [the crime], we will repeat [the punishment]," he said (Qur'an 17:8). The official religious discourse decided about half a century ago that the novel was incompatible with religious dogma. In this case the "moderate" discourse firmly refused even to reconsider the decision.⁹

This is not only the case with religious discourse in Egypt or the Arab world. It is also the practice of religious discourse throughout the Islamic world. A novel published in English in Britain created a massive stir in that world, especially in India, Pakistan, and Iran. Muslims in England and America also protested against the publishing company and the author and demanded they withdraw the book. People were killed in the demonstrations in India and Pakistan, and the Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of the Iranian revolution, issued a statement that included a fatwa declaring that the author's life was forfeit, that killing him was a duty incumbent on any Muslim who had the opportunity, and that anyone killed performing this obligation would be a martyr who would live forever in paradise. In response, the Indian-born author, Salman Rushdie, said, "The novel contains no attack on Islam, or any derision of any religious belief. It is not intended to insult anyone and I doubt that the Ayatollah Khomeini or any protesters in Iran have read the novel. They have probably based their judgment of the novel on extracts taken out of context. It is frightening that people should react so violently to a novel, a mere novel, imagining that it is a threat to religious dogma and stands against the whole of Islamic history."¹⁰

The dilemma and crisis of religious discourse lies, or rather comes to light, in this last sentence of this interview with the author of

The Satanic Verses—similar to remarks that Naguib Mahfouz made several times in his own calm and conciliatory style. We are not in this case debating the literary value of one novel or another, because that is a separate field, and there are scholars who specialize in that. The religious scholars are certainly not specialists in this field, but they nonetheless set themselves up as guardians defending dogma against dangers that are figments of their imagination. Even assuming that dogma as they interpret and understand it is incompatible with certain literary or artistic works, does that mean that dogma is necessarily the weaker of the two and always prone to defeat? Doesn't this idea, based on constant fear, imply that the very structure of religious discourse is inherently weak and incoherent? I wish our religious leaders had learned from the enlightened attitude of certain churchmen who flatly refused to ask for—even to ask for—a ban on the film *The Last Temptation of Christ* on the grounds that it portrayed Christ in a way that was incompatible with religious texts. The point of view of these enlightened men was that believing Christians could themselves, if they wanted, subvert this narrative by boycotting the film. In that way the churchmen, unlike our own clerics, abandoned any claims that they had the right to impose their views on the hearts and minds of their followers.

For all these reasons this study believes that it would be patently unfair, as well as imprecise from a scholarly point of view, to discuss what is known as the Islamist Awakening only through the discourse of the Gamā'āt, in other words in isolation from the overall context of Islamist discourse in both its “official” version and its “opposition” version. Disengaging the discourse of the Gamā'āt from religious discourse in general may give the misleading impression that this phenomenon is an invasive plant that

has encroached on the soil of religious thought—exactly the idea that the security services promote and that the official religious discourse insinuates. The implication of it being an invasive species is that the only solution is to uproot it from the ground, and that can only be done with a spade. This is a patent unfairness that academics not only must not take part in but must oppose with all the means at their disposal. These young people are victims in every sense of the word. If in the context of certain events or situations they sometimes look like monsters, the real monsters are the ones who have filled their brains, through new and diverse media, with all the ideas by which they have put whips, chains, and even bombs in their hands.

It is evidently inaccurate from an academic point of view to see the thinking of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya* as a natural extension of certain currents in traditional thinking, especially the tradition of the Hanbali school as interpreted in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn al-Qayyim. In fact such a conclusion should be seen as ignoring direct, proximate causes in favor of leaping to indirect, remote causes. Any similarity between the ideas of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya* and the ideas of the Hanbali school must have passed through the mediation of contemporary religious discourse, and that mediation would definitely not be neutral. It would reproduce traditional ideas through its own ideological attitude, and the ideas reproduced would have a direct influence on the discourse of the *Gamāʿāt*.

The theories advanced by these young people are in fact “immature” theories, to use the terminology that al-Shahrastani (1086–1153 CE) used when describing the ideas of the first Muʿtazila. The immaturity is evident from the fact that they are scattered ideas, in disarray, and they acquire order and symmetry when they

are placed in the matrix of religious discourse in general. In other words these young people do not bring to Islam any ideas or perspectives that differ from or are in opposition to the ideas and perspectives found in religious discourse in general, but through these theories they transition from the domain of discourse to the domain of action, because their ordeals in the real world have scarred them, and they have taken a dislike to its vices and deformities.

First: The Strategies Used in the Discourse

In analyzing any particular discourse it is in fact difficult to separate the strategies used from the premises behind the ideas. The two encompass each other and are concomitant. The strategies and the premises often overlap so much that they converge, especially in religious discourse, and it is impossible to distinguish between them. This overlap will sometimes lead to some repetition in our analysis, but we hope that this will not try the patience of the reader. One of the effects of this overlap is that it took us a long time to decide whether we should start our analysis with the strategies or with the premises. We have started with the strategies, and the only deciding factor was a faint hunch that the premises, at least from a formal, logical point of view, are based on the strategies, as well as the fact that in the previous passage we discussed some of the premises of religious discourse that we hope might have adequately prepared the way for an analysis of the strategies used in this discourse, before discussing its most important intellectual premises at a later stage.¹¹

Although we will concentrate on five strategies, which is the number we have managed to identify so far, we cannot claim that these are the only strategies used in religious discourse. The possibility of making additions, through observation and deeper and more thorough analysis, remains open, both with respect to strategies and premises. In our assessment these five strategies are the basic and essential strategies that govern and control the totality of religious discourse. The same applies to the two intellectual premises that we will analyze later.

Conflating Ideas and Religion

Since the very beginning of Islamic history, and during the time when the Prophet Muhammad was receiving revelations and the scriptures were taking shape, there was a well-established understanding that religious texts had special domains of activity, while there were other domains that were open to human reason and human experience and were unaffected by the texts. Faced with a given situation, the early Muslims would often ask whether the Prophet's conduct was based on revelation or on experience and reason. They would often disagree with him and suggest another course of action if it was in a domain open to reason and experience. There are many examples of this, and they appear in abundance in all the media used by religious discourse: books, articles, speeches, sermons, interviews, and television and radio programs. Religious discourse tries nonetheless to expand the authority of religious texts into all domains, ignoring the differences that are expressed in the principle "You know best about your own worldly affairs."

Religious discourse is not content with that: It automatically conflates the religious texts and the way it reads and understands them. Through this process of conflation, religious discourse not only eliminates the cognitive distance between the “subject” and the “object” but goes beyond that to claim, implicitly, that it can transcend all existential and cognitive constraints and obstacles and access the divine will that is lurking in these texts. In making this dangerous claim, contemporary religious discourse does not realize that it is entering a problematic zone—“speaking in God’s name,” that is, a zone that Islamic discourse has steered well clear of throughout its history, with only a few insignificant exceptions. Surprisingly, the contemporary discourse finds fault with this way of behaving when it talks about the Christian church’s attitude toward science and scientists in the Middle Ages.

It should be noted here that this strategy overlaps and coalesces with other strategies. The “intellectual dogmatism” strategy, for example, might be seen as one of its consequences, though that does not mean that it is not also an independent strategy used in the discourse. The “ignoring the historical dimension” strategy is to some extent part of the structure of the “conflating ideas and religion” strategy, since conflating “understanding” and “the text”—when the understanding takes place in the present and the text belongs to the past, at least linguistically—must be based on “ignoring the historical dimension.” In all of this, contemporary religious discourse seems to have its origins in assumptions that cannot be debated or contested. Several quotations in the previous passage reflect this conflation of human ideas and religion. Everyone talks about Islam as something clearly defined, without anyone showing the slightest hesitation or realizing that in fact

they are offering their own interpretation of Islam or of Islamic texts. Even reliance on the opinions or speculations of the early Muslims has come to mean reliance on “Islam,” to which the word “true” is often added to distinguish it from “false Islam,” which reflects some other speculative endeavor. We are not now in the business of judging this or that personal speculation, so we are not interested here in the value of their various conclusions but in showing how religious discourse encourages the conviction that one possesses “the truth”—a conviction that deprives religious discourse of many of the virtues of the discourse that prevailed among the earliest Muslims.

A representative of the moderate trend will say, “There is no such thing as progressive Islam or reactionary Islam. There is no such thing as revolutionary Islam or capitulationist Islam. There is no such thing as political Islam or social Islam, or one Islam for the rulers and another Islam for the masses. There is only one Islam, one book, revealed by God to His Prophet and then conveyed to human beings.”¹² It is a claim that is refuted by the history of Islam itself, a history that has seen pluralism in opinions and movements and sects that have arisen for social, economic, and political reasons and that have formulated their positions by interpreting the texts in innovative ways. But this insistence on the idea that there is only one Islam, together with rejection of the pluralism that exists, leads to two results, regardless of the intentions of this or any other writer. The first result is that Islam has one invariable meaning, unaffected by the course of history, the differences between various societies, and/or the diversity of groups inside one society because of their different interests. The second result is that the one invariable meaning of Islam is the property of one group

of human beings—the religious scholars of course—and that the members of this group are deemed to be exempt from the normal human biases and prejudices.

But religious discourse never acknowledges the logical consequences of many of its ideas. In fact it often combines an idea and its antithesis. The writer cited above on the unity of Islam says in another context, “Open any page in the history of Islam. You will find it crystal clear at every stage, written in straightforward language and plainly expressed. As you are, so is your religion.”¹³ Another writer writes about two kinds of Islam: the “tamed Islam” blessed and sponsored by the political authorities and “real Islam”—the Islam of the Qur’an, the *sunna*, the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors.¹⁴ “Real Islam” in the opinion of this writer is the Islam that the religious scholars expound in their discourse because they alone can understand real Islam, which means that the authority to interpret Islam should not extend beyond the confines of this circle. “Anyone who challenges the Qur’an and the *sunna* and contests the religious scholars of the community is not a reliable source for the teachings of Islam, and anyone who learns from the scholars and the books of the schools of Islamic law, while neglecting the material in the Qur’an and the hadith, has neglected Islam and the source of the shari‘a.”¹⁵

In this way religious discourse ends up creating a “priesthood” that represents authority and an ultimate authority in matters of Islam and belief. It even goes so far as insisting that religious learning can be acquired from the scholars only by direct oral transmission in the traditional manner.

“Studying shari‘a without a teacher is not without risks or possibly harmful effects. . . . That is why the early religious scholars

warned against studying under people who had acquired their knowledge in that way. ‘Don’t learn the Qur’an or study Islam from someone who learned from written texts,’ they said.”¹⁶

There is a contradiction in religious discourse between its denial that a priesthood or “sacred authority” exists in Islam, either theoretically or in practice, and on the other hand its insistence on the need to bow solely to this authority’s judgment on questions of religion and doctrine at the practical level. This is a serious contradiction that fundamentally undermines the essential premises of this discourse and at the same time exposes its ideological nature, which the discourse incessantly denies and tries to disavow while claiming to be completely “objective” and to be wholly immune from the biases and prejudices that are normal to humanity.

Explaining All Phenomena by Reference to One Starting Point

The idea of a single, invariable Islam accessible only to religious scholars is part of the structure of a broader strategy in religious discourse. This strategy is not as simple or self-evident as it might appear in ordinary, natural religious sensibilities. When we come across it in religious discourse it has serious dimensions that threaten society and almost paralyze the exercise of reason in ordinary life. When it uses this strategy, religious discourse relies on that ordinary religious feeling and uses it as if it were one of the accepted norms of faith that are never debated. While all doctrines hold that the world owes its existence to a first cause or a first principle, God in the case of Islam, it is religious discourse, and not doctrine, that interprets all phenomena, natural and social, by attributing them all to that one first principle. It posits “God” in

the immediate material world and in the process automatically excludes humanity. Natural and social “laws” are also denied and any knowledge is suppressed that doesn’t have a basis in religious discourse or that is not based on the authority of the religious scholars.

In this discourse, thanks to this strategy, the parts of the world look disconnected and nature appears to be disorderly, held together only by the thread that links each part of the world or of nature to the Creator or the Prime Mover. Such a vision of the world cannot produce any scientific knowledge of the world or of nature, let alone of society or humanity. This vision of the world is an extension of the old Ash‘ari position, which denied the laws of causality in nature and in the world in favor of a complete determinism, which was in reality an ideological cover for social and political determinism.

We do not at this stage want to anticipate our discussion of the “reliance on tradition” strategy, so we shall restrict ourselves to noting the similarity in the way the strategy is deployed. The hostility toward secularism and the constant attacks on it in contemporary religious discourse stem in part from the fact that secularism deprives religious discourse of one of its most effective strategies and also in part from the fact that it divests religious discourse of the “sacred authority” that it claims for itself when it pretends to possess the complete and absolute truth. Although religious discourse condemns the position that Christian clerics took toward science and scientists at the beginning of the European Renaissance, its own position is in fact no different from the one it condemns in theory. This is a point we will come back to shortly in the course of this section.

Explaining all natural or social phenomena by reference to a first cause or starting point necessarily leads to the theory of divine sovereignty as the counterpart and antithesis of human sovereignty. This strategy is therefore associated with the concept of God's sovereignty, one of the basic premises in religious discourse, and the two work together to attack secularism. "Secularism is in keeping with Western thinking, which believes that God created the world and then abandoned it, so God's relationship with the world is basically the relationship that a watchmaker has with one of his watches. He made it in the first place but then left it to run with no further need for God. This idea is inherited from Greek philosophy, especially the philosophy of Aristotle, in which God does not manage anything in this world, unlike the concept that we Muslims have, of God as the Creator of Creation, the Sovereign Ruler who organizes everything, is fully informed about everything, and keeps tabs on everything, whose mercy embraces everything and who provides for every living thing. That's why He revealed religious law that says what is right and what is wrong and required His followers to obey His laws and to govern on the basis of His revelation, or else they would be infidels or unjust or godless."¹⁷ It does not matter here whether the "watch and watchmaker" model reflects the whole of what the writer calls "Western thinking," because scholastic accuracy is not a requirement in religious discourse: What matters is the unpleasant associations of the term *Western* in a part of the world that has suffered, and continues to suffer, from the control of Western imperialism and exploitation by imperialism's local allies. From the perspective of this discourse what matters is extending the authority of the discourse by legitimizing the principle of divine sovereignty,

which explains everything by reference to God and denies human agency.

Religious discourse is not content to use this strategy merely to legitimize this principle. It also uses it when it attacks many of the people who try to use reason to interpret and understand natural or social phenomena. It does this by a form of reductionism, tracing their efforts back to a single idea that looks naive and incoherent when expressed in the terms of religious discourse. European secularism, for example, is reduced to opposition to religion, in other words it is transformed into an irreligious movement, the main interest and preoccupation of which is to separate religion from the state. Oddly, religious discourse pretends to mourn the fact that this principle has taken root in European life, although religious discourse is fully aware that Christian clerics were responsible for this development because of their bloody opposition to science and scientists in the name of religion and doctrine.¹⁸ Religious discourse, instead of avoiding the same mistake, puts itself in the same trench as the church by attacking secularism and denouncing it as infidel and a form of apostasy. Although secularism is very far from taking root in Islamic communities, religious discourse, in its constant endeavor to extend its hegemony and support the status quo, speaks about secularism as though it were a present danger. “Vice shows its face in public, corruption is rampant, and secularism speaks out at the top of its voice,” and significantly, this discourse does its best to link this supposedly dangerous secularism with Marxism, after reducing the latter as well, in this case to atheism. In fact religious discourse goes even further and links the two of them—secularism and Marxism—to the Zionist movement. “Marxism promotes itself shamelessly, and the Crusader movement makes plans and operates without

trepidation.”¹⁹ The exaggeration goes so far as to claim that “we have thousands of secularist followers of Marx, Heidegger, and Sartre who have learned how to go along with everything that comes from Europe. . . . They strongly believe in the theory of assimilation.”²⁰

We are at this point interested not so much in discussing this confusion as in exposing the use of the “explaining all phenomena by reference to one starting point” strategy in religious discourse. We referred earlier to the reduction of Marxism to atheism and materialism, because it is not important at all in what context Marx said that “religion is the opium of the people,” and it is also not important that Marx’s comment was directed at religious thinking and reactionary interpretations of religion rather than at religion itself. What matters is that this reductionism should achieve its ideological objective. So through this interpretation and through reductionism, religious discourse affirms Marx’s remark whereas it had wanted to refute it. In the same way Darwinism is reduced to “man’s animal nature”—an expression crafted deliberately to alienate listeners—and Freudianism is similarly reduced to “the mire of sex.” Sayyid Qutb speaks about the history of European thought and thinks that it began to rebel against the church and ecclesiastical concepts by “deifying reason”—note the wording. Then the Age of Enlightenment ended at the close of the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century started with a mortal blow against both reason and humanity when philosophical positivism came along and announced that now matter was god, because it was matter that gave rise to reason and that left the impression that it wanted on the senses of humanity. So the role of reason diminished, and the role of mankind diminished with it. Mankind was no longer his own god or the god of anything. He was just a

creation of nature and a slave of this god. Then Darwin came along with “man’s animal nature,” and then came the deadly blow at the hands of Freud on one side and of Karl Marx on the other, the first attributing all human motivation to sexual inclinations and portraying people as sinking up to their chins in a swamp of sex and the second attributing all historical developments to economics and portraying people as passive, feeble creatures, helpless in the face of the god of economics, or rather the god of the means of production.²¹

In the context of religious discourse it does not matter that the dialectical principle, one of the foundations and priorities of Marxist thought, has been ignored or that Marxism claims to be an idea that aims to change the world, not just to interpret it, by changing the consciousness of mankind as the instrument of change and as the “agent” in history and in the real world, because religious discourse does not aim to create awareness so much as it aims to create ideological confusion. Religious discourse has recently attempted to attack secularism without being hostile to science and rational knowledge. It has resorted to a tactical strategy that has, contrary to what was intended, exposed the incoherence of this discourse and the contradictions in its premises and in what it says. Some people have resorted to reducing the secular movement even further by translating its name as *dunyaawiyya* (roughly, worldliness) rather than the conventional *‘almāniyya*, unaware that such a shift puts the contemporary Islamist movement on the opposite side of the concept of *dunyaawiyya*, which would be *‘ukhrawiyya* (roughly, otherworldliness), which is incompatible with the main premise of the Islamist movement, which maintains that Islam is about faith and about the world.

In this way we can see that the strategy we described as “explaining all phenomena by reference to one starting point” is a strategy that operates in most aspects of religious discourse, and that it is a strategy that has nothing to do with natural and normal religious feelings, even if it tries to base itself on them for ideological reasons.

Reliance on the Authority of Tradition and the Early Muslims

We have seen several examples of how this strategy can be used in religious discourse, by converting the sayings and ideas of the early Muslims into “texts” that are no longer open to debate, reconsideration, or independent thought. Religious discourse goes beyond this position to identify these ideas with Islam itself. In other words, religious discourse exploits the “conflating ideas and religion” strategy in using this strategy. As for the second strategy—the “explaining all phenomena by reference to one starting point” strategy—it is itself present in that aspect of tradition on which contemporary religious discourse rests. It is clear that religious discourse deliberately ignores another aspect of tradition—the aspect that resists the use of this strategy and throws it back at those who use it. This is in effect an ideologically opportunistic attitude toward tradition, an attitude from which the rational and the enlightened have been excluded in order to legitimize what is reactionary and “backward.” This may be what encourages some people to use the same strategy, based on the enlightened rationality that does exist in tradition, in the mistaken belief that they can fight and defeat backwardness with its own weapon.²² In fact this

opportunistic attitude toward religious discourse helps it employ the “ignoring the historical dimension” strategy, as will become clear when we subject this strategy to analysis.

We have already referred to the fact that Muslims were aware that there were domains in which texts were operative and other domains where reason and experience were operative and texts were not operative. This awareness remained alive and present in the minds of groups and individuals. Its clarity was not diminished by the bloody disagreements that Muslims continued to see as disagreements over worldly interests and not over religious doctrine. It was the Umayyads and not the Khawārij, as contemporary religious discourse claims, who first put forward the idea of divine sovereignty, with all that implies in the way of claiming that texts are operative in the domain of political rivalry and clashes of interests. That was when Mu‘āwiya took the advice of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās and ordered his men to put pages of the Qur’an on the tips of their swords and appeal to the Qur’an as arbiter in their dispute with their rivals. We will return to this in detail in the context of analyzing the concept of divine sovereignty, but here it marks the start of the process of creating false consciousness, a process that the Umayyad regime practiced because it had lost the legitimacy on which any political system must be based. The Umayyad approach remained the prevalent practice in all forms of religious discourse that supported illegitimate regimes throughout the history of Islamic communities.

The Umayyad regime needed to establish its legitimacy on a religious basis that was compatible with the divine sovereignty principle that it had introduced. The way to do so was through the concept of *jabr*, determinism, which attributes everything that happens in the world, including the actions of mankind, to the

total power of God and His indomitable will. This principle later changed, evolved as Ash'ari thinking evolved, in the context of changes on the ground and in the intellectual climate, until eventually the law of causality was abandoned. When they looked at human action, Ash'ari thinkers tried to establish some connection between the doer and the deed and called that link *kasb* (acquisition), whereas in the field of nature they attributed actions directly to God. In his response to the philosophers, al-Ghazali took the view that God is the real agent behind all the particulars and events in the world and that this is what is meant by creating and doing. *Creation*, as al-Ghazali understood it from the texts, although he conflated it with the doctrine itself, meant bringing into being from nothing at every moment. *Action* had the same meaning, namely "bringing something into existence out of nothing by creating it."²³ Having thus assimilated creation and action, al-Ghazali naturally denied "acts of nature" to avoid giving the impression that nature was creative. To describe nature as active is a contradiction, according to al-Ghazali, because burning is not a necessary causal effect of fire: The connection between a deed and the doer is a necessary connection, whereas the connection between fire and burning is not a connection of that kind.²⁴ The connection between them is one of concomitance, not necessity. It is more like the connection between the lamp and the light, or the connection between a person and their shadow, which is not a necessary relationship, and so it has nothing to do with *doing*, except by extension or analogy.

In al-Ghazali's opinion, if we say that God is the cause of the world's existence and that the lamp is the cause of the existence of the light, we cannot necessarily conclude that the lamp is an agent, because an agent does not become an "agent that makes" simply

by being a cause. It becomes an agent because it is the cause of the act “in a particular way” or “by way of volition and choice.” Clearly al-Ghazali stumbled into a linguistic problem or a tangle of related expressions such as *action*, *creation*, and *creator*, and on top of that he confused the domains of theological discussion based on Ash‘ari concepts with the domains of research into nature. That led him to abandon the laws of causality. This led to a dangerous belief that has prevailed in religious discourse in Arab culture—the belief that fire does not burn, that knives do not cut, and that God is the agent behind all causes.

When contemporary religious discourse relies on this aspect of tradition, it deliberately ignores the other aspect, such as the naturalist school of thought among the Mu‘tazila and the philosophers. This is often done by conferring sacred status on the first school of thought and attributing the other school of thought to foreign influences that caused it to deviate from real Islam. So Sayyid Qutb tells us about a “unique Qur’anic generation,” meaning the generation of the Companions of the Prophet, whose uniqueness stems, in Qutb’s opinion, from the fact that they drew their knowledge and insights from the spring of the Qur’an alone. “And then what happened? Other springs appeared and into the spring from which subsequent generations drew their water Greek philosophy and logic were poured, along with Persian legends and concepts, Jewish lore, Christian theology, and the sediment from other civilizations and cultures. All of these elements were mixed into the interpretation of the Qur’an and Islamic theology, and also into the principles of religious jurisprudence. All generations after that first generation drew from that contaminated source, and the first generation never recurred.”²⁵ We should not be deceived here by the generalization that the writer makes about all

periods of Islam except the first period—that they were subjected to the disaster of “mixed sources”—because, as we will point out in a while, he adopts many of the personal speculative opinions of legal scholars and thinkers who lived in those later periods.

In spite of this selective and self-serving attitude toward tradition, or perhaps because of it, religious discourse does not hesitate to boast about this aspect of tradition, which it theoretically rejects. But this boasting is confined to occasions when it compares medieval Europe with the civilization of the Muslims and describes how Europe was influenced by the system of rational thought that the Muslims developed, especially in the natural sciences.²⁶ In fact this boasting is merely one of the justifications that religious discourse offers that allows Muslims to procure the material benefits of European progress and the Industrial Revolution by saying that they are “taking their own goods back.” According to religious discourse, we are reclaiming the fruits of the experimental method that Europe borrowed from our forefathers, but with it we will not take any of Europe’s disbelief, God forbid, meaning secularism, because when Europe adopted the experimental method it detached it from its doctrinal roots in Islam. Europe then took the method with it as it drifted away from God, at the same time that it was drifting away from the church, which was treating people arrogantly and unjustly in the name of God.²⁷ In this way European achievements are subjected to the same selective and opportunistic treatment as tradition is subjected to.

Religious discourse does not rely on tradition only through the strategy of “attributing all phenomena to one starting point.” It adopts the same selective and opportunistic method when it discusses many issues. Although we will discuss some of these issues when we discuss the problem of texts, it would be useful in

this context to point this out. Sayyid Qutb, for example, when he discusses the principle of jihad, adopts the classification that Ibn al-Qayyim makes for the relationship that Muslim society has with non-Muslims in general. We are not interested here in discussing the opinions of Sayyid Qutb or Ibn al-Qayyim. What matters is that Sayyid Qutb accepts Ibn al-Qayyim's personal opinion without discussion and, more importantly, equates that opinion with Islam itself. Speaking of the attitude that Ibn al-Qayyim says that Muslims should take toward non-Muslims, Qutb says, "These positions are the logical positions that are in line with the nature and objectives of Islam, not as understood by those who have surrendered to current circumstances and to the cunning throng of Orientalists."²⁸ In his exegesis of the Qur'an, when he discusses the penalty for theft, he does not discuss the ideas of the legal experts on which he relies. He cites their opinions as if they are texts that cannot be contested or debated, and he does not seem to be aware how serious it would be if these opinions were enforced under present conditions, as all those who call themselves Islamists dream of doing. According to the opinions that Qutb cites, if the penalty for theft is to be applied, the stolen object must have been in a closed and protected space, and the thief must have taken it and removed it from that space. This means that people who smuggle money abroad after appropriating it from people or borrowing it from banks do not count as thieves liable to the Islamic penalty for theft, since the money was not being held in a protected place. There is another condition that is even more serious—that the thief should not have any stake in the stolen money, in other words that all the money should be the private property of the person from whom it was stolen. Obviously this condition does not apply in the case of a public treasury, either in

its traditional Islamic form or its modern form, so anyone who appropriates public money, in whole or in part, would not be liable to the Islamic penalty for theft, because he would have “a stake in it and it would not all belong to others.”²⁹ In this way the penalty for theft would apply only to fraudsters and petty thieves. This is the Islam that religious discourse offers to people, promising them that it can solve real problems.

Contemporary religious discourse also tends to concentrate obsessively on superficialities, ignoring the comprehensive nature of shari‘a’s objectives. Many theologians, philosophers, and legal scholars believe that the acts of worship prescribed in Islam, just like other aspects of Islamic law, are meant to bring about benefits for people, in other words that human beings are the objective in everything that Islam says about acts of worship and about how people should deal with each other. But some scholars have made a distinction between acts of worship and interactions between humans, denying that the former are intended to bring any benefit to humans. This is the position adopted and defended by contemporary religious discourse. Traditionally those who took this position were known as the *mubaqqiqūn* (those who have made discerning inquiry) to give the impression that the other point of view was incorrect and that those who hold it are not discerning. Qaradawi says, “I agree with the Muslim religious scholars who are *mubaqqiqūn* when they say that the basic purpose of acts of worship is to show veneration to God, regardless of any benefits that might be intended, unlike the case with customs and dealings between humans. One cannot say that spending money on poor Muslims or on useful Muslim projects is more important than the obligation to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. One cannot say that giving alms instead of buying an animal for sacrifice while

on pilgrimage is better than making the ritual sacrifice prescribed by God. And one cannot say that modern taxes do away with the need for alms, the third pillar of Islam, which is often mentioned in conjunction with prayer in the Qur'an and in the *sunna*.³⁰

Intellectual Dogmatism

We referred earlier to the organic fusion between this strategy and the “conflating ideas and religion” strategy, and we hope that this section will elucidate the matter. The organic fusion between these two strategies in contemporary religious discourse is no doubt what sometimes leads those who adopt this discourse to be quick to dismiss their rivals as ignorant or denounce them as infidels. This discourse cannot tolerate any radical disagreement, although it is open to some partial disagreements. How could it tolerate radical disagreement when it claims to possess the complete and absolute truth? Only the religious scholars, “those who have knowledge of Islam,” can properly be allowed to discuss or write about the phenomenon of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya*, for example. The reason for this is that “many writers who are ignorant, malicious, or mercenary have taken up the subject *without knowledge, without guidance, and without scripture to enlighten them*,³¹ and writers with knowledge of Islam had to explain and speak out, so that they go about it the right way and restore truth and justice.”³² In an attempt to present a definition of extremism—a complicated phenomenon that requires cooperation by a group of specialists in various disciplines—religious discourse insists that it is the only authority on the subject and no statement or ruling would have any value “unless it is based on authentic Islamic concepts and on

the texts and principles of shari‘a, and not on mere opinion and whatever someone or other says, because no one has authority to speak until God and His Prophet have spoken.”³³ Based on these principles, for which the writer naturally relies on the opinions of some classical writer, extremism would not include the strict views that young people have adopted on singing, music, painting, photography, and so on. “These views are contrary to my own personal opinion on these matters and to the opinion of some prominent contemporary scholars, but they are in line with the views of several Muslim scholars, including ones who lived in ancient times, ones who lived later, and others who are contemporary. The reality is that many of the things for which those we called extremists are condemned and that might be considered fanatical or overzealous have roots in shari‘a law and in our tradition. Some contemporary people have adopted these things, and they defend them and promote them.”³⁴ These many things that are rooted in tradition include women insisting on the hejab or the niqab; men growing beards; wearing calf-length jelabas instead of shirts and trousers; refusing to shake women’s hands; and other such things.

And so, when religious discourse claims that it alone possesses the truth, it accepts differences of opinion only on details, and here its tolerance and openmindedness are obvious and admirable. It is tolerant toward fanaticism and zealotry and even to extremism. But when the disagreement goes beyond the surface, to the depths and the roots, religious discourse takes refuge in the claim that it represents the overall and absolute truth. It resorts to the language of dogmatism and certainty, and then the false divide that some people imagine between moderation and extremism disappears.

While some people might believe that describing others as infidels, even if they disagree with us over doctrines and intellectual

premises, is extremist and fanatical, even uncivilized, religious discourse believes that doing so is one of the fundamental elements of religious belief. “We have seen people who think it is fanatical and extremist to consider those who do not share their faith as infidels, but the basis of religious belief is that believers think that they are right and that those who disagree with them are wrong, and there is no justification for disguising this truth for the sake of politeness.”³⁵

Religious discourse assumes, for example, that Islam has been isolated and excluded from the dynamics of history. Based on this assumption, which it treats as an incontestable fact, religious discourse then tries to explain all social, economic, political, cultural, and ethical problems and sees a return to Islam and the application of shari‘a law as a solution to all those problems. So the issue appears to be self-evident in religious discourse, which shows no interest in posing any questions about why or how or when Islam was detached from the reality of Islamic communities, or communities that were Islamic, although these are basic questions that are at the core of the problem. Unless these questions are confronted and an attempt is made to answer them in a scholarly manner, the assumption that Islam is excluded from the dynamics of history will remain inevitable, inexplicable, and difficult to understand or analyze. The truth is that it looks that way in religious discourse, in other words this assumed divide between Islam and the real world seems inevitable, and this may explain why religious discourse is unable to offer detailed solutions to real problems but can only raise the slogan “Islam is the Solution,” while the problem is set out in the briefest and simplest of terms. “We held a weapon that we used once to triumph, but then we threw it away and ever since

then we have walked the path of defeat and decline. . . . When the Qur'an is set free, this nation will be set free."³⁶

In this way religious discourse shifts from making an assumption to diagnosing the real world and then to proposing a solution with confidence and dogmatic certitude, as if it is laying out postulates or axioms with which only infidels, or at best the ignorant, would disagree. This simplified analysis of reality not only reflects a perspective that is unable to comprehend that reality, but on the other hand it also helps to gloss over the real situation and the real problems, by attributing them all to a single factor. In its analysis, religious discourse relies of course on certain religious texts that are interpreted in a particular way (such as "This community will thrive in its latter days only through those things that enabled it to thrive in its early days"), and it thinks it is sufficient to rely on texts alone. This religion "created the Muslim community in the first place, and it re-creates the Muslim community whenever there is a desire to bring the Muslim community back into existence, just as God brought it into existence in the first place."³⁷ Religious discourse does not need to define with the same certainty and rigor the moment when religion became detached from the real world, nor to specify the causes. While some people trace the separation back to the period of the internal Muslim conflict in the middle of the first century of Islam or a little earlier, others trace it back to the general weakness that afflicted the political structure of the Islamic Empire and that ended in the fragmentation of the empire and the elimination of the caliphate.³⁸ Although the caliphate survived in token form under the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and later moved, or rather was forcibly transferred, to Turkey after the Turks took control of Egypt, religious discourse thinks that Kemal

Ataturk's abolition of the nominal caliphate amounted to rejection of Islam and destruction of the Islamic state.³⁹

If the starting point, although important, is mysterious, the search for causes is also extremely mysterious. All this leads to rhetorical generalizations marked by certitude and dogmatism. That naturally leads to confusion between causes and effects: The wave of European imperialism is held responsible for the backwardness of the Islamic world, ignoring the reality that the backwardness of the Islamic world made it easier for the imperial movement to exacerbate and perpetuate that backwardness. If opposing all forms of imperialism by all possible methods is something on which there is no disagreement, holding Europe wholly responsible leads in religious discourse to a demonization of Europe that requires us to oppose everything that comes from Europe. But, to be fair, religious discourse does distinguish between the material achievements and the intellectual and cultural achievements of European civilization. It is permissive about borrowing the material achievements, in fact advocates and approves of such borrowing, but it forbids borrowing the other achievements, branding them as *jāhili* (pre-Islamic) and *kufṛ* (unbelief). "All schools of philosophy, all movements in psychology, except for the material obtained directly from observation but not the general interpretations of that material, all studies of ethics, all interpretative schools of thought and social theories, except for the material derived from direct observation but not the general results derived from that material or the overall guidelines that emerge from it—all these academic pursuits are found in *jāhili* or non-Islamic thought in ancient and modern times and are directly influenced by and based on *jāhili* concepts. Most if not all of them have methodological roots that include overt or covert hostility toward the whole concept of re-

ligion, especially the concept of Islam. The idea that culture is a human legacy that has no country, no race, and no religion is correct as far as the pure sciences and their scientific applications are concerned, as long as it does not go beyond that realm into the realm of the metaphysical and philosophical interpretation of the results of those sciences, or philosophical interpretations of humanity, human activity, and human history, or into art, literature, and poetry. But when it goes beyond that, culture is one of the traps of world Jewry.”⁴⁰

So contemporary Muslims have to live physically in the present, dependent on Europe to meet their material demands, and live spiritually, mentally, and emotionally in the past, dependent on their religious tradition. This dismal state of affairs in Islamic societies is endorsed in the name of Islam itself, because religious discourse does not present these ideas as individual opinions but asserts that its theories are Islam. “Islam is tolerant about Muslims learning from non-Muslims, or from Muslims who are not pious, in chemistry, physics, astronomy, medicine, industry, agriculture, management, or clerical work and such things . . . but when the subject is the basic principles of their faith, the premises for the way Muslims envision their faith, the interpretation of the Qur’an, the hadith and the life of the Prophet, the course of their history and the interpretation of their activity, the form of Muslim society, the system of government, or the exigencies of their art, literature, forms of expression, and so on, Islam does not allow Muslims to take such things from non-Islamic sources but only from Muslims in whose faith and piety they can trust.”⁴¹ If everything material has no race and no country, then everything else falls directly into the domain of dogma and ideas that must be taken from God: “This is Islam . . . only this,” “Just as God does not forgive any

attempt to worship any other god alongside Him, He also does not accept any approach alongside His own approach. The one is exactly the same as the other, for sure.”⁴² After all this, it should come as no surprise to find all these theories in the discourse of young people, presented with the same level of certainty and dogmatism. This is evident in a statement issued by the organization Islamic Jihad in Occupied Palestine. The part we are interested in is the passage about the nation-state and how European imperialism introduced it to the Islamic world after turning some of the people of the Islamic world into collaborators.

The statement holds Europe responsible for the crime of the nation-state and confuses causes and effects in its analysis of the situation: “The decline in civilian and military power and the intellectual stagnation that began in the Islamic world after the 17th century CE had many reasons that had accumulated since the early centuries of the Islamic era. This decline coincided with the growing vitality of Europe, and then the Western imperial project took shape. While colonialism penetrated most parts of the world with relative ease, the Islamic wall, although it had grown increasingly weak, was still firm and strong and able to resist for more than two whole centuries. As the power disparity increased, the wall was bound to collapse, but the collapse came about only through a process that was extremely complicated and far-reaching. The colonial project succeeded firstly in winning over a broad sector of the elite of the Islamic world in favor of its own cultural framework. It succeeded secondly in partitioning the Islamic world by force—the force of arms, troops, and bloody occupation, with battles on the coast of Oman, to Libya, Egypt, and the First World War. It succeeded thirdly in planting the Zionist entity in the heart of the Arab and Islamic world to ensure that fragmentation, dependence,

annexation, and hegemony would persist.”⁴³ In this discourse the Arab nationalist movement comes across as a European conspiracy to break the unity of the Islamic world, as a prelude, presented as self-evident, to rejecting the declaration of a Palestinian state at the recent meeting of the Palestinian National Council.

This self-evident premise in religious discourse is based on the idea that nationalism is a secular concept that is incompatible with faith and religion, that “the ties of race, land, color, language, and common interests” are ridiculous, brutish barriers, and that Islamic civilization has never been “Arab, but always Islamic, and has never been nationalistic but always based on belief.”⁴⁴ With the same analysis, and with the same tone of certainty and dogmatism, religious discourse explains the current international situation and attributes the problems of mankind to the fact that mankind has gone against nature and deviated from the path set by God. “When people drifted away from God, from His path and His guidance; when they rejected the honor that God had bestowed on them and saw themselves as animals and turned themselves into instruments, and even turned that instrument into a god that ruled them at will, and turned the economy into a god that ruled them at will; when mankind turned women into gentle animals, just as men are rough animals, and when pleasure was the aim when men and women met; when people suppressed their human traits to focus their energies on material production; when people set up a system based on usury; when people adopted gods other than God and treated money as a god, and lawmakers as a god, and material things as a god, and production as a god, and land as a god, and sex as a god, and desire as a god, and lawmakers as gods who have appropriated God’s exclusive right to make laws and to be worshiped and have appropriated the right to act as god over mankind, and

when mankind had done all this by itself, then it had to face the natural punishment, paying the penalty for failing to respond to its true nature . . . and the whole of humanity must pay an enormous and severe penalty: horrible wars with victims in the millions—dead, wounded, disfigured, demented, and tormented—and crisis after crisis.”⁴⁵ With such certainty and dogmatism problems are presented and solutions suggested, and after that there is no scope for disagreement other than on the details. More dangerously, all this is presented as though it is the real “Islam.”

Dismissing the Historical Dimension

This strategy is glaringly obvious in all aspects of religious discourse, as well as in its basic premises. As mentioned earlier, it is evident in the illusion that the ideas that individual humans might have now are identical to original texts that belong to the past, at least linguistically. It is an illusion that leads on the doctrinal level to serious problems that religious discourse is unaware of. Conflating ideas and religion leads directly to conflation of the human and the divine and confers divine status on the human and the temporal. This may explain why many writers are reluctant to find fault with many of the opinions of the religious scholars and why they sometimes whitewash and justify those opinions.⁴⁶ If we were analyzing literary texts—the products of a human intelligence such as ours—we would not claim that the interpretation was identical to the text or to the author’s intent, whereas religious discourse not only ignores the historical dimension that separates it from the time of the text but also claims for itself an ability to have access to the divine will.

Religious discourse ignores the historical dimension just as obviously when it imagines that the problems and concerns of the present are identical to the problems and concerns of the past and when it assumes that the solutions of the past can appropriately apply to the present. Relying on the authority of the early Muslims and on tradition, along with treating their texts as primary texts that enjoy the same sacred status as the primary texts, reinforces the “dismissing the historical dimension” strategy, and both strategies help to deepen the alienation of the individual and cover up the actual problems of the real world in religious discourse. From this perspective we can see how this strategy interacts with the “attributing all phenomena to one starting point” strategy, especially when it comes to explaining social phenomena. To attribute every real crisis in Islamic societies, or indeed all the crises faced by mankind, to “deviation from God’s path” is in fact to fail to deal with historical facts and to throw them into the realm of the absolute and the metaphysical. The inevitable result of this approach is perpetuation of the status quo and deeper alienation for those who have to live with it. It means standing side by side with reactionary forces against all the forces of progress, in a way that is incompatible with the obvious sense of the discourse, which appears to be striving for reform and change and calling for progress and development.

It may suffice here to explain how this strategy operates when religious discourse uses the term *jāhiliyya*, given that we are going to explain later how it and other strategies are used in the context of our analysis of the intellectual premises. For a start, one must not confuse the word *jahl* as we use it in contemporary speech to mean ignorance or lack of knowledge and *jahl* as the antithesis of *hilm*, self-restraint or forbearance, in pre-Islamic Arabic.

Jahl in pre-Islamic Arabic meant susceptibility to the sway of emotions without recourse to the sobriety of the intellect or the power of logic. In this way we can see why some of the poets of the period boasted that they could meet *jahl* in this sense like for like. Take for example its use in the verb form to mean *to act in a rash and illogical way* [rendered here simply as *jahl*—Trans.], in these two lines of verse:

No one would *jahl* toward us, because we can *jahl* much more
than those who *jahl*

and:

Our patience weighs as much as mountains in sobriety
You would think we were djinn if we were to *jahl*

Jahl here refers to behavior that is contrary to reason and logic. As it is understood in the context of its use in pre-Islamic poetry, it is aggression that has no cause or justification rationally or logically. Used in a social context it means relying on the principle of force and coercion in relations between tribes on the one hand and individuals and smaller units of the tribe on the other. It was the principle that the poet Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma described when he said:

He who does not defend his ground by force of arms will
be crushed, and he who does not oppress others will be
oppressed.

Social relations based on oppression or *jahl* were no doubt one of the most important reasons for the general backwardness in that

society. One of the most important things that Islam brought to develop that society was the principle of having recourse to reason and rejecting oppression and *jahl*. Based on this fact it is possible to understand everything in the primary texts that condemns the “*jāhiliyya* regime” as an appeal to regulate society by reason and logic—an appeal that is radically at variance with the way religious discourse understands the world. Originally and fundamentally, the texts address a specific historical situation, and their meaning must be determined through that situation and through the language of that society in its overall socio-semantic context, but this meaning is always capable of opening up and expanding, provided the original meaning is not abandoned or contradicted. We can see that there are close ties between the historical usage of the term *jāhiliyya* and the sense of *jahl* in modern usage, because lack of knowledge is a basic component in susceptibility to the sway of emotions or, as we might say, fanaticism.

In post-Islamic language the word *jāhiliyya* was transformed into a term that referred to a historical stage in the evolution of Arab society, the stage before Islam. If Islam is the antithesis of *jāhiliyya*, then it essentially stands for the attitude of appealing to reason and logic, even in understanding its own texts. But religious discourse, using the “dismissing the historical dimension” strategy, dismisses all that in favor of its own ideology, and by its definition *jāhiliyya* means encroaching on the authority of God and appealing to reason. “This *jāhiliyya* rests on the basis of encroaching on God’s authority on Earth and on one of the most distinctive characteristics of divine status, which is God’s sovereignty. It assigns sovereignty to mankind . . . in the form of asserting a right to promote ideas, values, religious laws and secular laws, systems and rules and regulations without reference to God’s plan for life.”⁴⁷

Based on this definition, the term does not refer to a historical period that is over but rather to a state of mind or an intellectual attitude that can recur “whenever society has strayed from the path of Islam, whether in the past, the present or the future.”⁴⁸ Religious discourse claims that this is the objective definition of the term and that it applies to “all societies that actually exist today on Earth,”⁴⁹ not excluding Islamic societies or societies that are called Islamic, “because, even if they do not believe that anyone other than God is divine, they attribute the most distinctive attributes of divinity to entities other than God and maintain that entities other than God are sovereign.”⁵⁰

So *jābiliyya* is the antithesis of *hākimiyya*, divine sovereignty; in other words it is submission to human government as against submission to God’s rule. Although in the final analysis *hākimiyya* means recourse to religious texts, these texts cannot do without humans to understand and interpret them. In other words, the texts do not reveal their meaning and significance by themselves. Men articulate them, as the imam and caliph Ali bin Abi Talib said, and according to religious discourse, as mentioned earlier, the only authority that can perform this task with complete objectivity, unaffected by prejudices and ideological bias, is the authority represented by men of religion, who in the end are no more than human beings who have their own prejudices and ideological biases. But religious discourse shies away from this logical result (let us not say deduction) and resorts to a form of ideological mystification that resolves this contradiction. It says, “God’s kingdom on Earth is not based on particular men—men of religion, that is—exercising divine authority on Earth, as was the case with the authority of the Christian Church. No men speak in the name of the gods, as was the case in what are known as theocracies. It is

based on the idea that it was God's law that rules and on the principle that God is the final authority, in line with the explicit laws that He has decreed."⁵¹

Dismissing the historical dimension does not end with the illusion that the past and the present are identical. It goes further than that, to include the way the trajectory of Islam is understood during the phase when it arose in Arabian society. At this point we do not want to go into an analysis of the dialectic of the relationship between Islam and the real world from the time when the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation, because religious discourse appears to be aware of some aspects of this relationship when it wants to show that Islam is realistic or that it respects gradualism in reform and change. But it ignores all that when it speaks of the relationship between the early Muslims and the reality of their society, and its portrayal of Muslims in the time of the Prophet's mission is identical with the fantasy version portrayed in religious serials on television. They are distinct from their contemporaries in almost every detail—their clothing, the way they move, their gestures, many aspects of their language and the way they pronounce words. Islam as conceived by religious discourse divests Muslims of everything that linked them to their environment. "When people converted to Islam they left behind them all of their past in the *jāhiliyya*. At the moment they converted they felt they were beginning a new era, completely detached from the life they had led in the *jāhiliyya*. . . . There was a complete emotional disconnect between the past of Muslims in the *jāhiliyya* and their life as Muslims, which led to the complete rupture of their links with the *jāhili* society around them. They broke away decisively from their *jāhili* environment and forged permanent links with the new Islamic environment, even if there was some give and take

with some polytheists in the form of trade and daily interactions, since emotional disengagement is one thing and daily interactions are something else.”⁵²

Such a perspective is naturally associated with advocacy of detachment from, and contempt for, the real world. “It is not our mission to make peace with the reality of this society or to pledge loyalty to it, because as a *jāhili* society we cannot make peace with it. Our mission is firstly to change ourselves, in order to change society later. . . . The first step along the way is to transcend this *jāhili* society and its values and ideas, and never to distance ourselves from our own values and ideas in order to meet it halfway. Absolutely not. We and *jāhili* society are at a parting of the ways, and if we go along with it a single step, we will lose the way completely.”⁵³ This spring sustains the discourse of the Islamic groups and frames the behavior of their members, and in this way, because of this discourse, Muslims live outside history. Just as Muslims cannot make peace with their surroundings until they have changed them, Islam cannot make peace with any type of thinking or any positivist ideas whatsoever. “Islam’s view is clear: There is only one truth and any other view is false. The two cannot be confused for each other or combined: Either God rules or *jāhiliyya* rules. . . . Islam did not come to pander to people’s desires, as expressed in their ideas, their systems, their rules and regulations, their habits, and their traditions, whether in the early days of Islam or today, whether in the East or the West. It came to do away with and invalidate all of that and to set up human life on its own foundations.”⁵⁴ So the realism of Islam, as presented by religious discourse itself, breaks down, not to mention the dialectical relationship that history reveals between Islam and the real world since the Prophet received his first revelation. Religious discourse ends up detaching Islam

from both the real world and history, although the revelation, and hence Islam, were historical events.

Second: The Intellectual Premises

Divine Sovereignty

Islam's mission was in essence to give a primary role to reason in the domain of thought, and to justice in the domain of social conduct, as the antitheses of *jahl* and injustice, which were the fundamental components of the Arabian society that the Qur'an first addressed, as mentioned earlier. In the history of Islamic culture, religious discourse in its various forms has always been eager to deny that any contradiction can arise between revelation and reason as a result of the fact that the real world is constantly changing while the texts are static. Almost everyone has agreed that revelation is confirmed by reason, but not the other way round. Reason is fundamental in the process of accepting revelation, but after that a disagreement arises: should reason resign after playing its role confirming scripture, or should it remain active as one reads and interprets the texts? But this disagreement remained theoretical, and religious discourse has always been eager to prove that "what is patently reasonable concurs with authenticated revelation," as Ibn Taymiyya, the conservative, fundamentalist Sunni scholar, titled one of his most important books. Religious scholars helped to establish an important set of principles that gave the human mind a role in understanding and interpreting texts, such as analogy and

deference to the objectives of religious law and for textually unregulated interests. Arab-Islamic civilization remained alive and vigorous as long as it stayed interested in giving reason a primary role and as long as it was based on pluralism and freedom of thought. But this did not last long because of socio-political factors, some of which we will refer to in the course of our analysis.

The first attempt to shut down reason in favor of scripture came with the incident when the Umayyad side at the battle of Siffin held aloft pages of the Qur'an on the tips of their swords and called for "arbitration by God's book." There is no dispute that this was an ideological ploy in the name of scripture that succeeded in infiltrating the ranks of the rival forces and sowing discord among them in a way that ended the conflict in favor of the Umayyads. The arbitration ploy becomes transparent when one sees that it shifted the conflict from the socio-political domain, where it belonged, to another domain—that of religion and religious texts. The imam Ali understood this when he told his men, "People, in truth and in righteousness, persist in fighting your enemy. Mu'āwiya and 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀs [and he mentioned other names too] are men without religion or *qur'ān*. I know them better than you. I was with them and knew them as children and as men, and they were the worst of children and the worst of men. Woe unto you that they have raised them [the pages of the Qur'an]. It is only to trick you and entrap you."⁵⁵ When the socio-political struggle shifts from the realm of the real world to the realm of religious texts, reason takes second place to the text, its role confined to exploiting the text as ideological justification for something in the real world. Thinkers who serve those in power and those in opposition end up perpetuating that real world as long as the struggle becomes a religious dispute over the interpretation of texts. On top of that, appealing to texts

as arbiters in social and political conflicts leads to the idea that texts have universal application, and it has ended up dominating recent religious discourse, as is evident with the principle of divine sovereignty in contemporary religious discourse.

The principle that texts should be the deciding factor undermines the independence of reason by converting it into a subordinate that feeds off texts and follows them slavishly. That is what happened gradually in the history of Arab-Muslim culture until the Mu'tazilite school was wiped out after the reign of Ma'moun and philosophical reasoning was confined to very restricted circles. Then Abu Hamid al-Ghazali appeared and gave reason the coup de grâce. It should come as no surprise that the age that witnessed and listened to al-Ghazali's discourse was an age of political collapse, social fragmentation, and military control over matters of state—an age that ended with the fall of Baghdad and the destruction of the last symbolic manifestation of the Islamic state.

As mentioned earlier, al-Ghazali attacked reason by disrupting the relationship between causes and effects. In the end, about a century after al-Ghazali's death, experts in Islamic law were inciting the rulers against anyone who studied or taught philosophy, because philosophy was "the root of foolishness and decadence, the essence of uncertainty and error, incitement to deviance and heresy. Those who philosophize become blind to the virtues of the pure shari'a, which is backed by clear arguments and evident proofs. Those who meddle in philosophy, either as teachers or students, will meet disappointment and deprivation and will fall into the grip of Satan. The sultan has a duty to protect believers from the evil of these inauspicious people, expelling them from schools and exiling them, punishing those who practice their art and offering those who believe the doctrines of the philosophers a choice

between the sword and Islam, so that their fire will die out and all traces of it, and of them, will be obliterated.”⁵⁶

In this way the salafist discourse ends up at odds with Islam when it is at odds with its most important fundamental component, that is, reason, and imagines that in this way it is giving a primary role to scripture. But in reality it is repudiating scripture by repudiating its cognitive basis. A return to Islam cannot take place without reason being restored to its role in thought and culture, contrary to contemporary religious discourse’s calls for judging on the basis of texts—calls that echo the call of its Umayyad precursors, which led to its logical results in the real world of Islamic history.

Because the European Renaissance was based on freeing the mind from the authority of texts where the church had a monopoly on interpreting them, it was natural to see the rational aspect of Islamic culture (an aspect that had in fact already been driven into a corner and killed off) as support for the ideas of the Renaissance. This may explain why, in contemporary religious discourse, the concept of *jāhiliyya* has been expanded to embrace all schools of rational thought in both Arab-Islamic culture and in European culture. We have come across plenty of citations that attack the European Satan and that see the conclusions of all Islamic thought after the age of revelation (the “pure spring,” as many call it) as deviation from Islam. Abul A’la Maududi, one of Qutb’s most important sources, identified three strands of *jāhiliyya*: atheism, polytheism or paganism in all its ancient and modern forms, and the gnostic Sufi tradition, and he thought that these three strands had infiltrated real-world Islam, disguised as forms of Islam, immediately after the period of the first four “rightly guided” caliphs and started to spread their poison in its culture. The re-

sult, according to Maududi, was a “downpour of all admixtures of philosophy, literature, and science from the Greek, Iranian, and Indian skies on the Muslim soil. With these started the scholastic ‘duels’ among the Muslims, the creed of the Mu‘tazilites, atheistic and skeptical trends, and above all, the tendency of hair-splitting in the matter of ‘beliefs,’ resulting in the creation of a number of new sects. Not only that: Fine arts like dancing, music, and painting that are strictly un-Islamic found patronage from those who had been forbidden to practice these ‘ugly’ arts.”⁵⁷

This attack on rational thought and rejection of dissent and pluralism in ancient and modern times is one of the fundamentals on which the concept of divine sovereignty is based. The second and more serious fundamental is positing “the human” in contrast to “the divine” and the constant comparison between the divine path and the ways of humankind. The comparison naturally concludes that human effort is pointless. “All human activity is caught in a vicious circle and can never break out of this circle. It is the circle of human ideas and human experience, which is tainted by ignorance, imperfection, weakness, and folly, whereas salvation requires that mankind break out of the vicious circle and start an authentic experience based on a completely different principle: the principle of the divine path that stems from knowledge rather than ignorance, perfection rather than imperfection, strength rather than weakness, and wisdom rather than folly . . . based on the principle of diverting humankind from the worship of other humans to the worship of God alone.”⁵⁸ Such a complete divorce between the divine and the human ignores an important fact that is so well established in the very nature of divine revelation that it is described in Arabic as “bringing something down,” that is as a link or a form of discourse through which the divine and the human come into

contact. In other words, if the divine discourse (which includes its “path”) makes use of human language when it is “brought down,” despite all its knowledge, its perfection, its strength, and its wisdom, then the human mind, with all its ignorance, imperfection, weakness, and folly, relates to the divine discourse by interpreting it. But religious discourse ignores this major fact and, following in the footsteps of its Ash‘ari predecessors and endorsing a similar ideology, proceeds to exclude humanity, leaving the field wide open to authoritarian control of a special kind.

For the gulf between the divine and the human to deepen, religious concepts have to be reformulated through reinterpretation as part of the ideology of divine sovereignty, especially the concepts of worship, the deity, the Lord, and religion—concepts to which Maududi devoted an independent dissertation that has been printed in many editions in a number of Islamic countries and that is seen in effect as a manifesto for many Islamist groups.⁵⁹ Qutb is almost an expounder of and commentator on Maududi’s ideas: We need only consider his explanation of the concept of *‘ulūhiyya* or divinity as the pivotal concept for the three other concepts. Qutb believes that the most important attribute of divinity, or rather its primary attribute, is *hākimiyya* or “the absolute right of sovereignty, from which stems the right to make laws for human beings, the right to set the rules for their lives, and the right to define the values on which their lives should be based . . . and anyone who claims the right to set the rules for how a group of people should live has claimed the right of divinity over them by asserting the most important attribute of divinity, and anyone who endorses someone who makes such a claim has adopted him as a god alongside God, by recognizing that he possesses the most important attribute of divinity.”⁶⁰ The Islamic approach to this is

“the approach that is based on assigning divinity solely to God, in the form of divine sovereignty, and that regulates real life in all its daily details.”⁶¹ Not to submit to divine sovereignty as the most important attribute of divinity is to rebel against humanity’s status of servitude to God, but this is a rebellion that leads humanity to end up enslaved to other humans, which is the bigger form of servitude in the view of Islam according to Qutb, who treats his own interpretation, as well as Maududi’s interpretation, as identical with Islam.⁶² From the perspective of religious discourse, Islam arose in order to liberate mankind, but the way this discourse sees the liberation that Islam came to bring can be summarized as a process of removing governance from human reason and assigning it to divine revelation: “Declaring that God alone is Lord of the Worlds implies a comprehensive revolution against governance by humanity in all its shapes and forms, all its systems and regulations, and complete rebellion against the state of affairs that exists right across the world, wherever mankind rules in some form or, in other words, wherever mankind has divinity in some form, because whenever authority is derived from human beings, then human beings are being deified, with some of them installed as masters over others in place of God.”⁶³

If the approach ultimately comes down to the way human beings understand and interpret revelation, as has already been indicated several times, then religious discourse’s concept of the liberation that Islam brings to mankind disintegrates, laying bare the ideological cover for the concept of divine sovereignty, with everything the concept implies in the way of denying the efficacy of reason and handing human beings over, in chains, to authoritarian control of a special kind. Islam brought the doctrine of monotheism to free the human mind from the power of delusions

and myths and to lay a foundation for the human mind to operate freely, whether intellectually, in the natural world, or in social life. This doctrine, monotheism, also addressed social reality and helped to reformulate relationships between the competing tribes and to establish new relationships based on justice and equality. But religious discourse glosses over this fact and tries to explain away the relevant texts.

This gloss is attributed to the Arabs who were alive at the time when the Qur'an was revealed: "The expression 'There is no god but God,' as understood by Arabs who know what their language means, implies that only God has sovereignty. Law comes only from God, and no one has authority over anyone else, because all authority belongs to God."⁶⁴ This identification of divinity and absolute, all-embracing sovereignty in all aspects of life ends up confining human beings to a "servitude" role. Religious discourse believes that emphasizing this role alone when discussing man's relationship with God is the high point in the liberation that Islam offers man. In fact concentrating on this role has serious implications for the relationships that individuals have in various social institutions, on the one hand, and for the relationships they have with representatives of authority, any authority at any level, on the other. In its endorsement of mankind's enslavement, religious discourse relies of course on the authority of many religious texts, without understanding that all texts, including religious texts, have a historical aspect that is not incompatible with belief in their divine origin. Revelation, as indicated earlier, is a historical event, and its language cannot be extricated from its social context. Since we are going to discuss the problem of the text in religious discourse in appropriate detail in a subsequent passage, in this passage we must move on to analyze aspects of the concept of divine

sovereignty. We now have to discuss the real reasons why it has dominated religious discourse starting from the 1960s and examine its effect on social, political, and cultural life.

Religious discourse began to concentrate on the concept of divine sovereignty through the writings of Sayyid Qutb, the ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in the 1960s after the big conflict between the Brotherhood and the political authorities and after the trial of Brotherhood members (some Brotherhood leaders were executed and others were imprisoned for periods that varied according to their status in the organization). The Brotherhood has denied, and still denies, that the organization had anything to do with the attempt to assassinate President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the Manshia incident, and many of them go so far as to say that the incident was a charade arranged by the political authorities to create a justification for putting an end to the group's activities and suppressing its ideology. In fact the activities of Brotherhood members did not cease but merely went underground. Sayyid Qutb was one of the Brotherhood members who ended up in prison, but he did not stop writing, and it may have been this period that turned him into the organization's thinker and ideologue. For this reason many inquirers tend to say that the emphasis on divine sovereignty in Qutb's writings, with everything it implies in the way of denouncing society as "infidel" and putting on trial all the regimes and all of the social, political, and ideological models that have existed in human history, can be explained by the persecution and torture suffered by the Brotherhood, including Sayyid Qutb himself, in prisons and detention centers. So it was the "persecution complex" that brought Qutb and Maududi together and made the former borrow from the latter.⁶⁵ But in fact this view offers an excuse rather than an explanation, especially

once we have shown, in much of what we said earlier, that the concept of divine sovereignty is intrinsic to the religious discourse that has dominated the cultural history of Islam and is therefore latent in the fabric of this discourse, visible at times and invisible at other times. The persecution complex might serve as an explanation for the behavioral traits of some young people who have adopted Qutb's ideas or have absorbed them in prison and have later come out of prison to turn them into reality, maybe even through suicide. Although the persecution complex might explain why the concept appears in Qutb's discourse, it does not explain why it appears in the source on which Qutb relied, that is, Maududi's discourse, so the question remains pending, awaiting an answer.

In trying to answer this question it might be useful to identify some of the features of the difference between Qutb's discourse before he joined the Muslim Brotherhood and his discourse after he joined. Anyone who reads *Ma'rakat al-Islām wa-l-Ra'smāliyya* (*The Battle between Islam and Capitalism*, 1950) and *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fi al-Islām* (*Social Justice in Islam*, 1951) can see how preoccupied the writer was with the pressing issues of the world and how he was trying to find solutions in Islam. But the reader can also easily find in the same two books the themes that later came to dominate Qutb's discourse, such as how he positions the Islamic system in a relationship of complete incompatibility with Western culture, and how he laments the split that took place in the West between the Church and science, and how he attacks representatives of the call for intellectual liberation, especially Salama Moussa and Taha Hussein. But most importantly, he rejects the tradition of rational philosophy in Islamic culture, on the grounds that Islam has its own authentic philosophy, which lies

hidden in its theoretical principles, the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and the life and practice of the Prophet Muhammad. The philosophy of Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Averroes (Ibn Rushd), and others who have been called philosophers of Islam is, in his view, just a shadow of Greek philosophy that in fact has nothing to do with the philosophy of Islam. When he compares the various attitudes of particular religious scholars and traditional schools of Islamic law toward the problem of how texts relate to textually unregulated interests, we find that Qutb stands with the Malikites because they combine textual considerations and consideration of such interests and they reject al-Tūfi's view because he allows human interests to take precedence over a text. He also rejects the position of the Shāfi'is, who do not take human interests into consideration. But Qutb later retreated from this "moderate" position on the relationship between text and the real world and supported a principle favored by contemporary religious discourse in general—the principle that there is no room for independent judgment when a text is available. We will discuss this later.⁶⁶

If these are the invariables in Qutb's discourse, the variables can be defined as his emphasis on the issues that were hotly debated in the real world and that preoccupied many political and social forces, in fact dominated Egyptian and Arab debate on the intellectual and literary levels, particularly political discourse. The issues were imperialism, feudalism, and social and political injustice, and there was an awareness that these issues were interconnected. Qutb says, "The imperialists know that setting up an Islamic system of government will restore justice in governance and economic justice, because it will clip the wings of dictatorial rule and the despotism of wealth. Imperialists are always interested in ensuring that peoples do not govern themselves, because

then it is difficult to make them submit, so there has to be a dictatorial ruling class that possesses despotic powers and that owns national wealth. This is the class that imperialism can deal with.”⁶⁷ Qutb’s view was that equitable distribution of wealth would come about in Islam through a set of measures that would not be at odds with communist or socialist rule, though these measures would offer mankind a society of another kind—Islamic society, “in which mankind might find the dream which communism tries to achieve but which is undermined because it stops at food and drink, a society that socialism tries to achieve but its material nature deprives of soul and spontaneity.”⁶⁸ Leaving aside this simplistic and flawed understanding of both socialism and communism, Qutb does not in fact see any contradiction between them and Islam, except from the spiritual perspective. This is very close to the position taken in the National Charter that President Gamal Abdel Nasser presented in 1962. The measures that Qutb proposes for achieving equitable wealth in Islam are not very different from those that were put into practice under Arab socialism in the 1960s. Qutb believed that Islam gave the state wide powers “to allocate property and resources, to take the resources that are needed to reform society and prevent harmful practices, to control real estate rents and salary scales, to nationalize public utilities, to prevent monopolies, and to ban interest and excessive profiteering and exploitation. This form of Islam does not suit the exploitative classes, and exploiters cannot use it to ensure their survival.”⁶⁹ Qutb sometimes goes beyond this general outline and offers detailed solutions. Solving the problem of inflation, for example, is easy. “The state should control exports and imports and should buy on its own account all the crops that are exported abroad, primarily cotton, at a price that compensates the growers, and then sell the crops on its own

account at higher prices. With the income it makes from the difference, the state would help to reduce the price of imports when they are sold to the consumer, covering in this way the difference between the high purchasing price and the appropriate price for selling to the general public.”⁷⁰

This is the first part, related to economic justice in Islam. The second part, related to equitable governance, would be achieved by applying the principle of *shūra* (consultation) in a modern manner, that is by democracy, in that the people are the source of authority. “In Islam the ruler obtains power from one source—the will of the governed—and a voluntary expression of support is the only way to obtain power. This is the principle that prevailed historically.” The expression of support comes about through free elections, and real freedom can only be achieved by first eliminating economic exploitation and the social repression that it creates. “All Islam prescribes is the removal of the restrictions that make elections unrepresentative of true opinion in the nation. The electors should not be at the mercy of landowners, bosses, or those in power, as is the case now.”⁷¹ How did the later transformation in the priorities of Qutb’s religious discourse come about, and why did Qutb later express open hostility toward all the achievements of the 1952 revolution—hostility to the point of accusing the regime of being *jāhili* and *kāfir* (infidel), when in fact his own discourse had once called for the very same achievements? But we must bear in mind that the transformation marked a change in Qutb’s priorities and not in his premises. The question of dogma, which had definitely not been absent, now had priority over the issue of justice,⁷² and the discourse now included a decisive rejection of any new ideas that might be proposed, on the grounds that they amounted to distractions from the sublime goal, which was to establish human

societies through dogma, and it was now the duty of Islamist proselytizers to reject the ridiculous travesty of so-called Islamic law in a society that had not declared that it was submitting to God's law and that it had rejected all other forms of law. They had a duty to reject this diversion from serious work—a diversion that Qutb called "planting seeds in the air."⁷³ This call was in fact directed at a group of religious scholars, some of them from the Muslim Brotherhood, who cooperated with the leaders of the 1952 revolution in Egypt, but more importantly it was based on the principle of divine sovereignty, because there could be no new ideas and no law-making until that principle was established and prevailed as the crux and essence of dogma. The question of social justice disappeared, or decisions on it were postponed until divine sovereignty was established. It was natural that the question of social justice should finally disappear, because the very concept of divine sovereignty, as we explained earlier, excluded intellectual and political pluralism and was hostile to democracy. "God has one and no more than one party, and all other parties belong to Satan and the false god."⁷⁴

Promoting the concept of divine sovereignty in this way reflects circumstances similar to those in which the concept was first promoted, of course with differences of time and place and the complication of the situation, but in both cases there was a struggle for power, and one of the parties to the struggle tried to move the struggle from the framework of an earthly struggle to that of a religious struggle, which would allow that party to misrepresent people's ideas and anesthetize them in order to reach power. It is clearly a mistake to imagine that the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the revolution was a struggle over religion or dogma. On the contrary, it was a struggle over politi-

cal power or over sovereignty in the sense of ruling society and controlling the management of society's affairs. And the attitude of the Abdel Nasser government toward the Muslim Brotherhood was not perverse or any different from its attitude toward other national forces with which it differed and which it crushed by force. The shift in priorities in Qutb's discourse came about because the Abdel Nasser government had achieved everything that Qutb had been demanding when his discourse coincided with the general discourse that prevailed among all factions of the nationalist movement. So it was natural that space should then open up for the foundations and basic premises of Qutb's discourse, which had been lying deep, to appear on the surface. It is noticeable that the ideological dimension of Qutb's discourse comes to light with unambiguous clarity when it is read in a way that gets under the skin yet does not reach the far depths. We have already mentioned that his rejection of any evolution in Islamic legal theory—which he saw as tantamount to planting seeds in the air—was really a rejection of the decision by a group of religious scholars to cooperate with the Egyptian government. He also aimed his discourse directly at the slogans that the government adopted in the 1960s: the slogans of freedom, socialism, and unity. Except for the slogan of freedom, Qutb's discourse aims to shatter these slogans, denying them any legitimacy as long as they are not based, in his view, on dogma, that is to say sovereignty. Socialism, or social justice, and unity, which rest on the basis of Arab nationalism, are just false earthly gods or idols that Islam came to destroy. The Prophet Muhammad “could have launched his mission as a form of Arab nationalism that aimed to bring together the Arab tribes that were consumed by feuds and torn apart by conflicts and steered it in a nationalist direction to reclaim usurped land from the colonial

empires—the Byzantines in the north and the Persians in the south.”⁷⁵ “It might be said that he, the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, could have presented Islam as a social movement and declared war on the class of nobles, calling for reform and for redistribution of the wealth of the rich to the poor.”⁷⁶ Because he did not do that but instead launched Islam as a campaign based on dogma, no one has the right to do otherwise, because the world is living in a state of ignorance similar to the one that Islam came to confront or, rather, even worse. This is a discourse aimed at the Egyptian regime in the 1960s and at Gamal Abdel Nasser specifically—the regime that he wanted to combat when he brought up the term “divine sovereignty.”

In Qutb’s discourse we do not need to look for the source of his concept of divine sovereignty. Abul A’la Maududi is present in it in a way that requires no corroboration. The discourse of *al-Gamā’āt al-Islāmiyya* borrowed from both of these sources and not from the Khawārij or from anyone else, as representatives of the official “moderate” discourse sometimes suggest.⁷⁷ It was odd that al-Azhar and the Azhar sheikhs were silent and remained silent about Qutb’s book *Ma’ālim fī al-Tariq* (*Milestones on the Way*) when it came out and then, after the author had been imprisoned and the book had been banned, that they should write responses and that the state should put their responses together in another book entitled *The Brotherhood of Devils*, with all the answers focused on holding the Khawārij responsible for the ideas in *Milestones on the Way*. We have already explained that the Umayyads were the first to put forward the principle of resorting to the Qur’an as arbiter when they put pages of the Qur’an on the tips of their swords. They tricked the masses of well-meaning believers, who were exhausted by fighting,

and anyone who dared refuse to accept the Qur'an as arbiter would have raised suspicions about his faith and his orthodoxy. Everyone, and especially the Khawārij, woke up to the fact that appealing to the Qur'an for arbitration would necessarily lead to arbitration by men, because the Qur'an, as the imam Ali explained to them, "is a line that is drawn between two covers and that does not speak, whereas men speak for it."⁷⁸ So the principle of *la hukma illa lillāh* (only God has the right to judge), which the Khawārij declared and because of which they were called the al-Muhakkima, was a response to the fact that particular men were judging in a particular case—the political dispute between the sides in conflict. That absolves the Khawārij of the deliberate distortion that their ideas have been subjected to for many decades in books on Muslim sects and in articles, though it does not disprove the idealism that pushed their behavior toward extremism on many occasions. They were aware that texts had special domains of competence and that there were other domains unrelated to that competence. Ibn Abbas asked them, "What is it that you hold against the two arbitrators? God said, 'If the two of them desire reconciliation, God will bring about agreement between them.' How much more so with the community of Muhammad!" The Khawārij answered, "If God has delegated something to mankind and given them leave to look into it and reach a compromise on it, then it's up to them to do so, just as He commanded. But if He has decided something and effected it Himself, then it's not for his servants to look into that. God has prescribed that the fornicator should receive a hundred lashes and that thieves should have their hands cut off, and it is not for his servants to look into that." Ibn 'Abbas said, "But God says, 'Two "just men" from among you shall judge it.'" The Khawārij replied, "Do you place the ruling regarding game, which a woman

might discuss with her husband, on the same level as a ruling that involves the blood of Muslims?” The Khawārij said, “We said to him, ‘This verse separates us from you. Do you consider Ibn al-‘Ās a ‘just man,’ given that yesterday he was fighting us and shedding our blood? If he is a ‘just man,’ then we are not, for we are at war with him. You have appointed men as arbiters in the affairs of God, but God has given his verdict regarding Mu‘āwiya and his party—that they should be killed or repent. In the past they always rejected our appeals when we summoned them to the Book of God. Now you and he have written between you a document and agreed on a truce and discussions, but God has put an end to discussion and truces between the Muslims and ‘people of war’ since the revelation of ‘Quittance,’ except for those who agree to pay the *jizya*.’”⁷⁹ The invocation in Maududi’s discourse of the concept of divine sovereignty, in its Umayyad rather than its Khārijī sense, was only in the context of the struggle for power between Muslims and Hindus in the Indian subcontinent on the eve of independence. The British imperialists had no doubt aggravated the conflict until Muslim secession became the best solution, a solution that colonial circles had promoted since the middle of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ The Muslims were divided among themselves. The minority favored the democratic solution, while the majority insisted on secession. One of the most important arguments for secession in religious discourse was the call to consider religion, not land, nationality, history, or culture, as the basis for any human community. Given that Islam represents a way of life that covers all aspects, the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent must have their own independent homeland where they could organize their lives according to the teachings of Islam. Even if Maududi had some excuse for calling his own society *jāhili*, because of the nature of Hindu beliefs, the

fact that Qutb followed his example and called his own society *jāhili* can only be explained by the very concept of divine sovereignty. We must not forget that Maududi, and in his wake Qutb, considered all societies and governments that do not accept divine sovereignty to be *jāhili* societies and governments.

In this section we have yet to analyze the serious consequences, especially the socio-political consequences, that arise from promoting the concept of divine sovereignty, as well as the effect it has on undermining reason and suppressing thought in science and culture. The concept ends up legitimizing the most reactionary and backward social and political systems. It even backfires on those who advocate it when opportunistic politicians are allowed to adopt it, as is the case with many governments in the Arab and Islamic world. If dictatorship is the political phenomenon that best shows how low things have sunk in the world, religious discourse pours the concept of divine sovereignty straight into the mix that perpetuates this phenomenon and all the factors that hide behind it, in spite of the contradictions that float to the surface from time to time—contradictions that in our assessment are attributable to abuses in political conduct rather than to a difference in ideological perspective. The disagreement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian regime in the 1960s, as we have seen, was a disagreement over power, and the Brotherhood, unlike many of the political forces that disagreed with the regime, would not accept anything less than its own full control over the affairs of society, in the name of Islam and in order to bring about God's sovereignty. Monopolizing power was therefore the essence of the disagreement, which explains the nature and the extent of the conflict, as well as the fact that the rulers in the 1960s understood the gravity

of allowing religious sensitivities to be provoked in a society that included a significant Christian minority.

With the changes that upheaval in the 1970s brought about in the alignment of the political and social system, the system tried to confer on these changes a religious character that on the one hand was inspired by the atheism of its predecessor in the 1960s and on the other hand exploited the feelings of the masses to justify policies that were contrary to their interests. So it was no surprise that slogans were raised such as “The State of Science and Faith” or “The President Who Believes,” that political discourse was dominated by quotations from religious texts, or that government was referred to as *wilāya*, a term that evoked the mechanisms for choosing the leader in earlier ages, the age of the Caliphate until it came to an end at the hands of Atatürk. The masses came to be referred to as “my people” and soldiers and students as “my sons and daughters.” When oil wells appeared in part of the country, it was a blessing from God on the ruler personally, and thus the whole country, with its land, its people, and its heritage, became the property of the ruler. Any disagreement with him became a betrayal of the country and any discussion of his policy became an attack on the nation. The way the country was subsumed in the person of the ruler did not stop at that. It went even further, almost to the stage of the ruler deifying himself, when he declared, in the context of a political argument, “What I say cannot be changed.”⁸¹ The theocratic tendency is plainly evident and unambiguous, and after that it should come as no surprise that all opponents of the regime, even opponents of the ruler in his purely personal capacity, were seen as heretics and atheists, even if they were sheikhs with beards.

But it became clear that the 1970s regime and religious discourse and its representatives were incompatible only when, in

the end, they realized that the support that the regime initially conferred on them was conditional on them supporting the regime and fighting, and if possible eliminating, its political enemies. It became known that the government's decision to allow *al-Gamā'āt al-Islāmiyya* to operate and to support them financially and through training, in the universities and elsewhere, was intended to curtail the activities of the other political forces, specifically the Nasserists and the communists, who posed a danger to the regime's policies. When the confrontation reached the point of no return, the great explosion took place on October 6, 1981, but it was a confrontation that remained, despite its massive impact, a confrontation with the person of the ruler and not with the system of government.⁸² Religious discourse, which was formulated in the 1960s, provided ideological cover for the transformations of the 1970s, and it continues to do so, despite the appearance of tension and clashes with the security forces. Our current political system is based on the monopolization of power: This is the regime's interpretation and understanding of divine sovereignty, an interpretation that differs from that of religious discourse, and it is from this disagreement that conflict arises. The convergence between the political and the religious discourses is intrinsic, whereas the difference between them is secondary, because the two of them are based on one concept.

If the tone of the political discourse in the 1980s has changed a little, especially in the first five years, the content of the discourse has not changed greatly. The change in tone has been contingent on the state of disequilibrium created by the earlier confrontation, and when the regime had recovered its equilibrium, the old malaise began to re infect the political discourse, and the democratic détente ended in an authoritarianism in which the ruler

alone possessed facts unknown to all the other political forces, including the forces that had seats in the legislature. The claim to a monopoly over the facts, and the subsequent claim to a monopoly over the decision-making process, form the theoretical basis for the religious concept of divine sovereignty, as we have already explained. The political discourse did not make do with just this serious claim but coupled it with a claim that was no less serious as a basis for establishing exclusive power, and that is the claim that it is always right and cannot commit any mistake. This claim is clearly evident in the way the political discourse blames all shortcomings and policy failures, even all crises and problems in the real world, on ordinary citizens, who are accused of producing too little, consuming too much, having too many children, and being unpatriotic. So you have the government combining complete knowledge, overwhelming power, and infallibility, while the masses are marked by ignorance of the facts, impotence, and inadequacy. So would it be right to include these masses in running the country's affairs? Is there any difference between this and the concept of sovereignty in religious discourse?

This sovereignty that is immanent equally in both the religious and the political discourses moves on, especially in political discourse, to become the ideological basis on which the ruling forces and the forces that are really in control frame their relationship with the international forces that support them, cover their backs, and join them in exploiting their peoples. Evidence for this is the way our government constantly promotes the idea that the United States alone holds 99 percent of the cards in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the 1980s the percentage rose to become a complete monopoly, and the local forces lost even the 1 percent that they supposedly could contribute to managing the conflict. In the end

this merely reflects complete impotence and absolute dependency on the part of the government in its relations with the forces of global exploitation. In this way sovereignty is a dictatorial concept inherent in the official political discourse in its relations with local political forces, since it is sovereignty that defines the relationship between the regime and the opposition from a top/bottom or master/slave perspective, whereas this relationship changes and becomes bottom/top or slave/master in its relations with the global system. In both cases the concept of sovereignty rests on binaries: knowledge/ignorance, power/impotence. So the conflict, or more properly the signs of tension that we see, between the government and its institutions on the one hand and the totality of Islamist factions on the other is not an ideological struggle over ideas and concepts. It is a struggle over the right to exercise sovereignty in managing the affairs of society, over who can speak in the name of this sovereignty and use it as a weapon. It is a struggle over authority, power, and control between political forces that are intellectually similar.

But promoting the concept of divine sovereignty from a religious perspective does much more than merely offer ideological cover for a political system that religious discourse claims it is seeking to replace with a divine system that makes mankind happy in this world and the next. The ideological cover represents one aspect, maybe an unintended aspect, of the importance of the concept. The more important aspect is the intended and declared aspect. Religious discourse claims that a system based on the sovereignty of human beings—all existing political and social systems, that is—leads to some people enslaving others by monopolizing the right to make laws for them and to regulate their lives—a right that properly belongs only to God Almighty, the Creator,

the Sustainer, the Hegemon, the Controller, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent and Wise. Human beings should submit to enslavement or obedience only to God, and anyone who disputes His authority and sovereignty is one of the false gods from whose grip and authority Islam came to free humanity.

There is no dispute over the fact that Islam did in fact free human beings from the delusions and myths that controlled their minds or that it liberated them and their beliefs from everything that restricted their freedom. But religious discourse insists that mankind's relationship with God has only one dimension, that is, servitude, which restricts human agency to obedience and submission and stops human beings from asking questions or holding discussions. Faith is no doubt based on acknowledging this relationship on the doctrinal level, which is the emotional, heartfelt level at which there is no scope for interpretation or speculation and also no scope for human intervention. It is the personal, subjective relationship between a human being and his or her Lord.

We will go into a more detailed analysis of the question of servitude in the next section, but what concerns us in the context of divine sovereignty is that religious discourse makes servitude into a foundational principle that applies to legislative areas in which conclusions can be drawn only through independent thinking and interpreting texts and that allow for disagreement depending on differences in interests and customs, as the religious scholars understood. This is likely to lead—on the best of assumptions, including the assumption of good intentions on the part of religious discourse—to submission to the rulings of certain human beings, through submission to their speculative opinions. It would be the kind of uncritical imitation that Islam banned and that some jurists have declared to be *harām* and comparable to polytheism. In

other words, if religious discourse aims, through the concept of divine sovereignty, to put an end to human beings controlling and enslaving others, on a practical level this concept will end up giving power to people of a certain kind, people who claim for themselves a monopoly on the right to understand, explain, and interpret and who say that they alone have access to God's revelation.

Whereas the sovereignty of human beings can be resisted, fought against, changed by various human forms of struggle and replaced by fairer systems, the struggle against the form of sovereignty promoted by the religious jurists is stigmatized as atheism or heresy by describing it as blasphemy and rebellion against the rule of God. In this way the concept becomes a dangerous weapon that deprives human beings of any ability to change or amend their situation, because it transforms the conflict from one between human beings and other human beings to one between human beings and God.

All the binaries on which the concept of divine sovereignty is based are based in turn on the binaries knowledge/ignorance, power/impotence, and wisdom/folly, and all of them set mankind in contrast with God. This contrast is bound to end to the detriment of mankind, who cannot hold out in the face of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect wisdom. Believers thus start to feel deeply inadequate about their powers and abilities, so they resort to fatalism and passivity. In this way religious discourse offers an explanation for impotence, oppression, and exploitation by ignoring the social aspects of human existence and concentrating on the metaphysical aspect. This takes place through a series of leaps that ignore the complicated conditions and the complex, interlocking relationships in social life and that reduce human existence to the initial act of "creation," which helps to perpetuate

the ephemeral reality of the moment by giving it a metaphysical dimension. By clearing everything positive out of people's minds, so that they become like feathers in the wind, this paves the way for turning the ideology into a reality and for anesthetizing people as they languish in the dungeons of authority, any authority.⁸³

The Text and Nass

Religious discourse does not pause to make the slightest effort to define or describe the basic thrust of all its premises and strategies, and so far we have deliberately avoided getting into any discussion or argument with religious discourse about the interpretative strategies by which it formulates its premises and strategies, starting with that basic thrust. There is no need to discuss these strategies at this stage, given that the discussion here is about the problematic nature of text, which the discourse deliberately ignores, and not about the problem that religious discourse sometimes poses, especially in the course of polemics with *al-Gamā'āt al-Islāmiyya* or other groups. One of the most important aspects that is ignored in the problem of religious texts—and possibly the most serious aspect of all—is the historical dimension of these texts. “Historical dimension” here is not meant to refer to the branches of Islamic learning that examine the historical circumstances in which particular Qur'anic passages were revealed, or the way texts relate to reality or to questions that arise in society and life in general, or which parts of revelation override or supersede which other parts, or changes in precepts to accommodate changing circumstances, or other branches of Qur'anic learning that religious discourse cannot ignore. The discourse does deal with these things, if only

for the sake of argument, in order to affirm that Islam is realistic in the way it is inclined toward gradualism in the process of reform and change. Since we have already discussed these branches of learning exhaustively in a previous study, the historical dimension that we are dealing with here is related to the historicity of the ideas that the texts put forward through their content, as a natural result of the historicity of the language in which the texts are framed.⁸⁴

There is no disagreement over the fact that language, in addition to being embedded in history, is also embedded in society, which means that concepts have a social dimension, and if that dimension is overlooked, then the meaning of the texts will also be overlooked. Insisting on the historicity of texts does not at all imply that the texts are unable to re-produce meaning or address subsequent eras or other societies, because a reading that takes place in a subsequent era or in another society relies on two complementary strategies, which I will call “concealment” and “exposure.” The reading conceals whatever it sees as non-essential, usually inexplicable references to time and place, and exposes or brings to light, by interpretation, whatever is essential. There are no permanently essential elements in texts, but every reading, in the socio-historical sense, has its own essence that it discovers in the text. Religious discourse agrees with a part of what is now under discussion, even if it expresses it in its own special language, which is in fact a reiteration of the language of early Muslims—a fact that has a significance that we will analyze later.

Religious discourse agrees that religious texts can be re-understood and interpreted differently in different times and places, but it does not go beyond the Islamic jurists’ understanding of this phenomenon. So it confines the phenomenon to legislative

texts, excluding doctrinal texts or narrative. On this definition of the scope of independent thought, religious discourse lays the basis for the maxim that shari‘a law is well suited to every time and place and, as an article of faith, it opposes speculative opinions in the field of doctrine or religious narrative.

Texts, whether they be religious or human, are governed by fixed laws. The divine origin of religious texts does not exempt them from these laws, because the texts are “humanized” as soon as they are incarnated in history and language and as soon as they convey their content and their meaning to human beings in particular historical contexts. They are governed by the dialectic of permanence and change, in that the texts are invariable in their content but fluid and variable in how they are understood. Against the texts stands the reading, which is also governed by the dialectic of concealment and exposure.

This applies to texts that were written down as soon as they were born. Texts that have been subjected to processes of oral transmission, even for a limited period, as in the case of the *hadiths* about the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad, pose a more complicated problem with respect to both the content and the way it is understood. Texts of this type do not have a fixed content, and determining the content becomes a speculative matter subject to the dialectic of concealment and exposure.

Although the problematic nature of texts is so complicated, religious discourse is not content to confine the role of independent thinking to a narrow cross-section of texts—those categorized as legislative texts. It even goes back and rejects independent thinking wholesale when it declares that “there can be no room for *ijtihād*⁸⁵ on matters where a text exists.” In this way religious discourse freezes the meaning of texts even in the case of legislative

texts. In the course of this section we will see that this is merely an assertion and that invoking old examples of independent reasoning and presenting them as the answers to issues that come up in the real world is in itself a form of independent reasoning that depends on the “exposure” of one opinion and the “concealment” of another opinion.

We have already seen some examples that confirm the point we are trying to make. More importantly, the principle that “there can be no *ijtihād* on matters where a text exists” is in itself an example of this form of *ijtihād*, a kind that differs from the usual form in some of its strategies by weighing up the opinions of the ancients and choosing from them. Discussing this principle illustrates for us the difference between the ancients’ concept of text—a concept that has been suppressed or “concealed” by contemporary religious discourse—and the concept that the contemporaries emphasize or “expose.”

The role of independent reasoning came up in the newspapers recently after the writer Ahmed Bahā’ Eddin proposed that the Shi‘ite legal *ijtihād* should be adopted by which the existence of a daughter can exclude other relatives from inheriting, in the same way that in Sunni legal practice the existence of a son can.⁸⁶ There was a succession of responses, all pointing out that the Shi‘ite system contradicts valid texts and the rule that everyone falls back on—that “there can be no room for *ijtihād* on matters where a text exists.” In identifying the texts on which *ijtihād* is banned, some people might add that they include properly authenticated texts where the sense is definitive. Based on that, they believe that “the Sunnis do not base their opinions on an *ijtihād* that might change but on Qur’anic texts where the meaning is established.”⁸⁷

While some religious lawyers go so far as to give human welfare, or *maslaha*,⁸⁸ precedence over texts when the two are in conflict, based on the concept of “the objectives of religious law,” the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar thinks that texts should take precedence over *maslaha*, and in his opinion one should not “say without qualification that in this age society should choose *maslaha*, because *maslaha* cannot be taken into account when a text exists, and the *maslaha* that God’s law intended was the interest that does not conflict with the aims and well-established precepts of Islam. The Qur’an has decided the question of *ijtihad* by calling for compliance when it comes to legislation and obedience to texts.”⁸⁹

In his discourse Sayyid Qutb sometimes seems to be aware of an aspect of the historicity of religious texts. On that he bases two things: first, the idea that Islam’s agenda is dynamic, responding to changes and changing with them, and second, as a consequence of the first, the idea that independent thinking about theoretical matters in a society that does not accept divine sovereignty and does not implement shari‘a law is as futile as planting seeds in the air. When he tries to refute the opinions of those who claim that the principle of jihad in Islam is a defensive rather than an aggressive principle, he says, “Those who cite the Qur’anic texts as evidence for Islam’s position on jihad and do not take into account this characteristic of Islam [its dynamic realism] do not understand the nature of the stages through which this position has passed or the relationship between the various texts and each of those stages. Those who do this create great confusion; they misrepresent this position and attribute to the texts principles and permanent rules that the texts cannot support. That is because they see each text as if it is a permanent text that reflects the final rules of this religion.”⁹⁰ But this understanding of the historicity of texts, and

hence of the fact that the rules that govern them cannot have the status of “finality,” does not extend beyond cases where the focus is on the circumstances behind particular Qur’anic revelations or cases where parts of the Qur’an were overruled by subsequent revelation, even if it is couched in a language that is different from the language of the religious scholars. It is a language that gives the impression it is offering something new, whereas in fact there is nothing new. With Qutb, independent reasoning must not only stick to the areas about which the texts are silent, it must also follow without deviation the traditional mechanisms of independent reasoning. “If there is a text, then the text is decisive, and there can be no independent reasoning where a text exists. If there is no text, then the role of independent reasoning comes into play, according to the rules laid out in the same program, not based on whims or wishful thinking. . . . The rules for independent thinking and inference are also well established and known. They are not mysterious or vague.”⁹¹ And when the writer raises the question “Isn’t it the interests of mankind that shape their reality?” he does not hesitate to answer by citing the texts that say that God knows and mankind is ignorant. “The interests of mankind are included in God’s law as God revealed it and as the Prophet Muhammad passed it on.”⁹²

So religious discourse believes that religious texts are self-explanatory and speak for themselves, although at the theoretical level, especially when the discourse addresses young people, it seems to be aware of the gap in time and in language between the era of the text and subsequent eras and of the problems that this alone raises for understanding and interpretation, leading to inevitable disagreements.⁹³

The time gap is not the only problem, though it and the problems it raises are important, because the language in the texts, even

if it is contemporary with the reader, is not self-explanatory. The reader's intellectual and cultural outlook plays a part in understanding the language of the text and hence in producing meaning. It may be important here to again invoke the remark by the imam Ali—"The Qur'an has many faces"—or the remark of his that we cited earlier—"The Qur'an is a line that is drawn between two covers and that does not speak, whereas men speak for it"—but religious discourse, in its version of tradition, suppresses this important aspect of understanding the nature of a text, that is, the understanding that allows for pluralism and recognizes the vigorous nature of Islamic culture that continued until this form of understanding disappeared from sight, leaving the field to another form of understanding that froze the meaning of texts in rigid molds. This last form of understanding, or rather this freezing of understanding, was the premise for contemporary religious discourse and the aspect of tradition that the discourse brings to light. This is the interpretative attitude that we referred to earlier. The traditional concept of the text is different from the concept held by religious discourse, and when the religious scholars say that "there can be no *ijtihad* on matters where a text exists," they mean something else, something different from what religious discourse means.

The early Muslims did not refer to the Qur'an and the *hadith* as *nass* (text) as we do in contemporary language. They usually used other terms such as *al-kitāb* (the book), *al-tanzīl* (the revelation) or *al-qur'ān* (the recitation) to indicate the Qur'anic text, and they used terms such as *hadith*, *āthār* (traditions), or *sunna* (practice) to refer to *hadith* texts. They referred to the two together by the terms *wahy* (revelation) or *naql* (transmission). When they referred to *nass*, they meant a small part of revelation and something that, by virtue of its linguistic structure, did not allow for the slight-

est multiplicity of meanings. It was, in the language of the imam al-Shāfi‘i, “something that, once revealed, did not need interpretation.” If something could not be described as semantically obvious in a way that did not require explanation, then it was not *nass*. So one has to extrapolate and make inferences to understand things for which there is no *nass* in the Qur’an, and it is in this way that the imam al-Shāfi‘i defines the difference between *nass* and the so-called *muhkam* (definitive) parts of the Qur’an.⁹⁴ It is useful to consult dictionaries to discover the central meaning of the concept of *nass*, even if it does not help much in showing how the meaning has evolved. From the examples of usage cited in *Lisān al-‘Arab*, one of the most comprehensive classical dictionaries of Arabic, it seems that the central meaning is disclosing or revealing, as is evident from the following examples:

1. The antelope *nass*-ed its neck = The antelope raised its neck
2. He *nass*-ed the riding animal = He made the riding animal rise
3. Al-*nass* and al-*nasīs* = walking quickly
4. The *nass* of something = its extremity or limit
5. A line of poetry goes: At the *nass* of things (i.e., when things are at their limit), an extravagant man and a miser are much the same
6. He *nass*-ed the man = He pressed the man to tell him everything he knew
7. The women reached the *nass* of maturity = The women reached the age of maturity

These various senses—lifting, extremity, and reaching—are included in the idea of disclosing or revealing. Someone who *nass*-es

a camel or another mount lifts its neck and makes it visible. Similarly, investigating what someone knows by asking is in fact to bring to light whatever was hidden inside him, and the sense of extremeness or severity is a semantic extension of the first sense of lifting because when a rider lifts his mount's neck, he does so in order to make it move as fast as possible. When a camel's neck is raised, it moves at a brisk pace, as Abu 'Ubayd bin Sallām, the ninth-century philologist and *ḥadīth* expert, put it. Our identification of the core sense as disclosing or revealing is confirmed by the fact that this is the physical sense that survives in our contemporary language, as in our use of the same root in the word *minassa* to mean a raised platform that is readily visible, the same sense in which the word was used in ancient times, to mean "the place where a bride appears in order that she might be seen." From this core physical sense some semantic evolution might have taken place, and *nass* came to refer to the process of identifying the chain of transmission in *ḥadīth* scholarship. For example, Amr bin Dīnār says, "I never saw a man who was 'more *nass*' than al-Zuhri," meaning more skillful in tracing chains of transmission, and Ibn al-'A'rābi says, "*Nass*: tracing back to the greatest authority, and *Nass*: explanation, identification of something."

Attribution, explanation, and identification are senses that are all covered by the concept of definition at the abstract level, while "disclosing" is the core sense at the material level. The two senses or, to be more precise, the two levels overlap to create the concept of *nass* in the traditional context. But the diversity that Islamic culture has experienced has had an effect on the definition of what is a *nass* and does not require interpretation, and what is not a *nass* and therefore does require interpretation. The Mu'tazila and the Ash'aris in particular disagreed over what was defini-

tive and what was allegorical. Each side thought that whatever corroborated its intellectual position was definitive and *nass* and that whatever corroborated the rival position was allegorical and not *nass*. We have already discussed this disagreement in another study.⁹⁵ So one example should suffice here, from the commentary on the Qur'an by al-Zamakhshari and the comment on it by Ibn al-Munayyir the Sunni, because they both use the concept of *nass* and not the terms *definitive* and *allegorical* in their disagreement. Al-Zamakhshari says, "God has *nassa* ('has *nass*-ed') that His behavior is above reproach when he says, 'I am never unjust to my servants,' 'We did not wrong them but they wronged themselves,' 'God never commands what is shameful' and other similar verses of revelation."⁹⁶ These are verses that the Mu'tazila consider to be definitive, or *nass*, proving that God is just, and al-Zamakhshari cites them while explaining the seventh verse of the Cow chapter of the Qur'an: "And God has sealed up their hearts and their ears and placed a screen before their eyes, and they will face a terrible ordeal." This is a verse that the Mu'tazila consider to be allegorical, because the obvious sense gives the impression that it is God who causes unbelief and then punishes it. Ibn al-Munayyir objects to his interpretation of the verse, because from the Sunni point of view this verse is *nass* and therefore not liable to interpretation, and he accuses al-Zamakhshari of "descending from the dais [*minassa*—Trans.] of *nass* to the pit of interpretation, out of a wish to sow discord."⁹⁷ "The sealing in the verse is attributed to God Almighty as a *nass*," he adds.⁹⁷

The use of *nass* in this sense is not confined to groups of theologians or experts on religious law. It was almost universal in the circles that used religious discourse in classical works. Ibn Arabi, for example, distinguishes between the use of the verb *kāna* (was)

to indicate the past and its use merely to indicate existence, and he compares it with the word *al-ʿāna* (now), which every time it occurs must indicate a particular time. Based on this, he concludes that the word *al-ʿāna* is *nass* for the existence of time, whereas the verb *kāna* is not, because of its contingent nature.⁹⁸ If a *nass* has a definitive meaning and there is not the slightest scope for uncertainty, then the *nass* is something precious and rare, especially in the field of shariʿa: “There is no *nass* that can be referred to that is not open to uncertainty.”⁹⁹ Given the rarity that arises from the contingent nature of language, the Sufi solution to this problem lies in the Sufi experience itself—the experience of making contact with the source of lawmaking and taking laws directly from there, so committed Sufis are the only people who can be privy to the law laid down by the Prophet Muhammad, because “the religious scholars know nothing of it. Among the experts on Islamic law and the *ḥadīth* experts who had their learning by transmission from one dead man to another, those who came later could only take their learning on trust, since accurate transmission should be witnessed and concurrent chains of transmission are rare. If they then came across material that conveyed learning by universal report, that material would not be *nass* for any rulings they made, because *nass* is rare and what they could make of the material depended on the extent to which they could understand it, and so they disagreed. And against that material on that subject there might be another *nass* that contradicted it but was not available to them. And since they had no access to it, they could not follow it, and they did not know by which of the possible aspects of the material the Prophet would have ruled. But the Sufis learn this from the Prophet by a form of direct inspiration that gives them a clear *nass* by which to judge, or from God through the clear vision

they have from their Lord and through the insight by which they call mankind to God.”¹⁰⁰

It is not the Sufi solution to the problem of *nass* and its rarity that is important now. But what is fundamental and essential from the perspective of this study is the concept of *nass* on which the Sufis, and especially Ibn Arabi, agree with other classical schools of thought. The later Qur’anic scholars are no different from their earlier counterparts, even if they discussed the problem with a view to identifying what was “general” and what were “special cases” in the meaning of text/*nass*. The fact that a particular text specifies a restriction of, or an exception to, a general principle might be evident from the internal linguistic structure of the text/*nass* and might come to light only by analysis and *ijtihad*. Or this identification of a special case might come from another text, so independent reasoning is needed to combine the two. So examples of *nass* in the traditional sense are precious and rare. “Every generalization can be imagined as being qualified by a special case. The Qur’anic verse ‘Oh people, fear your Lord’ might be applied specifically to someone it was not originally aimed at. And the general prohibition in the verse: ‘You are forbidden to eat carrion’ was qualified by permission to eat dead fish in cases of necessity.” The scholars differ on how to define what applies generally and what identifies a restricted application or a special case. Similarly, the theologians differ on what is definitive and what is allegorical. There are things that al-Zarkashi cited as universally applicable while al-Suyūṭī thought they were examples of secondary rulings that would rarely have general application. Al-Suyūṭī found no generally applicable verse that did not have exceptions, except for the verse of the Qur’an that says, “Your mothers are forbidden to you.”¹⁰¹ The Qur’anic scholars conclude that, based on the level of

semantic clarity, the contents of the Qur'an can be divided into four categories:

1. parts that are clear and allow for only one meaning, known as *nass*;
2. parts that allow for two meanings, one of which is more likely and the other of which is less likely but possible, known as *zāhir* (obvious);
3. parts that allow for two meanings that are equally possible, known as *mujmal* (complex);
4. parts that allow for two meanings that are not equally likely, but the more likely or stronger sense is not the obvious sense, as with parts of type 2, but rather the more likely sense is the sense that is unexpected. This type is known as *mu'awwal* (liable to interpretation).¹⁰²

If this was the concept of text/*nass* in the classics, a concept quite different from our own, then when religious discourse brandishes the principle of “there can be no *ijtihād* on matters where a text exists” in the face of reason, it is in fact engaged in a cunning process of ideological deception, because it is not using *nass* in the same sense as it was used in the classics, which was the sense of “clear, obvious, and rare.” If we add to this the fact that defining what counts as *nass* and distinguishing between what is *nass* and what is not *nass* have been subject to disagreement and independent reasoning in the history of Islamic culture, then we can see the size and the scope of the deception. Contemporary religious discourse is not content to immobilize the text and strip it of its dynamism by jumbling together the modern concept and the old sense of the word *nass*; it also seeks to immobilize its meaning by

declaring a ban on independent thought, clearing the way for a ban on pluralism and for perpetuating the status quo along the lines of its own opinions and speculations. The Qur'an, the crux of our discussion so far, is a religious text that is stable in content, but inasmuch as the human mind addresses it and it becomes "intelligible," it loses the quality of stability. It becomes dynamic and can have a multiplicity of meanings. Stability or permanence is a feature of that which is absolute and sacred, but what is human is relative and variable. The Qur'an is a sacred text as far as its content is concerned, but it becomes intelligible through what is relative and variable, in other words through human beings. It is transformed into a human text that is "humanized," and it is essential for us to emphasize here that the status of a raw sacred text is a metaphysical status about which we know nothing, other than what the text says about it and what we, as inconstant and relative human beings, can understand.¹⁰³ From the moment when it was first revealed, that is, when the Prophet recited it at the moment of revelation, the text was transformed from being "a divine text" and became an understanding, a human text, because it changed from being revelation to being interpretation. The Prophet's understanding of the text was the first stage in the text's journey in its interaction with human minds, notwithstanding religious discourse's claims that the Prophet's understanding was identical with the intrinsic meaning of the text, assuming that such an intrinsic meaning actually exists. Such a claim leads to a kind of dilution of God's oneness in that it conflates the absolute with what is relative and what is constant with what is variable, when it conflates divine intentions with human understanding of those intentions, even if it is the Prophet's understanding. It is a claim that leads to the deification or canonization of the Prophet

by playing down the fact that he was human and concentrating on the fact that he was a prophet.

If the Qur'anic text raises all the previous problems, even though the content is established, the texts of the sayings of the Prophet raise special problems of their own on top of the previous problems, because they were written down only belatedly and were therefore subject to the processes of oral transmission, which makes them similar to the text in works of interpretation, in the sense that they paraphrase the sense and do not necessarily convey the actual words of the Prophet. So if the *hadiths* themselves, that is, as the Prophet spoke them in his own language and with his own words, were texts that explained a type of revelation that was different in nature from the revelation involved in the sunna, then the *hadiths* that we actually have are in fact interpretations of an interpretation.¹⁰⁴ If we add to that what is known about the many reasons and circumstances that led to the expansion of the corpus of *hadiths* through invention and fabrication, and the disagreements among *hadith* scholars on the criteria for identifying which *hadith* are authentic, then we can see how complicated the trajectory of these texts in the real world of human societies has been. Because of this, contemporary religious discourse seems less rigid and allows some independent reasoning and disagreement on texts of this kind, especially if the disagreement is over secondary matters. "That is because reasons for disagreement lie in the nature of mankind and of life and in the nature of the obligations that God imposes on mankind, and anyone who wanted to do away with disagreements altogether would have to place impositions on people, on life, on language, and on laws that went against their nature."¹⁰⁵ In discussions and arguments with young people,

problems arise over texts that are understood at face value without any independent reasoning or interpretation. In such cases it should be the case that the text “is authentic and accepted by everyone and it must clearly indicate the intended meaning. It must be unchallenged by any contradictory and similar or stronger text on a particular point of shari‘a or from the overall rules of shari‘a. A text may be correct in the opinion of one imam and weak in the opinion of another. He might consider it correct but might not accept that it gives the intended meaning. One scholar might consider it to have general application, while another scholar thinks it is a special case. One might see it as absolute, while another sees it as of restricted application. One might see it as evidence that a particular act is obligatory or forbidden, while another sees it as evidence that the act is commendable or repugnant. Someone might think the text is definitive, while someone else thinks it has been abrogated by another text. These are only some of the considerations.”¹⁰⁶

But this way of seeing the problem of the text in *hadiths* continues to look at the subject from the perspective of the traditional scholars, without breaking out of the framework of that perspective.

Perhaps it would be no exaggeration if we were to say:

The perspective of traditional scholars was more broad-minded, in that they did not stop the process of sorting out the corpus of *hadith* by additions and omissions according to criteria that were based on human reasoning and that were of necessity social. Stopping this important process and freezing the texts of the *hadith* in the five or six canonical works, dominated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, was in fact to freeze the status quo on the basis of the views and the thinking

of particular eras. Ideologically, it has features in common with the ban on the use of independent reasoning on the text of the Qur'an. The criteria that early scholars used for criticizing *ḥadīth* and for distinguishing between *ḥadīths* that were sound or weak or fabricated were no doubt governed by frameworks of knowledge that were of their time, that were relative and limited, and that did not rise to the level of definitive and objective criteria, as some people imagine. A *ḥadīth* is a dynamic text that can be recycled through a constant process of acceptance or rejection, based on rational and human criteria, that is, according to human thought that by its nature evolves and is connected to the circumstances of time and place and the environment that produces it. This is the case inasmuch as it is a raw text before human reason deals with it through understanding and interpretation, and it is a text that has taken shape and continues to take shape through the processes of the human mind, starting from the moment when it is first uttered. The distance that separates it from the sacred is so vast that it is almost a human text.

But to make this issue clearer in more depth, we need to take a general look at the sorting and checking mechanisms that are applied to the corpus of *ḥadīths*. This is what is known by the term *riwāya* (narration), to distinguish it from *dirāya* (knowledge), which focuses on rules and definitions. The rules and definitions are in fact secondary to the conditions of narration and discovering the circumstances of the narrators. In other words, in the technical sense and not in the sense of the process of transmission itself, the *riwāya* is the basis of the *dirāya*, which is related to judging the substance of the *ḥadīth*, whereas *riwāya* is interested in

studying the chain of transmission from two aspects. The first aspect is whether or not there could have been any contact between the various narrators who passed down the substance of the *hadith* from the time of the Prophet to the last person in the chain, and this is primarily an evidential question, since it is concerned with checking whether each narrator was a contemporary of the person from whom he heard the *hadith* and, more importantly, whether he met him face to face at an age when he was mature enough either to remember the *hadith* or to pass it on to someone else. The narrator should also have received the *hadith* by word of mouth, not from a written document, and there are other such evidential conditions. The same conditions must be met in the case of the subsequent narrator, and if any one of the narrators does not meet the conditions, there is a weakness in the chain of transmission that weakens the *hadith*, and if there is a long chronological gap between two narrators, it means that a narrator is missing from the chain, and the chain is deemed to be interrupted, which can lead to the *hadith* being rejected, unless it is authenticated by another version with a complete chain of transmission.

The second aspect of the study of chains of transmission relates to the scholarly and moral qualifications of each narrator. This is known as *jurh* (invalidation) and *ta'dil* (validation). There are many qualifications, most importantly that the narrator should have a good memory and be honest, should not lie or cheat, and should be a trustworthy person religiously and ethically.

Because tasks such as copying and checking dominated their work and because most of them had links with the government bureaucracy in most periods, *hadith* scholars did not have the same broad intellectual vision, open to disagreement and debate, as the theologians, the legal experts, or the Qur'an scholars. In fact they

were more like preachers in the way they saw the world and in their zealous opposition to any interpretations that were not directly authenticated in the tradition. So it comes as no surprise that the traditional works of biography excluded from the ranks of validated narrators all those who wrote polemical works—a category that covered all sects except those with which the *ḥadīth* scholar sympathized. Anyone who reads these biographical works can easily notice the contradictory verdicts on particular narrators. While some scholars hold a man to be trustworthy, others think that the same man is a cheat and a liar. When some describe a narrator as having a good memory and a large mental capacity, we find that others consign the same man to the ranks of forgetful dupes. These contradictory judgments do not arise from love or hatred, admiration or contempt, but rather from differences in criteria as a result of different ideological positions. We will not point out here how Sunni scholars dismiss stories accepted by the Shi‘a, or how Shi‘i scholars reject stories accepted by the Sunnis, which is highly significant in itself. We will merely note how each Sunni faction rejects the stories accepted by the followers of other factions.

One particular group appropriated the name *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā‘a* (The People of the Sunna and Community) and monopolized state support after eliminating the Mu‘tazila. This group became the arbiter of whether or not a narrative should be accepted and, by supporting the political authorities and enjoying their protection, it acquired the status of final authority on all matters related to religion and doctrine.

If we move on from examining the chain of transmission to examining the substance of the *ḥadīth*, the science of *dirāya*, we go straight into the heart of the process of independent reasoning. The substance is deemed to be sound if the sense does not

include anything that is at odds in the slightest way with the general principles and overall intentions of shari'a as derived from the Qur'an. In this the reasoning depends on comparing the text that is being examined and sorted with another text, the content of which is deemed to be sound and fully authenticated. But of course the comparison is not made at the level of the words but at the levels of sense and meaning. In this way the problems with *hadith* texts are superimposed on the problems we analyzed in the case of Qur'anic texts, and all the agency falls back on the human mind, which is beholden to the perspectives of time and place. It is a complex procedure that exposes the falsity of the principle that there can be no *ijtihad* in cases where a text exists, because *ijtihad*, as we have seen, is the other face of text—the face without which the text ceases to be a meaningful linguistic text and changes into an icon for decoration or a good luck charm, which is something that has in fact happened in our culture. Independent reasoning, contrary to what is said in religious discourse, is the only way to bring out the sense of the primary and principal text, the Qur'an, and it is the only way to confer on the secondary texts, the *hadith*, the same legitimate right to exist. So independent reasoning exists only in the case of texts, and fields other than the textual require innovation, not just *ijtihad*, and exploration, not just repetition of what the early Muslims said.

By focusing on the idea that texts should govern all aspects of life and thought, and by declaring that independent reasoning must be confined to practical applications rather than general principles, and to secondary texts (*hadiths*) rather than the primary text (the Qur'an), religious discourse helps to restrict both text and the real world. If we add to this the fact that the kind of independent

reasoning that religious discourse sometimes proposes amounts to nothing more than weighing up the opinions of legal experts and choosing between them, then we can see that this discourse really wants to take society backward and not, as it claims, to bring about progress. The past that it wants to take us back to is not a past that was bursting with intellectual vitality and that believed in pluralism and allowed for disagreement. It was a past that was content to imitate rather than innovate, content to repeat rather than create. When a beautiful past does appear in this discourse, it is in the context of boastful contempt for European reason and the material culture that Europe built on the basis of its borrowings from Islamic reason and so on, as we have mentioned in the course of our analysis. Religious discourse ends up trapped inside a circle of texts after freezing them and eliminating all their vitality. It ends up believing the saying, "We sought refuge in texts, and the thieves came in."¹⁰⁷

So the real world is the starting point and cannot be ignored. From the real world the text takes shape. From the language and culture of the real world, its ideas are fashioned, and as the real world changes under the agency of mankind its meaning takes new forms. The real world comes first, second, and last.

Ignoring the real world in favor of a frozen text with a meaning that cannot change turns both of them into myth. The text becomes a myth because its human dimension is ignored and its metaphysical dimension is emphasized, opening the field to sterile speculation about the nature of text in the metaphysical world, about what form it takes and what style of calligraphy it is written in, about whether the angels say it in Arabic or in some other language, and other such pointless questions that abound in media forms of religious discourse. The real world is transformed into

myth because sense and meaning are frozen, imbued with stasis because of their metaphysical origins and because there is an attempt to impose a supposedly eternal and invariable meaning on a human, social reality. The inevitable result is that both text and the real word are set aside and replaced by myth. In this way religious discourse condemns us to rotate around ourselves in a vicious circle and thereby severely curtails the chances of extracting possible and appropriate meanings for our historical and social situation.

This closed circle is evident in the very concept of divine sovereignty, because in promoting the concept religious discourse relies on the authority of the text. Verses of the Qur'an and *hadith* are cited, especially those that have become known as the three "sovereignty" verses in the Table chapter of the Qur'an, in an attempt to prove that appealing to texts is the essence of Islam and that any lenience on this or any denial of it poses a serious threat, not only to dogma but also to human life, by defying the system that God, in his knowledge, power, and wisdom, has decreed for it.

In other words, divine sovereignty is based on text in order to assert the authority of text. The formula could be reversed, and it would still be truthful from the perspective of religious discourse; it would then be said that the meaning of divine sovereignty is to establish the authority of text by relying on the authority of text, which is to turn in a closed circle.

In order to discuss this concept, or other concepts promoted by religious discourse, and to get out of the closed circle, we will have to go back to basics and seek guidance there.

The starting point is the authority of reason, the authority on which revelation itself is based, not reason as a dialectical, formal, intellectual mechanism but as a dynamic, historical, social force. This authority is fallible, but equally it is able to correct its

own mistakes. More importantly, it is our only means of understanding—understanding the world and life, ourselves and texts. And because it is a historical and social force, it is against rulings that are static, categorical, axiomatic, and definitive. It deals with the real world, social and natural, and with texts as drafts that are open-ended, changeable, and always amenable to exploration, scrutiny, and interpretation. Through this changeability and dynamism reason itself finds new forms. Its methods develop and mature in an endless dialectic that is fruitful and creative. Because religious dialogue realizes that appealing to this authority will deprive it of all its weaponry and remove its ideological mask, it is unable to hold a dialogue in the arena of reason and, in the face of attempts to establish reason in our culture (attempts that have faltered because of many factors), it resorts to accusing people of being unbelievers—an effective weapon in a backward environment where most people are poorly educated and most of the educated people suffer from cultural illiteracy. Some rationalists succumb to intimidation by this weapon and resort to dissimulation and compromise with religious discourse—an attitude that has serious consequences.

Our only option is to try to lay a sound basis for reason, not through discourse alone, though that is important, but by all possible methods of struggle. Earlier in our analysis we showed how, in its interpretation of texts, the concept of divine sovereignty depended on comparing God and man through binaries—knowledge/ignorance, power/impotence, wisdom/folly—and we also showed how in religious discourse these binaries, relying on texts too, rested on the divine power/human servitude binary, a binary that reduces mankind's relationship with God to that one dimension. At this stage we do not want to adopt the same strategies

and premises as religious discourse and cite other texts that base the relationship on love or rely on another traditional opinion that also bases it on love. No, we want to appeal to reason, which takes us back to the historical dimension of texts. This is the dimension that religious discourse ignores in all its pronouncements, not just in its interpretation of texts. The society that the Islamic revelation came to address was a tribal society that practiced slavery. In that society relationships depended on tribalism and slavery, the first of which might be seen as horizontal and the second as vertical. There is no need to elaborate on the vertical dimension that incorporated the upper/lower relationship inside any one tribe, and it was all the same whether slaves became slaves by purchase or by capture and enslavement because there was no difference in the status of slaves if they were Arabs. The horizontal dimension embodies the relations between tribes, which are relations based on the struggle over resources and the means of production, that is, water and pasture. It is natural in relationships of conflict that the weak tribes will resort to seeking protection from the strong tribes that monopolize the resources available in an area known as “the tribal reserve.” From this, patron/client relationships arose between the tribes—relationships that appear to be horizontal on the surface but, because they are between a stronger and a weaker party, are really in the middle ground between horizontal and vertical. The Arabic word that describes this kind of relationship is *walāʾ* (loyalty) and its derivatives, and some of the derivative words are ambiguous, referring to either one thing or its opposite. The word *mawla*, for example, which comes from the same root as *walāʾ*, can refer to either the master or the servant, the patron or the client.

Texts are linguistic constructions that are separable from the semantic system of their language only within special limits

conditional on the nature of the function they are meant to have in culture. So texts naturally shape the relationship between God and mankind through socio-linguistic binaries. But if language is evolving as society and culture evolve, then it formulates new concepts or develops the meaning of words to reflect relationships that are more developed, and it is natural, in fact essential, that the texts be re-understood and re-interpreted by setting aside the original social and historical concepts and substituting concepts that are modern, more humane, and more progressive, while the content of the text remains unchanged. The old words are still alive and in use, but they have acquired metaphorical meanings. To insist on tracing them back to the old literal meaning and on reviving the concepts that they reflect is to ignore both the text and the real world and to falsify the overall intentions of revelation. It is worth observing that religious discourse resorts to interpreting texts metaphorically in order to reject relationships of love, friendship, and familiarity between God and mankind, while at the same time it insists on the literal nature of the servile relationship on which it bases its concept of divine sovereignty. Interpreting what is socio-historical in the texts is a condition for the texts' renewal¹⁰⁸ by renewing what is essential and fundamental and by discarding what is accidental and temporary under different socio-historical conditions. The society that the revelation addressed was a mercantile society, especially in the centers of influence and of religious importance, and so its language reflects a framework of mercantile concepts such as buying and selling, profit and loss, the scales, and so on. None of the ancients, or even those who lived at the time of the revelation, insisted on the literal meaning of these concepts, and they were interpreted in exactly the same way as the texts that refer to the attributes of God.

We have said that insisting on the literal sense of socio-historical concepts in the language of texts means not only ignoring the real world and the text but also falsifying the overall intentions of the revelation, which is incompatible with what religious discourse overtly proclaims and maybe also with what it intends. This falsification takes place in two steps: first, claiming that Islam came to free human beings from servitude (in the old sense) to other humans and to restore them all to servitude to God alone—the sense that was understood by the Arabs whom the revelation addressed, and second, saying that true servitude, as the Arabs also understood it, meant rejecting the sovereignty of human beings and seeking guidance from God alone by appealing to texts. On this basis religious discourse explains the strong opposition to Islam from rivals who were prepared to engage in military conflict to oppose it. The first step coaligns with the second step if Islam was just a liberation movement to abolish the slave trade and free the slaves. That would be why the lords of Quraish were hostile to Islam as a system that would incite the slaves against them and eliminate what was an important source of their mercantile wealth. No doubt Islam in its Meccan phase did help to free slaves psychologically from the control their masters had over their lives and possessions, and that is what is meant by the “incitement” of which the lords of Quraish were suspicious. By the laws it imposed in its Medinan phase too, Islam helped pave the way for the emancipation of slaves by making the manumission of slaves a way of atoning for some offenses. But more important than all of that was the principle of equality between all people that the revelation insisted on, regardless of gender or color. Islam was not a call to abolish slavery, but that does not disgrace or dishonor Islam. A system that banned alcohol in three stages was not about to

destroy an important economic pillar of the real world. In essence Islam came to destroy the foundations of *jāhiliyya*, as we explained earlier, to organize life on a basis of equality and justice and to free human beings from the delusions of myth and superstition.

It is pure falsification to reduce Islam and its overall objective to the task of freeing human beings from servitude to other human beings in order to reinstate them in a servitude of another kind, because that would have been a superficial objective as long as Islam merely handed mankind over to enslavement by the high priests of texts. It is also a falsification that freezes the texts along with the real world, ignoring the facts of history and language and waging war on reason, which was liberated by the revelation. After all of that it should come as no surprise, since these things occur in the texts, that our children are learning in school that Islam allows men to own slave girls and to have sex with them and that this is one possible type of relationship with women, alongside legal marriage. Nor is it strange, in the light of the enslavement to texts, that they should be learning that Christians are second-class citizens that Muslims must treat well. That is how religious discourse, in its educational and pedagogical guise, addresses our children, instructing them that they must treat their Christian schoolmates and teachers “kindly and not make intolerable demands on them.”¹⁰⁹ Given the prevalence of the plague of fanaticism that religious discourse has spawned, wittingly or unwittingly since intentions are irrelevant here, it is not improbable that some independent thinker or modern-day revivalist will spring on us a fatwa that declares that the food prepared by Jews and Christians is unlawful for Muslims, based on the views of ancient writers who concluded that the term *People of the Book* in the fifth verse of the

fifth chapter of the Qur'an refers only to the Israelites to whom the Torah and the New Testament were revealed. "In contrast, newcomers from other nations who adopted their religion but who were not Israelites are not covered by this verse, and the animals that they slaughter are not lawful to Muslims because they are not the people who received divine revelations before the Muslims, and this is the view that Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī took."¹¹⁰

If texts are to dominate in a way that allows for disagreement only on secondary matters, within the confines of weighing up the opinions of the early Muslims and choosing between them, then independent reasoning will of course be set in a framework of rules that have nothing to do with life or the real world. So, faced with real independent thinking, religious discourse's only recourse is to take cover behind the principle that "there can be no *ijtihād* in matters where a text exists." In the case of the existence of a daughter excluding other relatives from inheriting in the same way that the existence of a son would, it would have been sufficient to take the overall intentions of the revelation as the criterion, and there was no need to rely on the *ijtihād* of Shi'ite religious law or to stick to the literal meaning of the texts. This criterion can be discerned by linking the texts to their socio-historical context, measuring the extent to which the text has changed reality, and determining the direction of this change. This is an important criterion for independent reasoning in the field of practical shari'a rules because it reveals the nature of the interests that have to be taken into account regardless of ideological preferences. In the case of inheritance by daughters and even women in general, we find that Islam gave them half the share of the inheritance that males receive, whereas previously they were completely excluded. That

was in a socioeconomic context in which women had almost no legal competence and were completely dependent, if not completely owned, by men, whether their fathers or their husbands. The direction that the revelation took is quite clear, and it is unacceptable that independent reasoning should stop at the furthest point that the revelation reached, otherwise the claim that Islam is valid in all times and all places would come crashing down and there would be a growing gap between the dynamic and evolving real world and the texts that contemporary religious discourse insists on taking literally.

All the levels of religious discourse that we have discussed here—the moderate level (government and opposition), the extremist level, the pedagogical version, and the media version—all contribute equally to its strategies and its premises.

The discourse of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya* may seem to have the loudest voice, but it is in fact merely the echo of earlier inputs from family, school, and the media, an echo that reverberated quietly all the time and was then helped to take shape by deteriorating conditions in which wise people were unable to meet the most basic human demands of ordinary citizens, while the people who grew rich from economic liberalism and those in power indulged in many kinds of corruption and in vice in all its social, political, and moral forms. If there was ever any similarity between the young men of *al-Gamāʿāt al-Islāmiyya* and the Khawārij, it was only in their cathartic and unrealistic idealism, which drives them to defend and promote their vision to the point of martyrdom.

According to the accounts of historians the Khawārij rushed to their deaths like moths to a flame, and they wrote many well-known poems about how pleasant death was and how it was preferable to life. From the perspective of the young members of *al-Gamāʿāt al-*

Islāmiyya, the real world is impervious to reform and human reason is incapable of creating an agreeable world, so the only solution is to resuscitate the old model that is ready to hand—Islamic society as the Companions of the Prophet experienced it under the leadership of the Prophet—and to appeal to the Qur'an as the only way to make this dream come true, and so on. . . .

2. Tradition Interpreted or Colored

A Reading of the Project of the Islamic Left

Before delving into the subject of this chapter—text in the project of the Islamic left—we need to propose a definition, if only procedural, of two concepts we will be using. The first is the concept of interpretation, which needs to be carefully defined, especially after its usage has expanded and the fields in which it is used have proliferated. It has moved from the field of reading and interpreting religious texts into the field of the humanities and social sciences, and from there to the field of epistemology in philosophy and from there to literary criticism and semiotics. The definition we would like to propose here involves going back to the sense

of the term in the field where it was originally used, that is, the field of reading and interpreting religious texts, especially in traditional Arabic works, with some additions and amendments that are needed because of developments in knowledge and advances in people's awareness. In defining the term, the only reason for reverting to the origins in this way is to make an attempt, a legitimate one I believe, to leapfrog back over the thick layers of semantic accretion that have made the term ambiguous. "Interpretation" and "coloring" have combined with the recent focus on the importance of the role of the reader, as opposed to the previous idea that authorial intent was what mattered. Because we are going to discuss the concept of coloring later, let it suffice here to say that the focus on the role of the reader and on the mechanics of reading has led to the growth of a subjective trend that ignores to varying degrees objective facts and circumstances, both in the case of literary texts and in the case of other texts, primarily the classical Islamic texts.

When we talk about "the reading of the Islamic left," we are referring to the way the Islamic left treats the traditional religious texts of Islam. Obviously the traditional religious texts do not raise the problem of intent in the same way that literary texts do. They do not raise it at the same cognitive level, but rather at another level that includes the totality of the objective circumstances—social, economic, and political—that accompanied the production of these texts and through which the fundamental and original meaning of the texts in question is therefore defined.

Interpretation: The Linguistic Sense and the Technical Sense

In discussing the sense of the Arabic word *ta'wīl* (interpretation) in ordinary language, it is important to point out that it includes two dimensions that might seem contradictory, whereas they are in fact complementary. The first dimension is the sense of the triliteral root that gives us the verb *'āla* and words derived from it—the sense of returning or going back. The *Lisān al-ʿArab* dictionary gives the definition “the thing went back” for “*ʿāla al-shay*” and from this we can see that *ta'wīl*, as the verbal noun of the causative form of the verb, could mean sending or referring the thing or the phenomenon in question back to its primary and original causes. That’s how the word is used in the twelfth chapter of the Qur’an, where the task of interpretation—interpreting the stories in Joseph’s dreams—is to discover the original meaning of the event or the subject before it appeared in the form of a dream. In the eighteenth chapter of the Qur’an, interpretation meant explaining the meaning of the events that took place, or in other words explaining their hidden causes. The second semantic dimension of the triliteral root *a-w-l* is the sense of reaching an objective by managing, governing, or reforming. This sense, the sense of outcome and objective, also occurs in some Qur’anic verses, though the root is more common in the first sense. In fact the two senses are not contradictory, because reaching an objective cannot be achieved in isolation from understanding the original causes. The two senses converge in the Qur’anic usage at the end of the story of Joseph (Qur’an 12:100), which runs, “Then he raised his parents on the throne and they fell prostrate in front of him. And he said, ‘Father, this is the interpretation of the dream I had earlier and

my Lord has made it come true.” “The interpretation” here means that the dream has achieved its objective, in that its original sense has been fulfilled. It could be said that the trilateral root *a-w-l* and the words derived from it, including the word *taʿwīl*, contain two opposing meanings, related to each other in the same way as cause and effect.¹

Qurʾan scholars usually discuss the technical sense of *taʿwīl* by comparing it with the other technical term *tafsīr*, which has a similar meaning. They say the relationship between the two words is the same as the relationship between the general and the specific, adding that *tafsīr* is associated with *riwāya*, while *taʿwīl* is associated with *dirāya*. In other words, *tafsīr* is associated with transmitted tradition while *taʿwīl* is associated with reason. By transmitted tradition we mean the fields of scholarship needed to break into the world of the text and pry open the locks in order to interpret the text. These fields of scholarship include, besides language studies, “the science that deals with the revelation of particular verses and chapters of the Qurʾan and with the stories and other allusions in the Qurʾan, the science of sorting the Qurʾan into parts revealed in Mecca and parts revealed in Medina, the definitive and the allegorical parts, the parts that were abrogated and the parts that abrogate other parts, the parts that mention special cases and those that state general rules, the parts that are absolute and the parts that have restricted application, the parts that can be read in more than one way and the parts that have been fully explained. And others have added other aspects, such as the science of sorting the Qurʾan into parts that impose bans and parts that give permission to do certain things, parts that make promises and parts that make threats, parts that give orders and parts that impose prohibitions and parts that teach lessons and set examples,

and these are the areas in which one may not state an opinion.”² All these fields of scholarship are deemed to be indispensable for anyone who takes on the task of interpreting a text, and without this knowledge individuals or groups would have unfettered and unregulated freedom to project their own ideology onto the text or to make the leap from interpretation to coloring, which is what the traditional scholars referred to as “specious interpretation” or faulty interpretation, by which they meant Shi‘ite interpretations in particular. The Qur’an scholars were receptive to the interpretations of some Sufis, however, on the grounds that these interpretations included symbolic references and were related to ecstatic experiences that were not incompatible or contrary to the original sense of the Qur’an. No doubt their decision to reject the Shi‘ite interpretations and accept the interpretations of some but not all Sufis was an ideological position in support of the authorities, but the cognitive principle by which they distinguished between what was acceptable and what was spurious in the field of interpretation remained sound and correct.

But interpretation is not a concept that is confined to dealing with language alone. It clearly goes beyond the context of being used in the Qur’an and in language generally to include all events and phenomena and is a concept for handling signs in the overall semiotic sense. Based on that, the complex of interpretative sciences has to change to suit the nature of the sign that is being interpreted. In other words the nature of the “interpretant” that is appropriate for interpreting the sign has to change. Every field of knowledge has its own tools and its own interpretative methods without which interpretation could not even begin. But that does not mean that interpretative activity is merely the mechanical outcome of knowing the interpretant. As we saw earlier, the

tafsīr form of interpretation is linked to *riwāya* and transmitted tradition, while the *ta'wīl* form of interpretation is associated with reasoning and inference.

We should point out here that fields of knowledge switch roles in such a complicated way that it is impossible to classify them according to the dialectic of *tafsīr/ta'wīl*. Otherwise we would fall into the dualistic distinction that the theologians make between core disciplines and auxiliary disciplines whose purpose is to serve the core disciplines. There is also a third, intermediate class that serves the core disciplines and is served by the auxiliary disciplines. One field of knowledge can help to explain another field of knowledge in the same way that the latter can explain the former in a different context.

Coloring: A Tendentious Reading

Given that interpretation/*ta'wīl* is a process of deduction, then obviously the knowing self has a role that should not be denied or ignored, but some modern theories that incline to the side of the text turn it into a world of semantic relationships that reveal themselves or come to light only through the perspective of a specific reader. That reader is epistemologically determined by the perspectives of place and time, and sometimes even by his or her momentary state of mind. So the meanings of the text proliferate and expand as the perspectives from which it is read change spatially and temporally, and the reading becomes in effect a process of creating a new text on the back of the original text. However

novel this concept might seem, in fact it takes us back, through a back door, to a form of impressionism. By insisting on detaching the text from the author and the period of time and the environment that produced it, to the extent that it promises us the age of “the death of the author,” it constructs for texts an independent world with its own laws. This is the New Criticism theory, which has taken off its old garb and replaced readers with creators, and the strategies of reading and interpreting with the strategies of innovation and creation. Even if we agree with those who hold the view that there can be no innocent reading of a text, we do believe it necessary to distinguish between a reading that is “not innocent” and one that is tendentious. The lack of innocence in cognitive activity in general, and in reading texts in particular, is something that can be explained epistemologically, given that the act of cognition does not start from an absolute, total vacuum analogous to the state of original and primal innocence, assuming that such a thing ever existed. But a tendentious reading is unlike that and can only be explained through ideology. The distinction that traditional scholars made between two types of interpretation, one of which was acceptable and the other objectionable, once we discard its ideological basis and give it an epistemological basis, might form the foundation for our own distinction between *ta’wīl* and coloring. Engaging with texts or interpreting them must start off from two perspectives that are indispensable to each other, especially if we are talking about traditional texts. The first is the perspective of history in the sociological sense—putting the texts in their context in order to discover their original meaning. This historical context includes of course the linguistic context particular to the texts. The second is the perspective of the current social and cultural context that provides the motive for showing an interest in interpreting,

or more properly reinterpreting, these texts, in order to distinguish between the original historical meaning and the significance that can be derived from their meaning. In textual interpretation, distinguishing between the meaning and the significance must remain an urgent requirement so that the lines between the past and the present are not blurred on the one hand, and on the other hand so that the ideology of the scholar does not influence the methodology of the interpretation arbitrarily and abusively. This does not mean denying scholars their natural and cognitive right to formulate their own attitudes to reality and to the classical tradition through their own methodology of interpretation, regardless of whether their attitude is progressive or reactionary. But we do disapprove, even condemn, this being done in a direct way that is arbitrary and abusive. We condemn the treatment or interpretation of texts from a self-interested, opportunistic perspective that ignores, on the one hand, the fact that they operate in their historical context and, on the other hand, treats with disdain facts and data that are indispensable to uncovering the meaning of the texts. Scholars usually treat and interpret texts arbitrarily when they are unaware of or overlook their own ideologies, which means that the ideology plays its role in secret, without any oversight, control, or restraint. In this case the leap from interpretation to coloring is easy, and the lines between meaning and significance are blurred.

The aim of cognitive activity in general, and the act of reading in particular, is to reveal facts that exist at some level beyond the range of the knowing self or the reader. If the reader's perspectives define his or her angle of vision, the data of the text in this encounter do not behave as the passive recipient of instructions from the knowing self. This means that true reading, and true cognitive activity in general, is based on a creative and fertile "dialectic"

between the self and the object. This relationship produces interpretation at the level of studying both texts and other phenomena, but contrarily, a tendentious reading only produces coloring. It is essential to point out here that coloring does not arise only from this self-interested, subjective approach toward dealing with texts or other phenomena. It arises to the same extent from a superficial positivist approach that conceals its ideological inclinations beneath the slogan of “scientific objectivity” and cognitive impartiality. The self-interested, subjective approach ignores the first of the two aspects that we referred to earlier—the aspect of the objective historical context of the texts—and therefore fails to discover their meaning. As for the superficial, positivist approach, it claims it can access the meaning and discover the truth, whereas the only thing it does in fact access is what it wanted to find in the first place. We have therefore called both approaches “tendentious reading” to distinguish them from “readings that are not innocent,” where the lack of innocence rests on the dialectic of the relationship between the self and the object.

Productive Readings

The two approaches we defined for dealing with and interpreting texts are not separate approaches, even if it is essential to keep them apart from the methodological point of view. The requirements of methodology also justify separating meaning and significance in the interpretation of texts, though in fact they are two faces of the same coin. That is because the significance cannot be dissociated

from the meaning to the extent that the significance steers aspects of the meaning. If it is possible to say that the significance, or to be more precise the attempt to reach it, is the “objective” of the act of reading, this objective can be reached only by discovering the meaning, even if the objective in another respect helps to some extent to shape some aspects of the meaning. If the meaning can only be discovered with the help of an interpretant in the sense that we explained earlier, then the two aspects of the process of interpretation—that is, the meaning and the significance—run in parallel with the two usages of the term *taʿwīl* in ordinary language, as was noted earlier. Discovering the meaning means going back to the source, whereas discovering the significance is the objective of reading, and the two senses, on the linguistic and technical levels, converge through the morphology of the term, which has the form of the verbal noun of the second form of the verb, implying frequentative action through the gemination of the second radical in the finite form of the verb. That means that *taʿwīl* is an action that repeatedly moves between a starting point and an endpoint, or between the meaning and the significance, rather like the movement of a pendulum, and not movement in one direction. It is a movement that starts with reality/significance and sets out to discover the meaning of the text/the past. Then the meaning goes back to lay a foundation for the significance and adjust the starting point. Without this oscillation between the significance and the meaning, the two lose touch with each other and the reading moves out of the field of *taʿwīl* and falls into the abyss of coloring. In other words, it changes from being a legitimate reading—even if it is not innocent—to being a tendentious reading. It is essential to emphasize here that the significance that marks the starting point in the reading is an embryonic, hypothetical significance that can

be amended, rejected, or confirmed, depending on the meaning that the reading produces. A significance that is invariable and predetermined in an inflexible and categorical way can only be an obstacle to a productive reading—a reading that follows the first process, or rather processes, of exploration from which the embryonic, hypothetical significance takes shape.

The Sufi distinction between the exoteric and esoteric levels in interpreting texts might be useful in explaining the relationship between the meaning and the significance, provided we leave aside the value judgment inherent in the lower/higher relationship in the Sufi tradition and substitute the relationship of dialectical interaction on which the relationship between significance and meaning is based. The exoteric element in this relationship represents the level of the meaning, which can only be determined through the overall context of the totality of circumstances that produced the text, while the esoteric element represents the level of the significance, which is latent within the meaning.

As a composite sign, a text is made up of a succession of signs that refer in their totality to spatio-temporal objects that lie outside the text, but some of these signs can break through this limited perspective to future perspectives that can address subsequent ages. In prestigious texts these signs can “renew” their meaning with every new reading, provided the conditions mentioned earlier are met, although that does not obviate the need for a productive reading of the signs that have a spatio-temporal nature. The act of reading does not in fact deal with the signs that make up the text in isolation from each other, except for the purposes of the analysis that takes place before they are put together, and at this stage two types of signs can be isolated, one of which establishes the meaning and the other of which establishes the significance

and helps the first in establishing the meaning. After that comes the role of the interpretative reading of the text as a composite, which sees the meaning as one of the levels of the text, that is, the exoteric level—a level that, from within rather than from outside, points to another deeper level that is the esoteric level or the significance.

In texts, especially high-status ones, the dialectic between meaning and significance, or between the exoteric and the esoteric, is a fact that cannot be ignored, and an interpretative, productive reading really can discover the dialectic and distinguish between its two parts. We do not want to deviate from the subject of this study by providing an example of a productive reading of particular texts, so we will make do with what we have already provided in the way of a reading of the concept of interpretation held by Qur'an scholars and of the concept of the exoteric and the esoteric in the Sufi tradition. For those concepts, this rapid reading sought to discover the significance that is appropriate to our way of thinking and at the same time based on its historic meaning by concentrating on the cognitive and not the ideological. We said earlier that Qur'an scholars accepted some Sufi readings of the Qur'an and categorized them as "permissible," whereas they rejected Shi'ite readings, which they categorized as "faulty," and we noted that this discrimination was legitimate as far as the cognitive significance was concerned even if, in its historical context, it was based on an ideological position. We can now put in the framework of the cognitive many of the texts that confirm the multiplicity of levels of meaning in religious texts in general, as long as we apply the concept across the board to include non-religious texts, on the one hand, and as long as the multiplicity is based on a dialectical relationship between its various levels, on the other.

Having made this distinction, which we hope is now clear, between interpretation and coloring or between productive readings that are not innocent and tendentious readings that are necessarily unproductive, we move on to a reading of the project of the Islamic left. We hope this reading will produce in its turn further explanation of the mechanics of reading and aspects of interpretation.

The Islamic Left and the Priorities of Religious Discourse

The concept of the left assumes its antithesis, the right. It basically offers its ideas in opposition to the right, although both of them start out from the same cognitive invariables offered by religious texts. In this respect the left belongs in the domain of religious thought, although some of its theories are dominated by the strategies of philosophical discourse. The term “Islamic left” was first introduced, as far as we are aware, in the early 1980s in Egypt by Hassan Hanafi, its most important representative not just in Egypt but in the whole Islamic world and especially in the Arab world. That was in the first and only issue of the magazine that came out to revive *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Strongest Link), the periodical published by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh from 1884. This does not mean that the Islamic left appeared as a distinct school of thought only in the 1980s. On the contrary, the appearance of a new version of *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* bearing the label “Islamic Left” showed that this school of thought felt that it was surrounded by dangers from two interrelated directions. The first direction was the danger faced by the left in general, in all its

forms and factions, as a result of the political, socioeconomic, and intellectual upheaval that was first evident in the purge of leftists in the Egyptian government in May 1971 but that did not bear its black and bitter fruit until the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when the Egyptian regime handed the reins of power wholesale to the historical enemies of the nation—world imperialism and international Zionism. Because the Islamic left was the legitimate child of the Arab nationalist movement, which had a progressive outlook on social matters and found its political expression in the Egyptian government that held power after the 1952 revolution, especially in the 1960s, the Islamic left was restricted, harassed, and suppressed in the same way as the left in general under the regime that held power in the 1970s. It is noteworthy that during that period some representatives of the Islamic left went through a drastic transformation and joined the ranks of the religious right, which, unlike the left, enjoyed wide freedom to engage in political activity and promote its ideas. It was the growth of the religious right that posed a danger from the other direction, in the form of an ideological challenge that was the counterpart of the political challenge that all leftist groups and factions faced.

So the Islamic left goes back to before the declaration that came out in the early 1980s. In fact we can even find some early traces of this school of thought in the writings of Sayyid Qutb in the early 1950s, especially in his books *Ma'rakat al-Islām wa-l-Ra'smāliyya* (The Battle between Islam and Capitalism) and *al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtīmāʿiyya fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam), as well as in *Ishtirākiyyat al-Islām* (The Socialism of Islam) by Mustafa al-Sibāʿi, one of the leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. These precursors certainly represented a natural extension of the rationalist interpretation of Islam that both Jamal

al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh promoted, responding to the challenge posed by Western civilization on the one hand and drawing on the rationalist tradition of the Mu‘tazila and Ibn Rushd on the other.³ Sayyid Qutb may have renounced his social interpretation of religion in favor of a theory of divine sovereignty that excluded human beings and froze the vitality of social life in rigid patterns, but this renunciation cannot be explained as solely the result of the Brotherhood’s clash with the Egyptian government in the 1960s without considering the self-serving nature of Qutb’s interpretation. Qutb, or others within the fold of religious thought, could not otherwise have reached the conclusions that they did in fact reach. This is no place for wishful thinking or crying over spilled milk, because the claim that Sayyid Qutb, “if he had continued to evolve naturally, would have concluded that scientific socialism was a synonym for Islam and would have become a tower of strength for the Islamic left in Egypt and one of its primary pillars in the Islamic world”⁴ is just an assumption based on hope. The evolution that took place in Qutb’s religious thinking was a natural evolution that was internally driven, and the external factors were merely auxiliary factors that played the role of stimulants that determined the nature and details of his response, depending on the nature and force of those factors. If we are right to use this psychological linkage between the stimulant and the response in analyzing the evolution of Qutb’s thinking on interpretative method, we would say that the stimulant in the early 1950s elicited an emphasis on the values of social justice and the struggle against domestic and international capitalism. These values were projected onto Islam directly and opportunistically without any deep analysis of the structure of Islam itself in its internal domain. This kind of projected interpretation, or coloring,

was likely to conceal some aspects of the internal domain of the phenomenon, which remained in a state of latency while waiting for the stimulant that would bring those aspects to light. When the Egyptian government in the 1960s adopted social justice as a popular demand and began to get into battles with international capitalism and its local ally, that stimulant disappeared, leaving the field open to another stimulant that this time took the form of a partisan question—the question of dividing up the cake and participating in government. Interpreting Islam from the perspective of divine sovereignty and associated concepts, primarily the concept of *jāhiliyya*, was the response to this other stimulant. In neither case was Islam the object of interpretation. On the contrary, it was the external world and its ideological requirements that were the objective that was projected onto the source and that colored it. In this way the specific and the general were mixed up together, the relative and the absolute overlapped, and the lines between significance and meaning disappeared.

This lengthy digression was necessary because the migration from the left to the right within the edifice of religious thought carried along many people other than Sayyid Qutb. We need only mention some of the other names here, such as Khalid Mohammed Khalid and Mohammed Omara. In fact the shift to the religious right from the left in general was one of the striking phenomena of the 1970s, and here we need only mention the name Adel Hussein. That period seems to have contributed to a large extent to a review of attitudes and a winnowing out of the groups that participated to varying degrees in the agenda of the July regime until the end of the 1960s. In addition to the dangers to the Islamic left that we mentioned earlier, this process of winnowing in the ranks of the Islamic left led to almost all its champions leaving

the field. Hassan Hanafi was the only one left in Egypt, and the need arose for him to declare his existence, so in 1981 he issued the first and only issue of his magazine *al-Yasār al-Islāmi* (The Islamic Left), which he edited almost singlehandedly. A year earlier he had issued an outline for an Islamic left project—in a conversation with me he called it “a manifesto”—with the title *al-Turāth wa-l-Tajdīd* (Tradition and Renewal). The first part came out in 1988 in five volumes under the title *Min al-ʿAqīda ila al-Thawra* (From Doctrine to Revolution), which is the main subject of our analysis in this study.

So the declaration that coincided with the start of the 1980s was not to announce the birth of an Islamic leftist movement as much as it was both an announcement affirming its existence and the announcement of a definition of that movement. In other words the declaration was tantamount to reshuffling the cards and rearranging priorities for confrontation with the dangers that faced the Islamic left politically and ideologically.

The Islamic left thought that declaring its “good intentions” would be enough to ward off the political dangers it faced, so it resorted to *taqiya* or “dissimulation,” the classic Shiʿite principle, declaring that it was not a political party, that it did not represent a partisan opposition and was not directed against anyone, because it “thinks that politics is about the culture and revival of the nation. . . . The battles are basically in culture and inside the nation’s cultural consciousness. . . . The Islamic left does not aim to issue a call to arms or incite anyone against anyone else. On the contrary, it wants the nation to wake up and continue its modern renaissance. It wants to offer people alternatives and to let the masses be the judges, to go beyond partial solutions and individual perspectives

toward a universal and comprehensive vision of the nation's place in history and of the nation's role vis-a-vis itself and others."⁵

While initially content to struggle on the cultural and intellectual level, in the late 1980s the Islamic left shifted toward insisting that intellectual struggle must be tied to political struggle, so the aim of reconstructing dogmatology in *From Doctrine to Revolution*, aside from setting out a clearly delineated revolutionary ideology that rests on the beliefs of the nation or setting out a theology of revolution, is "to put ideology into practice as a movement in history after mobilizing the masses through a revolution in their beliefs."⁶ This linkage rests on the well-established Marxist principle that "we are not interested in interpreting the world, as the ancients were, but rather in changing it, developing it, and controlling it" (1/33), and it is obvious that the ideology could be put into practice, and the change required could be brought about, only by mobilizing the masses in a revolutionary political organization whose fundamental role, once it was formed, would be defined as "leading the armed struggle, because armed struggle is not only a part of ideological construction but also the reality of the age—the age of liberation from colonialism and feudalism" (5/388).

The principle of *taqiya* may explain the hesitant tone in the political discourse of the Islamic left, adopted in order to confront the political danger that surrounded both it and all other leftist tendencies and factions at the beginning of the 1980s. But the principle that explains the way it faced the ideological danger that resulted from the rise of the Islamic right was syncretism (*tawfiqiyya*) as far as philosophical-religious discourse was concerned. The Islamic left was caught between a rock and a hard place, accused by the government of Marxism and loyalty to

foreign powers and by other leftist forces of promoting deceptions and apologies. The syncretist or conciliatory attitude, driven by the concern to unite brethren who were partners in the body of the nation, was the ideological response to this challenge:

We wrote *From Doctrine to Revolution* . . . to serve the interests of the nation and because we cared about national unity after the country had split into factions and parties in its national struggle and as a result of social change, especially between those who favor tradition and those who favor change, between the salafist movement and the secular movement, which are the main trends in the body of the nation, and as an alternative to reciprocal accusations of unbelief, the struggle for power, and each side's exclusion of the other.

Our beliefs are the link between the two wings of the nation and the means by which the salafist tradition can tackle the main issues of the age and by which progressive secularists (whether liberal, socialist, or Arab nationalist) can achieve their objectives, with tradition and the spirit of the nation as their starting point. The former can feel confident that they are not rebelling against society, covertly or overtly, or taking a hostile position toward ordinary people or the country as a whole, while the latter can feel confident that these beliefs will not end up producing a backlash and a counterrevolution. This is what the world around us demonstrates, both in the attitude of the Islamic movement and in the setbacks to and betrayal of the Arab nationalist movement. (1/39)

But that does not mean that the syncretism associated with the concern to unite factions was merely a response to the fact

of, or more properly the danger of, the ideological challenge in question.

In fact syncretism has been an integral part of the fabric of the Islamic left. Syncretism as an intellectual approach converges with *taqiya* as a political approach, since leftist intellectuals sometimes resort to *taqiya* on the intellectual level and practice syncretism at the level of political discourse.

In the context of discussing the problem of deciding whether reason or the transmitted tradition is desirable or undesirable, Hassan Hanafi asks:

Is God in danger, or is reason in danger? Should we be defending the sovereignty of God or the sovereignty of reason? Is it for us to defend God or are we human beings who should defend human rights? Faced with this high-stakes choice one can only remain silent, fearful of popular resentment, the weight of history and the might of those in power. But defending the rule of reason is the task of our generation, to defend human rights and to activate people's minds. (3/438)

Similarly, syncretism is evident in the way he sees the political party that he advocates, which is "the successor of God's chosen people" (5/387) and which represents the interests of ordinary people, not the interests of a class or a particular group (5/388). In the end it is the only true party "that defends and cares about the interests of the masses, as against a counter party that does not represent or reflect the interests of the masses" (5/390). Syncretism may also be associated with the concern for intellectual conformity, but there were grounds for *taqiya* in light of the puritanism

that is inherent in religious thinking in general and that was growing stricter in the 1970s.

We said that syncretism was an integral approach in the fabric of the left, an approach associated with its intellectual origins and based on the ideas and assumptions on which that fabric rested. If the writings and theories of the Islamic left in the 1960s showed a clear inclination to favor the progressive, secular wing, one of the two wings of the nation, then a close reading shows that this partisanship was confined to direct political discourse or what the author calls popular writings, or “a witness to the age.”⁷ If the reading goes beyond this level to the level of deep intellectual structure, as is evident at the level of philosophical discourse, then the syncretism emerges, negating the partisanship that protrudes on the surface. We therefore do not agree with many of those who thought that Hassan Hanafi, like others, had backtracked and left the leftist camp, because the partiality toward the fundamentalist wing—the other wing of the nation—that his writings suggested in the 1970s and 1980s was a superficial partiality in response to pressing political requirements. The apparent oscillation in the levels of the politico-religious discourse of the Islamic left was not attributable to subjective, self-interested factors and had nothing to do with personal ambitions dictated by incentives or disincentives. On the contrary, it was attributable to the syncretist approach mentioned earlier. It is important to point out that, alongside the totality of circumstances we have already noted for the 1970s, there were two basic factors that helped to make the superficial partiality toward religious fundamentalism so prominent. The first was the success achieved by the Iranian people under the leadership of Muslim clerics, in what is known as the Islamic revolution, against the most tyrannical, reactionary, and fascist regime in the Middle

East. In its initial stages it was a success that transcended the local and posed a danger to the interests of world imperialism, especially U.S. imperialism, threatening the imperialist presence in the region. This resounding success, which was associated with Islam in the eyes of many intellectuals in both the West and the East, caused a kind of reaction that made them reconsider the soundness of their intellectual premises and then reconstruct their intellectual systems. The second factor that pushed partiality toward fundamentalism to the surface in the discourse of the Islamic left was the impact caused by the assassination of President Sadat by members of the armed forces who belonged to the Jihad organization as well as the way that Egyptian nationalist forces and all other Arab nationalist forces reacted to the event with relief and a temporary feeling of deliverance. These were the forces that had suffered to varying degrees from the authoritarianism and repressiveness of the regime and that had been herded into prisons and detention camps a month before the assassination.

If syncretism is the underlying intellectual intention in the discourse of the Islamic left, the surface structure of this discourse has been susceptible to influences from the real world. So in the 1960s it leaned toward progressive secularism, and from the early 1970s until now it has leaned toward fundamentalism. We say this is natural, given that in its discourse the Islamic left insists on “blending” the political, the intellectual, the ideological, and the epistemic without establishing any hierarchical structure. Even if we refuse to interpret this blending and its consequences as motivated by personal, subjective factors, then the good intentions that are evident in the constant wavering between the role of the scholar and the role of the ordinary citizen are not enough to justify this blending (we are not saying “mixing”). In fact that

wavering is another manifestation of the syncretism deep in the structure of the left's discourse.

The first premise in the left's discourse is its belief that the cultural phase that the Muslim nation in general, and the Arab nation and Egyptian society in particular, is currently going through resembles to a large extent the European Renaissance.⁸ According to this diagnosis, the reform strategy should be: religious reform, humanism, and the promotion of science. Although religious reforms began in the Arab and Islamic world more than a hundred years ago, they did not bring about the desired results. In this context, the Islamic left makes a fundamental criticism of that religious reform movement, saying:

It wanted to direct people's attention to action without laying a foundation for how they saw the world, so reform remained merely a matter of preaching and exhortations urging people to act. But people don't act in response to sermons, they act because their ideas about the world have changed. So going back to laying a foundation for science and constructing a new theory of monotheism is the way to radical reform and then from reform to a revolution that is rooted primarily in the consciousness of the masses and that offers them a revolutionary vision of the world before the revolution really comes about. (1/243)

The religious reform movement may have been unable to bring about rational enlightenment because it was intellectually rigid and its thinkers could not bring about radical change in the way people saw things, but through its failure it left the field open to its intellectual antithesis, secularism, which was free to seize the

reins of the initiative. But the latter failed in turn to bring about the desired change because it ignored dogma and concentrated on practical benefits as a reaction to the religious reform movement, which had neglected the worldly interests of the masses and concentrated on doctrine (see 1/66). The failure of the secular projects was due, in the eyes of the Islamic left, to the fact that it tended to be influenced by the Western project and ignored the tradition that was the “psychological reserve” of the masses and the theoretical basis for the structures of the real world (1/323). According to the Islamic left, “We act every day on what al-Kindi says, we breathe al-Farabi at every moment, we see Ibn Sina [Avicenna—Trans.] in every street, so our classical tradition is alive and flourishing and guides our daily lives, while we think we are looking for a way to survive and are chasing after our daily bread.”⁹ That means that ignoring tradition and leapfrogging over it can lay the foundations only for projects that are like balloons, floating in the air unsupported by the masses who have an interest in change. This is the left’s diagnosis of secular modernization programs in all their various forms.

It is hard to accept the Islamic left’s view that the two main strands in modern Arab thinking are contradictory, even if one agrees with some of the theories we have mentioned, provided they rest on a sound scientific basis. There is no disputing, for example, that tradition has been effective, especially in framing our current cultural and intellectual consciousness, but it is not “tradition” with the definite article, in other words not tradition with all the movements and schools of thought that the left sometimes puts on the same level. In fact the influence of tradition depends on a complicated process of selection that is fundamentally driven by varying attitudes toward the immediate, real world—attitudes

that are contradictory to the point of conflict. In this process of selection, with all it involves in the way of highlighting some things and suppressing other things, showing some things and hiding other things, this or that trend in tradition is “colored” in a way that leapfrogs over the meaning of the tradition to a significance that is predetermined. It is this conditional agreement on tradition’s influence on shaping consciousness that is the basis for our radical disagreement with the Islamic left over the way it sees salafism and secularism as contradictory and mutually exclusive.

The secular movements have not been averse to relying to varying degrees on some aspects of tradition, and reformist salafism has not been unaffected by concern for the interests of the masses, since the social and cultural challenge was the “backwardness” that came to light through contact with the Western “Other,” and this was a challenge that defined the mental response of each camp, depending on its attitude toward the real world. The salafists thought that backwardness resulted from abandoning the true and original values of Islam, and “the Other” found its place in this perspective as those who had put those values into practice in their social life and in their behavior as individuals. So it became common to hear remarks such as “We are Muslims without Islam, whereas there [i.e., in the West] Islam flourishes without Muslims.” The way to reform was therefore defined as the need to go back to the original sources of authentic Islam. The beautiful and triumphant past was defined as the reference framework for solving the problems of the present.

Contrariwise, the secular movements were inclined to face the present and try to solve present problems by methods that were usually of a modern character, but they did feel the need to promote these methods in a way that the masses would readily di-

gest, and they found support for their approach in some aspects of tradition.

On this basis the disagreement between the two wings of the nation—as the Islamic left imagines it—has not been a radical disagreement when it comes to their relationships with tradition. The focus of the disagreement has been on the way each of the two has “used” tradition: For the salafists, it is a reference framework, whereas for the secularists it provided cover and support. In both cases tradition ceased to exist as an objective entity and was replaced by self-interested ideological coloring. Both sides failed to provide a basis for scientific knowledge of either the real world or of tradition, and so they failed to bring about even the slightest qualitative change in contemporary consciousness. The evidence for that is that we are still caught in the trap of a dualism that took shape and dominated our consciousness at the beginning of the nineteenth century—a dualism that has been growing sharper in our consciousness and deeper in our lives. One wonders whether the Islamic left can achieve something that has still not been achieved since the beginning of the Nahda period.

Putting salafism and secularism in this antagonistic relationship is what apparently gives the Islamic left its *raison d'être* and hence defines its priorities and also the strategies it adopts. If the Muslim nation is still going through the Nahda stage, with all that implies and with all that requires in the way of “enlightenment,” then the salafist and secular movements are offering projects that are detached from the cultural moment: the salafist movement by looking to the past and the secular movement by skipping the present and jumping forward to the future. Seen in this light, salafism represents conformism and secularism represents innovation, and “ingenuity” becomes the right path to take between conformism

and innovation and “renewing tradition” expresses the current cultural moment inasmuch as it is the middle way between salafism with its focus on the past and secularism with its focus on the future (see 1/35, 75, 211). In this way renewing tradition becomes the crux of the issue and the top priority in the project of the Islamic left, in fact its true act of ingenuity and its greatest contribution. Since the whole project starts with a syncretist gesture, and since syncretist gestures veer sometimes in one direction and sometimes in the other direction, the Islamic left tends to give tradition existential and cognitive priority over renewal, which starts from the needs of Islamic civilization in its current state of development:

The beginning is tradition. . . . Tradition is the starting point as a cultural and national responsibility. Renewal is reinterpretation of tradition according to the needs of the age, because the old precedes the new and tradition is a value in itself only to the extent that it provides a scientific theory for explaining the real world and for working to develop it. It is a theory for action, a guide to conduct and a national resource that can be discovered and exploited in order to rebuild mankind and his relationship with the Earth.¹⁰

But the priority status of tradition soon reveals another priority—the exploitation of tradition for practical, self-interested purposes. Tradition’s chronological precedence becomes tied up with the question of what benefits it can offer us regardless of its essential meaning, in other words regardless of what it means in its historical context.

We should note here that the way the Islamic left deals with tradition wavers between, on the one hand, seeing it as an effec-

tive and basic element in the structure of current consciousness, tangibly present in current culture, and on the other hand seeing it as an object due for renewal. In the first case tradition is active and the past is the foundation of the present, and in the second case tradition is the arena for the renewal process and the present is a basis for understanding the past. In other words, the binaries past/present and tradition/renewal change position depending on the angle of treatment and analysis, without the relationship between them being grounded, as it should be, on a dialectical foundation.

The Past and the Present: The Root and the Branch

It is obvious that in any dialectical relationship one of the parties to the relationship has theoretical priority and takes precedence over the other—a priority that allows for analysis, observation, and measurement, because analysis must depend on holding one party still in order to measure the relative movement of the other party. Without this process of immobilization, understanding is an impossible demand. It would be easy to say that a dialectical relationship means constant interaction and continual dynamism, which makes it impossible to talk about one party being immobilized, other than as a hypothesis or as an imaginary concept. Nevertheless, hypotheses and imaginary concepts are the basis of inquiry and prerequisites for the process of understanding. So a primary element or party must be identified in the dialectic between the past and the present, on the basis of which the thinker or the inquirer can formulate his initial conceptual position, without

ignoring, of course, the rules of the dialectic. But religious thinking, especially of the rightist kind, ignores this dialectical relationship and gives the past existential and cognitive priority so that it becomes the invariable essence, and the present's relationship with the past becomes a relationship of dependence and subservience, very similar to an accidental property's relationship with what is essential or substantial. In some traditional formulations, relationships between accidental properties and essences may be interactive relationships in that each needs the other in order to be visible and to acquire an identity, but the concept that religious thought has of the relationship between the past and the present goes nowhere near that. The past is the basis, and the present has to conform to it. If the present diverges too much from the past in appearance, it becomes corrupted and loses its way. Therefore the salafist religious discourse seeks to reshape the present to make it look like the past, and because this is an impossible dream, the discourse is dominated by histrionic, sanctimonious rhetoric and relies on mental strategies of a demagogic nature. Salafist thinkers turn into something like Old Testament prophets, heaping curses on people and society and threatening them with calamities and destruction.

But the Islamic left is armed with a deeper awareness and more refined intellectual and rhetorical tools. It offers a more profound concept of the relationship between the past and the present, a concept that does not rise to the level of the dialectic but that is more fertile and more vibrant. It is a concept that goes along with the syncretism that is the strategy of the leftist discourse. It is that the past, as defined in tradition, is implicated in shaping the present, not directly but after turning into a psychological reserve for the masses. This "stockpiled" tradition represents, in the eyes of the

Islamic left, the theoretical basis for structuring the real world (see 1/5, 323). In many of the values and ideas that are common in our culture and our behavior the Islamic left can of course easily find echoes of many traditional values and ideas, but this resemblance is not analyzed according to its relationship with the historic conditions that have produced those values in the past and the present but rather by leaping robotically from the past to the present.

Identifying the traditional values that, through being preserved in the consciousness of the masses, affect the course of events in the real world is a process that is more complicated than merely looking for some similarities, and to make that leap is to drape the present in the colors of the past. The prevalence of specific values such as respect for texts, belittling the role of reason, a hierarchical view of the world and of society, confusing reason and sentiment, giving theory priority over practice, and the lack of a historical dimension in our thinking is not the direct and automatic result of the fact that similar values are found in some aspects of tradition. It would be more accurate to say that these negative values have come from tradition in a complicated way, in that they have been reformulated in line with the requirements of the powers that control the way the real world works and that manage and propagate culture through the media in diverse, complicated ways that call for analysis and research.

The Islamic left, unlike the Islamic right, does not want to reshape the present on the model of the past, because it thinks that the tragedy of the present is that it has already been shaped with the past as its model as far as values, ideas, and modes of behavior are concerned. So its idea of tradition is fundamentally different from that of its antithesis, which automatically sees Islam and tradition as identical, after reducing the latter to some versions of

Islam, banishing from the domain of “Islam” anything that is at odds with its ideology. In the discourse of the Islamic left, the idea of tradition is that it stems from the environment in which it originates, in other words that it is a product of human history that lies outside the domain of the sacred. It says that “tradition reflects the earlier world, of which it is one component,” so it is not “a set of invariable theoretical facts or permanent facts that do not change, but rather the set of ways in which these theories have found expression in a particular circumstance or in a particular historical situation among a particular group of people, setting out their vision of the world and shaping their ideas about it.”¹¹ It is this concept of tradition that allows the Islamic left to subject tradition to its strategies for renewal, paving the way for rebuilding the masses’ psychological reserve, changing their ideas about the world and thereby enabling them to bring about the change required in the structure of reality. This disagreement between the left and the right seems to be superficial, but at the level of deep structure the two concur in thinking that the solution—the solution to the problems of current reality—lies in tradition. If the slogan of the right is now “Islam is the solution,” the slogan of the left is “renewing tradition is the solution.” In this way the left and the right converge in making the past central and the present peripheral. In fact the left goes beyond the simplicity and naïveté of the rightist thesis and turns tradition into both the starting point and the endpoint. Tradition is a repository of solutions as much as it is to blame for the crisis.

The relationship between the past/tradition and the present/crisis in the left’s project is a relationship that includes a dynamic descending from the past to the present, with tradition appearing in the form of a psychological reserve and ideas that form the

structure of reality. This descending dynamic is met by another dynamic ascending from the present to the past, with tradition as a subject for renewal to solve the crises of the present. This composite descending-ascending dynamic enables the left to “solve the crises of the age and unlock its mysteries in tradition.” It also enables the left to “rebuild tradition to give the age a new impulse toward progress because, as we have said, tradition is the psychological reserve of the masses and the theoretical basis for the structures of reality” (1/5). In other words one might say that the project of the Islamic left lies in giving tradition a revelatory reading, one that reveals “the historical roots of the crises of the age in old tradition—a reading of the past in the present and a vision of the present in the past” (1/223). The question we pose now is this: Is the left’s reading of tradition, which is a special kind of theology, a legitimate reading, especially in its first part, that is, reading the past in the present, which is the part that concerns us at this stage? Or to put it another way, is the reading here legitimate and a form of interpretation, or is it a tendentious reading marked by coloring?

It is striking that a truly interpretative reading of some data from tradition shows the leftist project that “reading the present in the past” while ignoring the historical meaning of the text in question amounts to an assault on truth and a sacrifice of the epistemological for the sake of the ideological. But this discovery does not help the leftist project see aspects of the methodological flaw in its colored reading or deter it from constantly leaping from the past to the present. In the disagreement on the question of the imamate all Shi‘ite factions and schools of thought, for well-known historical reasons and circumstances, were alone in saying that the imamate was based on designation and was not a matter of choice. Naturally

the religious texts were colored in order to serve the Shi'ite ideology, and the Islamic left takes note of this, saying:

In fact the idea of Ali being appointed imam by designation means going back and rereading the past based on the current psychological situation. Texts do not change into meaning: It is the interpreter who makes them say what he wants them to say. It is current reality that is central, and that is what gives the text its meaning. Instead of analyzing reality itself and its components, there is a dependence on the authority of those in power in a society where scripture is a source of authority. (5/228–29)

In this criticism that exposes this Shi'ite coloring, the left comes close to criticizing its own method of reading tradition, in that in its strategies it is similar to the Shi'ite method of going back and reading the present in the past, ignoring the meaning—the historical meaning—in favor of a significance that is defined by ideology. This criticism of Shi'ite behavior takes another step forward and goes so far as to reject totally the principle of reading the present in the past.

All the arguments based on scripture are in fact examples of adjusting the text to fit a particular individual case. Or else text from revelation is treated as prophecy or a sign, and then a particular historical event is chosen as the fulfillment of that prophecy or the fulfillment of that sign, and that is a mistake in interpretation, since it is not permissible to project the present onto the past or read the present in the past. (5/265)

It might be said that this criticism does not apply to reading classical works since they are a psychological reserve at the disposal of the masses and help to shape the structure of reality, in the sense that they form part of the fabric of reality.¹² But if one ignores the way in which tradition—or more properly the *mawrūth* or inherited tradition,¹³ that is, the parts of tradition that have been passed down—is related to the structure of modern culture and if one cannot identify what comes first dialectically in the relationship between the past and the present, then one again faces a puzzle rather like the riddle of the chicken and the egg:

In reality it is a difficult balancing act to look at the real world as a product of ancient tradition and to look at ancient tradition through the real world.¹⁴

But the expression “psychological reserve” soon falls apart when, in some revealing analyses, the Islamic left discovers signs of inconsistency between what happens in the real, material world and some of the values of tradition. While analyzing the concept of “the imam” in the theological tradition, the left ends up automatically linking theological theories, both Sunni and Shi‘ite, with signs of dysfunction in the political systems that dominate the countries of the Arab and Islamic worlds, and the countries of the Third World in general. If the Sunni schools of thought, especially the more recent ones, focus in their discourse on the need to obey the imam, even if he breaks the terms of the oath of allegiance or takes power by force and oppression, in order to spare bloodshed and maintain the unity of the nation, the Islamic left leaps straight from that to the present and concludes that “obeying the imam is absolutely impermissible, although the idea is well

established in our national consciousness in view of the fact that it is the dominant tradition. It took root after a choice was made in favor of the tradition that serves those in power and obedience became a one-way affair" (5/316).

Some Shi'ite schools of thought are inclined to deify imams based on the idea that the divine can become incarnate in human beings, and our rulers, in the opinion of the Islamic left, use this "psychological reserve," with "each ruler claiming today to be the unique god, the only ruler and the absolute authority. The effect of tradition as a psychological reserve in the hands of the masses is evident here. The masses are still oppressed and persecuted and their consciousness is based on a psychology of persecution and so, because of this conditioning, they are willing to deify their rulers, and the rulers understand that religion is the most effective way to control their peoples" (2/155-56).

But the example of Iran—the real heir of the Shi'ite tradition—works in a direction opposite to that of deifying the ruler. It even rejects the principle that the ruler should be obeyed in order to avoid bloodshed and to preserve the unity of the nation, and thousands of martyrs have paid the price for rebelling against tyranny and corruption, in an event that shook the convictions of many intellectuals in both the East and the West. Instead of the meaning of the event being analyzed in the context of the objective circumstances, local and international, that helped to bring it about, these complicated and interlocking circumstances are reduced to "the mechanisms of Shi'ite thought," which is revolutionary by virtue of historical experience, or to the ability of "Islam" to carry out revolution. Fortunately the religious left seems more objective when it notices that what happens in the real world is incompatible with the givens of tradition, and it attributes that to the fact

that the masses are now aware of their true interests—an awareness that “can undo historical bonds as the weight of the present eliminates the bonds of the past” (2/156).

Reading the present in the past on the basis that tradition is a “psychological reserve” leads in the final analysis to ignoring the present by imprisoning it in the cage of the past on one side and by treating it as a monolithic entity that can be defined as the reality of “the Islamic community” on the other. The Islamic left, in its quest for reform, enlightenment, and a united front, goes beyond the borders of the Islamic world to Asia, Africa, and all Third World countries, or the countries of the three continents (see 1/79–82), and since that is the case it is logical for tradition to be transformed into a single cohesive mass, despite the theoretical awareness, which undeniably exists in leftist discourse, that the traditional schools of thought are many and varied, but this remains a theoretical awareness that is not utilized in the left’s presentation and analysis. The most salient example of that in the context of this section is the way the Islamic left jumps between the Shi‘i and the Sunni with respect to both the present and the past simultaneously, although in the context of analysis it declines to refer to authentic Shi‘ite sources on the grounds that Shi‘ite beliefs “do not exist in our national consciousness as part of the living tradition” (5/655). This dismissal of the objectivity of the present and at the same time of the objectivity of tradition comes close to the surface in some of the left’s analyses, where it leads to the collapse of the concept of a “psychological reserve” as a compromise between the present and the past:

Despite the Sunni masses among whom we live, our system of government is close to the Shi‘i system, in that the imam

is appointed by designation or by testamentary disposition, from one army officer to another, from one commander to another, or from one king to another king. Although the Shi'a say rulers should come to power through designation, they are more able to rebel against an unjust ruler. This is a contradiction in the link between the old tradition and the present structure that raises the question yet again: to what extent does that part of tradition that has been passed down lurk in the psychological structure of the age? (2/229)

But although the question is important, indeed crucial, it remains in the realm of things that are possible but have not come about, and looking for causes for the crises of the present in the tradition of the past by "leapfrogging" has remained the strategy that dominates the discourse of the Islamic left (for examples of this, see 2/30, 3/31-33, 92-93, 95, 124, 192, 351, 4/255, 571, 5/252, 316, 333-34). It is revealing questions such as these in the structure of the leftist discourse that justify our current reading of this discourse. And if the discourse, because of its syncretist nature, has not been able to move those questions from the realm of the possible to the realm of the actual, then it is our reading, which we hope will be productive, that seeks to bring about this step and move the Islamic left from syncretism marked by coloring to objectivity through proper interpretation.

From Doctrine to Revolution, which in its five volumes represents the first part of the Islamic left's project to "renew tradition," may match in volume the writings of the judge and theologian Abd al-Jabbar al-Asadabadi (d. 1025), but when the author calls for the work to be summarized and condensed, we take that to mean that we should bring out the unspoken features in the structure of this

discourse in an attempt to develop it and go beyond it dialectically (see 1/227). With this in mind, we assert that “reading the present in the past” in the way that has come about in the leftist discourse is a tendentious reading, and the theory that “tradition is a psychological reserve” is an obscure theory that needs to be reconsidered and given a new foundation.

Tradition is “a purely historical product to which every age has contributed its culture and its ideas, and the outlook of the ancients was a purely historical outlook that reflected their period and their cultural level. Similarly, our outlook is a contemporary outlook that reflects the spirit of our age and our cultural level” (1/635). This does not mean in any way that the relationship between the present and the past is based on any “detachment,” even if it is equally not based on an interaction in which the past is the active element and the present is passive. It is a dialectic of interaction/detachment in which the present represents the starting point and the point of contact.¹⁵ “Our ruined world has found in our old tradition an explanation for and confirmation of its ruined state. We seem to choose from what is old only what we want and desire.”¹⁶

Tradition: A Construct of Consciousness or a Historical Construct

In the previous section we focused our analysis on the dynamic that descends from the past to the present and turns the tradition of the past into a basis for the crises of the present by transforming

it into a psychological reserve in the minds of the masses. In this section we focus our analysis on the dynamic that ascends from the present to the past in order to “renew tradition” by changing the consciousness of the masses and then reforming the deteriorating state of affairs in the life of the nation, “especially since all secular ideologies have failed to achieve modernization, and it is the faith-based beliefs that have preserved the identity of the masses and the national character of the country” (1/36–37). This ascending dynamic, like its descending counterpart, does not represent a direct, straightforward dynamic. It is a dynamic that operates through the mediation of “consciousness,” which is the counterpart to the psychological reserve in the descending dynamic. In this ascending dynamic it becomes clear that the Islamic left conceives of tradition as a construct of consciousness. This conception forms the theoretical basis for its strategies of renewal, in the same way that it forms the basis of all the “leaping” operations referred to in the previous passage when the crises of the present were read in the tradition of the past. The consciousness construct—unlike the historical construct—deals with ideas in general and tradition in particular on the basis that ideas are independent of the real world, even if it accepts that ideas did arise from the real world. From this we can understand many aspects of the left’s analysis of ideas, which is based on the concept of “ideal types” that are independent of history and of the real world and on the idea that intellectuals are merely the “carriers” of ideas:

Ideas are independent of their creators. In fact we are not interested in who created them or who first put them into words as much as we are in the ideas themselves. What matters is to eliminate the personalization of ideas, because people are

just carriers of ideas and not the creators of ideas. Ideas have a structure that is independent of history, even if they appear in history as movements, paths, and laws. (1/209)

This idea that ideas are independent of history and of their bearers makes historical movements and schools of thought in tradition into mere “reactions” or “intellectual” responses to pre-existing types of ideas. Obviously the history of the origins of sects and the development of theology is subject to Hegel’s law of the development of consciousness—the shift from thesis to antithesis and then to a synthesis of the two. The idea of “creating deeds,” for example, began life as part of a theory of determinism, then developed into its antithesis with the Mu‘tazila in the form of “man creating his deeds,” and then the two concepts were synthesized in the Ash‘ari concept of “acquiring deeds” (see 3/17, 199–200, 5/562–63). Almost all theological issues are subject to this arrangement, which is “deterministic” in character and universal in its scope: deterministic in that it imposes a rigid and strict sequencing on the evolution of ideas and universal in that it turns these ideas and sects into “ideal types” that can recur spontaneously in time and space (see 1/152, 154, 155, 5/614, 616), and it is distinctly odd that it should be this evolutionary movement based on action and reaction—on the level of ideas—that has preserved the nation’s intellectual equilibrium and brought about national unity based on pluralism (see 5/589).

This idea that ideas are divorced from history and are “ideal types” that can recur in any time and place turns Islamic theology into a cosmic science and deprives it of the fundamental meaning that arises from its socio-historical context. This throws renewal—the discovery of significance—into the abyss of the “colored”

subjectivity that is evident in the consciousness approach. Before we discuss the features of the consciousness approach as the Islamic left presents it, there are three revealing questions that “renewal” poses and that highlight the general idea we are discussing:

If theological sects are intellectual theories, and intellectual theories are ideal types of human thought, and these ideal types represent different aspects of the object in question, then the first line of questioning is: Has history produced examples of all these types? Has civilization uncovered all aspects of the object? Can an inquirer discover new types or uncover other aspects of the object? The second line of questioning is: If intellectual theories are ideal types of human thought, are these types solutions that all exist simultaneously, or are they solutions that are consecutive in time? And are they different aspects of the same object? The task of the inquirer is now to present the intellectual theories that the sects represent as different aspects of the same object, as if the inquirer is looking down on the object from above as a neutral observer. The third line of questioning is: If theological sects represent intellectual theories, are these theories permanent types of religious thinking that recur at all times and in all places? Because in a discussion of divine unity, Shi‘ism does not represent only divinization and corporealism, Sunnism does not represent only the anthropomorphization of God, and Mu‘tazilism does not represent only de-anthropomorphism. Divinization, corporealism, anthropomorphism and de-anthropomorphism are ideal types of religious thinking, or of human thinking about the deity, so the science of the principles of religion provides a struc-

ture for every civilization and for human thought in general.
(5/628–29)

In this way of seeing things, the object is transformed into an “absolute,” the various aspects of which are revealed successively over time. By the law of action and reaction, the appearance of sects and the evolution of ideas are seen as tantamount to various manifestations of that absolute essence. If that is the case, the inquirer could help to expose manifestations of that essence that history has not yet generated. In fact some analyses by the Islamic left show that this concept is not just theoretical or a hypothesis that can be proved, disproved, or amended but a concept that is used as one of the pillars in the structure of the discourse.

Since we will go back to discussing the manifestations of this conception in detail later, at this stage let it suffice for us to give one example of how the consciousness approach interacts with the earlier conception of thought (the object) as an imaginary datum. The disagreement between the traditional theological schools of thought over the definition of faith becomes, in the analysis of the left, an analysis of “aspects of consciousness” based on the idea that faith appears in its ideal form as a combination of “knowledge,” “credence,” and “affirmation,” on the one hand, and “action,” on the other hand. It is on the importance of these aspects and how to assign priorities to them that the schools of thought disagree, and the left insists that they are various aspects of one object, which is “consciousness.” In order for this conflation to take place, the left obviously has to subject these classical concepts to a “semantic shift” (we will discuss this in detail later), replacing knowledge with thinking, credence with feeling, and affirmation with speaking, while retaining action without any change: “Faith

appears in its ideal form through its four aspects: thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing. It is thinking that provides the theoretical basis, feeling that converts the thought into theoretical consciousness and lived experience, and speaking that proclaims the position that stems from the thinking and the feeling and calls on others to adopt it. In the end, it is action that brings all this about and converts it into a reality, changing the world and turning it into an ideal system through which the world can be perfected" (5/42). But when the theological schools of thought tried to define faith, they did not base their choices on this theoretical approach—the idea that knowledge, credence, affirmation, and action were all aspects of one object, which was consciousness. So analyzing the problem on the basis of this new approach helped to ignore the meaning of the choice of each school of thought in the context of its thought system on the one hand, and on the other hand it led to a discussion of imaginary options that have never existed in the history of Islamic religious thought. This is in addition to the repetition caused by insisting on dividing up the options according to the formal theoretical relationships between the aspects of the object, that is, faith (see 5/31–32, footnote 48). Naturally, in explaining some of the options that are produced by the formal analysis but that have never existed in the history of thought, it ends up saying that: "Sometimes the option is purely theoretical, and there is no school of thought that represents it. But some group, of which all traces have been lost, is bound to have represented this option and to have said something in the past, or some group that is yet to come in the future will say it" (5/75, footnote 52).

The Islamic left bases its rejection of the historical method of analysis on an understanding of history that does not go beyond the framework of historical events to an analysis of the socio-

economic structures that are the infrastructure of the cultural and intellectual structure.¹⁷ History in the sense of a succession of events is the history that appears in the discourse of the left, the background through which, according to the Hegelian law of the development of consciousness, aspects of thought are manifested. It is like a film screen running images that have been recorded in advance according to a law that governs the sequence of shots on the film. The quality of the screen might have some input into how clear or dark the image is, and the content of the images might affect how good or bad the show is, but it will not affect at any level the sequence of shots and therefore will not affect the storyline. Based on this particular concept of history we should understand why the left is averse to the method of historical analysis, although it does not completely reject it. In the outline of the Islamic left project that came out in 1980, renewal steps are proposed along the following lines:

1. analyzing the inherited tradition and how it came about and discovering how it has contributed to national character;
2. analyzing the psychological makeup of the masses, and to what extent it arises from the inherited tradition or from current social conditions;
3. analyzing the structures of reality and to what extent they arise from the real world itself and the degree to which the world has developed, or whether they stem from the psychological makeup of the masses, which in turn stems from the inherited tradition.¹⁸

But we should note here that the consciousness approach can accommodate all three of these steps, because the inherited tradition

is only a structure of consciousness that reflects ideal types, and the conditions that gave rise to these various phenomena are just a background that represents the superficial level in the meaning of this inherited tradition, so the concept of the inherited tradition includes all the details, however trivial, superficial, or insignificant to our age they might appear, because the details reveal the deep structure of consciousness that is hidden beneath the surface of historical meaning: “Every expression [in a particular text—Trans.] contains meaning, even the title, the introduction, the various religious formulas such as salams, prayers, words of praise for God, expressions such as ‘in the name of God,’ concluding remarks and formulaic epithets for the city of Cairo, for example, because they reflect the mentality and cultural level of those who lived in the past. Theological writings are just material that reveals the structure of consciousness from which that material emanated. Understanding them requires reading between the lines and sensing the true content behind the chapters and the sections, with the inquirer sharing the same experiences even if they are of a different type, expressing an advanced cultural attitude” (1/208).

But what is the starting point for analyzing the inherited tradition to discover its structure of consciousness? It seems here that the inquirer’s experiences of consciousness are the starting point, where the inherited tradition meets the two aspects identified as “the psychological structure of the masses” and “the structures of the real world.” It has already been noted that the leftist discourse comes close to establishing a relationship between these three levels on the assumption that tradition has priority and precedence, but the new element here is that “consciousness” is the intermediary in the process of renewal, just as the “psychological reserve” was the intermediary between tradition and the real world, and analyzing

consciousness is merely analyzing the two of them in their interaction inside the locus of consciousness: "The past and the present are both lived in consciousness, and a description of consciousness is at the same time a description of the psychological reserve accumulated from inherited tradition as it interacts with current reality as a projection from the past or as a vision of the present."¹⁹

The consciousness in which this interaction takes place is the inquirer's consciousness, which carries out the renewal, because tradition makes up a significant part of the inquirer's identity by virtue of the fact that he is a member of the group of people that created this tradition in the past and also by virtue of the fact that he is an intellectual who shares the concerns of the present and lives through the crises of the present by analyzing and understanding them, in an effort to overcome them and change this present into a reality that is more humane: "Renewing tradition includes the life of the person who is doing the renewing. It includes psychological analysis of his personality as a member of the nation in order to discover its psychological constituents. The tradition that he carries is simultaneously subject and object, because the object of study is the renewer as subject, that is, his historical existence in the present moment, between the past and the future."²⁰

There is no space here to object to the consciousness approach, which conflates, automatically and to a large extent arbitrarily, epistemological levels that cannot be conflated. If objections are made, the left has its defense of, or rather its justification for, this conflation—a justification that takes us back to the syncretist, or in this case ultimately deceptive, nature of the whole project, in which "the consciousness approach" is elevated into a method for analyzing "social consciousness": "Because consciousness is in fact awareness, and awareness is in reality social awareness, the consciousness

method is a way of analyzing social reality. Consciousness is not pure awareness in isolation from its surroundings, the world of things or the world of other people, but a social awareness that exposes the structure and constituents of the real world. Since the real world is at the end of the day an accumulation from the past and one of the phases of history, social awareness is also a historical awareness" (1/636).

If analyzing consciousness—the consciousness of the inquirer who is renewing tradition—leads to a social analysis that uncovers the structure of the real world, of which tradition is a basic component, then the question of what belongs to the past and what belongs to the structure of current reality in the psychological reserve of the masses is a meaningless question. We should point out here that the consciousness approach goes beyond the proposals of European phenomenism, and the author warns us with extraordinary insistence not to link phenomenism with his own consciousness approach (see 1/244). The difference between the consciousness approach and phenomenism is that the latter merely says that facts, a category that includes things and events, are revealed, or rather reveal themselves, only through the living consciousness of the knower, and that consciousness is not an empty, passive consciousness but a consciousness full of previous experiences. Phenomenism may have helped to lay a foundation for taking into account the knower and the role of previous experience in conditioning cognitive activity, but the consciousness approach has extended the concept in the direction of subjective idealism and has taken "consciousness" beyond the role of revealing facts into the role of revealing reality as a whole on all its many interconnected levels. It is an invitation that is steeped in an idealism unmitigated by the use of any terms from social analysis.

It is this consciousness approach, which can reveal all the complicated and interconnected levels of reality, that can also renew tradition: “If the inquirer or a group of inquirers could understand the spirit, the needs, and the requirements of the age, then they could use that awareness to develop theology and make a historic contribution to theology with this new idea” (1/635). So the consciousness approach that is aware of the spirit of the age is the basis for renewal. The spirit of the age as defined in the discourse of the Islamic left—in the first section of this study—is the spirit of “enlightenment” and reform, and under its guidance tradition will be renewed as a first priority in order to bring together and reconcile the two wings of the nation: salafism and secularism. But what does tradition look like when the syncretist consciousness approach reveals it?

Tradition: Rebuilding or a Fresh Coat of Paint

Reconstructing the traditional Islamic scholarly disciplines, both the rational ones and those based on scripture, is the ultimate aim of the Islamic left’s project, as a way to achieve its objective of revolutionizing the real world by revolutionizing the consciousness of the traditionally religious masses. The first step along the way lies with dogmatology, where the aim is to discover its old structure and then turn it into a contemporary psychological structure: “Tradition and renewal are both no more than commentaries on the past, but ‘commentary’ here does not mean just saying the same thing in a different way. . . . It means reconstructing the old as a

whole on the basis of an integrated perspective—examining the same objects and how their structures reflect an old psychological structure, then rebuilding these same objects on the basis of contemporary structures” (1/205).

The reconstruction requires dismantling the old structure first and then testing its components to exclude the elements that are closely associated with the past historical context and that do not have the significance needed for the contemporary psychological structure. In order to achieve that properly, it is essential to find out first the nature of the old structure and its component elements. This requires knowing how the elements are arranged and how the parts fit together. The shape that the structure of theology has ended up assuming—as it has come down to us in lengthy writings, summaries, and commentaries—resembles to a large extent the structure of philosophy, in that it starts with physics, then metaphysics and the study of prophetic revelation. But the resemblance is only a resemblance in external structure and does not allow us to compare them as if they are two similar cognitive systems. If we cannot, in the domain of philosophical structures, conflate the thought systems of al-Kindi and Ibn Rushd, even though they belong to the same cognitive domain, then conflating two thought systems that are sometimes different to the point of contradiction in order to construct a new theology would lead, when one tries to reconstruct it, to only painting and renewing the outward appearance of the structure.

It is highly significant that the term *renewing* here refers to “reconstruction,” especially as the term is the title of the project as a whole, which means that the reconstruction in question is just painting the old structure. This reconstruction really involves dismantling the thought systems of the sects and schools of thought

and then rearranging the parts that in themselves include an ideological meaning that gives pride of place to the Ash'ari system and suppresses the Mu'tazilite construct. Converting the multi-system structure of theology into an intellectual structure arranged according to formal logic would give the study of metaphysics existential and cognitive precedence over the humanities and amount to support for the Ash'ari system, which is based on this arrangement. The structure of the discipline was fixed in this manner in a socio-historical context that was opposed to the Mu'tazilite system and that was hostile to its tendencies to oppose despotism and advocate justice. More than that, the final form of the structure of the discipline is incompatible with its nature as a cognitive domain (a nature it acquired when the Mu'tazila laid the foundations for it) that is based on the principle that one can draw analogies about the unseen world from observations of the visible world, which means that theories about the deity are founded cognitively on theories about mankind. The fact that the Mu'tazila founded Islamic theology means that its structure was later subjected to changes that went against its nature (see 5/587–88, 643), and although the Islamic left always promises to go back to “the structure of Mu'tazilite theology” to discover justice both in metaphysics and the study of prophetic revelation (see 1/177), and although, on top of that, it promises to develop the Mu'tazilite tendency toward “a revolutionary mentality for the sake of a theology that includes revolution” (1/212), maintaining the structure of theology as it was formulated in later times on the model of the Ash'ari structure has struck the whole project in a vulnerable spot and has trapped renewal in the realm of repainting, not rebuilding.

In fact the leftist discourse at this point seems to be hesitant at the theoretical level, wavering between, on the one hand,

structuralism and historicism (despite the contradictions between them) and, on the other hand, the sociological method of analysis. When it compares what it calls “evolutionary consciousness” and what it calls “structural consciousness,” it is inclined toward the latter, though without categorically rejecting the former: “Consciousness is either evolutionary or structural: Evolutionary consciousness is historical consciousness in that theological knowledge appears in it stage by stage, either as an object or as an aspect of an object or as a fundamental element or as a set of fundamental elements. That is what the ancients called the history of sects, and it is the consciousness that the historical approach eliminates from consideration when it describes the subject matter of theology as the history of discrete sects in which consciousness plays no role, whereas the fact that sects give rise to other sects suggests that there is something that they have in common, which is historical consciousness. Structural consciousness is the consciousness in which theology appears as an integrated structure, regardless of the sequence of historical periods and the names of sects that come and go and give rise to new sects. In this case consciousness is a vehicle for ideal types that exist in every civilization and that reappear in every time and place” (I/141–42).

Structural consciousness has indeed had the upper hand in dealing with the structure of theology as a whole, and evolutionary consciousness has been confined to dealing with particular ideas once they have been removed from the context of their thought systems during the detailed analysis. Strangely, leftist discourse, which always describes theology as an upside-down discipline, with its head (the human and physical sciences) at the bottom and its feet (metaphysics and the study of prophetic revelation) at the top, is content to try to put it back in its natural position when it

comes to ideas but leaves it in its inverted position in its overall structure.

The real problem seems to be that the leftist discourse cannot produce a real sociological analysis to explain this upside-down arrangement in the structure of the discipline. The concern that has long dominated leftist discourse is looking for the “human beings” and “history” aspects, which are suppressed in our religious culture, and rediscovering them for the sake of the present.²¹ A third aspect is often added—the “social conflict” aspect, which has been suppressed on the grounds of “group unity” and deference to “consensus.” That being the case, in order to bring about the transition from doctrine to revolution, the aim of renewal would be to restructure theology by moving it “from its old fraudulent position to its new proper position and transform it, not just from ‘the study of God’ to ‘the study of man,’ because that contrast may not fully reflect the essence of the civilization in which theology originated, but also from the study of ‘religious doctrines’ to the study of ‘social conflict,’ because that is the discipline that deals with religious doctrines as the forces that guide the behavior of the masses today” (1/74–75).

But the concept of “social conflict” that is meant to be uncovered in the structure of theology amounts to no more than the political interpretation of the origins of ideas and of sects in the manner referred to in “evolutionary consciousness.” From this we can understand the many references to the historicity of theology and to the influence of politics on its genesis and development (see 1/635, 5/144, 383–84, 633). In this way politics, in the ideological sense and not in the sense that it reflects deeper levels of social conflict, ends up as the “interpretant” of the origin of ideas and sects, and the sects are even directly classified on a political basis

into the government sect and opposition sects, with the latter divided into covert and overt sects, some of which operate domestically and some of them abroad (see 2/612, 3/202, footnote 356).

With the historical approach transformed into “evolutionary consciousness” and the methodology of sociological analysis neglected despite praise for it and references to its importance and theoretical value (see 5/623), the leftist discourse is left with nothing but “structural consciousness.” The justification offered for ignoring the methodology of sociological analysis of the origins of ideas and sects is an explanation that comes close to revealing the syncretist nature of the leftist project on one hand, and on the other hand to revealing that this is a syncretism that inclines toward idealism: “If we sometimes divorce ideas from history, we do so for two reasons: firstly, because the two approaches are incompatible in the cultural environments around us and because that incompatibility reaches our culture and affects us. The sociology of knowledge opposes the idealist theory of knowledge, and there is no way to combine them. The second reason is that our social awareness and knowledge of the origins of ideas are inadequate because we in the middle class are preoccupied with ideas, despising social realities per se, for how could our distinctive feature, which is culture, emerge from the bottom of a cooking pot?” (5/633–34). So it was natural for the structural consciousness approach to deal with the structure of theology in the form in which it reached us in late writings, writings that present it according to the Ash‘ari construct.

Accepting the theoretical soundness of this construct means implicitly accepting its ideological content. This is likely to land the leftist discourse in contradictions and problems that it will not find a way to solve—contradictions and problems that can be

solved only by socio-historical analysis of the origins of ideas—the analysis that discovers what they mean in the context of the system to which they belong. The Ash‘ari construct of theology, unlike the Mu‘tazilite construct, gives “divine unity” precedence over “justice” and has physics paving the way for metaphysics. The Islamic left has put up new labels with a modern meaning alongside the old labels, out of a desire that the new should be close to the old.

Since the old is the foundation for the new and the past is the foundation for the present, the old labels have retained their prominence as headlines on the front cover, while the new labels have had to make do with appearing on the inside pages. But when it comes to detailed analysis, the old texts have been put at the bottom of the page in the form of footnotes, and the body of the text has been reserved for analyses of renewal. This formal, or apparently formal, segregation gives some indication of the syncretist nature of the whole project—a nature that turned plans to rebuild the old structure into a mere repainting of it, just as it turned plans to carry out a renewal into merely a coloring: “It is essential to have the texts in the notes at the bottom of the page, although they are tedious and onerous for the reader. This is ‘tradition,’ and our analysis of it at the top of the page is the renewal. In that way readers can compare and judge for themselves.

“In fact we wanted this study to bear witness to both tradition and renewal, as a reflection of past and present at the same time, so that readers can see how the old stems from the new and how the new stems from the old, and so that it can be an aid to anyone who seeks knowledge or leads a nation. Those who seek what is old will find it, and those who seek what is new will find it, and those who seek both will find both together” (1/126–27).

Based on the idea that the old construct can be renewed by repainting it, new labels have been put on its five objects as follows:

natural objects = theoretical premises

metaphysics = the perfect man

prophetic revelation = history

Metaphysics (= the perfect man) is divided into two research fields:

the essence = pure consciousness

the attributes = particular consciousness

Prophetic revelation (= history) is also divided into two research fields:

prophecy = general history

the life to come = the future

In another respect, metaphysics is divided into two research fields:

divine unity (= the perfect man)

justice = particular man

The research field of the perfect man (= metaphysics = divine unity) has been divided into:

pure consciousness (= the essence) and

particular consciousness (= the attributes)

And the research field of particular man (= justice) is divided into two research fields:

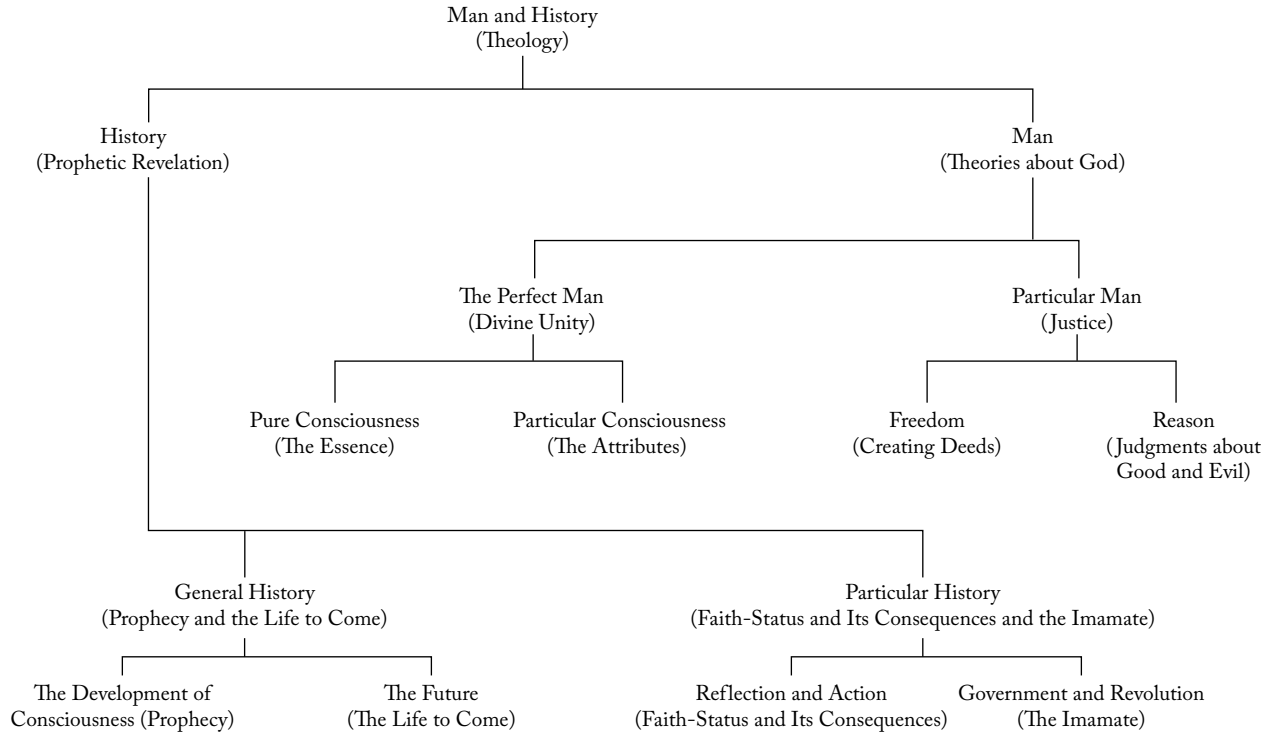
freedom (= creating acts) and
reason (= judgments about good and evil)

In the same way prophetic revelation (= history) is divided into:

general history (= prophecy and the life to come) and
particular history (= faith-status and its consequences and
the question of the imamate)

The accompanying chart (page 192) explains the structure of theology from the point of view of the leftist discourse, putting the old terms between parentheses.

Clearly the dominant concern in this repainting of theology is the concern to look for the two missing aspects of the real world: man and history. These two aspects were suppressed in the old theology because man has no place in theories about God and history has no place in eschatology, and they cannot be brought out into the open merely by a process of “semantic shift” based on a relationship of proximity and resemblance. Theories about God do not turn into the humanities, and prophecy is not transformed into history simply by an act of will and by looking for superficial aspects of resemblance. What is buried can only be brought into the open through an interpretative reading that accesses the significance by way of the meaning, not by leaping over it. In other words, neither the Islamic left nor anyone else can reconstruct theology—or rather, restore it to its normal alignment



after Ash'arism turned it upside down and stood it on its head—without the social “interpretant” that made the inversion possible.

Adopting the structure of Mu'tazilite theology, even in its traditional form, would have been enough to achieve partial fulfillment of the renewal project, and by the Mu'tazilite structure here we do not mean the arrangement of theological questions in the late Mu'tazilite works, such as Abd al-Jabbār ibn Ahmad's *al-Mughni fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa-l-'Adl* (The Book That Makes Sufficient in Matters of Divine Unity and Justice). We mean the epistemological arrangement that examines how ideas are generated, through the dialectic between thought and reality, until the particulars fall into place in the Mu'tazilite system. The late works of theology were arranged according to the convention that was laid down by the Ash'ari school of thought and that became, because of the Ash'aris' hegemony, almost the rule for the discipline. It is not difficult or impossible to uncover the structure of Mu'tazilite theology: In the final analysis, all of its five principles stem from their concept of justice (3/387), as the Mu'tazila themselves insist, according to Abū al-Husayn al-Khayyāt (d. 300 AH).²² The Mu'tazili concept of justice does not stop at the limits of the two themes of “freedom (= creating deeds)” and “reason (= judgments about good and evil),” as is the case in the renewal discourse. It extends beyond that into issues and particulars of theology.

The well-known disagreement between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'aris over the attributes of God and whether they are distinct from the divine essence, as the Ash'aris said, or inherent to the essence, as the Mu'tazila said, even if it was a disagreement on the question of divine unity, cannot be explained without going back to the principle of justice. Asserting that human acts are under solely human control and that God cannot be responsible for

them because He is just requires a theoretical formulation of divine unity that posits a god that is different from men, who commit evil deeds and are a source of injustice, so it was necessary to deny that the attributes of God are distinct from the divine essence and hence to proceed to use the weapon of “metaphor” to interpret the attributes that are mentioned in the religious texts and that suggest that God is similar to human beings. A different position was taken by the Ash‘aris, who treated all acts that have an effect on the world as activity by divine attributes such as power, will, and knowledge. They then set up a weak link, “acquisition,” between human acts and those who carry them out. This idea, which denies that human beings have agency and that the law of causality is operative in nature, naturally merges with a regal authoritarian concept in the domain of divine unity. Because in the final analysis this idea ends up corroborating a resemblance between God and man, it was proposed to make a distinction between the attributes and the essence as a solution to this problem, isolating the divine essence from involvement in the affairs of the world and from acting unjustly, oppressively, or arbitrarily and leaving that to the attributes. This is the idea that Ibn Arabi formulated in its final form in Arab culture. And so we can say that disagreements over the nature of God find their *tafsīr* in the principle of divine justice, and both of them find their *ta’wīl* in the struggles between religious and intellectual forces seeking to formulate positions in the real world of society.

The contradiction that sometimes appears on the surface between “divine unity” and “divine justice” is a contradiction that does not exist in the Mu‘tazilite structure, because the former is based on the latter. The contradiction does however arise in the Ash‘ari structure because it bases “divine justice” on “divine unity”—in

other words excludes it, ignoring the fact that “recognizing an external agent invalidates any recognition of the doer that is grounded in the realm of experience (*in praesentia*). For every act must have an agent, so how can humans not be the agents of their actions when they are *in praesentia*, and how can something *in absentia* be asserted as valid on the basis of something that is not realized *in praesentia*?” (3/144–45). Despite all that, in the discourse of the Islamic left we find an insistence that divine justice is founded on divine unity and that, as it repeatedly says, divine justice “emerged from its womb” (see for example 3/6). The discourse even makes an arbitrary link between asserting the attributes of God to be distinct from the divine essence and dismissing the law of causation in nature, transforming cause into effect and effect into cause: “The question of divine justice seems to find its solution in the essence of divine unity, because proving that the attributes of God are distinct from the divine essence serves to eliminate the independent status of nature and to prove that it is subject to a will and a power that is external to it. The essence is active in the world through the attributes and through deeds. It is the prime mover of the universe and the master of nature. If one denies that the attributes are distinct from the divine essence, then nature is independent, natural laws are inevitable, and there is an essential linkage between cause and effect, because no absolute attributes such as will or knowledge interfere with their operations. In this case the deity is a pure essence that does not interfere with the laws of nature because it has no attributes. This is the scientific concept of nature” (3/371).

Socio-historical analysis of the origins and evolution of ideas naturally helped the renewal project to achieve the “reconstruction of theology” that it sought by discovering the mankind and history dimensions and also to bring about, in a productive interpretative

way, the shift it had promised from “the structure of Ash‘ari theology to the structure of Mu‘tazilite theology” (1/177). The leftist discourse on renewal, unlike its rightist counterpart, is aware of the importance of the Ash‘ari method of constructing theology, and also aware of its historic role, which continues in the structure of contemporary theology, in creating a contradiction between what is due to God and what is due to man. “If divine unity refers to what is due to God, and justice refers to what is due to man, then the Mu‘tazilite science of the principles of religion gave precedence to that which is due to man—something that theology by the Ash‘ari arrangement did not preserve when divine unity swallowed divine justice so thoroughly that divine justice plays no part in our contemporary consciousness. Ash‘ari theology is responsible for our current backwardness” (1/173). But the leftist discourse adopted the Ash‘ari arrangement as it was nonetheless, making do with the shift mentioned earlier on the level of particular ideas, in isolation from the context of the thought systems through which the ideas acquire their meaning. Dismissing the methodology of historical analysis for the origins of ideas and the formation of systems has led to many of the contradictions in the left’s judgments, not to mention the leap of reading the present in the past and coloring the renewal of tradition to solve the problems of the present.

Historical analysis of the origins of ideas and of sects helps to uncover how different and varied the structures are in tradition, in a way that goes beyond merely recognizing the variety theoretically and continuing to deal with tradition as a monolithic whole at the practical level. Historical analysis is likely to reveal in particular the reasons for some examples of superficial contradiction between divine unity and divine justice in the structure of theology promoted by some schools of thought, especially those that com-

bine overt determinism with denials that the attributes of God are distinct from the divine essence. The historical analysis approach reveals that a close association between divine unity and divine justice was not always the case in the early intellectual movements, whose theories were in effect direct reactions to conflicts, so that the thinkers of those groups did not have a chance to base their theories on an epistemological foundation. This is something that the renewal project did not notice because it was dealing with the structure of theology from a single, monolithic perspective, and hence we can sense it hesitating to define the structural relationship between divine unity and divine justice: "Focusing on the oneness of God, regardless of how it is done, distracts one from divine justice, as if thinking intensely about God distracts one from thinking about mankind. The further one travels toward divine unity and away from the world, the more distant one moves from divine justice and the more one leaves the world behind. . . . It has been mentioned before that recognizing the attributes as distinct from the divine essence leads to the denial of human freedom and that denying the attributes leads to the assertion of human freedom. It is strange that this pattern should be broken by the fact that those who first preached determinism should also be the ones who at the same time denied that the attributes were distinct and denied freedom. In this way the first law is broken" (3/77).

It is hard to accept the concept of divine unity proposed here, which conflates divine unity and the assertion that the attributes of God are distinct from the divine essence, as if denying that the attributes are distinct in order to preserve the theory that the divine essence and the attributes are inseparable and to deny any multiplicity is not real divine unity from the perspective of tradition itself. The hesitancy in the leftist discourse is primarily

a trait that arises from its syncretist approach. It appears here in the preservation of the formal contrast between divine unity and divine justice and the way the contrast is framed in the form of a binary relationship that requires reconciliation between the two sides. This approach, as we have seen, may have led to a mere repainting of the structure of the old theology (see 1/634, 2/96, 3/457, 4/55, 4/321, 5/5, 5/381–84), but it sometimes leads to a retreat from the newly painted label and insistence on the old label.

That happens for example in the case of “creating deeds (= freedom),” where Hanafi faults some academics for using the terms *determinism* and *free will* when talking about the subject. He accuses them of falling under the influence of the West and yielding to the prevalent way of thinking (3/15). Stranger than this accusation, which could be directed at the left itself in the whole of its approach to renewal, is the fact that the old term “creating deeds” should be preferred. “It [creating deeds] sounds as exciting as freedom of action, since ‘creating’ suggests creativity, novelty, and responsibility, just like freedom,” yet it is superior to the term *freedom*, which is associated with political and social aspects, in that “it is a more authentic word, associated with tradition and not common in our contemporary culture, which has borrowed from the West” (3/16). This retreat reflects a wavering between “tradition” and “renewal”—a hesitation that sometimes veers toward tradition and clings to the language of tradition and sometimes veers toward renewal and insists on using modern terminology. In another context, it asks us to abandon modern terminology in political life, to stop talking about democracy because “it is more familiar to us culturally to talk about *shūra*, which the fundamentalists talked about long ago.”²³ The fact is that this syncretist wavering makes a shift to one or the other side dependent on the context of what

is being said in the structure of the leftist discourse. If the context is speech directed at the salafists, the discourse veers toward the language of renewal, and if the context is speech directed at secularists or at the general public through media outlets, the discourse veers toward the language of tradition. Because this wavering is not tactical, it indicates the syncretist nature of the whole leftist project—a nature that, as we have seen, is incapable of fulfilling aspirations for renewal with respect to constructing theology. One wonders whether the renewal project can achieve with respect to particular ideas something that it has failed to achieve with respect to the construct as a whole.

The Texts: Interpretation or Coloring

The first consequence of accepting the legitimacy of the Ash‘ari formal logic structure of theology, as already indicated, has been that ideas and texts are treated in isolation from the context of their thought systems. This result has led in turn to many negative results, the first of which is the rush to pass judgments of a clearly colored nature on some texts and ideas. One of the most important and prominent examples is what some sources say about the Karamiyya sect, which supposedly argued that God’s essence can be a substrate for originating events—a theory that, if it is true, the inquirer must analyze in the context of the thought system in which it appears in order to discover its meaning in this context. But the leftist discourse, obsessed by concern to discover the historical dimension in tradition, sees this theory as evidence for

saying that the Karamiyya emphasized the concept that God is active in history: “The Karamiyya provide the main response to the description of the divine essence as timeless or sempiternal. For them, God is not timeless but rather a substrate for events. Events subsist in Him, and events need Him in order to originate, either by will or by the order ‘Be.’ This is what gives God agency and makes God history, and makes history God. . . . This is where God’s agency and activity in the world stand out, and things that happen in the world become part of His divinity and the laws of history become attributes of His. ‘God’ here is equivalent to historical consciousness. When the Karamiyya disappeared as a sect, historical consciousness disappeared from our national consciousness” (2/125–26, see also 3/114–15).

Although what the Karamiyya said about the association between the divine will and events is not very different from the position of the Ash‘aris, who made God into the real agent for everything that happens in the world, the left’s attitude toward the Ash‘aris is one of constant hostility. The only explanation for this contradiction in the way they judge and color ideas is ideological bias based on the division of sects, as mentioned earlier, into government sects and opposition sects, as if the Islamic left wants to fight the battles of the present in the past, so it paints the past, through shifting the meaning of concepts and ideas, in the color of its attitude toward the present—an attitude that is sympathetic toward all opposition groups, whether of the right or the left, against the party in power.

If renewal with respect to the overall structure of theology ended up producing what we called a “repainting,” in which old terms and modern concepts live side by side like the two elements in a

simile, then “coloring” with respect to texts and particular ideas depends on a more effective strategy for achieving the ideological objectives of the leftist project, and this is the strategy of “semantic conversion.” It is a strategy rather similar to metaphor in the context of literary texts, where the meaning of texts and ideas is transferred from its original domain to other, modern domains, not by exploiting the possibilities of the original sense but through the mediation of “consciousness”—or the conscious experience of the academic—as happens in the case of metaphors in poetry.

The example of “coloring” that we discussed—the example of the divine will being attached to events—confirms the point we are making, because the theological context, even if one ignores the context of the sect’s own system, is the context of discussing the divine attributes, especially the attribute of timelessness or sempiternity. But the idea is taken out of the context that determines its meaning and transferred to a modern semantic context: “In the end it is not a question of rational arguments, logical proofs, or making your opponents contradict themselves. It is a question of a human experience that is full awareness of universal history, God as a history of the world, and revelation as the embodiment of humanity. Revelation is the word of God; the actions of individuals and groups of people, the prophets and peoples, are His will; and the movement of the masses is His doing and His activity. This is accepted by all philosophies in history that have made a link between God and progress, and between the attributes of God and the course of history and the laws that regulate its course” (2/127–28). So “consciousness” is the mental intermediary through which renewal deploys “semantic conversion” as a strategy of a metaphoric nature. It is a strategy that cannot be used when

dealing with the overall structure of theology, which is apparently the consensus structure that the left wants to preserve as it is in order to communicate with the rightist half of religious discourse.

In this way syncretism becomes the interpretant for the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, preserving the traditional nature of theology and merely using semantic proximity in the manner of a simile or a “repainting” and, on the other hand, using the strategy of semantic shift of a metaphorical, “coloring” nature in the domain of ideas and texts. In the first case there is a respect for tradition that maintains tradition as it is when addressing the right, and in the second case there is a “swing” toward renewal to address those on the left. If renewal in the second case takes place based on the subjective consciousness approach, then this approach is responsible for transforming renewal into “coloring” and for the almost complete suppression of the interpretative dimension. According to the consciousness approach, the coloring takes place in two steps as follows:

1. The old text is read, usually a text that is abstract, rational, and formal, and the reader is conscious of something, and that something is the missing element that enables him to complete the analysis of the text. And since the inquirer is alive today, the substance of the feeling reflects the contemporary psychological structure. Often the text is material as plain as physiological analysis of sensation, and in this case the feeling seems to elevate this material and put it on the level of intellectual consciousness, giving a theory of cognition that is based on consciousness as much as it is physiological. If the same feeling occurs when someone reads a “cosmological text” that includes anthropomorphization of

nature, for example by treating astronomical bodies as intelligent living entities or by talking about the Emanation, the Ten Intellects and all the other absurdities that people talk about, then consciousness begins a rational analysis of the text and reconstructs the object on a rational basis until the anthropomorphism and the fantasy and Illuminationist elements disappear.

2. Given that the analyses of the ancients are inadequate because they are dominated by rational analysis of formal existence, we supplement them with new material derived from human experience or from the spirit of the age. Just as the early Muslims used pre-Islamic poetry and the poetry of the sects, modern poetry can be used as an expression of the needs of the age. Since poetry was the dominant artform in Arab tradition, all the artforms that are common in our age can be used, including poetry, novels, short stories, and theater. Since the early Muslims also used Arab proverbs, we can also fall back on colloquial proverbs and even on the poetry of popular culture, which reflects the spirit of the people in a way that might be more faithful than written literature. (1/635–36)

We will not stop here to comment on the second step in the consciousness approach, other than to point out that it is meaningless to say that the early Muslims used poetry and proverbs in their linguistic analysis of concepts and ideas. It never occurred to the early Muslims in their analyses that all the arts reflect “the needs of the age” and “the spirit of the people,” but in this case leftist discourse performs a subjective, “consciousness-based” semantic conversion. The first step in the consciousness method

reveals the personal and subjective dimension in the “coloring” process mentioned earlier. But in addition to that, it reveals another consequence of the “repainting” with respect to the structure of theology.

Theology, especially in the age of commentaries and summaries, was permeated by many ideas and subjects, particularly from Illuminationist philosophy. Historical analysis of the origins of ideas and the formation of thought systems tends to trace that permeation back to the attempts by al-Ghazali (d. 1111 AD) to combine Sufism and the Ash‘ari theological system or to what some people have called “using linguistic analysis as the basis for gnosticism,”²⁴ when gnosticism and linguistic analysis are two different cognitive systems. That means that what the left calls “cosmic texts”—such as texts that anthropomorphize nature or imagine astronomical bodies to be living spirits that are intelligent and active, based on the theory of Emanation and the Ten Intellects—belong only to the Ash‘ari structure of theology after al-Ghazali. The Mu‘tazilite structure of theology does not admit these cosmic texts. In fact Abd al-Jabbār ibn Ahmad, in his book *al-Mughni*, savagely attacks these texts, dismissing them as gnostic and irrational. Leftist discourse has therefore dealt with these texts both outside their cognitive domain and outside the framework of the thought systems to which they belong.

In the final analysis the consciousness approach ends up treating texts as “empty general images” that can be filled with whatever content the subjective consciousness approach imposes. In such a conception of the nature of texts, religious texts are the same as intellectual texts on theology. Although leftist discourse is theoretically aware of the historicity of the meaning of texts, the consciousness approach always imposes on the discourse a nihilis-

tic, non-material idea of the texts. In replying to the scripturalists who insist on the literal meaning of texts, Hanafi says:

The Qur'an was initially an event, a revelation for which the circumstances are well known. The traditional argument disregards not only any subsequent events of the same kind but also the first event, and therefore treats the text as if it is floating in the air, with no substrate, creating its own reality out of itself, so that it remains empty, without content. The text is closed in on itself or is used out of place, as an alternative reality, according to whim or for some ulterior motive. The text is by its nature merely a broad outline that needs content to fill it out. And this content is by nature an empty mold that can be filled with the needs and requirements of the age, which are the structure of human life, in which revelation puts into words broad objectives. So text needs interpretation, and every text can be interpreted in order to bring about its own reality. Interpretation here does not necessarily mean dislodging the text from a real meaning to a metaphorical meaning but rather giving the text some contemporary context, because the text is a mold without content. Interpretation here is a social necessity in order to transform revelation into a system by changing reality into an ideal reality. (see 1/397–98)

Because coloring by means of the consciousness approach ignores the original meaning of texts, texts can give expression to contradictory meanings. The cosmological argument for God's existence, for example, has merits, but it also has flaws; the strange thing is that both the merits and the flaws are based on the same

principle, after the text has been colored in two contrasting colors. The principle in question here is the effect that the argument has on contemporary consciousness, and on that basis the merit in the cosmological argument is that it leads to “the sense that this world can be changed and that everything in it is subject to the free will of man, and so the incipience of the world is an invitation to change and to exercise free will so that reality can be reshaped according to the ideals of mankind and its national-communal project, which is the ideal system for the world that it derives from revelation.”

The flaw in the proof is the complete opposite: because the incipience of the world depends on an external metaphysical cause, the theory leads to “the destruction of the world and the assertion that man is powerless, which allows all oppressive and authoritarian regimes to play the role of God as the force that holds the world together and preserves it” (2/17–28 *passim*, and 2/31).

In the previous texts we moved, by semantic shift, from the cosmological argument for the existence of God to whether or not the world was created and then to the concept of “changing the world.” Based on this coloring by moving from one semantic domain to another, texts can take on contradictory meanings. Are not texts, as quoted earlier, empty molds that can be filled with diverse content according to the demands of the age, as defined by the consciousness approach? What we said about the incipience of the world also applies to texts on the question of whether God has anything in common with humans or is wholly transcendent, a question on which leftist discourse finds merits and flaws on both sides (see 2/220–21, 231–38). It is not just a question here of presenting one case and then the opposite for the sake of argument, as educational books do in order to stimulate the minds of the

readers and make them think, although that does come about indirectly sometimes. Here it is a question of wavering between the two sides, without a strategy for reconciling the two ever taking shape. It is the same hesitation that struck us as conspicuous when the leftist discourse preserved the Ash‘ari structure for constructing theology, while at the same time aspiring to transfer theology into the Mu‘tazilite structure.

In fact a consciousness approach based on “coloring” sometimes fails to uncover the meaning of some Mu‘tazilite ideas because, as we pointed out earlier, the ideas are detached from the systems to which they belong. The dispute between the Ash‘aris and the Mu‘tazila over the thingness or reity of the non-existent was related to the dispute over the eternal existence or incipience of the world. If the Mu‘tazila never openly promoted the principle that the world was sempiternal, they defended the idea that non-existent entities, or entities before they exist, do possess a thingness by arguing that they possess it to some degree, or rather at some level of existence, before they exist tangibly in the world. It is well known that Ibn Arabi (d. 638 AH, 1240 AD) drew on this concept in his thought system, which combined “sempiternity” as far as thingness in non-existence was concerned with “incipience” with respect to the manifestation of things at the level of tangible existence. Unlike the Mu‘tazila, the Ash‘aris completely rejected the idea that the non-existent possessed thingness.

It is striking that this was one of the few issues where the Mu‘tazila adhered to the exoteric meaning of religious texts, and especially the Qur‘an, while the Ash‘aris were forced to rely on interpretation—which confirms that interpretation was pivotal in both systems. But the leftist discourse, taking ideas out of context and preoccupied with modern “coloring” in line with the

consciousness approach, turns the original meaning of the idea on its head, and the materialist inclination of the Mu‘tazila becomes idealist, and the idealist/nihilistic inclination of the Ash‘aris becomes materialistic (see 1/438). And so the choice of the left falls on the Ash‘ari concept because it fulfills what it imagines to be the “renewal” attitude that suits the requirements of the real world and the spirit of the age:

The non-existent is not a thing, or else people would be afraid of it. They would recognize it because they could not resist it and would accept it out of weakness and laziness, despair and disgust, out of hatred for themselves and for others, and to spit at the world. Before they exist, possible non-existent entities cannot have being or essence or a true nature, because that would give people the false impression that non-existent entities exist as real things. It would mean that existence meant nothing, and it would undermine their resolve and their incentives to make things happen. (1/441)

If asserting the thingness of the non-existent leads to all the consequences mentioned above, then the whole Mu‘tazilite position deserves re-evaluation to correct what the left itself says about its progressiveness and intellectual enlightenment. Likewise, if the Ash‘ari position is so materialistic, then the left, which takes a materialistic line when it emphasizes the importance of science in the “enlightenment” phase, should change the judgments that fill the pages of its discourse about how the Ash‘ari position is reactionary, affiliated to those in power, and biased in favor of their interests at the expense of the interests of the masses.

But the justification that is offered to the reader—that those arguing for “renewal” have a motive for choosing the Ash‘aris’ position that is different from the motive of the Ash‘aris themselves—shows two things: first, that the motive that the left offers for the Ash‘ari position is a motive that does not link the idea to the Ash‘aris’ system but is more like a motive based on inference and speculation. The second thing is that the motive of those who advocate renewal is based on the consciousness approach with “coloring”: “Whereas the old Ash‘aris, when they denied that the non-existent could be a thing, wanted to emphasize the existence of God, who is capable of everything, of negating both existence and non-existence, since neither existence nor non-existence are constants, our motive is that denying that the non-existent can be a thing gives strength to motivate people, to be self-confident, and to reject fatalism, which in turn inspires optimism and hope and helps people imagine achieving the impossible. Asserting that the non-existent is a thing transforms absence into presence, non-existence into existence, and an exception into the rule. The non-existent is that for which there is no actualization in itself, which is what is denied, or that for which actualization takes the form of permanent non-existence. Occupation is the absence of independence, oppression is the absence of freedom, capitalism is the absence of socialism, the passivity of the masses is the absence of their activity, backwardness is the absence of progress, division is the absence of unity, and alienation is the absence of identity, because existence means independence, freedom, socialism, progress, unity, identity, and the mobilization of the masses” (1/443).

Coloring based on the consciousness approach will not only turn the original meaning of ideas head over heels, as we mentioned

earlier, but as is clear from the previous passage it has also led to conflict with the objectives of renewal themselves. Asserting the thingness of the non-existent, which is the Mu'tazilite position, helps to bring about the objectives proposed above because the values of true existence are values that are absent in the material reality of our society, in the sense that they do not exist, but they enjoy a kind of existence as aspirations or dreams or programs that might come about. The Ash'ari option, which is to dismiss the non-existent categorically and totally, is the option that could in fact lead to the disappointment, despair, resignation, weakness, and so on that were mentioned in a previous quotation.

If particular ideas are separated from the context of their thought systems, then they lose their particular meaning. Similarly, if the system is taken out of its socio-historical context, it loses its overall meaning. In both cases interpretation is bound to fall into the chasm of "coloring." In the previous example of coloring, the bias in favor of the Ash'ari position was not a reflection of objective neutrality, as the leftist discourse tries to convince us: "Our evocation of the Mu'tazila does not mean that we accept all the Mu'tazilites' positions blindly and fanatically. In this case, in denying the thingness of the non-existent, the Ash'ari school of thought is better able to mobilize people than the theory that the non-existent can be a thing, and more optimistic and hopeful, regardless of the Ash'aris' motive. Our support for the Mu'tazila is for its general trend and for the historical movement and not for the particular details in this or that theory" (1/443, note 85).

Although space does not allow us to pursue other examples of the coloring that relies on "semantic shifting," it is essential to note that some of these examples verge on interpretation in their ability to discover the significance that emerges from the meaning.

The Ash‘ari focus on linking everything that happens in the real world and in nature with divine power and the divine will helps in the final analysis to distract attention from the causes that have a direct effect. This in turn leads to an admission that man is unable to “change” reality, because this reality does not operate according to objective laws that the human mind can discover but according to a monolithic will that the mind cannot understand and whose purposes the mind cannot discover. The phenomenon of death, for example, is associated with an array of beliefs about lifespans that are set in advance and recorded in the Secret Ledger and that cannot be changed. But when this array of beliefs is put in the context of the Ash‘ari theological system, it is transformed into a condemnation of all mankind’s attempts to overcome the causes that lead to death, on the grounds that they are attempts to obstruct the divine will. This is not very different from the statements by some men of religion condemning kidney dialysis and organ transplants on the grounds that they are procedures that delay man’s meeting with his Maker and are therefore obstruction of the divine will. But more grave than this is the way these concepts lead to contempt for the value of human life in Islamic societies in particular.

“Indifference to the direct causes of death suggests ignorance of social conditions and lack of respect for human lives. It means that people make light of traffic accidents, exposed electrical cables, open manholes in the street, buildings that are liable to collapse or are shoddily built in order to make more profit or because money has been stolen, foodstuffs that are unfit for consumption and diseases. . . . In popular religion the phrase ‘there’s an entry in the Great Book for every lifespan’ is used to justify everything, for consolation or to drive away sorrows” (3/345). What is said about

lifespans and associated beliefs is also said about “livelihoods” and beliefs associated with that subject, as framed by Ash‘ari theology (see 3/351 et seq.). Once we expose the Ash‘ari ideological formulations behind these particular beliefs, we can see how they have penetrated the structure of contemporary belief on the one hand, and the beliefs can be interpreted in a way that reveals their meaning and significance on the other hand.

Syncretism: Success and Failure

In the framework that we discussed in the previous passage, the leftist project looks like more of a failure than a success. For a start, it endeavors to reconcile sides when the points of agreement and disagreement between them have not been identified precisely. Secondly, it holds the present in the grip of the past and makes the present almost completely subject to the past and its givens. This means that the Islamic left is fighting the battles of the present in the past, subordinating ideas to politics and letting ideology overwhelm epistemology. Thirdly, it ignores the socio-historical context of tradition (theology) and deals with it as an allegorical consciousness-based structure that has abandoned the time and place from which it originated. The results that we have discussed had the effect that the goal of “reconstruction” was transformed into “repainting,” and “renewal” was transformed into the old and the new living side by side. The more the project moved away from interpretation, the more the whole project fell into coloring. But this blatant failure at all levels does not represent the

whole truth, because the project can claim undeniable achievements in the study of tradition.

There has been an obvious effort to try to interpret doctrines, especially the doctrine of divinity, as attempts by human beings to overcome the alienation that they feel in the world, so humans create in their consciousness an entity out of their own being, modeled on it, after bestowing on it all the attributes of perfection and strength in their ideal form and after also excluding all the attributes of weakness that they disdain (see I/458, 475–76, 2/62, II3, 148, 242–44, 372–73, 381–82, 409, 432, 434, 536, 548–49, 567 et seq., 610 et seq., 639, 652, 3/6). It is a legitimate attempt to turn theology into anthropology and theories about God into the humanities. We call it a legitimate attempt, provided that it solves a problem that it created itself when it talked about the past, the producer of tradition, from two contradictory perspectives. From the first perspective the past is the beautiful triumphant past that achieved victory and effective unity and did not suffer the defeats and reverses that the contemporary Arab or Muslim world suffers from. And because the only source of danger that the Islamic world faced at the time was attacks on doctrine, then naturally our ancient thinkers bore the burden of defending doctrine. The second perspective, which clashes with the first, is to explain the origins of doctrines based on the concept of “alienation,” which means that the reality that produced the doctrines was not really so beautiful and triumphant. So explaining the origins of doctrines according to the concept of alienation seems to be very similar to explaining “the human situation” regardless of the circumstances of time and place (see I/70, 75–77, 178, 2/II3, 332, 335).

But the most important aspect of the Islamic left’s interpretation of Islamic doctrines is its insistence on treating them as

mental concepts that represent guides to conduct rather than as beliefs that point to a separate existence. Under such an interpretation “God” is not an anthropomorphized entity that has an existence that is separate from human consciousness: He is purely a “epistemic principle,” a fixed idea as it is known in logic. He is a “model” or an “ideal” that represents man’s quest for the abstract and the pure (see 1/362–63). This is a difference between Islam and Christianity that the Islamic left often insists on: that in the evolution of revelation Islam is the last phase, which releases man, or rather in which man is released, from the error of sensory conceptions of the absolute and in which his mind is freed from “incarnation” and abandons it in favor of “abstraction.” In this way revelation becomes law and is no longer a mystery; it becomes clarity and not divination, injunctions and prohibitions and not doctrine (3/52). Revelation became a realistic system based in the real world, with the aim of serving people’s interests, regardless of its origin or whether it indicates that a personified essence exists or whether its attributes must be affirmed (2/643). Human existence is the basis and the starting point in the opinion of the leftist discourse, and God speaks about Himself only through revelation, that is, through language, and so revelation has to be understood and interpreted starting with human consciousness. If human existence is the real existence, then every existence in consciousness is existence metaphorically, because it was human beings who created the language whose conventions enabled the revelation to manifest itself. That means that all linguistic concepts are concepts that in fact are applicable to man, who is the primary referent for linguistic terms, which apply only metaphorically to any other existence, whether God or the world, when compared with the way they apply to human existence” (1/450–51).

Within this humanist interpretation of doctrine, we should not forget that there is a clear bias in the scriptures in favor of “shari‘a” at the expense of “dogma,” although they are both essential aspects of the original structure of revelation. Because this bias is not founded wholly on interpreting the relationship between them in the context of the objective historical circumstances of the origins and development of the Islamic revelation, it pulls the leftist discourse, as we will see, to come to the right’s support when the right insists that the shari‘a is valid for every time and place (1/113) or when it insists that the purpose of human existence is to transform the world into an exemplary system that conforms to the contents and requirements of revelation (3/525). Human interpretation of doctrine remains nonetheless legitimate and productive, especially in the domain of linking divine knowledge and human knowledge and converting the former into the latter by formulating a human concept of revelation, a concept that excludes the metaphysical and favors the historical.

Insisting on the historicity of the revelation as an event and on the essential nature of the role of human understanding, in addition to the earlier interpretation of ideas about God through ideas about human beings, ends up transforming revelation into human experience and, in the final analysis, transforming divine knowledge into human knowledge. In this way the Islamic left comes close to solving the tradition/reason binary dialectically.

“The definition of knowledge can only apply to human knowledge, because divine knowledge is not an anthropomorphized attribute of the divine essence. It was revelation that was “brought down,” that became human knowledge simply by being read, understood, and interpreted. All we know about God’s knowledge is what we find in a book that is written in a known language and

that is interpreted, understood, imagined, and investigated by a mind—the mind of the person who receives it” (1/277). “Divine knowledge is in fact human knowledge, in the sense that it becomes human knowledge through understanding and interpretation. If the Qur’an, the revelation, is an expression of divine knowledge, it takes human understanding, which is associated with the perspectives of time and place, to transform this revelation into meaning. In this way the divine becomes human” (1/437). “The revelation itself, after it has been ‘brought down’ and understood, becomes human knowledge, whether it involves principles of religion, principles of religious law, philosophy, or Sufism” (1/248, see also 1/233). “Revelation is a type of knowledge that is independent in itself and that human beings infer. They then set rules for it. . . . Everything that can be used to impugn the human mind and human abilities can also be applied to the interpretation of prophecy and revelation which is carried out by the human mind, in which human interests are apparent and which imposes its will on them” (4/36).

In order to emphasize the idea that revelation and divine knowledge are “human,” it was necessary to focus on the “message” aspect rather than the “prophecy” aspect, in other words to focus on the horizontal dimension—the relationship between revelation and the real world—rather than the vertical dimension represented by the origin of revelation and the source of the message. “The method of communication does not interest us, whether it be by revelation, from behind a veil, through a messenger or in a vision, during sleep or while awake. What matters is the message itself, which contains salvation for mankind” (4/23–24). “What matters with prophecy is not its source, its method, or whether it is miraculous, because it is a historical event and the horizontal

dimension is the most important. Vertical prophecy is not part of prophecy, that is, not part of the *samʿiyyāt*, those parts of religious theory that are text-dependent. It is part of theory about God, that is, rational theory about divine speech and divine will” (4/39).

Focusing on the horizontal dimension of prophecy—the message—was bound to lead to a largely scholarly formulation of the revelation/reality dialectic—a dialectic that the rightist discourse ignores by focusing on the vertical dimension. Although the rightist discourse does not deny the facts presented by the Qurʾanic sciences, which assert that the dynamic and development of revelation is not separate from the dynamic and development of the real world, inasmuch as the Qurʾan is “brought down” and interpreted, this admission hardly modifies the metaphysical perspective that is the starting point for this discourse. But revelation from the perspective of the left on the other hand is intimately associated with the real world, and as far as it being “brought down” is concerned, this took place “based on a request from the real world, and it was completed based on the evolution of the real world, and it was reformulated according to what was possible and appropriate in the real world, as in the well-known case of abrogated and abrogating texts. It is a dialectical process between ideas and reality. . . . Reality calls out for ideas, and ideas appear in order to develop reality and guide it toward its natural fulfillment. Then reality again calls for ideas, this time for ideas that are more precise and more solid, so that the ideas can become real, as an ideal reality in which the natural reality finds its perfect form” (2/504–5).

In interpretation too, reality comes into the picture as an active third party that brings reason and transmitted tradition together, and the relationship between the latter two is not the kind of binary relationship that needs pure, formal synthesis: “It is a

three-way relationship, with a third party that is reality, which almost plays the role of a truth test, checking to see if there is any conflict between reason and transmitted tradition. Language alone is not a yardstick for understanding texts and reconciling possible meanings. That requires intuition, which is an act of an experienced mind, and that is the role of reality" (1/397–98).

So the leftist discourse comes close to transforming revelation into Nature. It takes metaphysics back to physics and gives shape to an enlightened understanding of doctrine and revelation—an understanding that makes every achievement of human reason in the domain of the natural sciences and the real world an addition to revelation and a continuation of it. By this understanding revelation is not just an event that took place several times in the past and then stopped happening, abandoning humanity to its own devices, but rather a name that is given to man's intellectual activity in every time and place:

Revelation is an expression of human nature. This is a concept that does not deny prophecy but means that prophecy continues through a propensity of nature, because nature is revelation and revelation is nature. Everything that man is favorably disposed toward by his nature is revelation, and whatever direction revelation chooses to take is a direction that has a place in nature. Revelation and nature are the same thing, and since nature is continuous, revelation is also continuous in that sense. Prophecy is permanent, but we are prophets who receive our revelation from nature, and the voice of nature is the voice of God. Natural revelation is the best response to vertical revelation because it is revelation without miracles, angels, or prophets, and yet it endorses di-

vine unity, resurrection from the dead, and reward and punishment, which makes using the term *revelation* here purely figurative, that is, understanding by reason, based on nature. Of course revelation in this sense continues, as long as reason and nature exist. (4/152–53)

An essential question now arises: Doesn't the continuity of revelation—even in the figurative sense proposed in the previous passage—conflict with the historicity of revelation, as proposed earlier? In other words, what is the point of perpetual revelation with all the dogma associated with it, including divine unity, resurrection, and reward and punishment? We were previously careful to say that the Islamic left had come close to finding a dialectical solution to the tradition/reason binary, without deciding that it had in fact solved it.

If the leftist discourse, in its interpretations of doctrine and in the historical concept of revelation that it proposes, inasmuch as the revelation is “brought down” and interpreted, conflicts radically with the salafist discourse, then the concern for conciliation and unity comes back to impose itself on the leftist discourse, because it is taking with its right hand what it gave with the left. The criticism that, within this discourse, is often directed at some traditional intellectual phenomena—“one step forward and one step back”—could be directed at the discourse itself. The leftist discourse has been so concerned for conciliation and unity that it has gone beyond addressing . . . and has even taken on the task of uniting the schools of thought in tradition and moving from “differences between sects” to “unity of sects.” The scripture/reason binary has not been spared the harmful effect of this concern, which has complicated the fertile possibilities that would

probably have brought about a dialectical presentation of it. To insist that revelation is continuous in a figurative sense, as revelation in nature, reveals the hesitant character that tries to resort to interpretation through semantic shifting and then falls into “coloring.” In this coloring the concept of revelation loses its historical dimension and is transformed into general principles and theories of an absolute and dogmatic character, outside time and place, that is, outside history.

Revelation is an independent discipline that human beings deduce and for which they lay down rules. It is not part of the Islamic sciences or one of the worldly sciences. It is the science of the first principles on which all sciences are based, including rational, natural, consciousness-based, and existential principles at the same time. (4/36)

Revelation provides a starting point of absolute certainty, so that people can avoid having to work endlessly by trial and error and so that there is less probability that they will make mistakes in understanding or in implementation. It is true that reason can access these starting points of certainty, but revelation shortens the time required, lessens the effort, and gives an impetus to reason at the earliest stages. . . . When a single mind sets out theories and makes laws derived from them, it is less likely to make mistakes than when one mind sets out the theories and leaves the laws to derivation by some other mind. . . . Revelation provides an overall, total view of life compared to the fragmented human view. . . . Revelation, as an expression of pure consciousness, provides an impartial picture that is not based on whim, self-interest, or emotion. . . . The facts of revelation are fair and unbiased.

It does not adopt the viewpoint of one person rather than another or promote the interests of one group rather than another. It is as if history has achieved completion, and the facts about humanity are all known. (4/62–63)

In these passages from Hanafi's work, the human mind, which is the basis of scripture and the measure of its correctness and truthfulness, is transformed into a subordinate of revelation, unable to depend on itself because it is liable to error and bias and incapable of taking an overall view or setting out general concepts. Even if we admit that it might be possible for the human mind to be correct and impartial and to set out general conceptions, that would take it a long time, so it is more convenient and more prudent for the human mind to leave that to revelation and narrated tradition and to do its best to understand and put into practice. It is at just this point that the left comes to the aid of the right and forms an extraordinary union with its salafist counterpart. Salafist propaganda in its most extreme form hardly goes beyond this theory of the role of both reason and transmitted tradition—a role in which reason is transformed into a pliant subaltern that has doubts about its own abilities and always takes refuge in texts.

The tendency of the leftist discourse to waver between one position and its opposite is natural in a project that is essentially syncretist. This is what distinguishes this discourse from its salafist antithesis, which relies on certainty and dogmatism when it presents its theories in the deluded belief that what it says is the absolute truth. Although this hesitancy produces harmful results at the purely cognitive level, it does serve a purpose in that it disrupts the structure of the dominant and established religious thinking. In the context of this hesitancy, reason comes before transmitted

tradition (3/459). Sometimes they occur simultaneously in deference to the givens of revelation (3/439). This is the ontological aspect. When it comes to epistemic precedence, they are either in unison with respect to their activity, that is, they each have the same epistemic legitimacy as each other, or the two of them exchange precedence with each other. One of the purposes of our current reading is to overcome this hesitancy by discovering the reasons for it and the consequences it has for the structure of leftist discourse, so that we can move from merely disrupting the structure of religious discourse to achieving the ambition of moving “from Doctrine to Revolution.”

(In addition to the previous, see 1/16, 345, 401–2, 404–5, 2/106, 218, 3/446–47, 392, 4/51, 481, 5/195.)

The leftist project, which in its writings always quotes the saying “We sought refuge in texts and the thieves came in,” which heatedly defends the rational method and which viciously attacks those who are “slaves to texts,” is led by its own hesitancy to criticize its rational approach and defend the text approach. Defending the text approach clearly depends on mental assumptions that could hardly have been examined interpretatively. *The Neglected Duty*, for example, the book by Mohamed Abdel Salam, one of the leaders of the Jihad group that assassinated President Anwar Sadat, did not depend on raw texts, if such texts truly exist. And Ibn Taymiyya’s critique of Aristotle’s logic did not depend on those raw texts. In fact the very concept of raw texts is a fiction, because the exegetic tradition has impinged on the texts in every age, and the mind and culture of the reader cannot be insulated from the accumulation of exegetic tradition about the texts. Besides, what is said about experts on Islamic law taking different approaches toward independent reasoning and the transmitted tradition is only

a description of how this or that expert is generally inclined to decide. If the whole tradition is “a theory of interpretation, linking reason and tradition” (3/92–93), then how can we talk about raw texts? For that reason we see the leftist discourse’s defense of the text approach in the context of the hesitancy that arises from the syncretist nature of the whole project—a nature that cannot be separated from the Islamic left’s attitude to the material reality that has been diagnosed, as we said earlier, through binaries: salafism/secularism, past/present, and tradition/reason.

And because, as far as political action is concerned, salafism has achieved what the leftist discourse considers to be an achievement in Iran and Egypt, and because our political regimes’ relationship with the Western “Other,” from the beginning of the 1970s until now, has been a relationship of complete subservience, confusion has arisen between, on the one hand, levels of political action and intellectual achievements and, on the other hand, the reality of the regimes’ subordination to the West and the limits of our intellectual and cultural agenda with the West. So the text approach has had merits “in limited historical periods”:

Understanding the text and analyzing its meaning might lead to the discovery that the text has an internal logic that is a logic for revelation and that can then be used to critique all the other kinds of logic, whether formal or materialist or Illuminationist. This happened in ancient times with experts on Islamic law, especially Ibn Taymiyya in his criticism of Aristotle’s formal logic. It seems to be a pressing issue these days, now that contemporary salafism has resumed the text approach, as is clear in Mohamed Abdel Salam’s *The Neglected Duty*. Reverting to texts empowers cultural rejectionism in

that the texts perform a cathartic function, and civilization reverts to a situation of “Me against the Other.” (1/401–2)

We do not want at this point to go into the subject of the many Arab thinkers who have repented and “washed their hands” of defilement by the West and by incoming Western ideas—without distinguishing between what is spurious and what is authentic or between knowledge and ideology—even if many indicators in the structure of leftist discourse make it possible to put it in this context. We would prefer to wait for the second part of the Tradition and Renewal project, in which it will state its position toward Western ideas. What interests us now is that defending the text approach side by side with defending the reason approach confirms that reconciliation between reason and transmitted tradition—the major binary in the history of our religious thinking and also in the structure of our contemporary culture—has not been fully achieved dialectically, even if the leftist discourse has come close to achieving it.

The syncretist approach of the leftist discourse has left many binaries unresolved, and the signs of success by this method remain partial and dispersed inside the discourse. This reading of ours, in its attempt to discover reasons and results in the structure of the leftist discourse, hopes to have provided an interpretation of this discourse—an interpretation that goes beyond the possibilities and limits of its achievement. As we noted earlier, one of the achievements of the Tradition and Renewal project has been to shake up many of the established and widely accepted ideas in our religious consciousness, and by doing so it has contributed to making it possible to reveal flaws in its structure. It may be said that although what has been achieved is incomplete, it is very impor-

tant. It is a step that undeniably leads us toward enlightenment, which is bound to evolve into “revolutionization.” If the structure of the discourse contains anything that pulls it toward puritanical right-wing salafism, the task of the productive interpretative reading is to inspire us to produce scientific awareness of both the real world and simultaneously of tradition. In other words, a productive interpretative reading has to move the leftist discourse from the abyss of coloring to the prospect of “interpretation” in understanding both the real world and tradition.

3. Reading Religious Texts

An Exploratory Study of Types of Meaning

It is now widely accepted as true that human ideas of all kinds, including religious ideas, are the natural product of the totality of the historical circumstances and the social realities of the age. That does not mean they are passive products: In fact, it would be more accurate to say that any ideas worthy of the name reflect positive thinking that takes on the facts of the age to which they belong through analysis, interpretation, and appraisal and endeavor to find and support the progressive elements and to isolate and combat the retrogressive elements. Thinking that is content to justify and defend the status quo belongs in the domain of thinking figuratively rather than factually. It goes without question that think-

ing that tries to take the socio-historical reality back to previous ages is not thinking at all, since the essence and nature of thinking is activity to discover the unknown, starting at the boundaries of the known.

Religious thought is not immune from the laws that govern the dynamics of human thought in general, because it does not acquire from its subject—religion—any of religion’s sanctity or its absolute nature.

At this point it is essential to distinguish between “religion” and religious thinking. Religion is the set of holy texts that are historically established, whereas religious thinking is the human endeavor to understand and interpret those texts and extract meaning from them. Those endeavors naturally differ from age to age, and they naturally differ from one environment to another—from one ethnic, geographic, historical, and social reality to another—and the endeavors are equally diverse from one thinker to another in a particular environment.

All this is widely accepted as true, and the pioneers of the Arab renaissance and enlightenment in the nineteenth century fought a long battle to implant and establish this in the soil of our culture. This was done by Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Lutfi el-Sayed, Taha Hussein, Ali Abdel Raziq, Qasim Amin, Salama Moussa, Abbas al-Aqqad, Ahmed Amin, Amin al-Khouli, and many others—each in his own specialty and domain of knowledge.

But there is a painful and poignant question that imposes itself when we are carried away with celebrating all or some of these pioneers: How is it that contemporary religious thinking has been able to suppress these facts and is trying to bury them in oblivion in favor of an absolutism that verges on the sacred and that it

ascribes indirectly to itself? Before attempting to answer the question, we point to manifestations of absolutism and sanctity in the attempts that are being made in the form of conferences, seminars, meetings, and publications, all on the subject of what they called “Islamicization” in all fields of human activity. While advocating the Islamicization of laws by reference to Islamic shari‘a is understandable in the context of our cultural history, despite disagreements over how and to what extent shari‘a might be implemented, advocating the Islamicization of the sciences, literature, and the arts may look congenial on the surface, but underneath lies misery. It would entrench religious thinking, which is dependent on circumstances of time, place, and social situation, as arbiter in domains of thought, intellectual and creative, that the religious texts never broached, although religious thinking has always tried, through contorted methods of interpretation, to make the religious texts say what it wants them to say in those domains.

The religious texts mention many natural and human phenomena in the context of enumerating the blessings that God has bestowed on mankind, and throughout our cultural and intellectual history religious thinking has tried to interpret these texts. The interpretation has always reflected the level of scientific and intellectual development at the time, as well as the environment and the people. It is striking that none of the thinkers or the people who interpreted scripture imposed their own interpretations of natural or human phenomena on the grounds that they represented “Islam.” When Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, a companion of the prophet and a man who deserves the titles “Interpreter of the Qur’an” and “Scribe of the Nation,” explained thunder as “a king who drives the clouds with a silver catapult,” an explanation that is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in some *hadiths*,¹ Muslims

did not take this explanation in an absolute and sacred religious sense that could not possibly be contradicted by scientific research. Muslims understood that religious texts do not offer explanations for natural or human phenomena and that explaining them was a matter for the human mind, which was constantly developing in order to discover new natural and human frontiers. This understanding was one of the most important reasons for the scientific and technical achievements of the Muslim scientists whom contemporary religious thinkers praise, saying proudly that at the beginning of the European Renaissance they provided Europe with early versions of the experimental method. If our forefathers had been obsessed with the Islamicization that obsesses contemporary men of religion, there would have been the same kind of conflict that happened in Europe and there would be none of the boasting that fills contemporary religious discourse and that is based on the idea that there is no contradiction between dogma and free scientific research.

In the domain of ideas, culture, and literary and artistic creativity, religious discourse likes to interfere in the name of “Islam” and say that the Qur’an and the sunna should be the authority by which to judge and evaluate. On January 29, 1990, the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* published a summary of the recommendations of the International Islamic Literature Seminar, which was held at the headquarters of the Young Men’s Muslim Association and was attended by a number of prominent people who reflect the official position of the regime in the fields of ideas, culture, and creative activities and who could not be accused of extremism.

The most important recommendations included: “to work by all possible means to Islamicize literature and to keep new generations away from the danger of communist, Marxist, and secular

ideas, to stand up to their destructive principles while upholding and clarifying the authority of Islamic literature and ideas.” The call to Islamicize literature, the arts, ideas, and culture is no less dangerous than the call to Islamicize the sciences, since both of them end up extending the control of men of religion over all aspects of life. It ends up in “inquisitions” that condemn, or rather criminalize, all human endeavors in all fields of knowledge and brand them as deviance, heresy, or atheism, simply because they do not conform to the way the men of religion understand and interpret religious texts. The fallacy of the religious discourse is obvious here—it denies the logical results of all its attempts to deny that the theory of divine sovereignty means giving men of religion the right to judge on all aspects of life.

To go back to our basic question: How was it possible that the achievements of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment could be corralled off, clearing the way for an oppressive religious discourse that is trying to put out all the lamps of humanism? In fact the revealed religions came to make those lamps shine more brightly and even provide them with more oil. We certainly agree with those analyses that attribute this retrogression to the artificial nature of the Arab Renaissance, which can be explained in turn by the fact that the middle class, which carried the banner of the Renaissance, was fragile, structurally unsound, and socially and economically subordinate, which made it also politically subordinate. But what we would like to focus on here is that the discourse of enlightenment, along with its salafist counterpart, always operated inside the circle of ideological argument and never went further to lay the foundation for new frontiers of knowledge. So it is not strange that there should be many cases of people relapsing, turn-

ing to salafism as they grew older or when new intellectual, cultural, and creative movements arose that were more radical.

By treating cultural, intellectual, and creative activity, and in particular religious thinking, as historical phenomena, Enlightenment discourse, as mentioned earlier, has been able to lift the lid of sanctity off both the old and the new religious discourses. In this way it has also been able to sow the seeds for dealing with tradition in all its aspects as an evolving historical phenomenon and, most importantly, one based on pluralism and struggle between various schools of thoughts. That has been a real achievement, on which there can be no going back, but it has not been enough. Because of the ideologically polemical nature of the relationship between the Enlightenment discourse and the salafist discourse, the advocates of Enlightenment have not been able to break away from the salafists by generating a scholarly historical awareness of religious texts. The ahistorical view of religious texts has remained the dominant view for both sides equally. There is no doubt that this failure on the part of the Enlightenment, in the context of objective socioeconomic factors, helped to enable the religious discourse to recover the ground it had lost.

But what would it mean to generate a scholarly historical awareness of religious texts? Certainly we do not mean the historical facts, well known in religious discourse, about how the religious texts were “brought down” in installments, depending on the circumstances and the immediate material events, or what are known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of revelation), although that is important and indicative of the realistic nature of the religious phenomenon and the practical nature of the texts. Certainly we also do not mean the facts about “abrogation”—

changes in religious rulings and their replacement by other rulings as the first Muslim community developed—facts that are no less important and no less indicative of the realistic nature of revelation than the *asbāb al-nuzūl*.

What we mean by scholarly historical awareness of religious texts goes beyond theories about religious thinking in ancient or modern times and depends on the achievements of linguistics, especially in the field of hermeneutics. Whereas religious thinking makes the speaker of the texts—God—the focus of its attention and its starting point, we make the audience, human beings in all their socio-historical surroundings, the beginning and the end of our approach. The problem with religious thinking is that it starts from ideas based on the doctrines of a particular school of thought about the nature of God, human nature, and the relationship between the two and then makes the texts give voice to those ideas and doctrines. In other words we find the meaning imposed on the texts from the outside—a meaning that is necessarily a historical, human meaning that religious thinking always tries to dress up in metaphysical garb to make it seem eternal and everlasting.

A recent incident at an academic meeting in Cairo was both extremely suggestive and amusing in this context, possibly less amusing than it was significant for exposing the contradictions in religious thinking that arise from the ahistoricity of this type of thinking, or rather from its ahistorical approach. At one of the regular meetings of the Egyptian Philosophy Association, the subject under discussion was a paper submitted by Hassan Hanafi, the head of the philosophy department in the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University, and entitled *Revelation and the Real World*. The analysis of the relationship between revelation and reality in the paper was based on material on *asbāb al-nuzūl* in a book by the same name

by the eleventh-century Persian scholar Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidi al-Nisāpūri. The questions and comments were sharp and aggressive, and some of those in the audience went so far as to condemn the author for giving the real world precedence over revelation. Some speakers even demanded that the author repent because some of the things he had written might give the false impression that revelation is human. One cannot imagine this happening in a religious seminary, let alone in a philosophy association.

The real surprise, and an amusing one at the same time, was the extensive comment by a respected academic and prominent man of religion who ridiculed everything that had been said about the relationship between revelation and the real world. With a derision that was telling, he asked, “What kind of revelation and what kind of reality are we talking about? Revelation in Islam is the Qur’an and the sunna. The Qur’an is the timeless word of God and an attribute of God’s eternal and timeless essence, and it was written in Arabic on a preserved tablet before the creation of the heavens and the earth and before the creation of mankind and before there was any real world. And as for the real-life incidents associated with the particular revelations and the abrogation of some passages, that was all known to God from eternity, and then the particular revelations were slotted into events in the real world as part of a divine master plan that had been prepared in advance. So the real world does not take precedence over revelation and cannot influence it or have anything to do with it, given that God has total knowledge of the present, the past, and the future and is just as aware of the details as He is of the generalities. In fact everything we say and what has been said in the past and what will be said is known to God and intended, because everything

in existence—things, events, incidents, ideas, and expressions—are all by His design and are part of His words, which are never exhausted, as it says in the Qur'an."

The only possible response to this lengthy comment was to say that in that case anything that is said is legitimate, in fact just as legitimate and credible as anything else, given that everything is known to God, is intended by him, and in the final analysis is just part of "God's words," in which case one would have to concede that it is legitimate to say that there is a relationship of interaction and influence—not to speak of a dialectical relationship that everyone is reluctant to acknowledge—between revelation and the real world. But rather than arguing back, it is more important to explore the nature of the meaning that is imposed on the texts from the outside and that is dressed up in the guise of eternity and timelessness to conceal its historical, or rather ideological, nature. The idea put forward in this comment—an idea that is widespread and well established in religious thinking generally—brings to mind the salafist concept that the word of God (the Qur'an) has existed from eternity, a concept that one group of theologians adopted and defended. It is also part of a conceptual structure that proposes a vision of the world, nature, and mankind that puts them all in a relationship of direct comparison with God. Such a comparison naturally marginalizes what is relative, partial, and non-eternal to the advantage to what is absolute and complete and has existed from eternity. In fact this vision has served only to entrench and provide a religious justification for a social situation in which the ruler and the ruling class played the part of the absolute, the complete, and the eternal, while the governed played the part of the relative, the partial, and the non-eternal. When contemporary religious thinking adopts this vision and the asso-

ciated ideas about the Qur'an and the existence of the revelation from eternity, then it achieves roughly the same objectives. On top of that, it gives that vision a sanctity derived from its long history in tradition and from the whiff of antiquity, which give the false impression that it is true Islam.

But in our cultural history this has not been the only idea, and the vision of the world on which it depends has not been the only vision, despite what religious thinking tries to assert. The opposite idea, which prevailed for some time and was later marginalized, was that the Qur'an was created at some time in history and its creation and revelation were linked to the needs of mankind and were intended to serve human interests. It is easy to understand that this opposite idea was part of another thought structure that provided a vital and dynamic vision of the world, of nature, and of mankind—a vision that did not exclude the absolute, the perfect, and the eternal but at the same time did not ignore the independent laws for the actions of whatever was relative, partial, and non-eternal. Needless to say, it was that opposite vision that innovated and produced achievements in scientific knowledge—achievements from which Europe benefited and about which religious discourse itself boasts, although it turns its back on the intellectual roots of those achievements and is hostile to the vision of the world that brought them about.

The idea that the Qur'an is uncreated and has existed from eternity means that the texts are frozen and the religious meaning is fixed, whereas the idea that the Qur'an was created and that revelation is part of history restores the vitality of the texts, frees the religious meaning from the prison of the historical moment through understanding and interpretation, and makes the meaning relevant to the concerns of the human community in

its activities in history. But that does not mean that we have to adopt that idea in order to confront its opposite, the fixed idea adopted by religious thinking. To say that the Qur'an is uncreated remains historically important as far as meaning and significance are concerned, and in this respect it is not enough to base scholarly historical awareness on religious texts. To adopt this historical sense alone puts us in the same trench as religious thinking—the trench from which we fight the battles of the present based on the experience of tradition without looking for our own innovative ways to win them.

The method adopted by the thinkers of the Arab Enlightenment was to use tradition in an opportunistic and apologetic way. That is what prevented them from achieving a radical break with the salafist alternative and enabled salafism to ambush the partial achievements of the Enlightenment movement. That does not mean that we advocate a complete break with the achievements of tradition where it had inclinations that were of a progressive nature in their historical context. What we do say is that we should not stop at meaning in its partial historical sense and that we must discover the “significance” on which we can base scholarly historical awareness.

(1)

In the final analysis religious texts are only language, in the sense that they belong to a certain cultural structure that has been produced according to the laws of that culture, which sees language

as its central semiotic system. That does not mean that texts are recipients that passively reflect the cultural structure through the system of language, because texts have their own agency, which arises from the linguistic structure itself. The distinction that the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure made between language and speech might help us here in clarifying the difference between the linguistic structure of texts, especially high-status texts, and the cultural-linguistic system that produced them. Language is the semiotic system of a community in its totality and in its multiplicity of phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels. It is the reserve to which individuals resort in order to articulate “speech.” So speech, in its relationship with language, represents what is particular and tangible. It represents a particular system, or a private code, within the overall system that is stored in the memory of the community.² If speech, despite being particular and specific, is what reveals the structure of the overall linguistic system, that means that the relationship between speech and language is dialectical and that separating them is a simplification that is inevitable for the sake of scientific analysis.

We can now use this distinction to determine the nature of the relationship between texts and the linguistic system through which they are produced.

Texts cannot be detached from the general linguistic system to which they belong, but in another respect they create their own code, which reconstructs from scratch the elements of the original semantic system. The extent to which texts are traditional or innovative is measured by the change they bring about in the linguistic system and the consequent change they bring about in both culture and the real world. One can nevertheless say that texts are tied to their cultural-linguistic reality and, on the one hand, are shaped

by it and, on the other hand, create the private code by which they reshape language and culture. There is an area of overlap between the two aspects, and this overlap enables the texts to perform their function inside the cultural structure during the text-production stage, that is, makes the texts meaningful and comprehensible to those who are alive at the time of production. This is the area that is full of meaning that refers to the real world and to history. And outside this area of overlap there are meanings that are open and liable to change in line with changes in the perspectives from which the texts are read, subject to changes in the linguistic and cultural reality.

A question arises here that has to be tackled if we are talking about religious texts in particular. It is a question that raises the problem of the difference between religious texts and other texts that are easily amenable to the method of analysis exemplified by de Saussure's distinction between language and speech. The obstacle to submitting religious texts to this method is that people are wary of subjecting the word of God, which should be different from human speech, to human, rational methods of analysis. The wariness here is based on the assumption that the relationship between the divine and the human is one of segregation, or rather of conflict and contradiction, a wariness created by the Ash'ari conception of the world that, as we discussed earlier, has permeated modern life. It might be possible to clear up the problem of the relationship between the divine and the human and eliminate this reluctance if we discuss it in a field other than the field of religious texts. The field in which we choose to expose the reluctance and explain the reasons behind it is the field of Christian beliefs associated with the nature of Christ. Needless to say we are not discussing the question from a theological perspective, which

would implicate us as a party in a contentious doctrinal question, so much as we are treating it as an example that exposes the contradiction in Islamic religious thinking when, in its understanding of the nature of the Qur'an, it adopts the general Christian perspective on the nature of Christ, although it rejects that perspective in its original context.

The attitude of Islamic religious thinking toward the nature of Christ is to deny any nature other than a purely human nature. This is not an attitude that is imposed on the Islamic religious texts from the outside: It is an attitude that rests on the immediate sense of the texts, in references that assert that Christ is God's servant and that the special nature of his virgin birth does not imply anything that changes his human nature, because in that respect Christ is like Adam: "He created him out of dust" (Qur'an 3:59). Comparing the nature of the Qur'an's revelation and the nature of Christ's birth shows aspects of the resemblance between the religious structure of each of the two within the doctrinal structure of Islam itself.

Perhaps we would not be exaggerating if we said that they are not two structures: They are a single structure even if the elements that make up the two are different. The Qur'an is the word of God, and similarly Jesus Christ was "the apostle of God and His word" (Qur'an 4:171). The good news brought to the Virgin Mary was "that God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary" (Qur'an 3:45). If the Qur'an was a spoken message conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus was likewise the word of God "that He conveyed to Mary and a spirit from Him" (Qur'an 4:171). In other words Muhammad equals Mary, and the intermediary in both cases is the Angel Gabriel, who appears to Mary "as a normal man" (Qur'an

19:17) and to Muhammad in the guise of a bedouin. In both cases it can be said that the word of God was embodied in a tangible form in the two religions: in Christianity in a human creature, that is, Christ, and in Islam in a linguistic text in a human language, that is, Arabic. In both cases the divine became human, or the divine was humanized. The medium in which and by which the transformation came about is the Arabic language in the Islamic revelation, while it is flesh and blood, Mary, in Christianity.

Islamic religious thinking contests as delusional the theory of the dual nature of Christ in Christian religious thinking, but to insist on the dual nature of the Qur'anic text or of scripture in general is to fall into the same delusion. In both cases the delusion arises from ignoring the objective historical facts associated with the phenomenon, insisting on its metaphysical origin and maintaining that it alone can interpret them and define their nature. So the delusion is a cultural-intellectual state of mind that reflects an ideological attitude toward a particular historical reality. Whereas this delusion led in Christian doctrine to worship of the Son of Man, in Islamic doctrine it led to the argument that the Qur'an has existed from eternity as a timeless attribute of the divine essence, as mentioned earlier. In both cases human beings are excluded and alienated from their reality, not in favor of the divine and the absolute, as it might appear on the surface, but in favor of the class that has been installed in place of the absolute and the divine.

Because reality is not a uniform or homogeneous whole, counter-forces offer a religious-intellectual alternative, in the case of Islam in the form of the Mu'tazilite position that the Qur'an was created in time and not eternal, and in the case of Christianity through those who say that Christ's nature is wholly human. If

the apologetic religious-intellectual schools of thought have been dominant in the history of both Christianity and Islam, that does not mean that their theories are correct or incontestable. The fact that one school of thought prevails is merely the result of a struggle between socio-political forces in a particular historical context.

Perhaps we are now in a position to say that religious texts are texts just like any other texts in culture and that their divine origin does not mean that, when we study or analyze them, we need special methodologies that suit their special divine nature.

To say the texts are divine and to insist on their divine nature necessarily implies that human beings are unable to understand them by their own methods unless the deity intervenes by granting some humans special powers that enable them to understand. This is exactly what the Sufis say. In this way the religious texts are transformed into texts that are impenetrable to ordinary humans, the intended recipients of the revelation—a divine code that only a special divine power can break. So God seems to be speaking to Himself, and the texts seem to lack the characteristics of a message, a proclamation, “guidance,” “light,” and so on. If we adopt the theory here that religious texts are human, we do not do so for self-interested or ideological reasons to counter the prevalent and dominant religious thinking but rather for objective reasons based on the facts of history and the facts of the texts themselves. When we propose this theory, we are not taking the traditional Mu‘tazilite position and its theory that the Qur’an was created in time as our foundation; the Mu‘tazilite position, despite its historical importance, remains a traditional position that is not the sole basis for our scholarly awareness of religious texts. The Mu‘tazilite position is a historical landmark that foreshadows something of scholarly and progressive significance, and it is that significance,

not the historical landmark, that interests us in order to lay a basis for awareness of the nature of religious texts.

If religious texts are human texts by virtue of belonging to language and culture in a particular historical period—the period in which they took shape or were produced—then they are necessarily historical texts, in the sense that their meaning cannot be divorced from the cultural-linguistic system of which they are a part. From this perspective language and its cultural environment are the reference point for interpretation in both the *tafsīr* and the *ta'wīl* forms. All the Qur'anic sciences play a part in that reference point for interpretation, and these sciences are based on transmitted tradition and include much information associated with texts—information that has been subjected to the critical instruments of scrutiny and authentication. The most important of these sciences that are relevant to the concept of the historicity of texts are the sciences related to deciding which parts of the Qur'an were revealed in Mecca and which in Medina, and which parts of the Qur'an abrogate which previously revealed parts.

To say that meaning is based in history does not mean freezing the religious meaning at the stage when the texts took shape, because language, the reference framework for interpretation, is not immobile and unchanging: It shifts and evolves with culture and with the real world. If the texts, as mentioned earlier, help to change language and culture, insofar as they are “speech” in the Saussurean model, the development of language again changes the meaning of the texts, usually to move it from the real to the metaphorical. This can be explained more deeply by analyzing some examples from the fundamental religious text, which is the Qur'an.

Many verses of the Qur'an speak about God as a king who has a throne, a footstool, and troops, and they also speak about the pen

and the tablet. In many of the narrative accounts that are ascribed to the second kind of religious text—the *ḥadīth* or reports on the sayings and doings of the Prophet and his companions, there are many precise details about the pen, the tablet, the footstool, and the throne, and they all contribute, if they are understood literally, to creating a mythical image of another world beyond our own material, visible, and tangible world—what is known in religious discourse as *the world of malakūt and jabarūt* [approximately the Kingdom of Heaven—Trans.]. Those who were alive at the time when the texts took shape or when they were revealed may have understood these texts literally, or maybe the images that the texts elicit arose from the cultural concepts of the community in that period. That would be natural, but it is not natural that religious discourse, in some of its versions, insists on freezing the religious meaning as it was in early Islam, even though the real world and culture have moved beyond those ideas of a mythical nature.

The image of the king and the kingdom and all the subsidiary images that reinforce that image reflect, from the point of view of meaning, a particular historical and allegorical reality as well as some historical-cultural ideas. Insisting on the literal meaning of an image that has been overtaken by culture and that has disappeared from the real world is tantamount to denying change and preserving an image of reality that has been overtaken by history. Quite unlike the attitude that rejects change, metaphorical interpretation dismisses the mythical imagery and lays the basis for rational ideas that can bring about a better world for human beings. From this we can see that the battles that the Mu‘tazila fought against the literalists in the field of interpreting religious texts were not just intellectual battles of an elitist nature. They were battles about the shape of society and the cultural concepts

associated with it. Since that is the case, it should come as no surprise that the Ash'aris insist on the image of the imperious king who punishes people with indifference and who "cannot be called to account for anything He does, whereas they will be called to account" (Qur'an 21:23), while the Mu'tazila were committed to denying that God could act unjustly, in affirmation of the principle of justice in society and in the world at large.

Scripture itself indirectly offers us pointers to a metaphorical reading of many phrases. We will not cite here the same things that the Mu'tazila cited, such as the Qur'anic phrase "There is nothing like Him" (Qur'an 42:11), so we do not run into another problem over the nature of text and the ways in which it produces meaning, which is the problem of the definitive and the allegorical, a problem we discussed in an earlier study.³ The pointer that we cite here from the text of the Qur'an is God's objection to the Jews' reading, or more properly their understanding, of the verses that ask believers to give God a generous loan (Qur'an 5:12, 57:18, 64:17, 2:245, 57:11, and 73:20). The Jews took the verses literally and said, "God is poor and we are rich" (Qur'an 3:181), and when the Qur'anic ban on usury, the lifeblood of the Jewish economy at the time, was revealed, they said, "How strange Muhammad's Lord is! How can he ban us from taking interest when he pays interest to us?"⁴ The fact that the text objects to the Jews' literal understanding of these verses is an indicator to us that they have to be read metaphorically.

That is how Muslims read everything in the Qur'an about believers selling themselves and their property to God in return for Paradise, and how they understood everything in the Qur'an that describes the relationship between God and believers as a "com-

mercial" relationship. The words *trade* and *loan* and *buying and selling* and other such words belong to a specific semantic field, and the fact that they occur so frequently in the Qur'anic text shows that the cultural environment was reflected semantically in the text, but the fact that they occur metaphorically and not in a realistic sense shows that they do not reflect the cultural environment mindlessly, like a mirror, since texts use their own figures of speech, of which metaphor is one of the most important.

Contemporary religious discourse does not object to metaphorical interpretations of these examples from the Qur'anic text. It even confirms such interpretations, insisting on the text's rhetorical nature. But because it is a discourse that is not based on a scholarly understanding of the texts, it contradicts itself when it rejects any metaphorical interpretation of the image of the king, the kingdom, and all the subsidiary images that reinforce it, such as the throne and the footstool, and insists on the literal meaning, in a way that reveals the ideological nature of the discourse. The ideological nature of religious discourse is also evident in the way it deals with religious texts, when it resorts in some circumstances to "leapfrogging" over the historic, literal meaning and dressing it up in a new meaning that serves its objectives and inclinations.

We will confine ourselves here to one of many examples, postponing the others for later because they are important and pivotal. The example is the expression *lahw al-hadith* (idle talk, roughly) in the Qur'anic verses: "But among men there are some who purchase idle talk, in order to lead people astray from the path of God, without knowledge, and to make fun of it. They will face a humiliating punishment. And when Our verses are recited to such people, they turn away arrogantly as though they have not heard

them, as though there is deafness in their ears, so give them tidings of painful punishment” (Qur’an 31:6–7). Religious discourse deliberately takes the expression firstly out of its linguistic context and secondly out of the context of the occasion for its revelation, in order to interpret *lahw al-hadith* to mean singing.⁵ More seriously, they infer from this that Islam bans the art of singing. The ban does not apply only to the kind of singing by which the singer deliberately distracts people from remembering God, a limitation suggested by the use of the preposition *li* (in order to) in the text, which would indicate that distraction is their motive; religious discourse applies the ban to all types of singing regardless of the motive or intention. When moderate religious discourse responds to those who are stricter, it excludes from the ban only religious songs and songs that encourage people to work hard and resist imperialism and Zionism, as we see in the writings of Sheikh Mohamed al-Ghazali.⁶ But if we go back to the occasion on which the verses were revealed, the context completely disproves the notion that *lahw al-hadith* means singing and exposes the ideological nature of this interpretation, which is hostile to the arts and to literature.

Failing to distinguish between what is historical and what is eternal in the sense of religious texts leads people into many pitfalls and dead ends. If distinguishing between what is specific and what is general in the meaning of texts in general is important, it is especially grave in the case of religious texts because it is related to the beliefs and social, political, economic, and ethical values of the religious community. There is no need here to distinguish between this study’s concept of the universal and the specific and the concept advanced by scholars of Islamic law and the Qur’anic sciences, because in the religious tradition the status of being uni-

versal or specific relates to texts that are relevant to shari‘a rulings, and because universality and specificity are discussed in the framework of a sentence, a phrase, or a verse or verses that are related to one subject.

What we mean by “specificity” and “universality” here is two aspects of meaning in the texts. The specific is the semantic aspect that refers directly to the historical-cultural world in which the text was produced, while the universal is the aspect that is constantly alive and capable of taking new forms at every reading. In other words it is the difference between the transient, particular meaning and the universal, overall meaning. To speak about the two aspects is a form of simplification because it separates them as part of a methodology for the purposes of study and analysis, and we have already seen that what is particular and specific can be transformed through interpretation into what is absolute and universal.

But some particular meanings, especially in the domain of legal rulings, lapse as the socio-historical environment changes and become historical semantic relics. That means we are dealing with three levels of meaning in religious texts: The first level of meaning is in texts that are just historical relics that cannot be interpreted metaphorically or in any other way, the second level is meanings in texts that can be interpreted metaphorically, and the third level is meanings that can be expanded on the basis of the “significance” that can be discovered from the cultural-historical context in which the texts operated and through which their meaning can be re-produced. Each of these three levels needs a special study, which would inevitably clash with religious discourse in its old and new forms alike.

(2)

Arab society before Islam was tribal and based on slavery and trade. The slave trade was an essential part of the economic structure. This reality was naturally reflected in the scriptures, linguistically, semantically, and with respect to law-making. In marriage laws, for example, the scriptures allowed a man to own concubines alongside up to four wives. The laws on illicit sexual activity set the punishment for slave women at half the number of lashes that free women would receive, and it said that offenders could atone for some offenses by manumitting a slave. It might be said that although Islam did not directly abolish slavery and the slave trade, it did impose some restrictions, and at the same time it opened the way to an eventual abolition. It also includes many recommendations of good treatment for slaves and of brotherhood between freemen and slaves. It even treated marriage to a Muslim slave of either gender as preferable to marriage to a free person who was an unbeliever or a polytheist. But certainly these many rulings were overruled and repealed by historical change when slavery as a socioeconomic system was consigned to the trash heap of history. Since that is the case, it would be impossible to insist on any of the previous meanings. In fact it would not even be useful to insist on the “significance” of the Islamic attitude toward slavery as it appears in the texts, except to point out how it was in the past. So it is strange that in religious education curricula in non-religious schools we find references to concubinage as one of the lawful ways in which a man can cohabit with a woman.⁷

One of the other areas that historical change has undermined and that religious thinking should discuss as a historical relic is the

question of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. In contemporary religious discourse we find strict Muslims insisting on the literal sense of the *jizya* poll tax on non-Muslims and on the need for non-Muslims to be submissive, while the moderates try to assert the principle of equality and insist that non-Muslims are part of the nation as equal citizens. Reliance on the literal meaning of the text certainly corroborates the position of the strict Muslims as opposed to the moderates, who do not offer any solution or any alternative interpretation of the texts. Muslims have understood that what the texts say about the need to kill polytheists, who are not covered by the term *Ahl al-Kitāb*, or “People of the Book,” arose in the way of a threat, and so there were no mass killings of those who did not embrace Islam and who were not People of the Book. The Muslim legal experts thought for themselves and ruled that Persians who were Zoroastrians or Manicheans, even the Hindus, were like the People of the Book by analogy, and they accepted the *jizya* from them. The motivation for the decision was the interests of the Muslim community, which would doubtless have suffered if the productive workforce in the conquered territories had been slaughtered en masse. Given the socio-historical situation and the way the legal experts saw the situation, *maslaha* favored taking *jizya*. Now that the principle of equal rights and duties regardless of religion, color, and gender has been established, it would be wrong to insist on the historical sense of *jizya*.

If, at the national and pan-Arab level, we are fighting against Zionist racism, which categorizes people according to their religions, if we oppose the idea of a Zionist state based on religious identity, and if we call for one state for people of all religions, then when it comes to religious discourse, how can we endorse the very

thing that we have rejected in our political discourse? Insisting on the literal sense of the texts in this area is not only contrary to the interests of the community, it also does serious harm to the country and to the wider Arab nation. What harm could be worse than dragging society back to a phase that humanity has left behind in its long struggle for a better world built on equality, justice, and freedom?

Other texts for which the obvious meaning must be considered as a historical relic include the texts on magic, the Evil Eye, the djinn, and devils. Some modern interpretations have tried to explain the djinn and devils through Freudian psychology in particular as psychological forces, but these interpretations have not arisen from any basis of knowledge about the nature of the texts so much as they have sought opportunistically to deny any conflict between religion and science.⁸ It is a contrived endeavor that still continues in religious discourse, though it has taken on other guises, such as “Islamicizing the sciences.” The difference between this latter guise and the earlier one is that the latter makes Islam the pivot for reconciliation, whereas the former made science the pivot.

Sorcery, the Evil Eye, the djinn, and devils are elements in a mental structure tied to a specific phase in the evolution of human consciousness, and the Qur’an has transformed the devils into obstructive forces and has made sorcery one of their instruments for dispossessing mankind: “They followed what the devils taught during the reign of Solomon. But it was not Solomon who disbelieved; it was the devils who disbelieved. It was they who taught mankind sorcery and what was revealed in Babylon to Harut and Marut. But these two taught no one without first telling them: ‘We are a mere temptation, so do not disbelieve.’ They learned from them how they could separate a man from his wife,

but they do no harm to anyone with their sorcery, unless God allows it. They learn something that harms them and does them no good. They know that he who deals in sorcery has no share in the Afterlife. Wretched is the price at which they sold their souls, if only they knew” (Qur’an 2:102).

What is significant is that all the Qur’anic references to sorcery occur in the context of historical stories, in the sense that the text speaks about sorcery as a historical relic, and the text’s attitude toward it is one of criminalization, as is clear from the text above. One cannot cite the sorcery that a Jew is said to have practiced against the Prophet, because the cultural environment at the time believed in sorcery. If we start with the premise that religious texts are human texts linguistically and culturally, then there is no need to demonstrate the humanness of the Prophet, with all its consequences in the way of belonging to an age, a culture, and an environment.

What applies to sorcery also applies to the phenomenon of *hasad*, “envy” or “the Evil Eye,” and the practices and rites associated with it, such as spells and talismans and belief in the power of the eye and the magical powers of language and so on. The fact that the word *hasad* appears in the Qur’an is not evidence that it really exists but only evidence that it exists in culture as a mental concept. Unlike the old hierarchical classification in traditional philosophy for the degrees of existence—material, mental, verbal, and then textual—modern linguistics believes that linguistic units do not refer to or bring to mind things that exist externally, but rather mental concepts.⁹ So language can refer to referents that have no material existence. In Arabic there are words, such as *‘anqā’*,¹⁰ that have no real, material referent. Those who seek to prove that phenomena such as sorcery and *hasad* exist by saying

that words referring to them occur in the Qur'an are falling into the error of conflating the signifier and the signified and into the old, traditional practice of conflating the material, mental, and linguistic levels of existence.

It is significant that the chapter of the Qur'an that speaks in detail about sorcery and *hasad* is chapter 113, the Meccan chapter entitled *al-Falaq* or "The Break of Dawn," which includes references to "the women who blow on knots" and to the evil of *hasad* and those who are envious. Other than in this chapter, we find that the word *hasad* is used metaphorically in the Qur'an. In chapter 2 it says, "Many People of the Book wanted to turn you back into unbelievers after you believed, out of envy in themselves after the truth had become clear to them. Forgive and pardon until God issues His command. God is capable of everything" (Qur'an 2:109). The word occurs in a similar context and with the same metaphorical meaning in chapter 4, verse 54, and in chapter 48, verse 15. These are the only places where the word occurs in the Qur'an, and three of the instances are in the metaphorical sense that is used in our living language, with one instance with the literal meaning associated with an array of beliefs and concepts of an ancient, quasi-mythical nature.

The semantic shift that the text brought about in the use of the word *hasad* is no doubt significant in showing the tendency of the text to change the structure of the prevalent culture and move it from the mythology stage to the threshold of reason. Any interpretation of religious texts that works in the direction of this shift is an interpretation from within the text and not imposed on the text from outside. But freezing a text at one stage, when the text wants to move on, using its own figures of speech, is an interpretation imposed from outside, or rather in fact a "coloring"

that is ideological, self-interested, and opportunistic, and that in our opinion is a forced interpretation.

A dangerous example of frozen religious meaning in contemporary religious discourse is in the invocation of the word *riba*, usury—a word that language has superseded in usage because the phenomenon it refers to no longer exists in economic transactions—to refer to a type of economic transaction that differs in structure and in the level of complication from transactions in which *riba* played a part. Without going into legal arguments over the motives and context of the ban on *riba*, let us say that invoking the word *riba* to mean what are called profits or interest payments in the complicated modern economic system is rather like insisting on wearing a galabiya in crowded, high-speed public transport and thereby running the risk of being run over by a vehicle on the public highway.

We should note that the two things—wearing a galabiya and invoking the word *riba*—are done in the name of the Islamic Awakening. It is an attempt to dress up the new and the modern in the guise of the past. It invokes *shūra*, consultation, as an alternative to democracy, despite the differences in the structure of the real world and the evolution of the mechanisms of political action. There are many examples of religious discourse insisting on using and reviving old language, to banish living language that reflects the real world and to make the real world seem unfamiliar, out of a preference for living in the past. Expressions such as international *istikbār* (arrogance) and the *mustadʿafūn fi al-ʿard* (those oppressed on Earth) have become common in referring to the relationship between big countries and little countries—expressions that reduce the complicated relationship to moral categories. The real struggle becomes invisible, and the lines are blurred.

To use the word *riba* to refer to profits and interest payments in modern economic systems is not just objective application of a ruling under Islamic law, because there are no such rulings. It is part of religious discourse's strategy to reshape the present in the molds of the past. As we noted when discussing sorcery and *hasad*, if the religious text tries to move the historical reality that it produced to a more developed stage by means of its own figures of speech, then religious discourse, by trying to revive the old language—the language of the text that has been overtaken by reality—is going against the text itself, even if it seems on the surface to be trying to conform to it.

In discussing modern banking systems religious discourse always resorts to the strategy of legal analogy, which in practice leads both to a ban and to legalization. The ruling depends on the nature of the reason that a legal expert using independent reasoning comes up with for banning *riba*. Since the legal expert's reasoning is merely an articulation of his attitude toward the real world and its problems, it should come as no surprise that supporters of the investment companies that were hostile to government intervention in their affairs should stand on the side of a ban and that the Mufti of Egypt and a few others should stand on the side of legalization. In fact banking systems do not deal in *riba*; they pay interest to depositors and take interest from borrowers, and modern banking systems have nothing to do with the *riba* that the Qur'an banned when it severely condemned those who make usurious loans. We should note also that the Qur'an did not condemn or even criticize needy people who are forced to borrow.

But when it comes to the capitalist economic system and the associated banking systems based on interest, the essential question is not posed by religious discourse. It is not hard to explain why the

question does not arise, or rather is deliberately suppressed, given that religious discourse, in the name of Islam, adopts the ideas of a capitalist economy with all its mechanisms, such as unrestricted property rights and a free market economy based on supply and demand, though these are ideas that are no longer current in such an extreme and crude form in contemporary capitalist societies. Yet again, the discourse contradicts itself because it contradicts the text that religious discourse falsely identifies as the source of its data.

(3)

When religious discourse starts from the literal content of the text and insists on a meaning that has been overtaken by culture and change in the real world, it clearly illustrates the ideological dimension in its insistence on confining the relationship between God and man to the “servitude” dimension. Servitude evokes the concept of divine sovereignty, on which it is based existentially and epistemologically, as we established in the first chapter of this study, when we discussed its political-ideological significance. We also dealt with its consequences, which include subjecting human beings to all kinds of restrictions that make them accept a socio-political system that saps their strength and dehumanizes them.¹¹

We shall note here that when religious discourse bases the theory of divine sovereignty on “servitude,” it has recourse to two contradictory strategies: to the strategy of entrenching oneself in the literal historical meaning of mankind’s servitude to God and,

by laying a basis for the concept of divine sovereignty, to the strategy of expanding semantically every reference in the Qur'an to governance or arbitration. With both strategies, the meaning of the texts is obscured by leapfrogging over the historical dimension and contemporary culture and environment, to take the meaning back to the time when the religious texts were produced.

Unlike the concepts and linguistic expressions that we have already discussed, servitude is a concept that still exists in culture and the word that refers to it is still used in language, although the socioeconomic system that it referred to when it was originally used no longer exists in practice. If the words *sorcery*, *hasad*, and *riba* are now just historical signifiers in that they signify the systems that they used to refer to in the past, then in their modern usage, especially in the case of sorcery and *hasad*, they hardly evoke the same concepts as they did historically.

In other words one can say, along with Abdul Qāhir al-Jurjāni, that the semantic transfer that happened to these words is of the concomitant variety, that is, it is not metaphorical. According to al-Jurjāni it is similar to the way a common noun or adjective is used to refer to people, and then it moves away from being a common noun or adjective and starts to denote a particular person, becoming a proper noun. This is a concomitant transfer in the sense that it is not temporary like a metaphorical transfer, which is not concomitant because the link between the metaphor and the real world is still evident.¹² When we call someone by a common noun or an adjective, we soon forget the original connotation because the connection between the new sense as a proper name and the original sense in language disappears. In language that is more contemporary, we would say that the words *sorcery* and *hasad*, now that their original senses have disappeared in modern

usage, belong in the category of dead metaphors whose meaning has shifted from one domain to another.

The word *servitude* is not a dead metaphor in modern usage, because the practice of humans owning, controlling, and exploiting other humans still exists in multiple forms in contemporary societies. It may be no exaggeration to consider racial discrimination of all shapes and forms, whether by whites against blacks in Africa and America or by Zionist occupiers against the indigenous Arabs, as a modern form of enslavement. Servitude takes many forms at different levels, but it does not mean complete ownership of the slave's life and body, as was the case under the socioeconomic system known as slavery.

In this way the semantic difference between using the word *servitude* in contemporary language and using the words *sorcery* and *hasad* is that the first is a living usage, a metaphor in which the link between the original meaning and the secondary meaning remains perceptible. When religious discourse confines the relationship between man and God to the "servitude" dimension, it does not have in mind the metaphorical sense of servitude; it insists on asserting the literal sense as slavery. This is the sense that is decisively confirmed when it is put in the context of the literal interpretation of the image of God the King with His throne, His footstool, His scepter, and His innumerable hosts.

Religious discourse overlooks in religious texts another dimension of God's relationship with man, especially with believers, and that is the relationship of love that the Sufi discourse is aware of and emphasizes. We do not want to argue with religious discourse here so much as try to map out an awareness of the types of meaning that exist in religious texts. If we discussed earlier the significance of the Islamic attitude toward slavery, although it was

an established socioeconomic system, the results that we derived at that point might have had their origins in the reality of the semantic analysis of the texts on which religious discourse relies to underpin and reinforce the concept of slavery.

There are some significant observations to be made on the Qur'anic usage of the word *'abd*, or slave. The first observation is that the word is used only three times in the sense of a slave who is owned and not free, once directly: "a freeman for a freeman, and a slave for a slave, and a female for a female" (Qur'an 2:178), once implicitly: "A male slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even one you like" (Qur'an 2:221), and in the third case defined by an adjective: "God gave an example: [on the one hand] a slave who is owned and powerless to do anything" (Qur'an 16:75). The second observation is that the plural form *'abid*, slaves, the form that is usually used in the literal sense, occurs only five times in the Qur'an, all of them in the context of denying that God could act unjustly by treating *'abid* unfairly (Qur'an 3:182, 8:51, 22:10, 41:46, and 50:29). The third observation is that the alternative plural form *'ibād* is the more common form in the Qur'anic text, and it refers to slavery in the literal sense in only one verse: "Marry off the single people among you and those of your male and female slaves that are fit to marry" (Qur'an 24:32). The fourth observation is that the most common sense of the word *'abd* in the Qur'an is *man*: "Therein lies a sign for every man (*'abd*) who is repentant" (Qur'an 34:9), "An insight and a reminder for every man (*'abd*) who is repentant" (Qur'an 50:8). When a possessive pronoun referring to God is added to the word, whether in its singular form or the plural form *'ibād*, it always means *man* or *mankind*, sometimes in the context of talking about prophets, as with "His [i.e., God's] *'abd*" or "Our *'abd*" or "one of Our *'ibād*" and so on.

The conclusion we can draw from these four observations is that the Qur'anic text does not frame the relationship between God and man on the basis of *'ubūdiyya*, slavery, but rather on the basis of "*'ibādiyya*," which would refer to the condition of being *'ibād*. The difference between the two is not trivial, so when the context was one of *'ubūdiyya*, slavery, the text needed to make a contrast between a freeman and an *'abd*, or include something to specify that the *'abd* was owned (the first observation). Maybe the Qur'anic text, in the way it framed the real world, made a semantic distinction between the two forms *'abīd* and *'ibād*, leaving the first form, which was more common in the culture, to signify non-believers, while allocating the second form to signify believers. The distinct usage of the two forms means that the Qur'an brought about a transformation in the meaning of *'ubūdiyya*, in that it came to mean that freedom did not come about through belief in the new doctrine, so the singular form *'abd* came to mean a man, whether free or owned.

There is no reason to believe that the distinction between the two plural forms, *'abīd* and *'ibād*, was known before the Qur'anic usage. There is also no reason to believe that the derivation of the word *'abd*, with the plural *'ibād*, from *'ibādiyya* had been proposed before the Qur'an. Everything the classical dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab* has to say about the distinction between the two usages is based wholly on the Qur'anic examples and *hadīths*. The dictionary says, "Abd: a human being, free or slave, who is seen as belonging to his almighty creator. . . . An *'abd* that is owned is the opposite of one that is free. Sibawayh said, 'It is originally an adjective.'" In order to emphasize that the sense of *'abd* as a human being is a sense associated with Islam, the author of the *Lisān al-'Arab* cites the *hadīth* that Abu Huraira narrated about the Prophet: "None

of you should say to his slave, 'My *'abd* or 'my *ama* [female slave]': You should say, 'My boy' or 'my girl'" and the author comments on this, saying, "This was to discourage owners from treating them arrogantly and thinking that they were slaves to them, since the one who deserves that is God Almighty, who is the lord of all *'ibād* and *'abīd*."

The semantic shift that the Qur'an brought about, as well as the way the texts insist on equality between men, and on faith and good works as the basis for discrimination between them, no doubt leads us to assert that Islam is against any tendency to reinforce the system of slavery. It might be no exaggeration if we were to say that, if we take into account the historical and socio-economic circumstances in which the texts took shape, we would find that the Islamic attitude is very progressive.

Since that is the case, extending the original orientation of the Islamic attitude must be the objective. In fact, moving in the same direction must be the test of legitimacy for independent thinking and the guarantee that the thinking is correct and sound. If the Islamic attitude toward slavery was, as we have seen, to move toward abolition, then the insistence in religious discourse on confining man's relationship with God to the "servitude" dimension in the literal, historical sense is at odds with the Islamic attitude itself. It is also at odds with the texts, in that it ignores the other dimension, which is the relationship of love. Religious discourse is not content only to treat metaphors as statements of fact, in a step that sets the sense of the texts in reverse, along with the attitude that they shape; it also deliberately suppresses one aspect of the meaning of the texts that define the relationship between God and man. If the relationship between God and man is a relationship of *'ibādiyya* rather than *'ubūdiyya*, an *'ibādiyya* full of love and

compassion—as a semantic analysis of the texts suggests—then there can be no explanation or justification for religious discourse’s theories other than ideology or self-justifying false consciousness, whether the discourse is ancient or modern.

The theory of divine sovereignty is a concept that is founded on religious discourse’s theories about the word *servitude*. But here the building does not collapse as soon as the foundations are demolished, since the two concepts have an independent root in religious discourse’s interpretation of religious texts. If the interpretative mechanism that lays the basis for servitude, as we said earlier, is “reinterpreting metaphors as statements of fact,” which is a kind of semantic “contraction,” since metaphor is an expansion of meaning, then religious discourse’s mechanism for interpreting the texts to lay a basis for the theory of divine sovereignty is the opposite of that: semantic expansion. But this semantic expansion does not rest on any kind of metaphorical expansion but rather on the basis of the phonetic similarity between two different words.

The texts that lay the basis for divine sovereignty (*hākimiyya*), according to religious discourse’s interpretation, refer to the related concept of *hukm* in the sense of deciding between parties that disagree over a particular issue: “But no, by your Lord, they do not believe until they make you judge [*yuhakkimūka*] in whatever disputes arise between them” (Qur’an 4:65). This is corroborated by the fact that some people objected when the Jews wanted to bring in Muhammad to arbitrate in one of their cases, an adultery case according to the experts on the circumstances of particular Qur’anic passages, although the idea of judging by the Torah was well known to them. “How is it that they ask you to judge [*yuhakkimūnaka*] when they have the Torah, which contains God’s judgment [*hukm*]?” (Qur’an 5:43).¹³

From the four verses in chapter 5 of the Qur'an (5:44-47), three phrases are taken out of context, and the verses as a whole are taken out of the context of the Qur'anic usage of the word and its derivatives, and then there is a semantic leap from *hukm* in the sense of deciding in particular cases between contesting parties to *hukm* in its political and social sense as "governance."

It was natural in the Arab society of the time that the Prophet should be invited to arbitrate in a dispute that arose between two people or two groups of people. Did they not disagree about the Black Stone in the Kaaba and agree to accept the verdict of the first person to walk in? But that did not mean giving him any jurisdiction outside the framework of the disagreement on which he was to rule. The Qur'an does not talk about *hukm* in the broad, universal sense that religious discourse proposes, and the semantic expansion that religious discourse performs for ideological purposes is not very different from the semantic expansion that Ibn Arabi, the famous Sufi, performs when he says that sweetness (*'udhūba*) can be one meaning of the word *'adhāb* (torment), just to provide textual authority for his Sufi attitudes, especially on the question of universal compassion encompassing all people, believers and unbelievers alike.¹⁴

In the two cases the interpretation does not depend on the semantic, linguistic content of the text or on the external context that defines its meaning. It depends on "coloring" from outside, and regardless of whether it is done with good or bad intentions, the outcome is the same: suppressing meaning for the sake of ideology. Whether the meaning is suppressed by semantic expansion or by semantic contraction, the result clashes with the text and the Islamic position loses its humane, progressive content.

(4)

We now come to the third type of meaning in religious texts. It is the type that takes us right to the heart of the process of independent thinking in the sense that we think is appropriate for the socio-historical context of texts. It is true that with the two previous types we were already talking about independent reasoning in interpreting texts, but the reasoning meant here is the kind associated with the technical sense confined to texts with legal implications. In our discussion of the first type of meaning, the type that has become merely a historical relic, we discovered how the dynamic of history and the evolution of human societies have overtaken some of the shari‘a rulings associated with the slave trade. But with the third type we now want to explore the meaning of some shari‘a rulings that occur in the texts, relying on the internal semantic context of the texts on the one hand and on the external socio-historical context on the other. Instead of relying on the mechanism of analogy—starting with the precedent and then moving to the new problem because the two share the same underlying rationale, which is also a question of independent reasoning, we will rely here on the distinction between “meaning” and “significance”—a distinction that is at play in the field of textual meaning in general, though in this case we will offer a special adaptation that suits the nature of the texts we are analyzing.¹⁵

The meaning is what is understood directly from the wording of the texts, and it results from analyzing their linguistic content in their cultural context—what those living at the same time as the text would have understood from it. In other words, meaning is the historical sense of texts in the context in which they took

shape, and it is the sense that does not provoke much disagreement among the initial audience and readers of the text. But stopping at the sense of the text alone means freezing the text at a particular point in time and turning it into a historical relic, and because, in that particular culture, the texts have a privileged status as knowledge, their meaning is not static. Often there is conflict between different social forces among the adherents of a religion, and disagreements over the meaning of texts is part of that conflict, even the most prominent manifestation of it.

Because the disagreement is usually intricate, complex, and multi-faceted, with many parties involved, knowledge is mixed up with ideology, and everyone continues to pursue the dispute on the battleground of sense and meaning, claiming, with varying degrees of caution, that their understanding and their interpretation is the “meaning” that is specifically intended. When meaning becomes mixed up with ulterior objectives, in religious or other texts, interpretation becomes a form of divination and, especially in the domain of religious texts, leads to the imposition of external, metaphysical ideas about God—the speaker of the text—onto the meaning of the texts, and the sense becomes the confirmation of something decided in advance, by making the texts say it rather than by analyzing them.

From the perspective of this study the difference between meaning and significance focuses on two aspects that are not separate. The first aspect is that the meaning, as we said earlier, is of a historical nature, that is, it can only be attained by accurate knowledge of the internal linguistic context and of the external socio-cultural context. The significance—although it cannot be disentangled from the meaning because it is contiguous and has the meaning as its starting point—is of a contemporary nature, in the sense

that it is the outcome of a reading in a time that is not the time of the text. If the significance is not in close touch with the meaning and does not have it as its starting point, then that reading moves into the realm of “coloring” the further it moves out of the realm of “interpretation.” The second aspect of the difference between meaning and significance—an aspect that is almost the outcome of the first aspect—is that the meaning enjoys a noticeable amount of relative stability, while the significance is of a dynamic nature, moving as the perspectives of the reading change, although its relationship with the meaning does, or should, restrict and direct that movement.

It might seem that saying that the significance must stay in close touch with the meaning and must have the meaning as its starting point is not very different from the way that analogy in Islamic jurisprudence depends on discovering the underlying rationale and then turning that discovery into a link that extends the meaning of the texts into similar cases that the texts do not address. In fact the resemblance is superficial and apparent, whereas the difference is radical and deep. The underlying rationale on which the legal experts hang their ruling might be a part of the meaning—that is, spelled out by the wording or by the intent of the text, and reaching it might require only reasoning on the part of the legal expert. In both cases the analogy is particular, that is, linked to a particular shari‘a ruling, and does not extend beyond that to other rulings. Besides, the analogy strategy, with this particular nature, extends to texts that are unrelated to shari‘a rulings. Legal experts in classical times did not investigate significance, and the furthest they went in that direction was to talk about overall objectives, which were restricted to preserving Islam, human life, reason, honor, and property. The word *preserve* here is

not without significance for what it says about the attitude of the classical jurist.

So significance does not refer to the overall objectives as the jurists defined them. It is instead the outcome of measuring the movement that the text brought about in the structure of language and thence in culture and the real world. When measuring that movement, one also has to define its direction, because some texts are not content merely to repeat the prevalent language and thereby immobilize reality and culture, but in their linguistic structure they revert to the past, repeating the past and taking culture and reality backward. It goes without saying that the yardstick for measuring the movement and direction of the text is a contemporary yardstick, which means that the significance is governed not only by the need for it to be in close touch with the meaning but also by the need for it to be forward-looking and focused on the modern world. That is why we said that the “significance” is dynamic—by virtue of being in close contact with the perspectives of the present and of the real world, even if its movement must also be governed by close contact with the meaning. So we said that the meaning is relatively stable, because discovering the historic meaning—how those living at the time understood the text—is not a process that is achieved once and then stops. Like the study of history, it is a continuous process of rediscovery. If the significance, as we have defined it, is radically different from the analogy of the jurists, it can, on top of that, be a more accurate gauge of the real intentions of revelation. The differences may become clear through a practical example.

The question of inheritance rights for females came up some months ago in the Egyptian press, and some people suggested adopting the Shi‘ite interpretation of law that treats males or fe-

males equally in inheritance matters or at least making it possible for an only daughter to exclude other more distant relatives from inheriting, as is the case with a son. Religious discourse was up in arms at this daring attempt at casuistry to circumvent the meaning of the texts. In the first chapter we discussed the nature of the principle that religious discourse raised at the time to close the issue, the principle that “there is no room for *ijtihād* on matters where a text exists,” and we exposed the semantic fallacy that it contains.¹⁶ We will now tackle the substance from the perspective of the distinction between meaning and significance.

There are two parts to the question of daughters’ share in an inheritance, and they are inseparable. The first part relates to the question of women in general and especially their status in Islam, and the second part relates to the question of inheritance as a whole, as reflected in the texts. The sense of the texts is clearly that they do not treat men and women equally in matters of inheritance or in fact in any legal matters, though they do treat them equally when it comes to religious observances and related rewards and punishments. On the question of inheritance there is no disagreement on the sense of the texts, because patriarchal and clannish relationships are the criterion for sharing out inheritances. Disputes over inheritance shares, which came to be called *furūd*, were decided based on patriarchal and clannish relationships.

But the sense implied directly by the texts is not the whole story, since it is natural that the legislative dynamic of the text should not clash with the conventions, traditions, and values that are fundamental parts of the cultural and social fabric. “Not clashing” does not mean that the texts do not shake up those values in a way that reveals the significance lurking behind the meaning. But the disruption should produce its effects only through change in

the real world and through whatever ideological or social struggle is associated with this change. In the first century of Islam, Arab-Islamic society tended toward reasserting the values, traditions, and conventions that the texts had tried to disrupt, so the scales in Arab culture have always been tilted toward immobilizing the religious meaning, while it lost sight of the possibility of discovering the significance, except in the case of some small groups whose influence remained limited.

Although religious discourse understands the gradualist aspect of Qur'anic discourse and of texts in general, it restricts this gradualist approach to things mentioned in the discourse (the banning of alcohol in three stages, the fact that some legal prescriptions were repealed, for example). But modern scholarship does not deal only with the things that texts mention explicitly; it also takes an interest in what is hidden, what is left unsaid, and what is implied in some way in the discourse itself. Gradualism in religious discourse, whether related or unrelated to law, shows the nature of the relationship between the text and the culture that produced it in two respects: The first respect is when the text takes shape and the culture/language is the subject and the text is the object, and the second respect is the formation respect—the linguistic structure of the text—when the relationship is reversed and the text becomes the subject and culture/language becomes the object.

What is left unsaid in the discourse is one of the strategies of the text in its formation respect, in that it is part of the semantic structure. What is left unsaid might be suggested implicitly in the discourse or it might be suggested by the external context. Both ways of suggesting what is left unsaid are found in the issues we are now discussing. We find what is left unsaid and suggested by the external context in women's issues in general, and especially in

the question of the portion of a legacy that should be allocated to women. We also find what is left unsaid and suggested implicitly in the text in the question of inheritance in general.

The meaning, and hence the significance, of many of the legal provisions relevant to women emerge only when we take into account the status of women in Arab society before the advent of Islam, when they were treated as legally incompetent entities that derived their value solely from their male relatives, whether fathers, brothers, or husbands. The evidence for this is immeasurable, and for the subject we are discussing it is enough to cite the fact that people objected to giving daughters a share of a legacy because they did not even give a share to the wife or to male children who were minors. The criterion was purely economic. They said, “We don’t give a share to those ‘who can’t ride a horse, can’t put up with fatigue, and can’t wound the enemy,’”¹⁷ which means that the criteria were the ability to be productive and associated ways of acting responsibly. There is no room here to provide citations to show that the status of women suffered from the man’s freedom to prevent her from marrying and to take a second wife, and if she was his wife, he had the right to divorce her and send her away as he wished for no reason other than to humiliate her. If a woman’s husband died, she had no right to remarry if a man from her late husband’s clan threw his cloak over her—a sign that he wanted to marry her, and she would remain hostage to this desire unless she redeemed herself by giving up everything she possessed.¹⁸

If that is the case, do not the ideas about women that occur in the texts, including the idea of giving them the half of a male share of an inheritance, have a significance that can be determined by measuring the nature and direction of the dynamic that the text created? It is a dynamic that goes beyond the lowly status of

women and moves in the direction of equality, both covertly and implicitly at the same time. The hidden aspect in the question of women and their equality with men only comes to light when the overall dynamic of the text is discovered, and the meaning of the hidden aspect is brought to light fully here when it is put in the context of the dynamics of the text and its position on slavery, which we dealt with earlier. Overall the underlying message is to liberate humanity—men and women—from the bonds of social and intellectual encumbrances and thus to promote “reason” as the antithesis of “*jāhiliyya*/ignorance,” justice as the antithesis of injustice and freedom as the antithesis of slavery. Those values could only be covert and implicit, because the text cannot impose on the real world something that is wholly at odds with the real world; it can only move it little by little. The trajectory of independent reasoning on the question of women’s inheritance rights may now have been defined, as indeed for all women’s issues that come up in our society and that religious discourse insists on discussing within the confines of the “meaning” of the texts, ignoring the “significance” of the texts. In this way religious discourse condemns history to inertia and condemns the meaning of the texts to stasis.

But just as we discussed the question of women’s inheritance rights from the perspective of the status of women in pre-Islamic society, the question must also be discussed from the other perspective: the question of inheritance in Islam as a whole. The sense suggested by the texts divides up the shares according to patriarchal, clan-based relationships, which is natural in a society that was based on a clan structure. The verse on inheritance in chapter 4, verse 11, of the Qur’an contains a phrase that suggests what has been left unsaid: “As for your parents and your children—you

know not which of them is more deserving of benefit from you,” an expression that can be read in two ways. In the first reading it responds to those who object to letting daughters inherit, on the grounds that it would not be beneficial, which is the reading that matches the context explained in *asbāb al-nuzūl*, that is, the external context, which is not at odds with the syntax. The second reading links it with the last sentence in the verse (“God is omniscient and wise”) and sees it as merely a reference to the ignorance of mankind as compared with God’s knowledge, isolating the verse from the external context. In this second version the immediate sense is upheld and the significance is ignored, and if the phrase was really intended as a response to those who objected, and therefore to be read in the first way, then the second reading sets aside “expediency” as a criterion in matters of inheritance.

In fact the things that are left unsaid and are implied in matters of inheritance go beyond that to shake up even “clannishness” as a criterion, because a non-Muslim is not allowed to inherit from a Muslim, however closely they are related. This is an undeniable setback to clan affiliation as the basis for inheritance. Because Islam is anxious to ensure that wealth does not accumulate, it prevents any one person, however closely related to the deceased, from receiving both his or her formal share of the inheritance and a separate bequest from the deceased on the side. But the meaning of what is left unsaid about inheritance does not stop here. It takes an unprecedented step toward fairness and wealth redistribution: “We prophets do not bequeath a legacy. Whatever we leave is alms to be given away in charity,” as the saying of the Prophet says. It is true that the text refers to a special case and is not universal, but the significance is clear to anyone who wants to see it. But religious discourse, which advocates following the Prophet’s example

in matters that are much more trivial than this and more specific to the Prophet, such as dress, facial hair, and eating habits, insists here that the remark is a special case. No one asks about the rationale behind the principle, maybe because asking would make public what has been left unsaid in the matter of inheritance, when this was meant to be suppressed.

Religious discourse does not conceal questions because it is unaware of them, but rather because bringing them up is at odds with the interests of the powers that it speaks for and supports. A few months ago it brought up the question of inheritance taxes and estate duties and suddenly discovered that they were *harām* and that the state had no right to “inherit” alongside the heirs specified in shari‘a. Religious discourse would not have made this amazing discovery unless the dominant and policy-making class was inclined to oppose the social justice that is the objective of shari‘a precepts and that is the significance of the meaning of the texts. In the final analysis, by stopping at “meanings,” religious discourse ends up taking the world backward and simultaneously freezing the texts—an outcome that cannot be endorsed because it undermines the very reason for its existence.

Notes

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Introduction to His Life and Work

1. In 2011, a volume of essays on Qur'anic Studies was dedicated to Abu Zayd's memory; it also contains what is likely the last piece he wrote before his passing. See Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Toward Understanding the Qur'ān's Worldview: An Autobiographical Reflection," *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* 2, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 47–87.

2. A useful overview is provided in M. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004).

3. A German translation was published in 1996, while, in the same year, part of the book also appeared in Dutch. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Politik und Islam: Kritik des Religiösen Diskurses* [Politics and Islam: Critique of religious discourse], translated by Cherifa Magdi (Frankfurt: Dipa Verlag, 1996); Nasr Hamid Aboe Zaid, *Vernieuwing in het islamitisch denken: Een wetenschappelijke benadering*, translated from the Arabic with an introduction by Fred Leemhuis and Rob Leemhuis (Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 1996).

4. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam: Zoals verteld aan Navid Kermani*, translated by Vreni Obrecht (Haarlem: Becht, 2002), 21 (my translation).

5. An examination of this concept can be found in Sayed Khatab, "Hakimiyya and Jahiliyya in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 2 (2002): 145–70.

6. On the ideas of the early Hasan Hanafi, see Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam* (London and New York: Hurst Publishers and Oxford University Press, 2011), 105–73.

7. For a well-informed introduction to their thought, see D. Gimaret, "Mu'tazila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs. Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0822, accessed July 6, 2016.

8. See I. Poonawala, "Ta'wil," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7457, accessed July 6, 2016.

9. Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam*, 100.

10. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 9th ed. (Beirut and Casablanca: Center for Arab Culture, 2014). To my mind, Abu Zayd selected the Arabic word *mafhūm* because it contains the meanings of both "concept" and "understanding." Thus the title of the book can be rendered in English as "The Concept of the Text" or "Understanding the Text." For this reason I have decided to use the Arabic title throughout instead of using an English translation.

11. The introduction is dated February 18, 1987. Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 7.

12. Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam*, 118.

13. For more on these cases, see Rachid Benzine, *Les nouveaux penseurs de l'islam* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004), 147–78.

14. For a detailed discussion of *hisba* in relation to the Abu Zayd case, see Susanne Olsson, "Apostasy in Egypt: Contemporary Cases of *Hisbah*," *Muslim World* 98, no. 2 (2008): 95–115.

15. Aside from Abu Zayd, consisting of Mohammed Arkoun, Hasan Hanafi, and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri. Carool Kersten, "Al-Jabri in Indonesia: The Critique of Arab Reason Travels to the Land below the Winds," in *Islam, State, and Modernity: Mohammed Abed Al Jabri and the Future of the Arab World*, edited by Zaid Eyadat, Francesca Corrao, and Mohammed Hashas (London: Palgrave, forthcoming).

16. Anke von Kügelgen, "A Call for Rationalism: 'Arab Averroists' in the Twentieth Century," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16 (1996): 97–132.

17. See also page 119 of this volume.

18. Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 9. See also Stefan Wild, "Die andere Seite des Textes: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd under der Koran," *Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 256–61.

19. Abu Zayd, *Mijn Leven met de Islam*, 91.

20. Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 17; Abu Zayd, *Mijn Leven met de Islam*, 93.

21. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-Ittijāh al-‘aqli fi al-tafsīr: Dirāsāt fi qadiya al-majāz fi al-Qurʾān ‘inda al-Muʿtazila* [Rationalism in exegesis: Studies in the problem of the metaphor in Qurʾān in the Muʿtazila], 7th ed. (Beirut: Center for Arab Culture, 2011); Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Falsafat al-taʾwīl: Dirāsātun fi taʾwīl al-qurʾān ‘inda Muḥyī al-Dīn bin ʿArabi* [The philosophy of hermeneutics: A study of Ibn Arabi's hermeneutics of the Qurʾān], 6th ed. (Beirut: Center for Arab Culture, 2007).

22. Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 237–41; see also pages 138–40 of this volume.

23. Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam*, 41.

24. Ibid., 101.

25. Abu Zayd, *Maḥbūm al-Nass*, 9.

26. Ibid., 25; see also page 78 of this volume. For a further exposition of this dialectic and the resulting “humanistic” hermeneutics, see Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, “The Qur’an and Man in Communication,” inaugural lecture for the Cleveringa Chair, November 27, 2000. Available at www.let.leidenuniv.nl/forum/01_1/onderzoek/lecture.pdf; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, “Rethinking the Qur’an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics,” inaugural lecture as Extraordinary Professor of “Humanism and Islam,” May 27, 2004. Available at www.stichtingsocrates.nl/Zayd/SocratesOratie%20Nasr%20Abu%20Zayd.pdf. See also Sukidi, “Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and the Quest for a Humanistic Hermeneutics of the Qur’an,” *Die Welt des Islams* 49, no. 2 (2009): 181–211.

27. See Carol Kersten, “Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Mohammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in Indonesia: A Study in Reception Theory,” panel paper at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, California, November 19–22, 2011.

28. Aside from the apparatus of references in Abu Zayd’s publications, of special importance are also Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Siza Qasim, eds., *Anzimat al-‘alāmāt: Madkhal ila al-Simiyūtiqa* [Systems of signs: An introduction to semiotics] (Cairo: Dar Ilyas al-Asri, 1986); Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Ishkāliyyat al-qirā’a wa-‘āliyyat al-ta’wil* [The problematic of reading and tools for interpretation], 8th ed. (Beirut and Cairo: Center for Arab Culture, 2008).

29. Abu Zayd, *Maḥbūm al-Nass*, 10–11.

30. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 47.

31. Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 170–71.

32. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 95.

33. Ibid., 55–56.

34. Ibid., 58.

35. Ibid., 59. Eagleton may dismiss this juridical approach, but because of the centrality of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) within the traditional Islamic sciences, the procedural approach of legal hermeneutics highlighted in the work of Thomas M. Seebohm is also relevant to the present account. See Seebohm, “Facts, Words, and What Jurisprudence Can Teach Hermeneutics,” *Research in Phenomenology* 16, no. 1 (1986): 25–40; Seebohm, *Hermeneutics: Method and Methodology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004).

36. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 60.

37. Ibid., 61.

38. Ibid., 62.

39. As had been the case with Izutsu, Abu Zayd also made a failed attempt to meet Gadamer in person. Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam*, 104–5.

40. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 63.

41. In relation to Abu Zayd’s interest in Shi‘ite theology, it is relevant to point to the resemblances and affinities between the work of Nasr Abu Zayd and Iranian (Shi‘ite) intellectuals, such as Mojtabah Shabestari and Abdolkarim Soroush, spelled out in Navid Kermani, “From Revelation to Interpretation: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and the Literary Study of the Qur’an,” in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur’an*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004), 181, 186.

42. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 92–93.

43. Ibid., 94.

44. Jakobson’s “Linguistics and Poetics” was a key source for Abu Zayd’s *Maḥmūd al-Nass*.

45. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 87.

46. Peirce is not only referenced in *Mafhūm al-Nass*, his classes of signs are also included in Abu Zayd and Qasim's *Anzimat al-ʿalamat*.

47. Benveniste was very important for fellow heritage thinker Mohammed Arkoun. See Carool Kersten, "From Braudel to Derrida: Mohammed Arkoun's Rethinking of Islam and Religion," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 4, no. 1 (2011): 34, 36.

48. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 67.

49. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī wa taʾsīs al-idiyulūjiyya al-wasatiyya* [Imam al-Shafiʿi and the foundation of the ideology of the middle path] (Cairo: Madbouli, 1996).

50. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-marʾa fi khitāb al-azma* (Cairo: Dar al-Nusūs, 1994); *Dawāʾir al-khawf: Qirāʾa fi khitāb al-marʾa* (Beirut and Casablanca: Center for Arab Culture, 2004).

51. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-tafkīr fi zaman al-tafkīr* (Cairo: Dar Sina liʾl-Nashr, 1995); Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-nass, al-sulta, al-haqīqa*, 5th ed. (Beirut and Casablanca: Center for Arab Culture, 2006).

52. Abu Zayd, *Mijn leven met de Islam*, 119; Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass*, 9–28. It was also this text that was selected from *Mafhūm al-Nass* and translated into Dutch in Abu Zaid, *Vernieuwing in het islamitisch denken*, 52–80.

Introduction

1. Translator's note: This is a reference to the Islamic "investment companies" that collected more than \$1 billion in deposits from Egyptians, mainly in the 1980s, and subsequently collapsed. Most of the depositors lost their money.

Chapter One: Contemporary Religious Discourse

1. Translator's note: I have chosen to translate the Arabic term *hākimiyya* with the phrase *divine sovereignty* wherever the author is referring to the theory that God exercises, or should exercise, political power in the world.

2. See the statement in the Cairo newspaper *al-Abrām*, January 2, 1985. See also the commentary by Youssef Idris in *al-Abrām*, January 9, 1989, and the commentary by Hilmī Murād in *al-Sha'b* newspaper, January 10, 1989.

3. 'Ādil Husayn (Adel Hussein), the previous issue of *al-Sha'b*. See also 'Alā' Muhyī al-Dīn (the amir of one of the Islamic groups), Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiyya bayna al-'Unf wa al-Hiwār [The Islamic group between violence and dialogue], *al-Sha'b*, January 14, 1989, and 'Ādil Husayn's commentary on it in the same issue.

4. *Al-Sha'b*, January 17, 1989.

5. *Al-Abrām*, December 21, 1989.

6. Look at the evolution of Qutb's thinking through the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with the July 1952 revolution on one hand, and Qutb's relationship with the Brotherhood on the other. Hassan Hanafi, "Athar al-Imām al-Shahīd Sayyid Qutb 'ala al-Harakāt al-Dīniyya al-Mu'āsira" [The influence of the martyred imam Sayyid Qutb on contemporary religious movements], in *Al-Dīn wa-l-Thawra fī al-Islām*, vol. 5, *al-Harakāt al-Dīniyya al-Mu'āsira* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbouli, 1988), 167–200.

7. For some of the reactions to the interview, see "Rif'at al-Sa'id, La Ya Shaykh Sha'rāwī" [No, Sheikh Sha'rāwī], in *al-Ahālī*, January 23, 1989.

8. Fu'ād Zakariyya, *Al-Haqīqa wa-l-Wahm fī al-Haraka al-Islāmiyya al-Mu'āsira* [Reality and illusion in the contemporary Islamist movement], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1986), 32.

9. The writer Ahmed Bahgat tried to defend the novel, but his defense ended in support of the idea of not publishing it in Egypt, or “republishing it,” as he put it. See his daily columns in *al-Abrām*, “Sandūq al-Dunya” [World box], February 7 and 8, 1989. What is significant in this respect is that Naguib Mahfouz’s story “‘Abath al-ʿAqdār” (“The Absurdity of the Fates,” published in English as “Khufu’s Wisdom”) was published by Dār al-Shurūq li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ in a simplified edition for children after the title was changed to “‘Ajāʾib al-ʿAqdār” (“The Wonders of the Fates”) because, Bahgat said, the fates cannot be absurd.

10. *Mainichi Daily News* (Japan), no. 23705, February 16, 1989, p. 1.

11. In distinguishing between the strategies and the premises, especially in religious discourse, we offer here a procedural proposal that might be discussed: The intellectual premises in this discourse represent the foundations that the discourse does not deny when debating its rivals, and to discuss them or deny them would be seen as heretical. The attitude of the discourse toward the strategies is not so strict: The discourse might deny that it resorts to some of these strategies, especially when they are clearly incompatible with scholarly discourse.

12. Fahmi Howeidi (Fahmī Huwaydī), *Al-Qurʾān wa-l-Sultān* [The Qurʾan and the sultan], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 7.

13. *Ibid.*, 20.

14. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya bayna al-Jumūd wa-l-Tatarruf* [The Islamic Awakening, between stagnation and extremism], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār el-Shurūq, 1984), 224.

15. *Ibid.*, 207.

16. *Ibid.*, 92.

17. *Ibid.*, 216.

18. See Sayyid Qutb, *al-Mustaqbal li-Hādihā al-Dīn* [The future belongs to this religion], an unmarked edition and probably a photocopy

of the Dār al-Shurūq edition, since the page numbers match. Chapter entitled “al-Fisām al-Nakid,” 27–54.

19. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya*, 110, 73.

20. Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahmān, “al-Mister Tūmās wa Hiwār fawqa al-Sahāb” [Mister Thomas and a dialogue above the clouds], *Al-Sha‘b*, January 24, 1989.

21. Sayyid Qutb, *al-Islām wa Mushkilāt al-Hadāra* [Islam and the problems of civilization] (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1967), 52; see also 73, 87, and 89. On how religious discourse understands Marxism, see Fu‘ād Zakariyya’s response to Mustafa Mahmūd, *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya fī Mizān al-‘Aql* [The Islamic Awakening judged by reason] (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1987), 22, 197–222. See also his response to Mohamed Omara (Muhammad ‘Umara) on his understanding of Darwinism: *al-Islāmiyyūn al-Mu‘āsirūn wa Thaqāfat al-Gharb* [Contemporary Islamists and the culture of the West], *Al-‘Arabī* magazine (Kuwait), no. 362 (January 1989).

22. Hassan Hanafi’s two books to a large extent reflect this approach, an approach that needs extensive discussion in another study. See the second chapter of this book.

23. Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tabāfut al-Falāsifa* [The incoherence of the philosophers], 4th ed., edited by Sulaymān Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1966), 139.

24. Ibid., 135, 139.

25. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘ālim fī al-Tariq* [Milestones on the way] (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1968), 14.

26. See Fahmi Howeidi (Fahmī Huwaydī), *al-Qur’ān wa al-Sultān*, 16; Sayyid Qutb, *Hādihā al-Dīn* [This religion], al-Ittihād al-Islāmī al-‘Ālamī li-l-Munazzamāt al-Tullābiyya [International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations] (Indianapolis, 1970), 66–87.

27. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, 13; see also Sayyid Qutb, *al-Islām wa Mushkilāt al-Hadāra*, 173–74, 176.
28. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, 67.
29. Sayyid Qutb, *fī Zilāl al-Qurʾān* [In the shade of the Qurʾān], 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ihyaʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), pt. 6, 149.
30. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya*, 66.
31. Translator's note: Qurʾān 8:22.
32. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya*, 30.
33. Ibid., 37.
34. Ibid., 42.
35. Ibid., 40.
36. Fahmi Howeidi (Fahmī Huwaydī), *al-Qurʾān wa-l-Sultān*, 18–19.
37. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim ʿala al-Tarīq*, 40.
38. Sayyid Qutb, *Hādha al-Dīn*, 38; Fahmi Howeidi (Fahmī Huwaydī), *al-Quran wa-l-Sultān*, 20–21.
39. See Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya*, 96.
40. See Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, 127–29.
41. Ibid., 130–31.
42. Ibid., 144, also 152.
43. Taken from *al-Wahda al-Islāmiyya* [Islamic unity] magazine (Iran), no. 107 (February 1989).
44. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, 52–53.
45. Ibid., 118–20, also 160.
46. This is clear in the comments that were published in the newspapers on the interviews that Shaʿrāwī gave on television, both the interview mentioned earlier on his attitude toward the 1967 war and in the fatwas that he issued on medicine and organ transplants. See

for example Salāh Muntasir in his daily column in *al-Abrām*, “Mujar-rad Ra’y” [Just an opinion], February 13 and 14, 1989.

47. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘ālim fī al-Tarīq*, 8.

48. Ibid., 167.

49. Ibid., 89.

50. Ibid., 91.

51. Ibid., 60.

52. Ibid., 16–22.

53. Ibid., 19, also 161–64.

54. Ibid., 150–51.

55. Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* [History of the prophets and the kings], 4th ed., edited by Muhammad Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1979), pt. 5, 48–49.

56. *The Fatwas of Ibn al-Salāh*, 34–35, cited in Mustafa ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Tamhīd li-Tārīkh al-Falsafa al-Islāmiyya* [An introduction to the history of Islamic philosophy], 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdha al-Misriyya, 1966), 85–86.

57. Sayyid Abul A‘la Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, 1st ed., translated by Al-Ash‘ari (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1963), 29.

58. Sayyid Qutb, *al-Mustaqbal li-Hādihā al-Dīn*, 8; see also *Hādihā al-Dīn*, 20–22.

59. Abul A‘la Maududi, *al-Mustalahāt al-Arba‘a fī al-Qur‘ān* [The four terms in the Qur‘an], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-‘Arabī lil-Tabā‘a wa al-Nashr wa at-Tawzī‘, 1986).

60. *Hādihā al-Dīn*, 15–16.

61. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘ālim fī al-Tarīq*, 81.

62. Ibid., 62.

63. Ibid., 59.

64. Ibid., 24–25.

65. See Hasan Hanafī (Hassan Hanafī), *Aṭhar al-Imām al-Shahīd Sayyid Qutb ʿala al-Harakāt al-Dīniyya al-Muʿāsira*, 169–70.
66. Ibid., 191–97.
67. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿrakat al-Islām wa-l-Raʾsmāliyya* [The battle between Islam and capitalism], 4th ed. (Jeddah: al-Dār al-Saʿūdiyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1969), 101.
68. Ibid., 61, also 109.
69. Ibid., 104.
70. Ibid., 116.
71. Ibid., 73.
72. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, 21, 28–29, 33.
73. Ibid., 45.
74. Ibid., 136.
75. Ibid., 23.
76. Ibid., 25.
77. See Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sabʿa al-Islāmiyya*, 58, and Fahmī Howeidi (Fahmī Huwaydī), *al-Tadāyyun al-Manqūs* [Inadequate piety], 1st ed. (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām li-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1987), 247–52.
78. Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, pt. 5, 66.
79. Ibid., pt. 5, 65.
80. M. Rafique Afzal, ed., *The Case for Pakistan*, National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad (Lahore: Ripon Printing Press, 1979), xi–xii.
81. Translator’s note: Quʾran 50:29.
82. See Fuʾād Zakariyya, *al-Haqīqa wa-l-Wahm fī al-Haraka al-Islāmiyya al-Muʿāsira*, 74.
83. Youssef Idrīs (Yūsuf Idrīs), in his column in *al-Abrām* on January 16, 1989, wrote, “We want someone who can solve the problem of Egypt for us or find a solution. . . . As for us solving

our problem by ourselves by our own efforts, really grabbing hold of it and not waiting for revelation to descend from heaven, because that's another issue that we will not cast judgment on or think about, or in other words, that we can't deal with." Then he asks, "How did this feeling take shape and grow in us—this certain feeling that we are too small and too weak to solve our own problems?" Our analysis of the concept of Hākimiyya may contain some answers to these questions.

84. Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥbūm al-Nass, Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* [The concept of the text, a study in the Qur'anic sciences] (Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, n.d.).

85. Translator's note: This is the technical term in Arabic for this kind of independent and sometimes speculative reasoning.

86. See his daily column "Yawmiyāt," in *Al-Abrām*, December 28, 1988.

87. The religious page in *Al-Abrām*, January 27, 1989.

88. Translator's note: *Maslaha* is also often translated as "public interest," "common good," or "benefit," but the scope of the concept is disputed. Rather than take sides in that debate, I shall reluctantly retain the Arabic expression in this passage.

89. See note 87.

90. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'ālim fī al-Tariq*, 57.

91. *Ibid.*, 95.

92. *Ibid.*, 96.

93. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī): *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya bayna al-Jumūd wa-l-Tatarruf*, 89–90.

94. Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risāla*, edited and annotated by Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 14, 19, 21, 22.

95. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr, Dirāsa fī Qadiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'inda al-Mu'tazila*, 164.

96. Jārallah al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Haqā’iq Ghawāmid al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-‘Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* [The revealer] (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), pt. 1, 50.

97. Ibn al-Munayyir, *al-Intisāf fīma Tadammnanahu al-Kashshāf min al-I’tizāl* [A fair account of what the Kashshāf says about the Mu‘tazila], in the margins of the Kashshāf, 49.

98. Muhyī al-Din Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* [The Meccan revelations], vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1900), 692. On the basis of this distinction, Ibn ‘Arabī denied the chronological significance of all the verses of the Qur’an in which the name of God occurs in conjunction with the verb *kāna*.

99. Ibid., vol. 1, 164.

100. Ibid., vol. 1, 189.

101. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* [Mastering the Qur’anic sciences], 3rd ed. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babī al-Halabī, 1951), pt. 2, 16. See also al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* [Proof in the Qur’anic sciences], 2nd ed., edited by Muhammad Abū al-Fadl Ibrahim (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa li-l-Tabā‘a wa-l-Nashr, n.d.), pt. 2, 217.

102. Ibid., pt. 2, 4.

103. “Raw text” is a concept that Hasan Hanafi (Hassan Hanafi) often brings up in his writings. By it he means text in isolation from any interpretation. It is a purely hypothetical status, not very different from the metaphysical status of the text.

104. For the distinction between the two kinds of revelation, the revelation in the Qur’an and the revelation in hadiths, see Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* [The introduction] (Beirut: Dār Ihya’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 98–99.

105. Youssef al-Qaradawi (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī), *al-Sabwa al-Islāmiyya*, 162.

106. Ibid., 164.

107. A saying that Hassan Hanafi often repeated in his writings, borrowed from a line of poetry.

108. Translator's note: This marks the introduction of the concept of *tajdid*, usually translated as "renewal" and a central concept in the debate over the relationship between majority-Muslim countries and the rest of the world. For the sake of conformity with other writings I have retained the term *renewal* despite the inadequacies that should become evident from the discussion.

109. See the book on religious education for the second grade, p. 100, and the book on religious education for the third grade of secondary school, p. 31, quoted by Hāmid 'Ammār, "On School Books," *al-Ahālī* newspaper, February 2, 1989.

110. Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* [A comprehensive explanation of the interpretation of Qur'anic verses], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1945), pt. 4, 101.

Chapter Two: Tradition Interpreted or Colored

1. See al-Sayyid Ya'qūb Bakr, *Nusūs fī Fiqh al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya* [Texts in the Fiqh of the Arabic language] (Beirut: Dār al-Nahdha li-l-Tabā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1971), pt. 2, 121.

2. Al-Zarkashī (Badr al-Din Muhammad bin Abdullah), *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* [Proof in the Qur'anic sciences] 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1984), 148.

3. See my study on the Islamic left.

4. Hassan Hanafi, *al-Dīn wa-l-Thawra fī Misr* [Religion and revolution in Egypt], *al-Haraka al-Dīniyya al-Mu'āsira* [Contemporary religious movements] (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1988), pt. 5, 219.

5. *al-Yasār al-Islāmi* [The Islamic left], no. 1, Cairo, 1981, 46.

6. *Min al-ʿAqida ila al-Thawra* [From doctrine to revolution] (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1988), pt. 1, 79. From now on this source will be referred to in the body of the text between parentheses, with the part first followed by the page number after the slash.
7. The writings that were published in six volumes under the title *Al-Din wa-l-Thawra fi Misr* [Religion and revolution in Egypt].
8. See *Qadāyā Muʿāsira* [Contemporary issues], 1st ed., *Fī al-Fikr al-Gharbi al-Muʿāsir* [On contemporary Western thought] (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1982), pt. 2, 22.
9. *Al-Turāth wa-l-Tajdid* [Tradition and renewal] (Cairo: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī li-l-Baḥth wa-l-Nashr, 1980), 14.
10. Ibid., 9.
11. Ibid., 11.
12. Ibid., 12.
13. On the difference between *al-turāth* and *al-mawrūth*, see Tayyib Tizīnī, *Min al-Turāth ila al-Thawra* [From tradition to revolution], 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1979), pt. 1, 637.
14. *Al-Turāth wa-l-Tajdid*, 21.
15. See Tayyib Tizīnī, *From Doctrine to Revolution*, 631.
16. *Al-Turāth wa al-Tajdid*, 15.
17. Ibid., 22.
18. Ibid., 25.
19. Ibid., 17.
20. Ibid., 23.
21. See *Dirāsāt Islāmiyya* [Islamic studies], 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1982), 299 onwards.
22. See *Al-ʿIntisār fī al-Radd ʿala ibn al-Rawandī al-Mulhid wa ma Qasada bihi min al-Kidhb ʿala al-Muslimīn wa-l-Taʿn ʿalayhim* [Victory in response to Ibn al-Rawandi and the lies and attacks he directed at Muslims], edited by Nyberg (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Misriyya, 1925), 13–14.

23. *Qadāyā Mu‘āsira* [Contemporary issues], pt. 2, 18.

24. Muhammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī, *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* [A critique of the Arab mind], 3rd ed., *Takwīn al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* [The formation of the Arab mind] (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-‘Arabiyya, 1988), pt. 1, 289.

Chapter Three: Reading Religious Texts

1. See al-Ṭabarī (Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī), *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ṭa’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān* [A comprehensive explanation on the interpretation of the verses of the Qur’an], edited by Mahmūd Muhammad Shākīr, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1969), pt. 1, 238–349.

2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin (New York and London: McGraw Hill, 1966), 9–13.

3. See Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-‘Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr, Dirāsa fī Qadiyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur’ān ‘inda al-Mu‘tazila* [The rational approach in interpretation, a study of the question of allegory in the Qur’an according to the Mu‘tazila] (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 1982), 180–89; see also Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass, Dirāsa fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* [The concept of the text, a study in the Qur’anic sciences] (Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, n.d.), pt. 2, ch. 3.

4. Wāhidī Nishapūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* [The causes of revelation], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Matba‘at Mustafa al-Bābi al-Halabi, n.d), 76.

5. Ibid., 197–98.

6. See Muhammad al-Ghazālī (Mohamed al-Ghazali), *al-Sunna al-Nabarwiyya bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Hadīth* [The Sunna of the Prophet: Between the jurists and the people of Hadīth], 6th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, n.d.), 14, 71.

7. See *al-Tarbiya al-Dīniya lil-Saff al-Thāni al-Thānawi* [Religious education for the second grade of secondary school], Egyptian

Ministry of Education, Cairo, Egypt, p. 100, cited in Hāmid ‘Ammār, *Harwla al-Kutub al-Madrasiyya* [On schoolbooks], *al-Ahālī*, February 1, 1989.

8. See Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 1, 223–24, 329–30.

9. De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 65–67.

10. Translator’s note: This is a mythical creature similar to a gryphon.

11. This is what we discussed in the first chapter of this book: “Contemporary Religious Discourse.”

12. See Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafājī, *Asrār al-Balāgha, Sharhun wa Ta’liqun* [A commentary on al-Jurjānī’s Secrets of Rhetoric], 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1972), 123–28.

13. See Nishapūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* [The causes of revelation], 111–23.

14. See Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* [The Meccan revelations] (Beirut: Dār Sādir, n.d.), a facsimile of the edition published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, Cairo, 1329 AH, vol. 3, 462–63.

15. We have relied here on E. D. Hirsch’s theory. See Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 1–10.

16. See chapter 1 of this book, pages 109–35.

17. Nishapūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* [The causes of revelation], 82–84.

18. Ibid., 42–45.

Index

Names starting with al- or el- are alphabetized by the subsequent part of the name.

- ‘*abd* (slave), Qur’anic use of term, 258–60
- Abd al-Jabbār ibn Ahmad: *al-Mughni fi Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa-l-‘Adl* (The Book That Makes Sufficient in Matters of Divine Unity and Justice), 193, 204
- Abduh, Muhammad, 12, 13, 148, 150, 227
- Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, 228
- abrogation, 231–32
- absolutism, 227–28, 234–35
- Abu Huraira, 259–60
- Abu ‘Ubayd bin Sallām, 114
- Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid: college education of, 6–7; in contemporary Arab thought, 11–14; death of, 10; doctoral studies on mystic Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi, 7–8, 20; early education of, 4–5; exile abroad, 1–2, 10; family of, 4–5; *hāfidh* status of, 4; international recognition of, 2; in Japan at University of Osaka, 8–9; on knowledge and power, 20; life of, 4–10; marriage to Younis dissolved by court order, 2, 10; master’s thesis on Qur’anic metaphor in Mu‘tazilite thought, 4–5, 20; Ministry of Communications job, 5; Muslim Brotherhood and, 5–6; publications on leading Islamic figures and schools of thought, 20; text criticism and discourse analysis by, 20; translations of works of, 273n3; *turāthiyyūn* member, 2; University of Cairo professorship controversy, 1; University of Humanistics (Utrecht) professorship, 10; University of Khartoum

- Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid (*continued*)
 professorship, 8; University of
 Leiden professorship, 10; Univer-
 sity of Pennsylvania dissertation
 research by, 7–8; works by, 8; *An-
 zima al-‘alamat* (with Siza Qasim,
 ed.), 278n46; *Circles of Fear: Read-
 ing the Discourse about Women*, 20;
Critique of Religious Discourse, 6,
 11, 12, 20–21, 33; *al-Islām al-Siyāsī:
 al-Usus al-Fikriyya wa-l-Ahdāf al-
 Amaliyya* (Political Islam: Intel-
 lectual Foundations and Practical
 Objectives), 33; *Mafhūm al-Nass*,
 12, 14, 20, 21, 274n10, 278n52; *The
 Problematic of Reading and Tools
 for Interpretation*, 20; “Religious
 Discourse and Scholarly Method”
 (introduction to *Mafhūm al-Nass*),
 21; *Systems of Signs*, 20; *Text,
 Authority, Truth*, 20; *Thinking in
 the Time of Anathema*, 20; “Toward
 Understanding the Qur’ ān’s
 Worldview: An Autobiographi-
 cal Reflection,” 273n1; *Woman in
 the Discourse of Crisis*, 20. *See also*
 hermeneutics
- al-Afghani, Jamal al-Din, 148, 149–50,
 227
- Afghan *mujahideen* resistance to
 Soviets, 2–3
- agency. *See* human agency
- Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāa* (The People
 of the Sunna and Community),
 124
- el-Ahwany, Abdel Aziz, lectures given
 in commemoration of, 33
- Ain Shams events (1985), statement
 issued by religious scholars after,
 37–40
- Al-Abram* (Cairo newspaper), 229,
 279n2, 284n83, 285n86
- Al-Azhar Islamic University (Cairo),
 5
- al-Alem, Mahmoud Amin, 3
- Ali bin Abi Talib (Imam Ali), 78, 82,
 97, 112, 168
- alienation, concept of, 213
- Alif* (journal), 33
- allegorical vs. definitive religious texts,
 114–15, 117
- alms, giving of, 65–66
- Amin, Ahmed, 227
- Amin, Qasim, 227
- Amr bin Dīnār, 114
- ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās, 60, 82, 98
- Angel Gabriel, 239–40
- anthropomorphism, 176, 202–3, 213
- apostasy, 56
- al-Aqqad, Abbas, 227
- Arab Averroists, 11
- Arab-Israeli conflict, U.S. controlling
 role in, 102–3
- Arab-Israeli War (1967), 2, 6, 41–42
- Arab nationalists, 28
- Aristotle, 55, 222–23
- Arkoun, Mohammed, 3, 275n15, 278n47
- art. *See* prohibition on theatre, musical
 performances, and the arts
- al-Asadabadi, Abd al-Jabbar, 172
- asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of
 revelation), 231, 232–33, 271
- Ash ‘ari thought: abandoning law
 of casualty, 61, 62; Abu Zayd’s

- criticism of, 17, 54, 196; "acquiring deeds" concept of, 175; coloring and, 207–12; compared to and superseding Mu 'tazilite thought, 17, 83, 114–15, 185, 189–90, 193, 196, 204, 207, 210; death, beliefs about, 211–12; on definitive statements and therefore not requiring interpretation, 114–15; deterministic stance of, 54; divine unity and, 189, 193, 194; divine will as focus of, 211; exclusion of humanity by, 86; formal logic structure of theology of, 199; on God, 176, 191, 193–94, 244; Karamiyya on role of God compared to, 200; nihilism of, becoming materialistic, 208; renewal and, 185, 193; segregation between the divine and the human assumed by, 238; structural consciousness approach and, 188
- Ataturk, Kemal, 69–70, 100
- atheism, 42, 57, 84, 100, 105, 230
- authorial meaning, 17, 137
- authoritarianism, 101–2, 157
- authority of reason on which revelation is based, 127–28
- Averroes (Ibn Rushd), 11, 91, 150, 184
- Avicenna (Ibn Sina), 91, 159
- Awakening, 27, 46, 253
- al-Azhar, Sheikh of, 27, 39–40, 44, 96, 110; *The Brotherhood of Devils*, 96
- backwardness of Islamic world, explanation for, 70, 76–77, 99, 126, 160, 196, 230, 262, 272
- Baghdad, fall of, 83
- Baha' Eddin, Ahmed, 109, 285n86
- Bahgat, Ahmed, 280n9
- banking systems, 253–55
- Benveniste, Émile, 19, 278n47
- British aggravating power struggle in India between Muslims and Hindus, 98
- al-Bukhari, 121
- Cairo University: Abu Zayd as associate professor at, 9; Abu Zayd as student at, 6–7; Abu Zayd in professorship controversy at, 1; Taha Husayn's firing, 9
- Camp David agreements, 43
- capitalism, 150–51, 255
- causality in nature, 54, 194
- censorship of works of literature and arts, 43–46
- Christianity/Christians: based on men of religion exercising divine authority, 78; censorship and, 46; compared to Islam, 214, 240–41; in Middle Ages, 50; as minority in Egypt, 100; mixed into interpretation of Qur'an and Islamic theology, 62; nature of Christ, beliefs on, 238–40; secularism's development in reaction to, 56; split between Church and science, 90; treatment as second-class citizens in Muslim world, 132; Virgin Mary, nature of, 239–40
- classical works: ignoring objective facts and circumstances in, 137; *nass* in, 115–18; as psychological reserve for masses, 169

- code of religious texts, 237–38, 241
- coloring. *See* interpretation
- communism, 41–42, 92, 229
- Companions of the Prophet, 52, 62, 135
- conciliation, 219
- concubines, 248
- conflating ideas and religion, 35, 39, 49–53, 59, 66, 74
- confusion created by religious discourse, 57–58, 62, 72, 80
- consciousness construct, 173–83; coloring and, 203–4, 209–10; doctrine of divinity and, 213; evolutionary consciousness vs. structural consciousness, 186–88; Hegel's law of development of consciousness, 175, 179; intellectual consciousness and cosmological texts, 202–3, 205–6; nihilistic aspect of, 204–5; revolutionizing consciousness of masses, 183; semantic shift facilitating mediation of consciousness, 201–3; suited to every time and place, 186
- consensus and group unity, 187, 202
- contemporary religious discourse:
 - absolutism of, 227–28, 234–35;
 - concealment and exposure of texts by, 109, 112, 227; effect on *Gamāʿāt* discourse, 47; entering into dangerous zone of “speaking in God's name,” 50; extremism, attempt to define, 66–67; focus on superficialities, 65; hostility toward secularism, 54; metaphorical interpretations, use of, 245; *muhaqqiqūn* (those who have made discerning inquiry) title applied to, 65; radical disagreement not tolerated in, 66; reliance on tradition and secondary texts, 62, 82–84; on scientific achievements of Muslim scientists, 229. *See also* literalism; strategies used in discourse
- cosmic texts, 204–6
- “creating deeds,” 175, 198
- cultural-historical context of religious texts, 237–38, 247. *See also* socio-historical aspect
- cultural rejectionism, 223–24
- Darwinism, 57, 58
- de-anthropomorphism, 176
- death, beliefs about, 211–12
- deification: leaders deified by masses, 170; ruler deifying himself, 100
- delusion in religious thinking, 104, 132, 240
- democracy, 6, 93, 94, 98, 193, 253
- determinism (*jabr*), 54, 60–61, 175, 197, 198
- deviation from God's path, 73, 75. *See also* secularists and secularism
- dialectical relationship, 163–64, 234
- Dilthey, Wilhelm, 8, 16
- discourse. *See* contemporary religious discourse; moderate vs. extremist discourse; strategies used in discourse; *specific sects*
- divine justice. *See* justice
- divine knowledge. *See* knowledge
- divine sovereignty, 5, 81–106, 279n1; depriving humans of ability to judge for themselves, 105, 230;

effect on believers, 105–6; human language in divine discourse, 86; human usurpation of right to make laws and regulate lives, 103–4; Islam and, 55; *jāhiliyya* encroaching on God's authority, 77–78; meaning of, 87; monopolization of power and, 101–3; not submitting to form promoted by religious jurists, 87, 105; Qur'an's "sovereignty" verses, 127; Qutb on, 89, 96, 150–51; related to knowledge/ignorance and power/impotence, 103, 105, 128; reliance on authority of texts, 127–28; representatives of authority and, 88; servitude based on, 104, 128, 130, 255–57, 261; socio-political consequences from promotion of concept of, 99; as sole source to explain all phenomena, 35, 55–59; in struggle for power between Muslims and Hindus, 98; "There is no god but God," 88; Umayyads introducing idea of, 60
 divine unity vs. divine justice, 189, 193–95, 196–98
 divine vs. human path, 85, 211
 doctrine distinguished from religious discourse, 35, 53–59
 dogmatism. *See* intellectual dogmatism
 dogmatology, 183
 dualism, 161, 240
dunyawīyya used as term to describe secularism, 58
 dynamism. *See* reform and change

Eagleton, Terry: *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 15, 16–18, 19, 277n35
 early religious scholars and Muslims: changes in religious rulings of, 232; dependence on authority of, 35, 39, 51, 59–66; distinguishing types of interpretation, 142; doctrinal attacks as sole source of danger to early Muslims, 213; exempt from human biases, 52; extremism in alignment with, 67; poetry and proverbs used by, 203; on proper ways to acquire religious learning, 52–53; reality of their society as identical to time of the Prophet, 79; texts and, 109, 112, 130. *See also* secondary texts
 economic justice in Islam, 93
 economic motivation of human behavior, 58
 economic system and banking systems, 253–55
 Egyptian Philosophy Association meeting discussion of Hanafi's paper *Revelation and the Real World*, 232–33
 Egyptian Revolution (1952), 6, 93, 149
 elections as part of freedom, 93
 Emanation, 203, 204
 Enlightenment discourse, 29–30; allowing parishioners to choose whether to see religiously subversive film, 46; Arab renaissance and enlightenment in the nineteenth century, 227, 230; evolving historical phenomenon and,

- Enlightenment discourse (*continued*)
 231; exclusion from authority of
 tradition and the early Muslims,
 59; failure of, 230–31; in Islamic
 left's discourse, 183; tradition used
 in opportunistic way, 236
- epistemology, 136, 141–42, 181, 193, 197,
 212, 214, 222, 255
- equality: monotheism and, 88; regard-
 less of religion, color, and gender,
 249–50; revelation's insistence on,
 131, 260; women's rights, 133–34,
 266–71
- eschatology, 191
- European civilization/Western
 culture: Abu Zayd's aligning
 Islamic tradition with West-
 ern thought, 13; Arab regimes'
 subordinate relationship with
 Western "Other," 223; backward-
 ness of Islamic world in compari-
 son to, 160; contempt for, 70, 126;
 imperialism and, 55, 70; influence
 from Muslims' system of rational
 thought, 63, 126, 229; introducing
 nation state into Islamic world, 72;
 Islamic system's incompatibility
 with, 13, 150; Middle Ages, 50, 63;
 middle class, 230; partitioning
 of Islamic world by force, 72–73;
 phenomenalism vs., 182; Renais-
 sance analogy to Egyptian cultural
 phase, 158; Renaissance as freeing
 from church's authority, 84; split
 between Church and science in,
 90; Tradition and Renewal project
 to state position toward, 224.
- See also* Christianity/Christians;
 Middle Ages
- Evil Eye, 250–51
- evolutionary consciousness vs. struc-
 tural consciousness, 186–88
- exoteric vs. esoteric, 146, 147, 207
- exploitation, struggle against, 33, 93
- extremism: attempt to define, 66–67;
 consequences of, 132; tolerance
 toward, 67
- al-Farabi, 159
- fatwas: on author Salman Rushdie, 45;
 on medicine and organ trans-
 plants, 282n46
- feudalism, 91
- fiqh* (jurisprudence), 277n35
- Foda, Farag, 2
- Ford Foundation, 7
- fraud in name of Islam, 31, 187
- freedom: of action, 198; Mu'tazili
 theme of, 193; in struggle against
 oppression and exploitation, 33; of
 thought, 82
- Free Officers Movement (Egypt), 6
- free will, 198, 206. *See also* determin-
 ism (*jabr*)
- Freudianism, 57, 58, 250
- fundamentalism, 156–57. *See also*
 Islamic right
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 8, 17, 18, 19,
 277n39; *Truth and Method*, 16
- al-Gamā'āt al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic
 Groups), 2, 36; conditions giving
 rise to, 134; denouncing infidels
 and enforcing public morals

through force, 37–38, 40–41; giving up on real world, 135; Khawārij's similarity to, 134; Maududi as influence on, 96; political use of by 1970s regime, 101; prohibition on theatre, musical performances, and arts, 43–44; religious scholars permitted to discuss or write about, 46–47, 66; similarity to Hanbali school, 47; texts and, 106, 134–35

al-Ghazali (d. 1111 AD), 204

al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, 83

al-Ghazali, Muhammad, 38, 40, 45, 61–62, 83, 246; *Hādha Dinunā* (*This Is Our Religion* column), 44–45

gnosticism, 84, 204

God: attributes of, 195, 197, 201; cosmological argument for existence of, 205–6; doctrine of divinity, 213; existence of world owed to, 53–59; existence separate from human consciousness, 214; expressions “in name of God,” 180; Karamiyya sect on God's role in history, 199–200; Mu‘tazilite vs. Ash‘ari views on, 176, 191, 193–94, 244; religious thinking focused on, 232; speaking through revelation, 214. *See also* divine sovereignty; divine unity vs. divine justice

government: considered infidels due to communist views held in 1960s, 41–42; government sects vs. opposition sects, 188, 200; regime of 1970s relying on religious support in suppressing its enemies, 100–101; religious texts as controlling discourse of, 100; ruler deifying himself, 100; Shi‘i system, 171–72. *See also* political discourse

gradualism, 107, 268

Greek philosophy, 55, 62, 91

hadiths, 52, 71, 91, 108, 112, 120–25; Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāa (The People of the Sunna and Community) and, 124; analysis of substance of, 124–25; contact between narrators, determination of, 123; defined, 122; details creating mythical images in, 243; revelation in, distinguished from in Qur‘an, 286n104; *riwāya* (narration) applied to, 122–23; scholarly and moral qualifications of each narrator, importance of, 123–24; on slavery, 259–60; thunder, explanation of, 228–29

hākimiyya (absolute right of sovereignty), 86, 261, 279n1, 285n83. *See also* divine sovereignty

Hanafi, Hasan, 274n6, 275n15, 287n107; on academics using terminology of “determinism” and “free will,” 198; criticism of, at philosophical association meeting, 232–33; as Egyptian intellectual colleague of Abu Zayd, 3; on hypothetical status of text, 286n103; Ibn Arabi as shared interest with Abu Zayd, 11; Islamic left, introduction of term by, 148; on Islamist left, 29, 152; leaving leftist camp, 156; on literalism, 205; phenomenological work of Husserl and, 16; as professor of

Hanafi, Hasan (*continued*)

Abu Zayd, 7; on revelation, 218–21; on *ta'wīl's* similarity to hermeneutics, 8; teaching style of, 7; works by: *Min al-Aqida ila al-Thawra* (From Doctrine to Revolution), 29, 152, 153–55, 172, 281n22; *Revelation and the Real World*, 232–33; *al-Turāth wa-l-Tajdid* (Tradition and Renewal), 152, 281n22; *al-Yasār al-Islāmi* (The Islamic Left), magazine published by, 152

Hanbali school, 47

hasad (Evil Eye) mentioned in Qur'an, 251–52

Hegelian law of development of consciousness, 175, 179

Heidegger, Martin, 8, 16, 18, 19, 57

heresy accusations, 40, 105, 230

heritage thinkers. *See turāthiyyūn*

hermeneutics: as Abu Zayd's specialty in Qur'anic studies, 8, 11; on differing views of texts at different times throughout history, 16; Eagleton's influence, 16–18; Gadamer's influence, 17; reception theory and, 19; *ta'wīl's* similarity to, 8, 13

Hindus, 98–99, 249

Hirsch, E. D., 16–17

hisba cause of action against Abu Zayd, 9–10, 275n14

historical dimension: construct of consciousness vs. historical construct, 173–83; definition of, 106–7; historic relics in religious texts, 247, 248–52, 263, 264; ignor-

ing or dismissing, 36, 74–81, 106; Islamic left and, 185–86, 199; Qutb's awareness of, 110–11; of revelation, 215, 221; in sociological sense, 16, 142–43; structuralism vs. historicism, 186; tradition and, 196–97, 199. *See also* consciousness construct; time gap

bukm (deciding between disputing parties), 261–62

human agency, 54; denial of, 56, 104; in formulation of divine, Mu ' tazilite vs. Ash ' ari views on, 191–94; giving meaning to new ideas, 126; hermeneutic thinking focused on, 232; paying price for deviation from God's path, 73–74. *See also* servitude and slavery

human biases and prejudices, 52–53, 78

humanistic hermeneutics, 15, 19, 214–15

human knowledge. *See* knowledge

human welfare (*maslahah*), 110, 285n88

Hussein, Adel, 151, 279n3

Hussein, Taha, 9, 90, 227; *Fial-Shir al-Jāhili* (*On Pre-Islamic Poetry*), 29–30

Husserl, Edmund: *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 15–16, 18

Ibn Abbas, 97–98

Ibn al-Munayyir the Sunni, 115

Ibn al-Qayyim, 47, 64

Ibn 'A ' rabi, Muhyi al-din, 7–8, 11, 20, 114; *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (“Meccan Openings”), 14; Arab culture and, 194; on *nass*, 115–16, 117, 286n98; on sempiternality,

- 207; on universal compassion in semantic shift of, 262
- ibn Hanbal, Ahmad, 12
- Ibn Khaldūn, 286n104
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 12
- Ibn Rushd (Averroes), 11, 91, 150, 184
- Ibn Sina (Avicenna), 91, 159
- Ibn Taymiyya, 12, 47, 81, 222–23
- idealism, 134, 174, 182, 188, 208
- ideas: conflating ideas and religion, 35, 39, 49–53, 59, 66, 74; as independent of their creators and history, 174–75; as products of totality of historical circumstances and social realities of the age, 226; reality and, 217; sociological analysis of origins of, 188, 195–96, 204. *See also* consciousness construct
- Idris, Youssef (Yūsuf Idrīs), 284–85n83
- ijtihād*: *ḥadīth* texts and, 125; *nass* and, 108–10, 112, 117, 118, 267
- Illuminationist philosophy, 203, 204, 223
- images in religious texts, literal meaning of, 243–44
- imperialism, 55, 70, 91–92, 149, 157, 246
- independent thinking/reasoning: *ḥadīth* texts and, 122, 125; reduced to choose among opinions of legal experts, 126, 133; religious texts and, 59, 104, 108–11, 119, 263; in shari‘a law, 133
- Indonesia, influence of Abu Zayd in, 10
- infidels, denouncing of, 38–41; divine sovereignty and, 55, 105; Egyptian leaders in 1960s denounced as communists, 41–42; as fundamental element of religious belief, 68; Muslim Brotherhood and, 89; Qutb denouncing Nasser as, 93; religious discourse resorting to, 128; secularism and, 56; state’s ideology and, 42–43
- inheritance practices, 109, 133–34, 266–71
- intellectual dogmatism, 35, 39, 50, 66–74
- intellectual premises of religious discourse, 81–135. *See also* divine sovereignty
- intellectuals, 6
- International Islamic Literature Seminar (1990), 229
- interpretation: coloring of texts, 137, 141–46, 148, 150–51, 160, 168, 189, 199–212, 220, 253, 262, 265; definition of, 136–37; history of religious thinking in field of, 228; Islamicization of, 228; meaning vs. significance, 16, 143–46, 151, 160; metaphorical, 244–47, 255–62; need to use facts and data to uncover meaning, 143; original historical meaning distinguished from significance derived from meaning, 143–46; productive readings, 144–48, 215; reading between the lines, 180; tendentious readings, 141–44, 145, 173; true reading and true cognitive activity, 143–44, 147. *See also* Qur’an, interpretation of; *ta’wīl*
- intuition, 218

- Iran, revolution in, 2, 156–57, 170, 223
- Iser, Wolfgang, 19
- Islam: based on dogma, 96; Christianity compared to, 214, 240–41; exclusion from dynamics of history, 68; “Islam is the Solution,” 29, 68, 166; “Islam is truth and justice,” 40; military opposition from rivals, 131; only one truth allowed in, 80; pluralism and, 50–51; “real Islam” or “true Islam,” 51–52, 74, 160, 235; *turāthiyyūn* (heritage thinkers) view of, 3; view of non-Muslims in, 64. *See also* Islamic theology; Qur’an, interpretation of; *specific sects and types of discourse*
- al-Islām al-Siyāsī: al- Usus al- Fikriyya wa-l- Ahdāf al- Amaliyya* (Political Islam: Intellectual Foundations and Practical Objectives), 33
- Islamic Empire and end of the caliphate, 69–70
- Islamic heritage, scholarly approach to, 15, 236
- Islamicization, 228–30, 250
- Islamic Jihad in Occupied Palestine, 72
- Islamic left, 28–29, 136–225; analogy of Egyptian cultural phase to European Renaissance, 158; Ash‘ari thought used in structuring theology, 185, 207, 210; coloring of, 137, 141–46, 150–51, 160, 168, 189, 199–212, 220; condemning obedience to imam, 169–70; daily lives guided by classical tradition, 159; deferring to Sunni beliefs over Shi‘ite, 171; discourse structure of, 177; divine unity vs. divine justice and, 195; geographic community of, 171; goals of reconstructing traditional Islamic scholarly disciplines, 183–99; hostility toward Ash‘aris, 200; introduction of term, 148; Marxism associated with, 153; Mu‘tazilite theology, promises to return to, 185, 196, 210; nationalist movement and, 149, 154; new labels with modern meaning for old labels, 189–91, 198; past-and-present relationship as concept of, 164; philosophical discourse and, 148, 156; in post-1952 revolution Egypt, 149; priorities of religious discourse, 148–63; real world and objectivity in thinking of, 170–71; rejection of historical method of analysis, 178–79; religious texts as subject of, 137; response to perceived dangers, 148–49; revelation and, 219; sciences involved in, 139–40; secularists favored by, 156; shortcomings of, 158–59, 196, 212–13, 224–25; social conflict aspect of leftist discourse, 187; socio-political circumstances of production of texts, 137; specious (Shi‘ite) interpretations, 140; syncretism and, 153–58, 172; *taqiya* in political discourse of, 153, 155–56; tradition and, 159, 162–68; “We sought refuge in texts and the thieves came in,” 126, 222. *See also* consciousness construct; renewal

Islamic right: compared to Islamic left, 165; dialectical relationship ignored by, 164, 217; Islamic left members joining, 149, 151–52; rise in counter movement to Islamic left, 153; slogan of “Islam is the Solution,” 166. *See also* Islamist movement

Islamic theology: leftist discourse describing, 191–92; Mu‘tazila as founders of, 185; pluralism as part of, 62, 112; socio-historical aspect of, 175, 185, 195–96, 212; structure similar to philosophy, 184. *See also* Ash‘ari thought; Mu‘tazilite thought; Shi‘ite theology; Sunni/Sunnism

Islamist movement: activists’ persecution of Abu Zayd, 2, 9; based on isolationism, introversion, and self-sufficiency, 28; politics viewed as connected with religion, 43; secularism described as *dunya-wiyya* by, 58; syncretism and, 154; totalitarianism of, 3; *turāthiyyūn*’s counter-narrative to, 2. *See also* Awakening

Izutsu, Toshihiko, 8, 17, 277n39

al-Jabri, Mohammed Abed, 3, 275n15

jāhili (pre-Islamic) thought, 70, 98

jāhiliyya regime, 76–77, 151; as antithesis of divine sovereignty, 78; as antithesis of justice and reason, 270; atheism, polytheism, and gnostic Sufi tradition in, 84; con-

version to Islam requiring people to detach from their life in, 79–81; Islam intended to destroy foundations of, 132

jahl: justice as antithesis of, 81; use of term in contemporary speech vs. in pre-Islamic Arabic, 75–77

Jakobson, Roman, 18

Jesus Christ, nature of, 238–40

Jews, 71, 251, 261. *See also* Zionism

jihad, 64, 110

jizya poll tax on non-Muslims, 249

Joseph’s dreams, interpretation of, 138–39

al-Jurjāni, Abdul Qāhir, 256

justice: divine unity vs. divine justice, 189, 193–95, 196–98; economic justice in Islam, 93; “Islam is truth and justice,” 40; monotheism and, 88; Mu‘tazilite theology and, 185, 189, 193, 194, 244; primary role in Islam, 81; religious discourse predicated on, 66; social justice, 94; in struggle against injustice, 33

Kaaba, Muhammad the Prophet at, 38

Karamiyya sect, 199–200

Kermani, Navid, 277n41

Khalafallah, Muhammad Ahmed, 9, 13, 14, 30

Khalid, Khalid Mohammed, 151

Khawārij, 60, 96, 97–98, 134

al-Khayyāt, Abū al-Husayn, 193

Khomeini, Ayatollah, 45

el-Khouli, Amin, 13, 14, 30, 227

al-Kindi, 159, 184

knowledge, 14, 187–88, 215–16, 233. *See also* consciousness construct; ideas

lahw al-hadith (idle talk), expression in Qur'anic verses, 245–46

The Last Temptation of Christ (film), 46

law and regulation: divine sovereignty usurping human right to make laws and regulate lives, 103–4; human welfare given precedence, 110; independent thinking and legislative texts, 104, 108–9; interests of mankind covered in God's law, 111; natural laws, 54–55; obedience to texts, 110; Qutb on duty of Islamists to reject so-called Islamic law in Egyptian society, 54; socio-historical aspect of applying, 107–8, 133. *See also* shari'a law; social laws

Leemhuis, Fred, 10

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 8, 18

linguistics: evolution of, 130, 256–57; phonetic similarities among words, 260–61; as specialty field of Abu Zayd, 5, 7; speech and, 237–38; texts as linguistic constructions, 129–30. *See also* meaning vs. significance; semantic shift

Lisān al-'Arab (dictionary), 113, 138, 259

literalism, 12, 205, 243–45, 249–50, 257

literary studies, Abu Zayd's work as, 15

literature and the arts: ban on singing, 246; extremist views of young people toward, 67; Islamization of, 229–30; moderate vs. extremist discourse on, 43–45; modern use to

express contemporary needs, 203; patronage of, 85. *See also* prohibition on theatre, musical performances, and the arts

Lotman, Yuri (Juri), 15, 19

love, 129, 257, 260–61

magic. *See* myth, magic, and superstition

Mahfouz, Naguib, 2, 46; works by: “‘Abath al-'Aqdār” (“Khufu's Wisdom”), 280n9; “‘Ajā'ib al-'Aqdār” (“The Wonders of the Fates”), 280n9; *Awlād Hāratina* (*Children of Gebelawi*), 44

Mahmud, Zaki Naguib, 3

Malikites, 91

Mamluk rulers, 69

Ma'moun, 83

Manshia incident, 89

marriage laws, 132, 248, 269

martyrdom, 45, 134, 170

Marxists/Marxism, 28, 56–58, 153, 229, 281n21

maslaha (human welfare), 110, 285n88

masses: deification of leaders by, 170; ignorance of, 102; Islam for, 51; Islamic left's appeal to, 152; mobilization of, 153; radical reform rooted in, 158; reform of 1970s and, 100; revolutionizing consciousness of, 183; social conflict as doctrine guiding, 187–88. *See also* psychological reserve of the masses

materialism, 42, 57, 208

Maududi, Abul 'Ala, 84–87, 89–90, 96, 98–99

al-mawrūth, 288n13

meaning vs. significance, 16, 143–46, 151, 160, 191, 263–72; contemporary nature of significance, 264–65; dynamic nature of significance, 265; historical nature of meaning, 264; measuring the movement and direction of the text, 266; modern world as realm of significance, 266; stability of meaning, 265; wording of texts giving meaning, 263–64. *See also* stasis (freezing of texts)

Mecca, conquest of, 38

Meccan vs. Medinan phase, 131

media's role, 36, 42, 126–27, 199

men: extremist views on grooming, dress code, and behavior for, 67; marriage laws for, 132, 248; patriarchal society, 267, 270

mercantile society, 130, 131, 244–45

message: prophecy vs., 216–17; religious texts in divine code, 241

metaphorical interpretation, 7, 130, 194, 201–2, 205, 214, 243–47, 255–62
metaphysics: in Ash‘ari vs.

Mu‘tazilite construct, 189–90; delusion of dualism and, 240; God and, 264; historical facts and, 75; incipience of world depending of, 206; interpretation excluding to favor instead the historical, 215; interpretation steeped in, 30, 217; metaphysical status of raw sacred text, 119, 286n103; myth, emphasis placed on by metaphysical origins, 126–27; Nature and natural

sciences, 218; in philosophy's structure, 184; religious discourse and, 105–6; religious thinking and, 232; in renewal of old Mu‘tazilite construct, 189–90; science and, 71; in theology's structure of humanities vs. physical sciences, 185–86

Middle Ages, 50, 63

middle class, 188, 230

“mixed sources” entering into interpretation of Qur‘an and Islamic theology, 62–63

moderate vs. extremist discourse, 34–35; agreement on attitude toward literature and the arts, 43–45; agreement on denouncing others as infidels, 41–43; agreement on use of force to enforce public morals, 37–38, 41, 43; marginal difference between, 40; on non-Muslims, treatment of, 249; strategies used in, 35–36, 134; violence and, 39. *See also* strategies used in discourse

modernizing of Islamic thought. *See* semantic shift; time gap

monotheism, 87–88

Moussa, Salama, 90, 227

Mu‘āwiya, 60, 82, 98

mufasssīrūn (orthodox practitioners), 11
al-Muhakkima, 97

Muhammad (the Prophet): Arab nationalism and, 95–96; on bequests to be used as alms for charity, 271–72; compared to Virgin Mary, 239–40; deciding between disputing parties, 261–62; destruction

- Muhammad (the Prophet) (*continued*)
of idols and condemnation of
paganism by, 38; humanness of,
251; revelations of and shaping
of scriptures by, 11, 49, 119–20; on
slavery, 259–60; Sufism and, 116;
thunder, explanation of, 228–29.
See also *hadīths*
- Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘i. See
al-Shāfi‘i
- muhagiqūn* (those who have made
discerning inquiry), 65
- Muntasir, Salāh, 283n46
- music. See prohibition on theatre, mu-
sical performances, and the arts
- Muslim Brotherhood: Abu Zayd
and, 5–6; assassination attempt on
Nasser and, 89; divine sover-
eignty and, 94–95; influence and
financial support of, 6; reaction
to 1952 revolution and army-led
government, 41, 94–96, 99, 279n6;
totalitarianism of, 3, 5. See also
Qutb, Sayyid
- Mu‘tazilite thought: Abu Zayd’s in-
terest in, 11, 20; *Ahl al-Sunna wa-
l-Jamāa* (The People of the Sunna
and Community) eliminating, 124;
Ash‘ari orthodoxy compared to
and superseding, 17, 83, 114–15, 185,
189–90, 193, 196, 204, 207, 210; col-
oring and, 207–10; in competition
with atheistic and skeptical trends,
85; decline of, 83; on definitive and
therefore not requiring interpreta-
tion, 114–15; as a dominant Qur’an
commentary, 11; on God, 176, 191,
193–94, 244; intellectual theory
of, 176; Islamic left promising to
return to, 185, 196, 210; justice and,
185, 189, 193, 194, 244; Kashshāf on,
286n97; literalists vs., 12, 243–44;
“man creating his deeds,” 175;
materialist approach and idealism,
208; metaphor and, 7; naturalist
school of, 62; on Qur’an as created
in time and not eternal, 240–41;
rationalist approach of, 11, 150;
renewal project’s possible adoption
of, 193; al-Shahrastani describing
ideas of, 47
- myth, magic, and superstition, 31, 126,
243, 250–52
- Nahda stage, 161
- narratology, 18
- Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 6, 89, 92, 95, 96
- national character in relation to
inherited tradition, 179
- National Charter (1962), 92
- nationalism: Islamic left and, 149,
154; as secular concept, 72–73, 95;
Zionism and, 249–50
- nation state, European imperialism
introducing into Islamic world, 72
- naturalist school of thought, 62
- natural laws, 54–55
- natural phenomena and Nature, 35, 53,
218, 229
- New Criticism theory, 142
- nihilism and non-existence, 204–5,
208–10
- al-Nisāpūri, Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn
Ahmad al-Wāhidi, 233

- non-eternal, laws for, 234–35
- non-Muslims: inheritance forbidden from a Muslim, 271; Islamic views on, 64, 71; poll tax on, 249. *See also* Christianity/Christians; Jews
- obedience to imam as central tenet, 169–70
- Omara, Mohammed, 151
- one starting point to explain all phenomena, 35, 53–59, 75
- ontology, 18, 222
- opportunistic attitude toward religious discourse, 59–60, 63
- oral transmission: textual variance created by, 108, 120; in traditional manner as way to acquire religious learning, 52
- paganism, 38. *See also* polytheism
- Palestinian National Council, 73
- Palestinian state, rejection of, 73
- past vs. present. *See* socio-historical aspect; time gap
- patriarchal society, 267, 270
- patron/client relationships in tribal society, 129
- Peirce, Charles Sanders, 18, 278n46
- penalty for theft, 64–65
- persecution complex, 89–90
- phenomenalism, 182
- phenomenological hermeneutics, 16
- phenomenological mediation of Husserl, 15–16
- philosophy: opposition to study or teaching of, 83–84, 91; philosophical discourse of Islamic left, 148, 156; theology in structure similar to, 184
- phonetic similarities among words, 260–61
- pluralism: in Arab-Islamic civilization, 82, 126; ban on, 50–51, 119; consensus and group unity, 175, 187; divine sovereignty rejecting, 85, 94; Enlightenment discourse and, 231; mixed into interpretation of Qur'an and Islamic theology, 62, 112; on Qur'an's origin and intention to serve human interests, 235
- poetry: modern poetry to express contemporary needs, 203; pre-Islamic, 9, 76; and Sufism, 12
- political discourse: blaming ordinary citizens for problems and crises, 102; connection with religion, 43, 60, 91, 100–104, 156, 255; dysfunction in political systems of Islamic worlds, 169; monopolization of power, 101–2
- polytheism, 84, 104, 249
- positivism, 57, 144
- Prague school of linguistics, 18
- pre-Islamic society, 75–76, 248, 269–70; *jāhili* (pre-Islamic) thought, 70, 98
- “priesthood,” creation of, 52–53
- prohibition on theatre, musical performances, and the arts, 43–44, 246
- prophecy, 216–17, 218
- the Prophet. *See* Muhammad
- proverbs, use of, 203

psychological construct, 183–84
psychological reserve of the masses,
159, 164, 166–71, 173–74, 179–81

Qadāyā Fikriyya (Intellectual Issues series), 33

Qadāyā wa Shabādāt (Issues and Testimonies periodical), 33

al-Qaradawi, Youssef, 40, 65

Quraish lords hostile to Islam, 131

Qur'an, interpretation of: Abu Zayd recognizing three dominant streams of, 11; aesthetic dimensions of, 4, 13; as arbiter of disputes, 60, 82, 96–97; Companions of the Prophet drawing knowledge solely from, 62; Cow chapter, 115; as divine knowledge, 216; early religious scholars referring to, 112; as evaluator and judge of literary and artistic merit, 229; explanations of interpretation task in, 138; finality of, 111; *hasad* (Evil Eye) mentioned in Qur'an, 251–52; humanization of, 119, 216; Islam of Qur'an as "real Islam," 52; Joseph's dreams, 138–39; *lahw al-hadith* (idle talk), expression in Qur'anic verses, 245–46; literalism in, 12, 205, 243–45, 249–50, 257; as literary text, 13; Meccan chapter, 252; Muhammad as first interpreter, 11, 49; multiple functions of text, 13; Mu'tazilite thought on, as created in time and not eternal, 240–41; *nass*, meaning of, 112–13, 115; semantic clarity, categories of,

118; "sovereignty" verses of, 127; stability of, 119; Table chapter, 36, 127; uncreated, 235–36; as word of God existing from eternity, 234, 235–36, 238–40. *See also* interpretation; religious texts; *specific sects*

Qutb, Sayyid, 89–96; Abu Zayd's study of, 5, 13; on Companions of the Prophet, 62; denouncing societies and governments as infidels, 41, 99; on divine sovereignty, 89, 96, 150–51; on equitable distribution of wealth, 92; on European thought, 57; evolution in discourse of, 90, 150; execution of, 5, 274n5; forsaking moderate position on relationship between text and real world, 91; on historicity of religious texts, 110–11; imprisonment of, 89; Islamic left and, 149; on Islamic system's incompatibility with Western culture, 90; on jihad and relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims, 64; literary critic approach to Qur'an, 14; Malikites' influence on, 91; Maududi as source for, 84, 86, 89, 96, 99; Muslim Brotherhood's ideologue, 89, 279n6; on penalty for theft, 64–65; on "planting seeds in the air," 94–95, 110; works by: *al-ʿAdāla al-ʾIjtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām* (*Social Justice in Islam*), 90, 149; *Maʾālim fī al-Tariq* (*Milestones on the Way*), 96; *Maʾrakat al-Islām wa-l-Raʾsmāliyya* (*The Battle between*

- Islam and Capitalism), 90, 149. *See also* Muslim Brotherhood
- racial discrimination as form of servitude, 257
- rationalism, 30–31; of ancients, 203; dissimulation due to intimidation, 128; exclusion from authority of tradition and the early Muslims, 59; promoted in response to Western challenge, 150; prophecy and, 217; Qutb's rejection of, 90
- Raziq, Ali Abdel, 227
- reading of text. *See* interpretation;
- Islamic left; religious texts
- "real Islam," 51–52, 74, 160, 235
- real world: analyzing structures of, 179; attitude to, separating Leftists and Rightists, 160, 170; changes to meaning of religious texts in light of, 126, 238, 268; ideas and reality, 217–18; ignoring, 79–81, 131, 159; possibility of Islam offering solutions to problems in, 29, 68–69; revelation and, 217, 233. *See also* masses
- reason: in Arab-Islamic civilization, 82; authority of reason on which revelation is based, 127–28; desirability of, 155; divine sovereignty rejecting, 85; early Muslims looking at Prophet's conduct in light of, 49; European focus on, 57, 84; Mu'tazili theme of, 193; primary role in Islam, 81, 84, 128–29; reality bringing reason and tradition together, 217–18; reductionism to attack, 56; rejection's first occurrence at battle of Siffin, 82; revelation vs., 81, 132, 218–20; in struggle against superstition, 33; *ta'wil* associated with, 139; tradition/reason binary, 215, 219, 221–24
- reception theory, 15, 19
- reductionism, 56–57
- reform and change: authority as changeable and open to exploration, 128; gradualism, 107, 268; gradualism in Islamic reform, 107; origins of, 12; significance's dynamic nature, 265. *See also* renewal; semantic shift; socio-historical aspect; time gap
- relativism, 17
- reliance on authority of tradition and the early Muslims, 35, 39, 59–66
- religion: as basis for a human community, 98, 176–77; conflating ideas and religion, 35, 39, 49–53, 59, 66, 74; formal analysis creating options for, 178; four aspects of: thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing, 178; meaning of, 32; religious thought vs., 227; sedition in name of, 40; "there's an entry in the Great Book for every lifespan" as justification of everything, 211–12. *See also* Christianity/Christians; Hindus; Islam; Jews; secularists and secularism
- religious discourse. *See* moderate vs. extremist discourse; religious texts; strategies used in discourse

religious right. *See* Islamic right
 religious texts, 106–35, 226–72; ahistorical view as dominant view of, 231, 232–33; code created by, 237–38; concealment and exposure strategies, 107, 109, 114, 272; cultural structure of, 236–37; divine nature of, 241–42; dynamic realism as characteristic of Islam and, 110; eternity and timelessness of, 233–34; finality of, 110–11; frozen meaning of, 59, 108, 112, 126–27, 132, 235, 243, 252–53, 264, 270; historical dimension of, 106–7; historical vs. eternal dimensions of, 246; as historic relics, 247, 248–52, 263, 264; humanization of, 108; *ijtihad* and, 108–9, 112, 117, 118, 125; independent thinking/reasoning and, 59, 104, 108–11, 119, 263; interests of mankind covered in God's law, 111; Islamicization of, 228–30; Islamic left's reading of, 137; levels of meaning in, 247; as linguistic constructions, 129–30, 236–47; metaphorical interpretation, 247; Mu'tazilite vs. Ash'ari on what is definitive and what is allegorical, 114–15, 117; *nass*, scope of, 112–18; natural phenomena not explained by, 229; oral transmission, effect of, 108; Qutb's response to, 110–11; reading of, 29, 107, 137; scholarly historical awareness of, ways to generate, 231–47; self-explanatory despite disagreements through time gap, 111–12; significance

discovered from cultural-historical context, 247; socio-historical aspect of language, 107–8, 131, 133; special domains of, 49; universal vs. specific application of, 246–47; unsaid in, 268–69, 270–72; “We sought refuge in texts and the thieves came in,” 126, 222. *See also hadiths*; interpretation; Islamic left; Qur'an, interpretation of
 renewal, 287n108; Ash'ari thought and, 208; changing consciousness of masses to renew tradition, 174, 181–82; as commentary on the past, 183; consciousness as mental intermediary of, 201–2; exclusion of elements of the past that have no significance for the present, 184; mixing past and present together, 189; new labels with modern meaning for old labels, 189–91, 198; as reconstruction, 184–85; renewing tradition, 162–63, 181, 183; semantic shift from “tradition,” 198–99; shortcomings of project, 197, 199; socio-historical conditions and, 130
 revelation: *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of revelation), 231, 232–33, 271; becoming human knowledge, 215–16; coloring and, 220; continuity vs. historicity, 219; distinction between in Qur'an and in *hadiths*, 286n104; early Muslims referring to, 49, 112; equality as priority of, 131;

- as expression of human nature, 218–19; falsification of, 131, 132; God's method of speaking, 214; as historical event, 88; historicity of, 215, 221; Islam as last phase in, 214; mercantile society addressed by, 130; *nass*, meaning of, 112–13; prophecy vs. message in, 216; Prophet's understanding of text at time of, 11, 49, 119; real world and, 217, 233; reason and, 81, 132, 218–20; shari' a law and, 215; as a starting point of absolute certainty, 220; suited to every time and place, 218; tribal society addressed by, 129; as word of God, 201, 238–40
- revolutionary mindset, 185, 225
- riba* (usury), 253–54
- Ricoeur, Paul, 8
- Rida, Rashid, 12
- ruler: in absolute, complete, and eternal role, 234; authoritarianism of, 101–2, 157; promotion of virtue and condemnation of vice not requiring permission from, 38
- Rushdie, Salman: *The Satanic Verses*, 45–46
- Sadat, Anwar, 6, 42; assassination (October 6, 1981), 3, 8, 36, 101, 157, 222
- salafism, 12, 154, 160–61, 164, 199, 219, 221, 223, 225; Enlightenment discourse vs., 231, 236; on Qur'an as word of God existing from eternity, 234; retreat to, 230–31
- salaf sâlih* as golden age, 6
- Salam, Mohamed Abdel: *The Neglected Duty*, 222–23
- salvation, 85, 216
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 57
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 8, 18, 237, 238; *Course in General Linguistics*, 16
- el-Sayed, Lutfi, 227
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 8, 16
- sciences: conflict between religion and, 250; Islamicization of, 230; scientific achievements of Muslim scientists, 229
- scientific objectivity claims, 144
- secondary texts: as arbiters in social and political conflicts, 82–83; prohibiting theatre, musical performances, and the arts, 43–45; treated as primary texts, 35, 75, 125. See also *hadiths*; religious texts
- sects: government sects vs. opposition sects, 188, 200; social conflict among, 187–88. See also *specific Islamic sects*
- secularists and secularism: achieving goals of, 154, 158–59; advocates of enlightenment as, 29; *dunya-wiyya* used as term to describe, 58; European, 56, 63; hostility toward, 54–55, 229–30; innovation and, 161–62; Islamic left and, 156, 158–59; Marxism and, 56; modern approach to problem solving, 160; nationalism as secular concept, 72–73; salafism in opposition to, 160–61; scholarly understanding and, 32; semantic shift in discourse aimed at, 199

- sedition in name of religion, 40
 Seebohm, Thomas M., 277n35
 semantic shift, 177, 191, 198–99, 201–2, 206, 210–11, 220, 252, 256, 262
 semiotics, 16, 18–19, 20, 236–37
 sempiternity (timelessness of God), 201, 207
 servitude and slavery: *‘abd* (slave),
 Qur’anic use of term, 258–60;
 divine sovereignty based on, 104, 128, 130, 255–57, 261; in early Islamic culture, 129, 131, 260; Islam not requiring abolition of slavery but attitude moving toward abolition, 131, 248, 260; manumitting a slave to atone for offenses, 248; progressive approach toward, 260, 263; psychological freeing of slaves, 131; racial discrimination as form of, 257; semantic shift in terminology created by Qur’an for, 259–60; slave girls, permissibility of, 132; slave trade in pre-Islamic society, 248
 sexual inclinations as human motivation, 58
al-Sha‘b (newspaper), 40, 279n2
 Shabestari, Mojtahed, 277n41
 al-Shāfi‘i, Muhammad ibn Idrīs, 20, 113, 133
 Shāfi‘is, 91
 Shahin, Abd al-Sabur, 9
 al-Shahrastani (1086–1153 CE), 47
 el-Sha‘rawi, Mohamed Mitwalli, 43, 282n46
 shari‘a law, 68; evolution of human societies and, 263; favored over dogma, 215; independent reasoning in realm of, 133; internal semantic context vs. external socio-historical context, 263–72; Islamicization by reference to, 228; *nass* and, 116; philosophy vs., 83; revelation and, 215; suited to every time and place, 108, 215
 Shi‘ite theology: Ash‘ari orthodoxy compared to, 17; coloring of texts to serve, 168; as a dominant Qur’an commentary, 11; imam’s role, 169–70; intellectual theory of, 176; Iran and, 170, 277n41; legal *ijtihād* on inheritance by daughter, 109, 133–34, 266–67; Mu‘tazila’s presence in, 12; rejection of principle of reading the present in the past, 168; rejection of Qur’an commentary from, 140
shūra (consultation), 93, 253
 al-Sibā‘i, Mustafa: *Ishtirākiyyat al-Islām* (The Socialism of Islam), 149
 Sibawayh, 259
 Siffin, battle of, 82
 significance. *See* meaning vs. significance
 signs: exoteric vs. esoteric, 147; interpretation adapted to nature of, 140; recognized by Jakobson, 18; text composed of succession of, 146
 singing. *See* prohibition on theatre, musical performances, and the arts

- single starting point to explain all phenomena, 35, 53–59, 75
- slavery. *See* servitude and slavery
- social awareness, 182
- social conflict, 187–88, 264
- socialism, 28, 92, 95
- social justice, 94, 150, 151, 272
- social laws, 54–55; *jahl* as basis for, 76–77; slaves and, 248
- socio-historical aspect: of language, 107–8, 131, 133, 237–38, 247, 263–72; of shari‘a law, 263–72; thinking and, 226–27; of tradition (theology), 175, 185, 195–96, 204, 212
- sociological analysis, 187–88
- Solomon, reign of, 250
- sorcery. *See* myth, magic, and superstition
- Soroush, Abdolkarim, 277n41
- sovereignty. *See* divine sovereignty
- speech, 237, 238. *See also* oral transmission
- stasis (freezing of texts), 59, 108, 112, 126–27, 132, 235, 243, 252–53, 264, 270
- state’s official religious establishment, 27–28
- strategies used in discourse, 35–36, 48–49, 280n11; additional strategies possible, 49, 142; conflating ideas and religion, 35, 39, 49–53, 59, 66, 74; dismissing the historical dimension, 36, 74–81; explaining all phenomena by reference to one starting point, 35, 53–59, 75; intellectual dogmatism, 35, 39, 50, 66–74; overlap between strategies and premises, 48; reliance on authority of tradition and the early Muslims, 35, 39, 59–66
- structural consciousness vs. evolutionary consciousness, 186–88
- structuralism: Eagleton on, 17–18; Islamic left and, 185–86; legitimacy of Ash‘ari formal logic structure of theology, 199; reception theory and, 19; Saussure’s development of, 18
- Sufism: Ash‘ari orthodoxy compared to, 17; distinguishing between exoteric and esoteric, 146–47; gnostic tradition and, 84, 204; love as part of God’s relationship with man, 257, 262; *nass* and, 116–17; relationship with Shi‘ite hermeneutics, 11–12; religious texts requiring superhuman powers to understand, 241; some interpretations accepted by Qur’an scholars, 140, 147; theosophy, 7–8
- sunna* (Islamic custom and practice): early religious scholars referring to, 112; as evaluator and judge of literary and artistic merit, 229; “real Islam” of, 52
- Sunni/Sunnism: *hadith* narrators and, 124; intellectual theory of, 176; Islamic left deferring to, 171; legal practice of inheritance by son, 109; obedience to imam as central to, 169
- superficialities, 65, 144, 156
- superstition. *See* myth, magic, and superstition

- al-Suyūṭī, 117
- syncretism, 162, 164, 183, 212–25;
 consciousness approach and, 181;
 fighting battles of the present
 in the past, 212; Islamic left and,
 153–58, 172, 198–99; knowledge
 and, 215–16; mediating between
 traditional nature of theology and
 semantic shift of coloring, 202;
 revelation and, 218–21; sociological
 analysis of origins of ideas and,
 188–89; tradition/reason binary
 and, 215, 219, 221–24; unresolved
 binaries in, 224–25
- tafsir* (type of Qurʾan commentary),
 8, 11, 12–13, 139, 141, 194
- Taha Badr, Abdel Muhsin, 25
- al-Tahtawi, Rifaʿa, 227
- tajdid* (renewal), 287n108
- taqiya* in political discourse, 153, 155–56
- taʾwil*, 138–41; cause and effect within
 meaning of, 139; nature of God
 and, 194; reading falling within
 scope of, 145; reading outside
 scope of, 146; reason associ-
 ated with, 139, 141; similarity to
 hermeneutics, 8, 13; terminological
 difficulties with *tafsir*, 12–13, 139,
 141; translation of term, 8, 14, 138;
 usages in ordinary language, 145
- taxes: inheritance, 272; on non-
 Muslims, 249
- tendentious readings, 141–44, 145, 173
- Ten Intellects, 203, 204
- texts. *See* religious texts
- theft, penalty for, 64–65
- theology. *See* Islamic theology; *specific
 sects*
- theosophy, 7–8
- time gap, 163–73; cultural-historical
 context of religious texts, 237–38,
 247; early religious scholars saying
 reality of their society is identi-
 cal to time of the Prophet, 79;
 fighting battles of the present in
 the past, 212; hermeneutics and,
 16; inside locus of consciousness,
 181; past idealized, 213; reader de-
 termined by perspectives of time
 and place, 141; religious discourse
 seeking to return to the past, 126,
 253; religious texts self-explanatory
 despite, 111–12; renewal requiring
 exclusion of elements of the past
 that have no significance for the
 present, 184; shariʿa law as suited
 to every time and place, 108, 134;
 tradition's role for Islamic right
 and Islamic left, 164–66. *See also*
 socio-historical aspect
- timelessness of God (sempiternity),
 201, 207
- tolerance toward fanaticism, 67
- Torah, 261
- tradition: coloring and, 202–12; as
 commentary on the past, 183;
 construct of consciousness vs.
 historical construct, 173–83;
 contemporary religious discourse
 relying on, 62, 82–84; defined, 173;
 desirability of transmitted tradi-

- tion, 155; disagreement between salafists and secularists over use of, 161; effectiveness of, 159–60; historical analysis of, 196–97; Islamic left and, 159, 161–63, 213; mixing past and present together, 189; national character in relation to inherited tradition, 179; priority status of, 162–63; as psychological reserve, 173; reality bringing reason and tradition together, 217–18; semantic shift to “renewal,” 198–99; *tafsir* associated with, 139, 141; tradition/reason binary, 215, 219, 221–24. *See also* reliance on authority of tradition and the early Muslims; renewal
- tribal society, 129, 248
- truth: “Islam is truth and justice,” 40; religious discourse predicated on, 51, 66, 67
- al-Tūfi, 91
- al-turāth*, 288n13
- turāthiyyūn* (heritage thinkers), 2–3, 10, 11, 278n47
- Turkish control of Egypt, 69
- ‘*ulūhiyya*, concept of divinity, 86
- Umayyads, 60, 82, 84, 96
- umma*, 28, 31
- unity, 219; divided by dependence on Europe in presence and by religious tradition of the past, 71. *See also* divine unity
- University of Humanistics (Utrecht), 10
- University of Khartoum, 8
- University of Leiden, 10
- University of Osaka, 8–9
- University of Pennsylvania, 7
- al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The Strongest Link, periodical), 148
- use of force: *jahl* and, 76; public morals enforced by, 37–38, 41, 43
- vice, condemnation of, 38, 56
- “Vice Must Be Prevented by Force” (newspaper article), 38–39
- vicious circle of human ideas, 85
- Virgin Mary, 239–40
- virtue, promotion of, 38
- al-Wahhab, Muhammad ibn Abd, 12
- walā’ (loyalty), 129
- Western culture. *See* European civilization/Western culture
- women: concubines, permissibility of, 248; extremist views on dress code and behavior for, 67; inheritance rights of, 133–34, 266–71; marriage laws and, 248, 269; slave girls, permissibility of, 132; status in pre-Islamic Arab society, 269–70
- word of God, 201, 234, 235–36, 238–40
- young Islamist activists, 39–40, 47; extremist views toward literature and the arts, 67; immaturity of, 47–48; intellectual dogma of, 72; text arguments with, 120–21
- Younis, Ibtihal (wife of Abu Zayd), 2, 10

Zakariyya, Fu'ād, 281n21

al-Zamakhshari, 115

al-Zarkashi, 117

Zionism, 56, 72–73, 149, 246, 249–50, 257

Zoroastrians, 249

Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma, 76

al-Zuhri, 114