

Copyright  
by  
Banafsheh Madaninejad  
2011

**The Dissertation Committee for Banafsheh Madaninejad Certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**New Theology in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Comparative Study  
between Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar**

**Committee:**

---

Katherine Arens, Supervisor

---

Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, Co-Supervisor

---

Kamran Aghaie

---

Hina Azam

---

Syed Akbar Hyder

---

Kristin Brustad

**New Theology in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Comparative Study  
between Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar**

**by**

**Banafsheh Madaninejad, B.S., M.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**August 2011**

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my grandmother, Qamar Khanum-e Khunsari, the calming, powerful moon whose presence I feel often; my father, Mojtaba Madaninejad, who had enough faith in me to insist on letting me go to the West; and to my mother, Servat Okhravi, who teaches me persistence and a zest for life through how she lives.

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation could not have been written without the endless help of my committee members: the brilliant, most giving and tireless Dr. Katie Arens who trusted me like no one else in academia ever had; the MES graduate cadre's advisor extraordinaire and intellectual therapist, Dr. Kamran Aghaie, whose door rarely closes while he is on campus; Dr. Hina Azam, whose loving friendship and guidance have made a big difference in the last few years; Dr. Akbar Hyder, who has been a rock of support through thick and thin and a model of teaching excellence; Dr. Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, whose wisdom about life in general has been a source of grounding energy; and Dr. Kristen Brustad, who believed in me when the only sign of success was a glow of potential and who gave me the opportunity to fall in love with Egypt. I have had many teachers over the years, and I thank them all. I cherish the teachings and opportunities created by my Aunt Mehrangiz Okhravi without whose help I could not have come to the US to study; my polymath Uncle Morteza Madaninezhad, who instilled in me a love of all knowledge by spending hours teaching me calligraphy, poetry and Arabic, and answering questions like "Will music ever end?"; and my cousin's husband, Mehdi Shushtari Alavi to whom I owe my first exposure to Soroush in 1994 and my love of classical Western music. This dissertation looks decent and got turned in on time partly due to the editing generosity and emotional support of my dear friend Delia Avila. Most of all, I want to thank my loving and generous husband Roy Casagranda, who despite having a full-time teaching job, was both mommy and daddy to our son Sina for several months and who has always had my back.

# **New Theology in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Comparative Study between Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar**

Banafsheh Madaninejad, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisors: Katherine Arens and Mohammad Ghanoonparvar

This dissertation describes the nature of what has been called *kalām-e jadīd* (new theology) in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It argues that there are currently two kinds of “new theologies” in practice. One new theology that is more widely adhered to is an extension of classical theology and stays true to traditional precepts, while the second is postmodern in nature and breaks with tradition completely. The first strand of *kalām-e jadīd*, referred to as “theology of selectivity,” is represented here by the works of Mohsen Kadivar, the person who epitomizes the intellectual but tradition-bound wave of post-revolutionary theological thought in Iran. The second strand of *kalām-e jadīd*, referred to as “postmodern theology,” is presented via the works of Abdolkarim Soroush, the most representative thinker of this type of *kalām*. In making this distinction, this dissertation therefore delineates the different forms of post-revolutionary reformist theology in Iran and presents Soroush’s work in terms of the greater postmodern discourse that feeds his work. The interest and importance placed on Soroush’s work also speaks volumes about the receptiveness of Iranian reformist intellectual communities towards postmodern thought and the possibility of placing these communities within what has come to be known as the postmodern condition. Thus, in essence this project can be seen as a

comparative work that also points towards the ideological distance between these two modernizing trends in current Iranian Islamic thought.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Overview .....	1
Chapter 2: Key Concepts .....	16
Classical <i>Kalām</i> Tradition.....	16
<i>Kalām-e Jadīd</i> (New Theology) .....	21
New Theology: Connections with Continental Philosophy.....	26
Postmodernity and Postmodern Theology .....	49
Some Conclusions.....	58
Chapter 3: Revelation Theology .....	60
Revelation as Understood Classically.....	64
Early Soroush.....	74
Point 1: The Substance of Religion Is Experiential in Nature .....	74
Point 2: The Accidentals of Religion Were Essential to the Prophet's Experiences.....	80
Point 3: The Accidentals Have No Lasting Authority .....	83
Point 4: Islam Is Founded on the Prophet's Divinely-Sanctioned Personality.....	83
Point 5: The Prophet's Religious Experience Is the Same as Reception of Revelation.....	84
Point 6: Being Religious Means Expanding the Prophetic Experience.....	86
Point 7: The Best Way to Be a Non-Imitative Believer Is to Be a Scholarly Gnostic.....	89
Later Soroush .....	91
Kadivar Responds to Soroush.....	100
Kadivar's Position.....	101
Some Conclusions.....	103
Chapter 4: The Issue of Religious Pluralism .....	105
Religious Pluralism.....	106
Classical Position .....	121



The Debate .....	122
The Rhetoric of Pre-Revolutionary Ideologues .....	127
Soroush's Transformative Rhetoric .....	132
Some Conclusions.....	138
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	140
Bibliography .....	145

## Chapter 1: Overview

This dissertation describes the nature of what has been called *kalām-e jadīd* (new theology)<sup>1</sup> in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It argues that there are currently two kinds of “new theologies” in practice. The one which is more widely adhered to is an extension of classical theology and stays true to traditional precepts, while the second, is postmodern in nature and breaks with tradition completely. The first strand of *kalām-e jadīd* under consideration here, which will be referred to from now on as “theology of selectivity,” is presented through the works of Mohsen Kadivar, the person who epitomizes the intellectual yet tradition-bound wave of post-revolutionary theological thought within Iran.<sup>2</sup> The second strand of *kalām-e jadīd*, which I will refer to as “postmodern theology”

---

<sup>1</sup> *Kalām-e jadīd* literally translated means “new theology.” A brief exposition of classical and new *kalām* is given in Chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Kadivar is arguably one of most outspoken clerics against the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh*. Since the 2009 presidential elections he has also taken to openly criticizing the regime and its inhumane and un-Islamic treatment of protestors. He is a founding member of one of the main Green Movement opposition websites, *Jonbesh-e Rah-e Sabz* or *Jaras* for short (Green Path Movement: <[www.rahesabz.net](http://www.rahesabz.net)>) and seems to have a personal relationship with Moussavi (this became evident from our personal conversations shortly after the election). Hojjat al-Islam Kadivar was born in the town of Fasa in Fars province in 1959. After abandoning his studies in electrical engineering at Shiraz University in 1978 he graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in Theology and Islamic Studies from Qom University in 1989. His Ph.D. studies in Islamic Philosophy and Theology with a specialty in *al-Hikmat al-Mota’ālīyah* (Transcendental Philosophy) were at Tarbiyat Modarres University in Tehran, from which he graduated in 1999. During his graduate studies at the university he also received his *Ijzat al-Ijtihad* (Independent Legal Reasoning) from the Howzeh-ye Elmmiyeh-ye Qom (Qom Theological Seminary) in 1997 under the supervision of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri Najaf Abadi. Of Kadivar’s many books the two which caused the most stir are direct criticisms of Ayatollah Khomeini’s *velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih* theory (sole political rule, or sole guardianship of the jurist): *Nazariya-ye Dowlat dar Fiqh-e Shī’i* (1997; Theories of State in Shī’i Law) and *Hukumat-e Vilāyī* (1998; Government by the Guardian). In these two works, Kadivar criticizes the notion of *velāyat-e motlaqih-ye faqih* by attempting to show the lack of qur’anic, rational, and *fiqh* (jurisprudential) grounds for the idea of political rule by the clergy, headed by a supreme jurisprudent (the leader). As a result, the Special Court for the Clergy charged him with propaganda against the Islamic Republic, dissemination of lies, and creating confusion in public opinion, for which he served a prison term of eighteen months. For more on Kadivar’s court hearings see, Mohsen Kadivar, *Baha-ye Azadi: Defa’iyat-e Mohsen Kadivar [The Price of Liberty: Text of Mohsen Kadivar’s Defense in the Special Clerical Court]* (1999). For more on Kadivar’s work see Mahmoud Sadri, “Sacral Defense of Secularism” (2001). Kadivar spent virtually all of his imprisonment in solitary confinement and was released from Evin Prison on July 17, 2000. He is currently a Visiting Associate Professor of Religion at Duke University. For more on Kadivar, see especially Yasayuki Matsunaga, “Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran” (2007) and Roger Hardy, *The Muslim Revolt, a Journey through Political Islam* (2010), especially pp. 54-55; and Shireen T. Hunter, ed.,

from now on, will be presented through the works of Abdolkarim Soroush, the most representative thinker of this kind of *kalām-e jadīd*.<sup>3</sup> In making this distinction, this

---

*Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity* (2009), especially Chapter 1: “Islamic Reformist Discourse in Iran, Proponents and Prospects,” pp. 57-68, and “Islamic Revolution: Impact on Islamic Reformist Thinking, Reformist Clerics.”. For details on all bibliographic citations, see the complete bibliography.

See also: Yousra Y. Fazila, “Between Mullahs’ Robes and Absolutism,” especially pp. 51-53; three entries in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (2009): “Islamic State,” “Kadivar, Mohsen,” and “Wilayat Al-Faqih”; Shahrokh Akhavi, *The Middle East, the Politics of the Sacred and Secular* (2009), especially Chapter 6: “The State” and Chapter 7: “Conclusion,” pp. 230-33 & 245; Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini* (2009), especially Chapter 2: “Dual Leadership and Constitutional Developments after Khomeini,” and Chapter 5: “The Rise and the Fall of President Khatami and the Reform Movement,” pp. 52-54, 76, 94, & 108; Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy* (2009), especially Chapter 3: “A Concise Anatomy of Secularism,” p. 101; Fakhreddin Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran* (2008), especially Chapter 11: “The Culture of Politics,” p. 419; Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics* (2008), especially Part IV: “Iran’s Pluralistic Momentum and the Future of Iranian Democracy,” pp. 161 & 168; Eva Patricia Rakel, *The Iranian Political Elite* (2008), especially, Section 4.3.3.1: “Lay and Clerical Public Intellectuals,” pp. 123-24, and “The Political Elite in the Islamic Republic of Iran” (2009), pp. 109, 114, 117 & 120; Yasuyuki Matsunaga, “Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Post Revivalist Islam in Iran” (2007), pp. 317-29; Farhang Rajaee, *Islamism and Modernism* (2007), especially Chapter 4: “The Fourth Generation,” pp. 208-21; Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam* (2007), especially Chapter 2: “Islam and Secularization,” p. 451; Charles Kurzman, “Critics Within” (2004), especially Chapter 4, pp. 88-89; Nikki R. Keddi, *Modern Iran* (2003), especially Chapter 12: “Society, Gender, Culture and Intellectual Life,” pp. 307-10; Genevieve Abdo and Jonathan Lyons, *Answering Only to God* (2003), especially Chapter 5: “Reinventing the Islamic Republic,” pp. 123-50; and Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic* (2007), especially Chapter 3: “The Making of a Post-Islamic Movement,” and Chapter 4: “Post Islamism in Power: Dilemmas of the Reform Project,” pp. 86-94, 101, 12, & 186-89.

Useful in this context as whole are: Lloyd Ridgeon, “Introduction: Iranian Intellectuals (1997–2007)” (2007); Shahra Razavi, “Islamic Politics, Human Rights and Women’s Claims for Equality in Iran” (2006); Farzin Vahdat, “Religious Modernity in Iran” (2005); Bahman Bakhtiari and Augustus Richard Norton, “Voices within Islam” (2005); Farhad Khosrokhavar, “The New Intellectuals in Iran” (2004); Mahmoud Sadri, “Sacral Defense of Secularism” (2001 or 2003); Said Amir Arjomand, “The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran” (2002); Ervand Abrahamian, Book Review of *Political Thought in Islam* (2001); Ahmad Ahsraf and Ali Banuazizi, “Iran’s Tortuous Path Toward ‘Islamic Liberalism’” (2001); Mohsen Milani, “Reform and Resistance in the Islamic Republic of Iran” (2001); Reza Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran* (2001); and Farzin Vahdat and Mohsen Kadivar, “Post-Revolutionary Discourses of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar” (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, born Farajollah Hossein Dabbaq, is arguably one of Iran’s most influential contemporary thinkers. He has been called the Erasmus of Islam. Mahmoud Sadri in “Attack from Within: Dissident Political Theology in Contemporary Iran,” published in *Iranian.com*, claims that some Western thinker has called Soroush Erasmus but fails to give the name of the person(s) who did so. Soroush was awarded the 2004 Erasmus prize, so Sadri might be referring to that prize. Robin Wright in “Tehran Meets the Scholar Whose Ideas Could Reconstruct Muslim Societies,” published in *The Los Angeles Times* on January 18, 1995, called Soroush the Luther of Islam. Considering that Martin Luther made a break with tradition while Erasmus, unlike Luther, did not break from the church but remained a vocal and influential critic of the tradition, I have to agree that Soroush is more like Luther than Erasmus. As noted by Forough Jahanbakhsh in her introduction to the English translation of *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*

dissertation therefore delineates the different forms of post-revolutionary reformist theology in Iran and presents Soroush's work in terms of the greater postmodern discourse that feeds his work.<sup>4</sup> The interest and importance placed on Soroush's work<sup>5</sup>

---

(Leiden: Brill, 2009), Soroush was also named one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World by *Time* magazine in 2005. Notwithstanding how he compares with historical Christian thinkers and how he is viewed in the West, Soroush is considered an intellectual father of the reform movement by insiders and scholars of Iran. In the introduction to selected writings of Soroush in Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri call Soroush the “enfant terrible” and the “bête noir” of the regime, a superintellectual that holds the “mantle of a *roushanfekr* intellectual,” a persona whose scholastic credentials even the “ideologically correct scholars of the establishment no longer challenge” (xi-xii). Jahanbakhsh claims that Soroush is “one of the most eminent, influential and controversial figured of contemporary Iran.” After the controversial 2009 presidential elections that ended with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election Soroush, who now lives in the U.S., joined other expatriates, including dissident cleric Mohsen Kadivar, Abdol-Ali Bazargan (Islamic thinker and son of a first post-revolutionary prime minister), Ata'ollah Mohajerani (former parliamentarian and Islamic Guidance Minister), and Akbar Ganji (investigative journalist and champion of secularism), to create a diasporic front in support of the Green Movement. Together they published a manifesto to that effect (the statement can be found on [drsoroush.com](http://drsoroush.com)). Soroush has penned close to thirty books and numerous articles. He spent his high school years in the famous Islamic ‘*Alavi* school in Iran (this high school turned out to be the training ground for many of the Islamic Revolution's leaders). He obtained his Master's degree in chemistry from the University of London but soon became interested in the subject of the indeterminacy of science and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the History and Philosophy of Science at Chelsea College. He studied for more than four years but never finished his thesis. He became an integral part of the very influential student expatriate community during the years leading up to the 1979 revolution, and his influential speeches prior to and during the revolution were published in book or pamphlet form. After the revolution Soroush was placed in charge of the university system's cultural revolution, during which time controversial decisions were made—decisions for which he is still criticized. In 1984, disenchanted with the destructive turn the cultural revolution had taken, Soroush abandoned his governmental post and dedicated himself to teaching and research. In 1991 he began publishing a series of controversial pieces questioning the *Velayat-e Faqih* (Rule of the Jurist). After being stripped of his university position, banned from public speaking, and suffering several attempts on his life (allegedly by government-supported vigilante groups), Soroush left Iran for the West in 2002. These details of Soroush's life are extracted from Chapter 4 of Ghamari-Tabrizi's *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (2008). Other critical secondary sources in English on Soroush are: Hassan Abbas, “Islam versus the West and the Political Thought of AbdolKarim Soroush” (2006); Mahmoud Alinejad, “Coming to Terms with Modernity” (2002); R. Scott Appleby, “The Fundamentalist Factor” (2001); Said Amir Arjomand, “The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran” (2002); Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, “Iran's Tortuous Path toward ‘Islamic Liberalism’” (2001); and Asma Barlas, “Reforming Religious Knowledge” (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Soroush claims that he was not aware of Gadamer's work when he created his theological position but has since become aware of similarities in their work (Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, 7).

<sup>5</sup> Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi describes Soroush's importance in the following way: “After Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, Abdolkarim Soroush emerged as one of the most controversial intellectual figures on the Iranian political scene. At the core of this controversy was Soroush's rejection of the ideological claim of the Islamic regime as the sole bearer of “true” Islam” (Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 89). Ghamari-Tabrizi also says that Soroush was poised to become the “court philosopher” (GH,

also says volumes about the receptiveness of the Iranian reformist intellectual communities towards postmodern thought and the possibility of placing these communities within what has come to be known as the postmodern condition.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in essence, this project must be seen as a comparative work that also points towards the ideological distance between these two modernizing trends in current Islamic thought.

The postmodern Soroush seeks to have traditional Islam engage directly and unapologetically with Western thought, sometimes at its peril. He often mirrors Heideggerian tendencies seen in Gadamer and Ricœur,<sup>7</sup> placing his works at a great distance from the tradition-bound reformers working on new theology, mainly Mohsen Kadivar, who are concerned with “adapting” the tradition to a new era. By proxy then, this comparative study of Soroush’s and Kadivar’s theological positions reflects the ideological spectrum within the reformist movement by comparing the theologies of its two most politically active, academically prolific, and at times controversial representatives. As such, this juxtaposition also illuminates what is particularly political about theology in this era and how theological debates need to be seen directly as potential interventions into the vision of a polis, a state, and the political logic of citizenship.

---

128). This did not, however, pan out as Soroush started distancing himself from the regime several years after the revolution.

<sup>6</sup> As argued by Jean-François Lyotard in his book by the same name, the Postmodern Condition is “incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on . . . Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979], xxiv-xxv).

<sup>7</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (2003) claims that although they are not usually considered postmodern in cultural studies, in the context of theology Gadamer and Ricœur are “significant postmodern philosophers in their own right whose ideas have been appropriated by many theologians albeit in a usually unsystematic way” (171).

Before further progress is made into the subject, a word should be said about methodology and why this work is relevant to the fields of theology, philosophy, and political science. This study is organized around the structure of Soroush's work. Chapters 3 and 4 present Soroush's analysis of a major theological debate followed by an account of how Kadivar has dealt with the same issue in his body of work. This preference for presenting Soroush's work first and then Kadivar's response mirrors the intellectual relationship of the two thinkers in real life, where Kadivar has repeatedly felt the responsibility of defending the faith in response to Soroush's controversial and unorthodox positions. Their overriding, epistemological disagreements not only portray points of divergence between the two thinkers but also within the current reformist movement.

Based on what will be shown to be Soroush's postmodern epistemology, along with his immense popularity among university youth who grew up in the 1990s, much can be said about contemporary Iranian culture's denial of grand-narratives. The postmodern condition, according to Jean François Lyotard, is first and foremost contemporary culture's *epistemological* denial of metanarratives, which he considers a quintessential feature of modernity.<sup>8</sup> It goes beyond the purview of this work, however, to analyze what this tendency against grand-narratives could mean for the reformist culture. Also, this investigation's outlook towards the works of Soroush and Kadivar is inspired not only by Western philosophies of religion but also by the work of Christian theologians. That said, enough is doctrinally different between the traditions of Christianity and Islam and its practitioners that associations made between the two are mainly analogical and should be taken as such.

---

<sup>8</sup> Lyotard, 5.

Although some work has been done to present Soroush's and Kadivar's political theologies, this work is the first of its kind in either English or Persian to lay out Soroush's and Kadivar's revelation theologies and positions on soteriology in a comprehensive way.<sup>9</sup> The project also adds to efforts in creating dialogue between Islamic theology and Western philosophy of religion. By placing the study of Iranian theology in the context of a global, postmodern ethos, the work better fuses the discussion of Islamic theology with the extra-religious sciences and thus opens a window on how even revelation and soteriology can be a viable politics, a link often lost in the West since the early modern period.

Despite postmodernity's elusive nature and its resistance to being defined, a word should also be said about the postmodern condition that I am attributing to Soroush's work—in particular, the more general epochal concept used to bring the disparate parts that make up the postmodern ethos under a single umbrella. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Lyotard suggests what he calls an extreme simplification of the postmodern as “incredulity towards meta-narratives.”<sup>10</sup> These meta-narratives are all-encompassing, large-scale theories about the world and how it works, a set that includes our understanding of the progress of history, the possibility of full disclosure through science, and absolute freedom from restraint. Lyotard argues that we no longer believe that narratives of this kind are adequate to represent and contain us all within a single public sphere. We have become alert to difference, diversity, the incompatibility of our singular aspirations, beliefs, and desires, and for that reason we have come to persistently oppose universals, meta-narratives, and generality—especially

---

<sup>9</sup> Refer to footnotes 2 and 3 of this chapter for secondary works about Soroush's and Kadivar's political theologies. The goal for the expansion of this project includes an analysis of the thinkers' political theologies.

<sup>10</sup> Lyotard, 7.

many universalist claims of the Enlightenment. For the purposes of this dissertation, what makes postmodernity unique as an ethos is the collapse of grand-narratives, which in the context of Islamic theology is a set of collapsed grand-narratives focused on four issues (involving revelation theology, or the nature of the Qur'ān): 1) the Qur'ān is not the unmediated word of God but is already an interpretation of the Prophet (this is a claim made by Soroush), 2) reason as complimentary to the word of God, 3) ethics as moral progress through self-realization, and 4) soteriology, or the exceptionality of the Islamic *'umma* (community) as having the highest chance of salvation as a result of Muhammad having received the final divine message. Soroush breaks with orthodoxy and questions grand-narratives, exhibiting postmodern tendencies on all these issues. In order to maintain manageability however, only two of these four non-political theological issues will be covered in this dissertation.

As a theocratic state, much in the Islamic Republic of Iran is dictated by theology. Although it seems as though the state-sanctioned theology tries to dominate all outward manifestations of the personal and political, Iranian Islam is actually influenced by three conflicting theologies: 1) the previously mentioned and apparent *state-sanctioned theology*, a hyper-politicized and totalitarian version of Shī'ī orthodoxy (representatives of this theology include state-supported ayatollahs like Mesbah Yazdi),<sup>11</sup> 2) the *theology of selectivity* that seeks to “amend” the orthodoxy and is the most consistent with pre-revolutionary trends in Shī'ī orthodoxy (representatives of this theology include many high-ranking ayatollahs and young seminarians in Qom, especially the late Ayatollah Montazeri<sup>12</sup> and his protégé Mohsen Kadivar), and 3) a *postmodern theology* that seeks

---

<sup>11</sup> For more on Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi and his position as the “archconservative” cleric, see: Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (2008), 85-118.

<sup>12</sup> Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri was “the loudest clerical voice of dissent,” especially after the allegedly fraudulent 2009 presidential election and before his untimely death on December 19, 2009 (Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollahs' Democracy: An Iranian Challenge* [2010], 258). In fact he has been called



to rewrite basic theological concepts, such as the nature of reason, ethics, revelation, and human agency, even if those rewritings seem to counter traditional readings of the divine message.

The links between theology and politics are most visible in the concept of *vilāyat-e muṭlaqih-ye faqīh*, arguably the backbone of state-sanctioned political theology. According to orthodox Twelver Shī'ī political theology the guardianship of the 'umma in the post-occultation period of the Twelfth Imam (Mahdi) falls to the *faqīhs* (Islamic jurists). Traditionally this guardianship was limited to non-litigious matters (*al-umūr al-ḥisbīyah*), including religious endowments (*waqf*), family law, and the property for which no specific person is responsible. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's innovation was to extend this guardianship to include all issues for which the Prophet and the Imams were deemed responsible, including governance. The idea of guardianship as rule is now presented in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the concept of *Valī-ye Muṭlaqeh-ye Faqīh* (The Absolute Jurist Guardian). This guardian is also known as the "Supreme Leader," a position first occupied by Imam Khomeini himself and currently held by Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Such state-sanctioned theology has much in common with the theology of selectivity in non-political issues, but almost nothing in common with post-modern theology. Theology of selectivity is looking for solutions that better fit with the public's modern lives while staying (more or less) within the confines of orthodoxy. Tradition

---

the spiritual leader of the Green Movement (*pedar-e Ma'navi*) by Hossein Bashirieh. According to Kadivar he began as an orthodox (*sonnati*) cleric and ended up a democratic orthodox cleric (*rowhani-ye sonnati-ye democratic*). Both statements were mentioned in a December 20, 2010 interview with <roozonline.com> on the first anniversary of Ayatollah Montazeri's death (Kadivar, "Montazeri was the Voice of the People," accessed July 15, 2011,

<<http://kadivar.com/Index.asp?DocId=2602&AC=1&AF=1&ASB=1&AGM=1&AL=1&DT=dtv>>. For more on Montazeri, see: Genevieve Abdo, "Rethinking the Islamic Republic: A 'Conversation' with Ayatollah Hossein 'Ali Montazeri" (2001). For more on how Montazeri initiated vocal clerical support for President Khatami's reform movement in 1997, an act that led to his house arrest, see: Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (2006), 135.

plays a large role in this theology and its attempt to transform Islam from within. Engaging with theological literature of the classical era and maintaining continuity within Islam of shared hermeneutical principles is paramount. That these two theologies open up new political possibilities has not gone unnoticed, as leaders and supporters of the reformist movement are theologically influenced by these two camps.

Yet, despite its appeal to conservative roots, the theology of selectivity can be set apart from its state-sanctioned counterpart by way of its innovations in qur'ānic hermeneutics. Theology of selectivity, the “legitimate” heir to the Islamic classical tradition, has made great strides in determining new limits for the Qur'ān. These limits become clear by investigating the two defining hermeneutic strategies used by Kadivar. In line with tradition, Kadivar believes that the Qur'ān contains a determinate and stable main message that is inviolable and timeless in its meaning. In other words, the intentions of God (the author) *can* be retrieved through methodic excavation, justifying the exegetic tradition. This is in stark contrast to Soroush's views. Soroush holds that although certain parts of the Qur'ān are inviolable today, that can change if and when we become ready to forgo metaphysics altogether.<sup>13</sup> For Soroush, not only does exegesis not have access to the mind of God (and never will), but if the Qur'ān itself is already an interpretation (Soroush claims that the Qur'ān is the Prophet's personal reading of God's words), then the foundational text—the purportedly infallible word of God itself and the integrity of 1,400 years of exegetic tradition—is brought under question.<sup>14</sup>

In Kadivar's reliance on textual exegesis, or hermeneutics, and commitment to finding an exegetic “method,” the text's meaning is accessible through tested exegetic and theological practices, yet he too insists that there are changes necessary within these

---

<sup>13</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, “Islamic Revival and Reform: Theological Approaches,” in *Reason, Democracy and Freedom in Islam* (2000), 26-37.

<sup>14</sup> Details covered in Chapter 2.

practices, requiring classic hermeneutics to be amended and modernized. In fact, Kadivar is willing to even situate the Qur'ān itself as a historical document. Explicitly expressed, Kadivar's second interpretive strategy thus maintains that the Qur'ān, which is classically understood to be inviolable and containing necessary and timeless wisdom, also includes verses that are no longer relevant and need to be abandoned when practicing contemporary exegesis. What makes Kadivar's work relevant, powerful, and dangerous to the regime is that he takes specifically those parts of the Qur'ān to task that are at odds with precepts of human rights and this is what makes his theology *political*.

In reality, the situating of the Qur'ān in history has been practiced by exegetes since the early centuries after the death of the Prophet, but while the act of putting into relief certain verses of the Qur'ān and dismissing other relevant ones has been used consistently in classical hermeneutics, it has rarely if ever been *openly acknowledged* as a strategy.<sup>15</sup> Kadivar writes as if this age-old practice needs to be openly and unapologetically reclaimed as a necessary hermeneutic approach.<sup>16</sup> By maintaining this position, Kadivar is in effect supporting the unrepentant historicizing of the unmediated holy word. He is, for example, willing to bend orthodoxy for verses that relate to the mistreatment of non-Muslims in Muslim majority lands and the unfair treatment of women. Kadivar's Qur'ān is inviolable within its historical spaces, but not necessarily complete in all its horizons.<sup>17</sup>

Kadivar's new theology is based on *admitting* an already established reading approach: that the Qur'ān must be read historically. But whereas certain fundamental theological points for Islam (such as the nature of prophethood, revelation, and soteriology) remain sacrosanct and untouchable, he highlights principally those verses

---

<sup>15</sup> A later section in the Introduction goes into further detail.

<sup>16</sup> Examples of this can be seen in his treatment of women and minorities and will be covered in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> This issue will be covered in Chapter 2.

where the Qur'ān is less authoritative in its coverage. This is not postmodern in nature; Kadivar argues simply for interpreters' historical *optics* on the text as relevant to the truth it contains.

Postmodern theology, in contrast, is a clear break with tradition in a way that is unacceptable to Kadivar. Not only does it try to rewrite orthodox theories about revelation and soteriology, it also tries to redefine ethics, the nature and role of rationality (*`aql*) as will be further discussed in Chapter 4; it also expands the field of religious agency (and by extension, in the case of Iran, political agency) in Ricœurian fashion, whereby the text creates its own world.<sup>18</sup> In that tradition it is then up to the reader to inhabit that world, finding within it realities that explain her/his own particular situation. Overarching master-narratives regarding nationality, identity, and political unity are also relinquished as contingent, and individuals move toward micro-politics, identity politics, local politics, and necessarily never-ending institutional power struggles, questioning the place of themselves as individuals both within the Tradition and the *`umma* (the greater Muslim community).

Perhaps the most controversial of these master narratives, the singular point of reference from whence all foundationalism emanates in Islamic theology, is the claim that the Qur'ān is the word of God, or *kalām Allah*. But the Qur'ān, according to Soroush, is not the direct and unmediated word of God; it is already an interpretation of God's word by the Prophet, and as a result, much more contingent than our traditional understanding of the Qur'ān allows. Even though the existence of God and his nature, certain aspects of Muhammad's prophethood, and soteriology are currently considered sacrosanct in Soroush's theology, he goes so far as to suggest that it is not impossible to envision a day when even these fundamentals of the religion become indefensible and

---

<sup>18</sup> This issue will be covered in Chapter 3.

need to be abandoned for less traditional readings. This might happen because, according to Soroush, a verse does not need to “remain certain or ambivalent forever.”<sup>19</sup> Soroush’s theology can be divided into two distinct moments: 1) the distinction between religion and religious knowledge and 2) the desacralization of the Qur’ān.

Soroush’s first hermeneutic innovation stresses the distinction between religion qua religion and religious knowledge. The early Soroush (circa 1991) still suggested that the Qur’ān was the unmediated word of God and as a result proposed that, while the primary source of Muslim knowledge, the Qur’ān, is beyond reproach, knowledge about the Qur’ān (and by default, renditions of Islam) are not.<sup>20</sup> Just like any other human knowledge, our understanding of the Qur’ān and Islam are legitimately susceptible to error and incompleteness.

It is not that the Qur’ān is incomplete and some verses questionable; it is that they are questionable according to our contemporary sensibilities and abilities to decipher it. The Qur’ān is complete. When we assemble the present state of the human condition (our current knowledge of how the world works) alongside our current *understanding* of the Qur’ān, we have no choice but to consider certain parts (historical and scientific) questionable. What was innovative in Soroush’s 1991 study was not the error-prone nature of *tafsīr*, per se; this fact can be attested by the polysemic nature of the genre during the heyday of qur’ānic science in the third and fourth centuries A.H (ninth and tenth centuries A.D.). What was different about Soroush’s study was his distinction between the “complete” Qur’ān and the “incomplete” Islam. If the Qur’ān and Islam were conflated in the believer’s imagination, then Soroush helped separate the two and assign

---

<sup>19</sup> Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> An earlier incarnation of Soroush’s book, *The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Sharī’ah*, was first presented from May 1988 to March 1990 in a four-part essay in *Kayhān-e Farhangī* (a cutting edge cultural publication at the time). See Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran* (2008), 192.

different ontological and normative signification to each. Islam, as a religion and system of beliefs, is based on error-prone readings of the complete Qur'ān. Islam, as a human and social construction, and in its many manifestations, is not only based on possible error but also keeps generating an ever growing corpus of religious knowledge (by extension, also error-prone), making itself increasingly hefty (*farbih*). Thus, Islam, though based on divine revelation, is ultimately a human construction.<sup>21</sup>

Soroush's second innovation reworks his earlier notions about the Qur'ān and suggests that the Holy Book, which he earlier called the exact, complete, and infallible word of God, is in fact itself already an interpretation by the person of the Prophet. The word of God was revealed to the Prophet, but what has been handed down to us is the Prophet's interpretation of revelation. If the epistemological distinction between religion qua religion and religious knowledge set the stage for greater freedom in breaking with orthodox interpretations, then this second game-changing strategy, considering the Qur'ān as an interpretation rather than the unmediated word of God, serves to desacralize the Qur'ān and leaves the field open for Soroush's postmodern theological break.

Does this mean that Soroush believes there is no stable and determinant meaning contained in the Qur'ān that will remain safe from the ravages of time or the interpretations of fallible humans (all humans being fallible)?<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, Soroush is a firm believer in the "complete and flawless" message of God, but we can only have access to that message through experiencing God or following those who do. Although much can be gleaned from the Prophet's encounter with the divine as well as the

---

<sup>21</sup> This is the basic message of Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz va Bast-e Tiorīk-e Sharī'at: Nazariyyih-ye Takammul-e Ma'rifat-e Dīnī* [The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Shariah: The Theory of Evolution of Religious Knowledge] (Tehran: Sirāt Cultural Center, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> An important note to make here is that Soroush is also questioning the Shī'ī concept of *'ismah* or infallibility of the Prophet and by extension his *ahl al-bayt* (the 14 *ma'sūms* [infallibles], which include Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and their progeny).

experiences of mystics like Rumi, their interpretations of the divine are nevertheless historically mediated and contingent and, as a result, error-prone. Our understanding of the divine, our religious knowledge, is inextricably dependent on non-religious learning and wisdom about the world. Although the divine experiences of past religious saints and prophets are a place to start, it is up to each believer to question and search the truth on their own.

The tracing of Kadivar's and Soroush's theological attempts to modernize Islamic thought and the situating of their innovations within both religious and political thought is the topic of this dissertation. Kadivar is faithful to the traditions of Islam, while Soroush works outside the orthodoxy. To proceed systematically, the thinkers' works must first be situated with respect to Islamic traditions so that the power and appeal of their innovations make sense.

To that end, then, Chapter 2 of this dissertation will discuss the *kalām* tradition, the nature of classical Islamic hermeneutics, the "new *kalām*" tradition, the elusive nature of postmodernity, and the relationship between theology and postmodernity in the West. That is, Islamic hermeneutics will be presented both within its own space of interpretations and with respect to twentieth-century Western epistemological innovations. Reclamations of past hermeneutic trends (Sufi *tafsīr*, in the case of Soroush) and Western innovations ground Kadivar's and Soroush's innovations.

In turn, Chapters 3 and 4 will respectively outline the two main theological issues that are key to their innovations. Chapter 3 begins with an introduction to classical revelation theology, followed by Soroush's and Kadivar's views on the nature of revelation and the position of the Qur'ān in exegetic practice. Chapter 4 covers the topic of religious pluralism, which shows the potentially political and dangerous nature of revised theology. The main topic of Chapter 4 is religious pluralism, but in the process

Soroush's pluralist views on society and culture are also touched upon (including his views on the unclear bases for social / national / ethnic unity, his sense of a fragmented and decentered self, and his conception of Iranian identity as arising from a multiple and conflicting web of cultures, all of which are some of the defining characteristics of the Postmodern Condition). Soroush argues for religious pluralism, holding that as humans we are epistemologically unable to determine the superiority of any one religion, while Kadivar rejects pluralism on the grounds that it makes faith obsolete.

This discourse of pluralism, when applied to religious thought, has manifested itself in terms of a decentered religious epistemology, which is mired in indeterminacy, contingency, and polycentric sources of information. That is, the pluralism debate has all too often been thought of as an emergence of Western relativism trying to counter the singular, interpretive authority of the Shī'ī cleric and the strict, superior position of the Muslim's salvation in relation to the other People of the Book. As a result, Soroush's response to charges of relativism is also provided in Chapter 4.

The conclusion of this study will briefly discuss the other remaining theological points of contention mentioned earlier: views on rationality, ethics, and political theology. Thus, the goal of the next three chapters is to isolate two classical theological issues dealt with by Iranian new theology—revelation and soteriology—and in doing so, make a cultural statement, however tentative, about the capacity of this “Muslim” public to ingest new and promising forms of Islam.



## Chapter 2: Key Concepts

### CLASSICAL *KALĀM* TRADITION

The power of theology has always been its comprehensiveness, its claim to explain the broad panoply of issues experienced by a community of co-religionists, as posed by human life in this world and the next. In the Muslim world Islamic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) arose as an apologetic meant to counteract nonbelievers’ charges against the new religion.<sup>23</sup> Over time, however, theology not only filled this traditional role, just as it had in other religions, but it also became, in the words of Mark Juergensmeyer:

A repository for a whole range of human activity . . . Long before the advent of modern academic principles: structure, the social, ethical, political, and spiritual aspects of a culture” were brought together in theology . . . [In classical literature] there often exists no clear distinction between Islamic theology, in the sense of *kalām*, and other Islamic and not so Islamic sciences, such as grammar, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), philosophy (*falsafa/hikma*), sufism, and the more specific activities of learning how to operate with the traditions of the Prophet, and how to assess and rank the chains of narrators which differentiate their levels of reliability.<sup>24</sup>

Muslim theologians did not separate what they did from other scholarly activities, and so it is not easy today to provide a neat account of the definition and boundaries of Islamic theology over and against other frames of religious thought.<sup>25</sup> Norman Calder states in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*: “Ghazālī for instance described the science of *kalām* as the most general or universal (*‘āmm*) of the religious sciences, the others being concerned with

---

<sup>23</sup> “‘*Ilm al-kalām* is ‘defensive apologetics,’ or ‘the science of discourse’ (on God)” (Louia Gardet, “‘*Ilm al-Kalām*,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. P. J. Bearman, et al. [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 3: 468).

<sup>24</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, “Beyond Words and War,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4, (2010): 886.

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Leaman and Sajjad Rizvi, “The Developed *Kalām* Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

particulars (*juz'ī*).”<sup>26</sup> It is no wonder that theology used to be called the “queen of all the sciences” in both Christianity and Islam.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the first four centuries of Sunni Islamic theology were a time of vibrant creativity, as known by the popular slogan, *man talaba al-dīn bi'l kalām tazandaqa* (whoever seeks religion through *kalām* becomes a heretic).<sup>28</sup> This accusation of heresy was inspired by the differences in the way rival schools were divided according to their views on the limitations of the use of reason in trumping tradition.

In Western accounts, the over-arching distinction between the different schools of early Sunni theology (the first four centuries) have been delineated by somewhat tendentious names: the Traditionalists and the Rationalists, where the Traditionalists are “known” to have favored “irrationality” (they were insistent on using *hadīth* to ground their readings), while the Rationalists (who used *hadīth* along with rational arguments) were known for their reliance on rational thought process. Western reliance on Enlightenment values almost automatically favors the Rationalists; only in critique of the Enlightenment is space made for the value of irrationality. These labels are thus not very helpful overall, and in fact can be misleading in assessing theology and its capacity to innovate for a community or state. The fact of the matter with *kalām* is that no one group within this landscape of early Islam operated without rationality, and as to the matter of methodology, this era’s theologians seem to have differed more in emphasis rather than in their possible abandonment of either reason or tradition in reaching theological pronouncements.<sup>29</sup> The Rationalists emphasized the use of reason while the Traditionalists emphasized reliance on *hadīth*. Still, by the fourth century, Sunni *kalām*

---

<sup>26</sup> Norman Calder, “Uṣūl al-Fiqh,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. P. J. Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 10: 931.

<sup>27</sup> Juergensmeyer, 886.

<sup>28</sup> Leaman and Rizvi, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

went silent alongside *tafsīr*, right around the time when the doors of *ijtihād*<sup>30</sup> were deemed closed.<sup>31</sup>

There were many strands of early Shīʿī *kalām*, but the present project will concentrate on the Twelver Shīʿī strand, as it is the one most relevant to work on contemporary Iran. The development of theology for the Shīʿa was a function of their intellectual encounter with the Muʿtazilite rational theology and later with the *falsafa* tradition<sup>32</sup> in second to fourth century Iraq.<sup>33</sup> It was Sheikh al-Mufīd<sup>34</sup> (d. 413 A.H./ 1022

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ijtihād* is the making of a decision in Islamic law by personal effort, independently of any school (*madhhab*) of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). *Ijtihād* is in direct contrast to *taqlīd*, which is copying or obeying without question.

<sup>31</sup> The claim that Sunni *kalām* went silent is made in 2008 by Leaman and Rizvi in a book about classical Islamic theology, but it was countered in 1982 by Wael Hallaq in his seminal article “Was the Gate of *Ijtihād* Closed?” (*IJMES* 16, no. 1 [1984]: 3-41), where he argues that claims made by the likes of Joseph Schacht (*An Introduction to Islamic Law* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964], 70-71), Norman Anderson (*Law Reform in the Muslim World* [London: Athlone, 1976], 7), H. A. R. Gibb (*Modern Trends in Islam* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947], 13) and W. Montgomery Watt (*Islam and the Integration of Society* [London: Routledge & Paul, 1961], 206-07, 242-43) are “baseless and inaccurate” (Hallaq, 4). By the beginning of the fourth century A.H. (some argue the seventh century), the scholars of the established schools of *fiqh* (Hanafī, Shāfiʿī, Malikī, and Hanbalī) and by extension other Qurʾānic fields of study, felt that all essential questions had been thoroughly discussed and finally settled. From this, a consensus was gradually established suggesting that henceforth no one might be deemed to have the necessary qualifications for independent reasoning in law (and by extension, theology), and that all future activity would have to be confined to the explanation, application and, at most, interpretation of the doctrine as it had been laid down once and for all. What followed was a demand for *taqlīd*, which came to mean the unquestioning acceptance of the doctrines of the four established schools of law and their authorities. This theory, known as *insidād bāb al-ijtihād* (closing of the door of *ijtihād*), is arguably still the dominant position on the issue. In his response, Hallaq suggests “that *ijtihād* was not only exercised in reality, but that all groups and individuals who opposed it were finally excluded from Sunnism” (Hallaq, 4).

<sup>32</sup> *Falsafa* (Islamic philosophy) can be said to have been “almost entirely based on Arabic translation of the Greek texts” (Hossein Ziai, “Islamic Philosophy [*Falsafa*],” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge, 2008], 55). The relationship between early *kalām* and *falsafa* was so close that the formative period of *falsafa* was actually “shaped by the problems posed by *kalām* scholars” (Ziai, 56). This does not, however, mean that Islamic philosophy became a handmaiden of theology (Ziai, 56.). “After the seventh and eighth centuries A.H. *falsafa* died out in Sunni Islam but was kept alive in Iranian centers of learning” despite being a “marginal scholastic activity” (Ziai, 56.). For more on Islamic philosophy see: Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (1996); Daiber Hans, *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy* (1999); Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (2005).

<sup>33</sup> The Muʿtazilites were an Islamic school of theology that flourished in Iraq (Basra and Baghdad) during the second to fourth centuries A.H. They are best known for their theory of the created Qurʾān. The theory stems from their belief in the perfect unity and eternal nature of God. Because God is eternal in nature the Qurʾān must have therefore been created, as it could not be co-eternal with God. Because the Qurʾān was created by God, the Muʿtazili school posits that the injunctions of God are accessible to rational thought

A.D.) who reconciled Twelver Shī'ī theology with Mu'tazilite thought. The distinction between Sunni Traditionalist and Rationalist divide was also very much alive for the Shī'īs. The Traditionalists at the time, like their Sunni counterparts, gave greater significance to the Qur'ān and *aḥadīth* (pl. *ḥadīth*; prophetic sayings and recorded opinions of the Imāms) as opposed to independent reasoning. Shī'ī Twelver Traditionalists had also acquired a reputation for believing in determinism, literalism, and anthropomorphism.<sup>35</sup> It was al-Mufīd who, through such works as *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt* (Correction on Beliefs), “distance[d] Twelver Shī'ī theology from such forms of irrationalism.”<sup>36</sup> But the “adoption of Mu'tazilite thought was never wholesale or uncritical.”<sup>37</sup> Unlike in the Mu'tazilite case, Sheikh al-Mufīd “felt strongly about the role of reason in theology but did not allow for the supremacy of unaided reason as a source for discovering truth.”<sup>38</sup> So, we see the foundations and limitations of current day Iranian Shī'ī Theology being set by Sheikh al-Mufīd. Al-Mufīd, through his rejection of the Mu'tazilite position on the supremacy of reason above all else, is making sure that the “content” and main message of the Qur'ān remained untainted.

Later Shī'ī theology is known for the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī schism. The Akhbārīs are a minority within Twelver Shī'ism who, according to Lawson, reject the use of reasoning in deriving verdicts and believe only that the Qur'ān and *aḥadīth* should be used as

---

and inquiry. Also, since knowledge is derived from reason, reason is the “final arbiter” in distinguishing right from wrong. It thus follows according to Mu'tazili reasoning that “sacred precedent” is not an effective means of determining what is just, as what is obligatory in religion is only obligatory “by virtue of reason.” For more on Mu'tazilite theology see: Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (2006); John A. Nawas, “The *Mihna* of 218 A.H./833 A.D. Revisited: An Empirical Study” (1996); Nagel Tilman, *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present* (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Sheikh al-Mufīd is considered one of the most eminent of Twelver Shī'ī theologians and the most important figure in early Twelver Shī'ī theology. For more on al-Mufīd see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufīd* (2005) and Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (1978).

<sup>35</sup> Leaman and Rizvi, 91.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

religious sources. “In some cases, we are told some scholars only accept *hadīth* as a proper source.”<sup>39</sup> Akhbārīs do not follow *marja*’s (clerics deemed models for imitation) and “in short reject *ijtihād* [independent legal reasoning].”<sup>40</sup> Akhbārīsm crystalized as a distinct movement with the writings of Muhammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036 A.H./ 1627 A.D.) and achieved its greatest influence in the late Safavid and early post-Safavid era. However, shortly thereafter, Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī (d. 1206 A.H./ 1792 A.D.) along with other Uṣūlī *mujtahids* crushed the Akhbārī movement.<sup>41</sup> Today it is found primarily in the Basra area of southern Iraq, where they form the majority in many districts, although no longer within the city. Akhbārī are also found in the island nation of Bahrain with reportedly “only a handful of Shī’ī *ulema*” remaining Akhbārī “to the present day.”<sup>42</sup>

Since the crushing of the Akhbārīs in the late eighteenth century A.D. (thirteenth century A.H), Uṣūlīsm has been the dominant Twelver Shī’ī school of thought. *Uṣūlis* favor the use of *ijtihād* (i.e., reasoning in the creation of new rules of *fiqh*, or jurisprudence); they insist on assessing *hadīth* to exclude traditions they believe unreliable and consider it obligatory to obey a *mujtahid* when seeking to determine correct behavior. The task of the legal scholar is to establish intellectual principles of general application (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)<sup>43</sup>, from which particular rules may be derived by way of deduction: accordingly, legal scholarship has the tools in principle for resolving any

---

<sup>39</sup> Todd Lawson, “Akhbārī Shī’ī Approaches to Tafsīr,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 1993), 173-74.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shī’ī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shī’ī sm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 222.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> *Uṣūl al-fiqh* is the study of the origins, sources, and principles upon which Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is based. It refers to the sources of Islamic law. In an extended sense it includes the study of the philosophical rationale of the law and the procedures by which the law applicable to particular cases is derived from the sources. This stands in contrast to the *furū’ al-fiqh*, which is constituted primarily by rules (i.e., positive law).

situation, whether or not it is specifically addressed in the Qur'ān or *ḥadīth*. I will discuss the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī debate in more depth later in this dissertation when I address the stability of the qur'ānic text. Soroush and Kadivar are working off of this Uṣūlī tradition.<sup>44</sup>

These two different strategies for evolving theologies, these two cognitive styles—one more reliant on rational thought and the other on the *salaf*<sup>45</sup> for interpreting the Qur'ān—thus exists next to each other within the Imāmī tradition. In reality, although everyone in Qom is working off an Uṣūlī platform, there are those who are more willing to be creative and rely on their intellect. These two intellectual styles define the kind of Islamic theology one is engaged in. Although both thinkers presented in this work ostensibly operate within an Uṣūlī framework, we can clearly see Kadivar placing limits on his creativity in order not to step outside the traditional boundaries, and Soroush nearly abandons the tradition altogether.

### ***KALĀM-E JADĪD (NEW THEOLOGY)***

In his 2009 presidential address for the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Mark Juergensmeyer, an expert on post-secularism, noted that “while in 1909 (the year the AAR was founded), the study of religion was the study of words, specifically sacred text,” the study of religion in the global age (the postmodern, post-national, post-secular,

---

<sup>44</sup> For more on the Shī'ī Akhbārī/Uṣūlī debates see: Wilferd Madelung, “Imamism and Mu'tazilite Theology” (1970); Norman Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative: The Emergence of an Imāmī Shī'ī Theory of Ijtihād” (1989); Andrew J. Newman, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran” (1992); Hossein Modarressi, “Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shī'ī Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey” (1984); Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbari Shī'ī School* (2007); J. R. I. Cole, “Shī'ī Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered” (1985); Mangol Bayat and Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, “The Usuli-Akhbari Controversy,” in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History* (1989).

<sup>45</sup> A member of the *salaf* is an early Muslim (first three generations after the advent of Islam).

post-Cold war era) is the study of “epistemic world views.”<sup>46</sup> Religious perceptions, according to Juergensmeyer, “coalesce around notions of social reality” and “produce powerful ways of looking at the world.”<sup>47</sup> As Juergensmeyer points out, this invokes Foucault’s concept of *episteme*, a paradigm within a particular discourse based on a common set of understandings about the basis of knowledge within that discourse.<sup>48</sup> We are also reminded of Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, the social location of shared understandings (set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste) about the world and how it should work.<sup>49</sup> Juergensmeyer’s statement again points towards theology assuming the role of a master discourse on culture and society, not just a “science of religion,” as it is often presented in the secularized West.

Juergensmeyer further claims that theology has always studied the episteme and the habitus of religion—a study of society, not just of abstracts. These structures of knowledge were traditionally understood in language that only recently has been named religious and opposed to the *public sphere*, or civil society. Thus, remaining today the comprehensive science that it was during its classical heyday, *kalām* has close affinities with this notion of theology being the science of an epistemic worldview. Where there was little if any difference between what we deem today as religious and non-religious

---

<sup>46</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, “Beyond Words and War,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2010): 886.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Foucault more specifically defines *episteme* “as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific” (Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, et al. [New York: Pantheon, 1980], 197). For more on episteme see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), especially p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> For more on *habitus* see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), especially p. 76.

discourse, theology had been the ultimate study of all things rational and logical, and it remains so today.<sup>50</sup>

In the current project I abide by an additional analogy: that theology, defined in this way, is also a political study of society, equivalent in many ways to Western political science. This allows me to argue that, in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the epistemic worldview of the Iranian reformist public (their social location of shared understandings about religion and its role in the world) can be characterized in terms of theology, not just politics. Most particularly, Soroush's and Kadivar's theologies, as we will come to know them, represent particular definitions of the public sphere and society, not just issues concerning revelation theology. (These issues are the topic of Chapter 3; positions on the salvation of the Other are the topic of Chapter 4, and values, ethics and morality will be the topic of a later piece.) By looking at Soroush's and Kadivar's theologies, we can gather their sense of reform in terms comprehensible to their publics. What Soroush and Kadivar are presenting in their theologies is a study of present-day Iranian episteme and habitus—a study of the society, not mere theological abstractions. With the classification of the reformist theology into the Soroush and Kadivar camps, I am not suggesting that reformist leaders and their followers are affiliated strictly with one of these two thinkers. Instead, my claim is that the way they see the world and their role in it (particularly their identities as public intellectuals) are reflected and defined, to a large extent, by these two schools of new theology: the modern, as exemplified by Kadivar, and the postmodern, as exemplified by Soroush.

---

<sup>50</sup> This can be seen in the works of Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra, Ibn Hayyan, al-Khawrazmi and al-Kindi. For the expansion of this project into a longer monograph, I plan to expand this part of the chapter to include an exposition of their outlined theologies, which were simultaneously studies of their corresponding epistemes and habitus. For more on the aforementioned thinkers see: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (1996); Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Amin Razavi, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, Vol. 1: "From Zoroaster to Omar Khayyam" and Vol. 2: "Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age" (2008).



But what exactly is the make-up and history of this *kalām-e jadīd*? The first ever mention of the term *kalām-e jadīd* can be found in `Alāmah Shiblī Nu`mānī's *`Ilm Kalām Jadīd* (first published in 1949 but written earlier), a tract in which he mentions how certain topics formerly not considered within the purview of theology should, as a result of Islam's encounter with modernity, become part of Islamic theology. In his introduction to the book, Shiblī gives us the reason why he felt it necessary to consider a "new *kalām*":

Old *kalām* dealt exclusively with doctrinal issues (*`aqā'id*). This is because complaints (*e`terāzāt*) about Islam were couched against its doctrinal issues. Today religion is also considered and judged according to its historical, ethical, civilization and social merit. It is not doctrinal topics but instead legal and ethical questions about a religion that take precedence for European scholars. Polygamy, divorce, slavery and finally *jihad* in order to vanquish an opposing religion [they are referring to European fascination with the concept of *jihad* against the Christians] are better criteria for judging the truth value of a religion. It is because of this reason that I will commence a discussion about *kalām-e jadīd*.<sup>51</sup>

Most of the topics Nu`mānī covers in his book overlap with orthodox *kalām*. Topics such as the place of reason in Islam, the nature of God, and prophethood overlap in all versions of the *kalām*. What is different is that, even though classical *kalām* was at some level apologetic, it spoke from a position of power and entitlement. *`Ilm Kalām Jadīd* is defensive and acknowledges the subordinate place of *kalām* in reference to the Enlightenment. The pages of each chapter are filled with scientific terminology from the late nineteenth century, and Nu`mānī's rebuttals are defenses against them. There are, however, four interesting chapters towards the end of the tract that signify it as a work of new theology, issues that make Nu`mānī's text address the modern world, specifically with topics not seen in classical theology: human rights, women's rights, and inheritance and civil rights (*hoqūq-i āmmeh-i nās*).

---

<sup>51</sup> `Alāmah Shiblī Nu`mānī, *Tārīkh-i `Ilm-i Kalām: `Ilm-i Kalām Jadīd* (Tehran: Chāp-i Rangīn, 1949), 4. The English translation is mine and done directly from the Persian text.

According to Abdolhossein Khosropanah,<sup>52</sup> prior to becoming popular in the post-revolutionary period, *kalām-e jadīd* was taught by Morteza Motahhari in his theology classes at Tehran University during the Shah's reign.<sup>53</sup> Today, although the concept is written about extensively in Iran, "what in fact sets *kalām-e jadīd* apart from its predecessor is not very clear."<sup>54</sup> According to Khosropanah, there are four views regarding what is distinctive about *kalām-e jadīd*:

1. *Kalām-e jadīd* has become synonymous with Religious Studies / Philosophy of Religion: Contemporary theologians need to learn new sciences in order to adequately respond to modern qualms. If in the past the responsibilities of *kalām* were to respond to doubts, describe religious knowledge, and produce proofs for doctrinal foundations, today it has the added responsibility of devising the field of Religious Studies (*Dīn Shenāsi*). Since Religious Studies is an extra-religious look at religion, new theology has sometimes also been called Philosophy of Religion.
2. New issues are raised: In comparing *kalām-e jadīd* with its predecessor this view finds that new theology has appended previously uncharted areas of study. If in the past theology dealt only with discourses on the nature of the divine, prophethood, and revelation, today new issues that have more to do with religious studies and anthropology have supplanted these older issues.
3. It mends a longstanding shortcoming: This view holds that orthodox theology has always avoided fully dealing with normative, ethical, and legal propositions in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* and has opted instead to define itself by concentrating on prescriptive questions. Traditional theology deals with issues such as the characteristics of God, prophethood, and eschatology. *Kalām-e jadīd* breaks with tradition and takes a more critical stance towards normative, critical, and legal issues.
4. The difference between old and new theology is a matter of ontology: This group believes that there is an ontological difference between new and old

---

<sup>52</sup> Abdolhossein Khosropanah is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Mo'asseseh-i Hekmat Novin Islami (Islamic Institute for New Culture and Thought) in Tehran, Iran.

<sup>53</sup> Abdolhossein Khosropanah, *Kalām-i Jadīd [New Theology]*, Mo'asseseh-e Hekmat Novin-e Islami, n.d., 5. [The English version of this text may be *Modern Theology*, 4th ed. Iran: Qom Islamic Seminary Publication, 2009.] Morteza Motahhari is considered an important ideologue of the Islamic Republic. He was co-founder of Hosseiniye Ershad and the Combatant Clergy Association (*Jāme'e-ye Rowhāniyat-e Mobārez*). He was a disciple of Ayatollah Khomeini before the revolution and had a promising career ahead of him, a career that was cut short when he was assassinated on May 1, 1979, just a few months after the victory of the revolution.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 7.

theology; that as a result of the scientific revolution, it is no longer possible to prove that which is considered divine. The noumenal is not accessible through the phenomenal. It is therefore necessary for us to use a different language (skepticism) when speaking about God, prophethood, eschatology, and revelation.<sup>55</sup>

It is clear that the last two classifications in Khosropanah's taxonomy refer respectively to Kadivar and Soroush.

In fact, what I would like to suggest is that most if not all of the new theology presently practiced by reformists in Iran can fall under these latter two categories, as both Kadivar and Soroush also engage the Western philosophy of religion and believe that modernity has presented the Muslim tradition with new challenges. In other words, the study of *kalām-e jadīd* can be exhausted through the study of its most distinguished theorists Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar since all the key positions and issues are represented in their work. Let us now turn to some central elements of new theology in both its incarnations (the modern and the postmodern), to establish the rest of the framework and terminology that will recur throughout this dissertation.

## **NEW THEOLOGY: CONNECTIONS WITH CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

Kadivar's new theology sheds light on a rarely acknowledged classical hermeneutic practice in the Muslim world: selectivity.<sup>56</sup> Kadivar holds that the Qur'ān contains determinate and stable messages that are inviolable, timeless, and accessible.<sup>57</sup> This is not the same as saying that the whole Qur'ān is stable and determinate. There are

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>56</sup> This term is borrowed from Moshe Sokol, "How Do Jewish Thinkers Interpret Religious Texts?" *Modern Judaism* 13, no. 1 (1993): 25-48.

<sup>57</sup> Stable and determinate meaning refers to meaning that has exact and definite limits; it is not as if anything goes, or that the horizon of possible meanings is infinite. For instance, the Qur'ān self-references itself as the word of God. There might be some unknowns about the exact details of the revelatory process (was the word interjected into the Prophet's ear or written onto his heart or both, etc.) but the fact that what the Prophet recited to his *`umma* was the word for word account of that transaction, is not disputable for Kadivar. The verses (presented in the next chapter) that speak to the sending down of the Qur'ān, are for Kadivar, stable and determinate and despite the unknown details about the transference, their meaning is limited to the Qur'ān being *kalām Allāh*.

parts of the Qur'ān to which we do not have absolute access (the *mutashabbihāt*, or ambivalent verses). For those parts that are accessible, the meaning of these messages are easier to get to because the intentions of God (the author)<sup>58</sup> can, in fact, be retrieved through expert excavation: reading and understanding are established practices that can be taught and learned. The stability of some parts, however, does not mean that the text, as a whole, is immune to the passage of time. Certain parts of the Qur'ān, if they are intended to refer to the world beyond the text, are behind the times and defunct. Certain verses, for instance, no longer represent the sensitivities of contemporary followers and thus need to be ignored as an understanding of a text is transferred into a context of practical religion or theology. Ignoring these verses and *selecting* certain others does not corrupt the main divine message that is inherent in the text, but from a historical perspective it is necessary to overlook these verses as a means to stay true to the divine message within shifting modern perspectives.<sup>59</sup>

Kadivar's position about the stable, divine meaning of the text is reminiscent of the interpretive approaches of contemporary theological hermeneuticians like Emilio Betti,<sup>60</sup> whose work is very much in the dominant continental traditions of hermeneutics and is known as reconstructive, or objectivist hermeneutics.<sup>61</sup> As I demonstrate below, like Betti, Kadivar believes that it is possible to extrapolate the intentions of God in a systematic reading and maintains that there is a stable meaning within the qur'ānic text. Betti operated at a time when the idea of timelessly reading the mind of the author was becoming passé in light of German Romanticist ideals and Nietzsche's perspectival

---

<sup>58</sup> A more extensive discussion of this topic will have to include the created vs. uncreated Qur'ān debate.

<sup>59</sup> Two examples of this treatment (Kadivar's treatment of women's issues and his pronouncements about the fate and salvation of non-Muslims in Islam) are covered in Chapter 3.

<sup>60</sup> Emilio Betti (1890 -1968) was an Italian jurist, Roman Law scholar, philosopher and theologian.

<sup>61</sup> This tradition is summarized in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1985). His introduction summarizes the general outlines of this modern theological hermeneutics.

position. Betti was one of the few thinkers who remained wary of the death of the author theory, which was finally exemplified in Roland Barthes' essay by the same name.<sup>62</sup> Although Kadivar also believes in being able to access the mind and intentions of the author (in this case, God), he nevertheless parts with Betti's objectivist hermeneutics by refusing, in very substantial ways, to suppress his own point of view. This subjectivism comes through in his strategy of selectively reading the Qur'ān. Betti seems to have been confused about where to draw the objectivist-subjectivist line and refused to join the continental hermeneutics movement that stressed the objectivity of the reader as critical to the act of reading. Unlike Betti however, Kadivar consciously and intentionally inserts himself into the Qur'ān by being selective and subjectively deciding which parts are no longer relevant.

To better understand what Kadivar does let us look at an outline of Betti's position in *Teoria Generale della Intrepretazione* (A General Theory of Interpretation),<sup>63</sup> which appeared in 1955, as understood by Ormiston and Schrift in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*.<sup>64</sup> I will follow Betti's position via a synopsis of Gadamer's response, which was provided in the first edition of *Truth and Method* in 1960.

First and foremost, for Betti, the "texts contain a 'stable determinacy of meaning.'"<sup>65</sup> That is, as long as the interpreter has access to suitable "historical and critical instruments," s/he is able to recreate the permanent meaning of the text in its *original* socio-cultural context [emphasis in original]."<sup>66</sup> In other words, for Betti it is

---

<sup>62</sup> Roland Barthes is best known for his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," which became a stepping stone for Derrida's deconstructionism. This essay can be found in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

<sup>63</sup> Emilio Betti, *Teoria generale della interpretazione [A General Theory of Interpretation]* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1955). This book has not been translated into English.

<sup>64</sup> Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 8-20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

possible to capture the original intent of the author (yet not necessarily only that, or in its original form). This is something Betti and Kadivar share. In Kadivar's hermeneutics, the primary intent of the Qur'ān (which resides in the *muḥkamāt*, or certain verses) remains intact and can be retrieved with the correct tools, regardless of the idiosyncrasies of the exegete or the socio-cultural biases s/he faces.

Before we proceed further, two helpful distinctions in this discussion come to us by way of E. D. Hirsch and Thomas Guarino. The next few paragraphs will be dedicated to discussing Hirsch's distinction between *meaning* and *significance* and then an exposition of Guarino's difference between *form* and *content* will be presented. In his familiar text on hermeneutics, *The Aims of Interpretation*,<sup>67</sup> Hirsch points out that there needs to be a distinction made between the *meaning* of a text and the *significance* it has for contemporary readers. A text's significance aims to apply the meaning of the text to contemporary circumstances and situations.<sup>68</sup> By analogy, the meaning of the Qur'ān does not change, but the significance of the Qur'ān is elevated by promoting the weight and significance of certain verses (i.e., the *muḥkamāt*) and denying the justice and rationality of other verses which are no longer pertinent to the times—verses, for example, that indirectly support slavery, openly support the secondary social status of women, and directly compromise the legal status of non-Muslims living in Muslim lands.

Kadivar uses the same distinction between the *meaning* of the Qur'ān and the *significance* it has for contemporary readers. In the case of slavery, Kadivar insists that qur'ānic judgments (*aḥkāṁ*) are divided into two groups: 1) *ṣābiṭ* (fixed, firm) and *dā'imī* (permanent, continual) judgments, which persist through time; and 2) *muvaqqat* (temporary) and *mawsūmī* (seasonal) judgments, “whose time has come to an end

---

<sup>67</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Hirsch took up Betti's mantle in the United States.

<sup>68</sup> Ormiston and Schrift, *Hermeneutic Tradition*, 18.

[*dawrān-e 'itibār ān bi sar risīdih ast*].”<sup>69</sup> One of the ways in which a *faqīh* or *mujtahid* (jurist) decides that a judgment is temporary is by deciding if it is still “just [‘*ādilānih*] and rational [‘*uqalār*] when compared against the precepts of human rights.”<sup>70</sup> If the judgment does not satisfy these two prerequisites, as is the case with slavery, then it must be considered defunct. This means that for clerics like Kadivar, sources for *ijtihād* have now been expanded to include the Universal Declaration for Human Rights—an extra-religious source.

When writing about women’s issues, for example, Kadivar admits that the “unfair treatment of women not only has textual precedence in the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, but that there are actual verses in the Qur’ān that support maltreatment of women.”<sup>71</sup> Kadivar admits:

*Bā ṣavabiṭ-e ijtiḥād-e muṣṭalaḥ nemītavan bi tasāvi-ye ḥuqūq-w zan o mard dast yāft. Īn rā shaffāf, ṣarīḥ va qāṭi ‘āneh ‘arz mīkonām* [It is not possible to achieve legal equality for men and women through the commonly used criteria of jurisprudence. I say this in a transparent, explicit and categorical manner].<sup>72</sup>

In his 2003 article, “Rawshanfekrī-ye Dīnī va Ḥuqūq-e Zanān” [Religious Intellectualism and the Rights of Women], Kadivar enumerates the different ways women have been treated as second class citizens in civil, constitutional and criminal law. Kadivar takes to task many of the injustices women endure in the Islamic Republic and asks his reading public to imagine an Islam that would be fair to both genders. “Would the religion of God

---

<sup>69</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, “Mas’aleh-ye Bardehdaī dar Islām” [The Issue of Slavery in Islam] (paper presented at Second International Symposium on Human Rights, Mufid University, Qom, Iran, May 18 2002), 15; Also online, accessed June 5, 2011, <http://kadivar.com/Index.asp?DocId=598&AC=1&AF=1&ASB=1&AGM=1&AL=1&DT=dtv15>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, “Rawshanfekrī-ye Dīnī va ḥuqūq-e Zanān” [Religious Intellectualism and the Rights of Women], *Ā’in* 1 (2003): 11. *Ā’in* is a social, cultural, and political monthly publication in Iran.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

change if girls, like boys, did not have to receive permission to get married?”<sup>73</sup> Kadivar continues, “The husband is considered the head of the family in family law . . . What would be the problem in expecting family issues to be resolved through mutual consultation and deliberation [between husband and wife] (*Che eshkālī dadad begūm umūr khawnevādigī bā mashvirat yekdīgar sāmān biyābad*)?”<sup>74</sup> Kadivar expects the *mutashabbihāt* of the Qur’ān to be able to pass the test of being just and rational. This strategy maintains that the text’s integrity be preserved, but makes sure that its applications, within certain contexts, also be revisable.

As for the issue of legal status of non-Muslims living in Muslim lands, Kadivar says, “The question we are trying to answer is whether or not the judgments that are applied to the *dhimmīs* [non-Muslim citizens living in Muslim lands] are *ṣābiṭ / dā’imī* [fixed / permanent] judgments or *muvaqqat / mawsūmī* [temporary / seasonal]?”<sup>75</sup> It is in this 2003 article that Kadivar clearly states that “some verses of the Qur’ān can contain judgments that are changeable and temporary (*ba’zī āyāt-e Qur’ān mītavānad ḥāvi-ye ba’zī aḥkā-m-e mutighayyir bāshand*).”<sup>76</sup> Kadivar’s response to the question is that legal issues around this topic can be divided into three categories: fixed judgments, conditional judgments, and temporary judgments whose time has passed.<sup>77</sup>

Human dignity as presented in Q 17:70 “We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our Creation,” is, for

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>75</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, “Mas’aleh-ye Huqūq-e Gheyr-e Musalmānān dar Javāmi‘-ye Islāmī” [The Issue of the Rights of Non-Muslims in Muslim Lands] (paper presented at International Conference in Reframing Islam: Politics into Law, Irish Center for Human Rights, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland, September 1, 2005), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2



example, a declaration that Kadivar reads as fixed in meaning. Q 17:70 yields, for him, fixed judgments, such as the fixed judgment that demands non-Muslims in Muslim lands be treated with the dignity with which God meant them to have.<sup>78</sup> The *dhimmī* rule was established when Muslims were in a position of political power. Today conditions are different, and fair treatment is based on the *‘umma*’s less than favorable standards. In consequence, it is now necessary to rethink the law and allow the ruler to decide what the expedient policy would be. This does not mean that the newly devised law will hold forever. If the Muslim community ascends once again, judgment might have to be revisited.<sup>79</sup> Kadivar continues: “How Muslims are treated in foreign lands, in fact, needs to be the criterion for foreigners’ treatment in Muslim lands . . . In other words, if we follow the foundational tenets of Islam [*usūl va mabānī*], the majority of the judgments and rulings [*aḥkām*] that deal with non-worship issues [*gheyr-e ‘ibādāt*] have been enacted according to contextual details of time and place. Flexibility in *ijtihād* allows contemporary Islam the necessary ability to search for new answers in light of new conditions.”<sup>80</sup>

When Kadivar selects certain *mutashabbih* (unclear) verses and reads them against the Declaration of Human Rights, then, he is essentially lowering the significance of those verses by evaluating them according to extra-religious sources. That is, he is reading the Qur’ān from outside of Tradition. But Kadivar stays true to what he considers the *content* and true message of the Book, what he calls the foundational tenets (*usūl va mabānī*) that, he suggests, are very much in synch with the Declaration of Human Rights. Guarino’s distinction, as posited in his 1990 essay “Revelation and Foundationalism: Toward Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness,” highlights the difference

---

<sup>78</sup> Kadivar, “Mas’aleh-ye...,” 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

between *form* and *content*.<sup>81</sup> Guarino states that while it has historically been the case that in Christian theology, horizons of historicity and finitude, as well as cultural and linguistic particularities, have gradually been incorporated into classical theology, in each case the historicizing of the divine word has occurred only on the condition that these delimiting elements not influence the fundamental tenets of Christian theology, and that the changes they introduce modify only a particular doctrine's context and form rather than its content.<sup>82</sup> Orthodox theologians would assert that the narrative about the Bible may change, but not its necessary fidelity to the text and to fundamental articles of faith. This assertion was also true for classical Islamic theology.

Guarino's distinction can be fruitfully applied to the Qur'ān. An example of the change of context and form through a change in narrative would be the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation).<sup>83</sup> This genre of qur'ānic study attempted to establish the historical and situational contexts within which revelation was sent down to Muhammad in his twenty-three years as the Prophet. The *asbāb* literature follows a simple logic: if a particular verse or group of verses, or even a phrase making up a part of a verse, treated an issue that found a likely context in an event known from the biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet, it was assumed to have been revealed in relation to that occasion.<sup>84</sup> According to Rueven Firestone, studying these contexts and forms can make all the difference in our understanding of the core message of the Qur'ān. Firestone questions the evolutionary theory of the warlike nature of latter revelation (Medinan verses) as opposed to the early

---

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Guarino, "Revelation and Foundationalism: Toward Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness," *Modern Theology* 6, no. 3 (1990): 222.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Other interpretive methods that change form and context are the genre of "abrogating and abrogated" (*al-nasikh wal mansukh*), also called *al-naskh* (abrogation). This method determines which of the contradictory terms in the Qur'ān had been sent down later, giving less weight to verses that had been sent earlier.

<sup>84</sup> Rueven Firestone, "Disparity and Resolution in the Qur'ānic Teachings on War: A Reevaluation of a Traditional Problem," *The Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 3.

pacifist revelation of the Meccan period and posits that Islam seemingly became more violent in nature not because war became more expedient for Muhammad and his community in order to survive, but because of the disparity that arose (the “internal disagreements between early scholars after the Prophet’s passing”) when all the verses about war were gathered together.<sup>85</sup> He contends that the reason that the more violent passages gained the upper hand in defining the tone of the Qur’ān is related to conscious choices made by scholars, who marginalized the more pacifist voices and proceeded to read the Qur’ān in a more aggressive voice.<sup>86</sup>

Orthodoxy maintains that the meaning of a text is permanent even if the verbal formulation changes. Revelation can be “expressed in varying languages, cultures, and conceptual schemas i.e., in a plurality of ‘forms,’ but the ‘content’ remains, with some nuances, identical.”<sup>87</sup> What we are talking about here is a “plurality of expressions, perspectives and context,”<sup>88</sup> all of which preserve the stable determinacy of the Qur’ān. For instance, Soroush’s first hermeneutic innovation speaks of an epistemological difference between religion and religious knowledge.<sup>89</sup> Religious knowledge, any and all knowledge currently held by the Muslim community, be they lay persons or clerics, is nothing but fallible human knowledge. In the cognitive strategies of new theology, this is not an alteration in the content of the doctrine, rather it is only a reformulation in the order of religious knowledge—the doctrine’s form, context, and historical site in which its understanding as a narrative is deployed. According to Soroush the current period in

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>87</sup> Guarino, 222.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> See Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shari’at: Nazariyyeh-ye Takamol-e Ma’rifat-e Dini* [The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Shariah: The Theory of Evolution of Religious Knowledge] (Tehran: Serat Cultural Center, 1994), where Soroush changes the modern theological discourse in Iran by making the discussion about Islam an epistemological endeavor.

Islamic history requires that we bifurcate the underlying conditions for understanding religious truth. His second innovation, however, of identifying the Qur'ān itself as a narrative (i.e., as an interpretation of God's message), is a denial of a principal doctrinal tenet, a redefinition of content. It will now be easier to pinpoint epistemological differences positions with the help of the two aforementioned distinctions.

Betti's position is by no means unsophisticated. For him, a proper hermeneutic procedure tries for an "interpretive fidelity" to the stable meaning of the text, which acknowledges its timelessness: "All tendencies to relativize the horizon of the text to one's own point of view must be suppressed."<sup>90</sup> Simultaneously, however, he does not necessarily push for a uniformity of application or significance. Betti even goes so far as to hold that even if the meaning of the text is determinate and retrievable in this way, "one cannot overlook cultural linguistic horizons."<sup>91</sup> That each interpreter understands the text from her/his own perspective, as well as from the linguistic and cultural resources available to that reader, is a fact. The office of the interpreter, Betti says, "is that of researching and understanding the meaning of the 'other'; this can hardly mean that the interpreter is an inert recipient with a passive and mechanical operation."<sup>92</sup> But Betti draws the line by rejecting the idea that context so dictates any uses or significances of the content that any search for stable determinacy of meaning of a text is illusory.<sup>93</sup> Kadivar would agree with both of Betti's positions since despite the situatedness of the Qur'ān, it is nonetheless possible to extract an unchanging and eternal message if one sticks to the *muḥkamāt*.

---

<sup>90</sup> Ormiston and Schrift, *Hermeneutic Tradition*, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Betti, 315-16.

<sup>93</sup> Guarino, 228.

As can be seen from Betti's and Kadivar's positions, there are clear tensions between the view of a retrievable message and a subjective and partial interpreter, but how possible is it to maintain interpretive fidelity to the text's stable meaning while simultaneously injecting one's perspective into the exegetic process? Betti is not able to resolve this tension in his hermeneutic method, but Kadivar has been able to exact a concession from tradition by using the distinction between the *muḥkam* and the *mutashabbih*.<sup>94</sup> Kadivar sacrifices the stability of the text as a whole and is willing to make do with a stable "main message" since it is only the *muḥkamāt* that remain stable over time.

That this problem from classical Western hermeneutics interests a new theologian like Kadivar is no accident. This tension between perspectivism and the excavation of stable meaning can be seen in classical *tafsīr* literature as well. Arriving at a stable reading for certain verses (i.e., the *mutashabbihāt*) of the Qur'ān has never been automatic or a given. The problem of providing a stable reading of the Qur'an is compounded when the distinction between clear and unclear verses is not made. Firestone, for instance, argues that the history of early Islam was mired with intense debate about *ayah* classifications into *muḥkam* and *mutashabbih*.<sup>95</sup> Lawson argues that it is still not clear whether the Qur'ān is all *mutashabbih*, all *muḥkam*, or comprised of both since there are *ayat* to support all three of the claims.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup>The concept of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbih* came about in order to better understand Q 3:7: "It is He who hath sent down unto thee the book, wherein are some verses clear to be understood, they are the foundation of the book; and others are parabolical. But they whose hearts are perverse will follow that which is parabolical within, out of love of schism, and a desire of the interpretation thereof; yet none knoweth the interpretation thereof, except God. But they who are well grounded in knowledge say, we believe therein, the whole is from our Lord; and none will consider except the prudent." For more on the topic, especially how serving to undermine Q 3:7, some verses of the Qur'ān point to there being only *muḥkam* verses and some other verses point to there being only *mutashabbih* verses, see: Leah Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashabbihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," in *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation* (1999).

<sup>95</sup> Firestone, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

The following very short primer on classical Sunni and Twelver Shī'ī *tafsīr* literatures is presented in an effort to better highlight the long standing efforts behind the search for the “stable” meaning of the Qur'ān. Even though Kadivar and Soroush fall within the Imāmī category, Sunni and particularly Early Sunni medieval exegetic trends are relevant to this study because there is much to be gleaned about the nature of Shī'ī *tafsīrs* from these works since, as Bar-Asher notes, there is not much difference between pre-Buyid Shī'ī and Sunni *tafsīrs*.<sup>97</sup>

The Sunni theological literature of Islam's classical era operates within what Walid Saleh calls a “genealogical tradition,” one that maintains “continuity of shared hermeneutical principles as the primary mode of operation.”<sup>98</sup> Classical theologians worked within an environment of pluralism and “admissibility of difference in all religious matters,”<sup>99</sup> a space where “the preferred mode of disagreement was to add one's voice to the pool of interpretations inherited...where changes and innovations were more easily overlooked and thus introduced as it were, almost imperceptibly.”<sup>100</sup> At certain intervals however, “individual exegetes would cause major upheavals in the tradition due to an emphasis on one of the many currents that constitute the tradition to the exclusion of others.”<sup>101</sup> Such acts of interpretation served to show the shaky foundation on which the concept of the stable Qur'ān stood upon. As Norman Calder argues, in creating and developing his theory of *ijtihād*, Shāfi'ī was trying partly, to account for, and justify the phenomenon of *ikhtilāf* (disagreement), and partly to assert the authority of the clerical class.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Walid Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12 (2010): 14.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>102</sup> Norman Calder, “*Ikhtilāf* and *Ijmā'* in Shāfi'ī's *Risāla*,” *Studia Islamica* 58 (1983): 55-81.

Once the concept of *ikhṭilāf* had taken root, through their acceptance of polysemy, medieval commentators preserved the idea that a stable text of revelation can produce more than one understanding: “The Qur’ān spoke to many meanings, and they were all true, unless there developed an *ijma`* (consensus) concerning a particular meaning.”<sup>103</sup> But consensus was more often than not an elusive goal. A verse, Saleh says, “could have conflicting interpretations, each of which could be adduced as part of the meaning of the word of God without disrupting the notion of clarity of the Qur’ān.”<sup>104</sup>

To see what this interpretive pluralism implies for the stability of the text and for the politics of polysemy, it is instructive to look at al-Tha’labī’s work.<sup>105</sup> If we agree that polysemy signifies textual instability, al-Tha’labī’s work is a useful example of how apprehensive some medieval scholars were in admitting the inherent instability of the Qur’ān.

Even though *ikhṭilāf* was agreed upon and openly practiced, this did not mean that commentators were comfortable in flaunting their creativity on paper. One of the more interesting findings in Saleh’s study of al-Tha’labī is that, while al-Tha’labī takes great pains to explain his methodology in his rather meticulously crafted introduction (most medieval commentaries do not contain introductions)—a methodology that incidentally professes to be devoid of any and all creativity—he proceeds inside the commentary itself to follow a rather different set of rules, this time much more open to what we today call *tafsīr bi’l-ray*, or bringing in his own perspective into the interpretive act. His own exegetical practice, therefore, reaches somewhat beyond his own theories. This practice

---

<sup>103</sup> Saleh, 18.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 18. For more on the polyvalent nature of *tafsīr* see Norman Calder, “Tafsir from From Tabari to Ibn Kathir,” in *Approaches to the Qur’an* (1993). Calder states, “Polyvalent readings remain the norm though named authorities are considerably reduced” (103).

<sup>105</sup> Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Th’alabī (d. 427/1035-1036) was one of the main medieval scholars of the Qur’ān. His work was revived in Western scholarly circles due to Saleh’s monograph.

points to how, regardless of the actual polyvalent atmosphere of medieval *tafsīrs*, there seems to have been a tendency towards obscuring difference. Al-Tha'labī, like some contemporary qur'ānic scholars, was either uncomfortable in bringing attention to what set him apart from other commentators, or he had trouble openly professing the less than stable nature of the holy text.

The Sunni pre-modern openness to *ikhtilāf* has diminished in the twentieth century, however. Saleh's 2010 historiography of *tafsīrs* shows how what he calls the "genealogical tradition" in pre-modern *tafsīr* works was damaged in the twentieth century by the Salafīs'<sup>106</sup> appropriation of *tafsīr* studies.<sup>107</sup> Saleh illustrates how the popular distinction between *tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr* (*hadīth*-based interpretation) and *tafsīr bi'l-ray* (deductive or rational interpretation) is in fact merely a "Sunni ideological position," a political move "without much analytical value."<sup>108</sup> As indicated by Saleh, the divisive terms *bi'l ma'thur* and *bi'l ray* were not used as analytic terms until the early twentieth century, whereby Salafīs who believed that "*tafsīr* was not to be a generative field, began inserting" the two terms into the discourse.<sup>109</sup> The Azhari Salafī historians (supporters of the Taymiyyan ideology)<sup>110</sup> "used the term to legitimize the Sunni hermeneutical heritage on their own terms. Since most of the Sunni exegetical tradition was not of the [*tafsīrs*

---

<sup>106</sup>A Salafī is a follower of an Islamic movement that takes the predecessors of the patristic period of early Islam as exemplary models. Wahhabism is a particular orientation within Salafism. Wahhabism is the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. As a position, it favors purging Islam of its impurities and is considered by some as ultra-conservative and heretical. For more on Salafī thought see: Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft* (2005) and Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (2004).

<sup>107</sup> Saleh, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibn Taymīyyāh (b. 661 A.H./ 1263A.D.) was an Islamic scholar, theologian, and logician who lived during the Mongol invasions. He was a member of the school founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and sought a return to original interpretations based only on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. It was a dissertation by al-Azhar scholar al-Dhahabī in the early twentieth century that brought Ibn Taymiyyah's radical position to the fore (Ibid., 10-11).



*bi'l-ma`thūr*] mode, they could hardly afford to reject this whole corpus en masse.”<sup>111</sup> To them, “hermeneutics was narration,” and *tafsīr* meant the opinions of Muhammad and his followers. *Tafsīr* presented in this *hadīth* format (as a narration of what the Prophet and the *salaf* had thought of the Qur’ān) “ceased to be a danger,” no longer a place where “legitimacy or religious and theological positions could issue from an interpretation of scripture.”<sup>112</sup>

To summarize, up until the take-over by Salafī polemics in the twentieth century,<sup>113</sup> the polysemic nature of *tafsīrs* and the *madhhab* system of law and theology was for the majority of writers within the classical tradition based on the acceptance of the concept of *ikhtilāf*. It was Imam ash-Shafī`ī who established this trend as early as the second century after the death of the Prophet with his authorizing of “*ijtihād*.”<sup>114</sup> This did not prevent inter-school rivalries or even, at times, violent dispute, but the acceptance of difference and the epistemological consequences of such acceptance was essential to the intellectual coherence of the Sunni system. The Sunnis agreed to differ among themselves.

It took the Shī`ī much longer to grapple with the concepts of *ikhtilāf* and *ijtihād*. The principle of *ijtihād*, the concept that allowed commentators, legislators, and theologians to use reason in arriving at new understandings of the Qur’ān, was rejected by Imāmi scholars of the pre-Buyid and Buyid periods.<sup>115</sup> They categorically rejected it

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>113</sup> For more on how the ideological dissertation in defense of Taymiyyan hermeneutic theory (that the interpretation of the Salaf, or early generation of Muslims, be accorded sole legitimacy in interpreting the Qur’ān) by al-Dhahabi changed al-Azhar from an Ash`arī camp into a hub of Salafī thought, see: Saleh, 10-17.

<sup>114</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 61.

<sup>115</sup> For more on early Imāmi *tafsīrs* see: M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (1999); Mahmoud Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmi Shi’i *tafsīr*,” in *Approaches to the History of Interpretation of the Qur’ān* (1988);

as an “invalid principle, leading to *ẓann* (doubt), not *‘ilm* (knowledge).” In a seminal paper, Calder suggest that the same reasons that led Shafī’ī to come to terms with the concept of *ikhtilāf* and support *ijtihād* is also the same reason that caused Imāmi scholars to ultimately embrace the two concepts.<sup>116</sup> It is also important to note that while the following discussion about *ikhtilāf* and *ijtihād* take place in the context of legal theory, the results are authoritative across the board in other Islamic sciences, such as *tafsīrs* and theology. If it becomes legitimate to use *ẓann* in producing legal rulings, it follows logically that it also becomes equally justifiable to lower the epistemological bar in theology and exegesis.

According to Calder, the character of early Imāmi rejection of *ijtihād* (a sign of not coming to terms with *ikhtilāf*) is confirmed in Tūsī’s<sup>117</sup> *‘Uddat al-Uṣūl*.<sup>118</sup> Calder suggests that Tūsī recognizes the same issue Shafī’ī had grappled with and devises a theory of his own in order to justify the tolerance he had witnessed in the works of past scholars and “to establish for the present and the future a similar broad tolerance.”<sup>119</sup> Tūsī introduced doubt and flexibility into a system ostensibly concerned with certainty (*‘ilm*, not *ẓann*) by “asserting an area of choice.”<sup>120</sup> “This acknowledgement of choice as an option in the assessment of legal values was in effect a confession of doubt and brought the Shī’ī very close to the Sunni theory of *ijtihād*, which nonetheless tradition required that Tūsī reject”; he was himself aware that this distinction between *ijtihād* and choice was at best a subtle one.<sup>121</sup>

---

Etan Kohlberg, “Some Notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qur’ān,” in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (1972); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism* (1994).

<sup>116</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 61.

<sup>117</sup> Abu Jafar Muhammad Ibn Hassan Tūsī, or Shaykh Tūsī (b. 385/995) was a prominent Persian Twelver Shī’ī scholar.

<sup>118</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 61.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

The next big name in Shī'ī *tafsīr* is that of Ja'far ibn Ḥasan al-Ḥilli, known as al-Muḥaqqiq. According to Calder, “the most striking feature” of al-Muḥaqqiq’s work is the addition of “impingement of doubt as to the content of divine law.”<sup>122</sup> “If you considered the variation [of opinions] amongst the excellent in legal matters,” al-Muḥaqqiq writes in his *Mu'tabar*, “that would indicate to you the difficulty of achieving [an answer] without study and reflection.”<sup>123</sup> Calder states, “Clearly for al-Muḥaqqiq, the *sharī'a* was not structure, easily known, of order and stability, it was uncertain, shifting and doubtful.”<sup>124</sup> Al-Muḥaqqiq maintained that law was “doubtful” and that scholars should be “cautious expressing their views or should suspend decision (*tawaqquf*).”<sup>125</sup> The disadvantage of this position was an abdication of authority, something that al-ʿAllama<sup>126</sup> corrects.

Al-ʿAllama’s importance in the historical scheme of Shī'ī law is his rendering of *ijtihād* to be the central principle of Shī'ī *uṣūl*.<sup>127</sup> It is therefore al-ʿAllama who authorized *ijtihād* in Shī'ī thought. The essence of this conclusion means that “the actions of ordinary people (*mukallaf / muqallid*) could and should be based on the mere opinion (*ẓann*) of *mujtahids*. All pretension to certainty was thereby lost. “His system acknowledged a complete lack of certainty in the law,” states Calder.<sup>128</sup> Calder continues, “There was an immediate necessary knowledge (*darūrī*) which related to structural elements such as the incumbency of *salat* (prayer) and *zakāt*,”<sup>129</sup> the details of which belong to the category of *ʿilm*, meaning that there was no doubt regarding the

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>126</sup> Jamal al-Dīn Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Ḥilli, known also as “al-ʿAllama” (The Sage), was born 648/1250 and died 726/1325.

<sup>127</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 67.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>129</sup> *Zakāt* is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It is the giving of a fixed portion of one’s wealth to charity, generally to the poor and needy.

interpretation of these concepts.<sup>130</sup> “The other types of knowledge, devoid of definitive indicators, concerned detailed *sharī`ī* values (*al-aḥkām al-shar`īyya al-far`īyya*), and these belonged to the category of *ẓann* and were the prerogative of the *fuqahā`*.<sup>131</sup> We therefore see how the ‘*ulama`*’ slowly develop a system whereby they are permitted to deduce *ẓanni* values by *ijtihād*. Although it is incumbent on the *mujtahid* to put forth his best effort, the erring *mujtahid* is also understood to be forgiven and was not subject to the law in case of error since *ijtihād* is defined as a reasoned effort based on doubt and without guarantees.<sup>132</sup> By the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century, the Shī`ī’s had conceded that there can be no certain knowledge about matters not already established and accepted such as prophethood and that all available sources of knowledge at best only give rise to opinions.<sup>133</sup> *Ijtihād* was on the surface a purely terminological innovation, but through its naming, it justified doubt, uncertainty, and instability in the meaning of the Qur’ān.

Of the period from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, Calder states:

The development of Imāmi *uṣūl* can be characterized as a move from the idealized desire for ‘*ilm*’ through the law, to a recognition that its basic structure subsisted with a mass of details (whose boundaries were never, perhaps could never be, defined) subject to variation and doubt. Within this area of doubt the social, political, economic and personal factors that affected a *mujtahid*’s choice are not easily, perhaps not all quantifiable.<sup>134</sup>

The subsequent struggle between the Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs dominated Imāmi jurisprudence throughout the Safavid period<sup>135</sup> and beyond.<sup>136</sup> The important

---

<sup>130</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 70.

<sup>131</sup> The terms *faqīh* (an expert in *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence) and *mujtahid* (an Islamic scholar who is competent to interpret *sharī`a* through *ijtihād*) are both attributable to al-`Allama.

<sup>132</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 71.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>135</sup> The Safavid was a significant ruling dynasty of Iran that established the Twelver school of Shī`a Islam as the official religion of their empire. The Safavids ruled from 1501 to 1722. For more on the Safavids, see: H. R. Roemer, “The Safavid Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6 (1986); Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs* (2002); Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (2007).

transformation during this period was that the profound epistemological doubt al-ʿAllama had established in the Shīʿī system of jurisprudence—that is, the position that the requirements for God’s law were ultimately not within human grasp and that the best believers could ever attain was based on the best guesses of their *ʿulamāʾ*—resulted in a desired need for certainty for the Uṣūlīs. Robert Gleaves shows how this “inevitable doubt” seen in the works of two representative eighteenth-century scholars, Yusūf ibn Aḥmad al-Baḥranī (an Akhbārī) and Muḥammad Akmal al-Bihbahānī (an Uṣūlī), is overcome. Al-Baḥranī argues that the way to overcome this doubt is by proceeding with caution when encountering doubtful situations and doing the most of what might be required. Al-Bihbahānī argues for procedure and method. Certainty for the lay person can be gained through the “procedure of asking for and following a *mujtahid*’s opinion whereby the *mujtahid* finds a way to approach certainty by proceeding in terms of probabilities.”<sup>137</sup> We can never know for sure if our reading of what God wants is correct because the definitive sources for such information (the Prophet and the Imāms) are not with us, but we can still proceed based on a qualified cleric’s best guess, whereby he chooses the option with the highest chance of being correct given what is known.

Gleave understands the difference between the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī positions to primarily be “at root over epistemology” even if the disagreement has traditionally been “presented as a dispute over *ijtihād*.”<sup>138</sup> In general, both camps agreed that “perception is always recognized as less than certain,” regarding the requirements of God’s law.<sup>139</sup> These positions present two theories of knowledge, which revolve around the acceptance and rejection of the ability of any *mujtahid* to achieve certainty. Gleave concludes that

---

<sup>136</sup> Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative,” 77.

<sup>137</sup> Gleave, 28.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Gleaves, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shīʿī Jurisprudence*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 247-48.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

these two approaches are evidence of “two radically different epistemologies: one in which knowledge is the goal [Uṣūlī], and the other in which knowledge is recognized as an ideal, but rare commodity [Akhhbārī].”<sup>140</sup>

Aron Zysow states that “since the 19th century the *mujtahids* have been divided into two groups . . . One group, following al-Bihbahānī, finds recourse to probability as necessitated by the general ‘closing off of the gate of knowledge’ (*insidād bāb al-‘ilm*), that is, of avenues to certainty earlier available.”<sup>141</sup> A reliance on probability was deemed necessary to keep the legal system from breaking down. The other group, which now constitutes a majority in Twelver Shī‘ī circles, favors the opposing view that certainty is only available if the probability may be relied upon (*ẓann-e kāṣṣ*). This is the doctrine known as *infītāḥ*, the openness of the avenues of knowledge and of those types of probability that are known to be valid (*al-‘ilm wa’l-‘ilmī*). It is not necessary to go into details about contemporary trends in Twelver *ijtihād*;<sup>142</sup> suffice it to say that Kadivar and Soroush are working within a late Shī‘ī Uṣūlī background where the epistemological goal is certainty and much faith is placed in the ability of the cleric to produce a reliable understanding of the divine mandate.

Working within this late Shī‘ī Uṣūlī tradition, Kadivar’s innovation is admitting the instability of the Qur’ān when it comes to the *Mutishabbihāt* and suggesting that certain parts can be selectively ignored. By being selective in choosing the verses he highlights, by elevating the significance of certain verses in favor of certain others that are more relevant to the times, he reads the text based on what he considers expedient,

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>141</sup> Aron Zysow, “Ejtehād,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Online Edition, 1998, accessed June, 8, 2011, <http://iranica.com/articles/ejtehad>.

<sup>142</sup> One of the goals of the book version of this dissertation is to expand on the concept of *infītāḥ*, since it is important to know the exact boundaries which Soroush transcends and from behind which Kadivar speaks and pushes against. Does Kadivar in fact question the workable model of *infītāḥ* by being selective? What is the role of *ijma’* (consensus) here?

but maintains that the meaning of the Qur'ān—the text's integrity—does not change. Unlike Betti, Kadivar does not seem to make every effort to control his prejudices and to subordinate his *a priori* understandings. Instead, he insists that the Qur'ān must be understood in light of our present day understanding of, for instance, human rights in the process of which some verses no longer remain viable. In effect, one can consider Kadivar's innovations in *ijtihād* to be the next iteration of the *infatih* doctrine, whereby *ẓann-e kāṣṣ*, or relied-upon probability, can only come about if one tests the qur'ānic readings and rulings of the *mujtahid* within the arena of public opinion. For Kadivar, the injustice meted against women, minorities, and slaves no longer has a place in Shi'ī doctrine because it fails to pass the minimum requirements of the agreed upon inalienable rights of humans.

Betti was brought into the equation in order to better place Kadivar within a Western milieu. The same pedagogical exercise can be repeated with Soroush and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer suggests in *Truth and Method* that, contrary to the Enlightenment ideals of presuppositionless understanding, we always bring in our prejudices to our processes of understanding, and despite the warnings of modernity, having presuppositions is not the calamity it is made out to be. As part of our broader contextual horizon, these prejudices can sometimes impede our clear understanding but are also indispensable, in that they are necessary to understand anything. Without a reference point to start from at the moment of understanding, or a preconceived notion of what we are experiencing, we are not able to properly register the experience. In this model every act of understanding is the fusion of one's horizon with that of the author—a reading hypothesis drawn from the reader's horizon of expectation that is then corrected by the text.

This model, however, by no means leads to relativism, or to the conception that “anything goes,” but stays true to traditional methods because it too posits a stable textual horizon of truth; only the description of how an individual approaches that text is different. In fact, conventional acts of understanding begin with this acceptance of the fusing of horizons and meld it with the careful methods of interpretation that have been practiced in the hermeneutic traditions. What is different in Gadamer’s model is simply our epistemological expectation of what happens when minds meet. We no longer are afraid of overstepping boundaries because we can never truly know the intentions of the author, but only encounter one of its moments, as we seek to understand the text.<sup>143</sup> Vanhoozer summarizes:

Gadamer’s creative insight is that our horizon does not necessarily hinder but is the indispensable means for grasping the claim to truth in a text . . . This is a way of recognizing the incarnational dimension of interpretation, namely that no reading rises above time and history but rather always originates from a particular place and time.<sup>144</sup>

Thus the status of the text is clear in this epistemological project, but the interpreter needs to work out from an individual point of view toward the stability of the text.

The fact that interpretation is a situated enterprise (commonplace in Western hermeneutics) has always been the little white elephant in the great halls of qur’ānic science. Indeed, Soroush also points to this fact when he says, “In the realm of interpretation we<sup>145</sup> have always been pluralists and acted pluralistically; in other words, we have accepted plurality and have never accepted anyone as the final interpreter or the final commentator.”<sup>146</sup> As shown earlier, a lack of epistemological theorizing around the

---

<sup>143</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2004).

<sup>144</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179.

<sup>145</sup> It is not clear if Soroush means Muslims in general or only the Shī‘ī when he says “we.”

<sup>146</sup> Abdulkarim Soroush, *Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 121.



issue has haunted the Islamic sciences for centuries. Saleh's exposition shows how the concept of *tafsīr bi'l-ray* (i.e., the use of reason in interpretive methodology beginning with one's own opinions, or reason bearing on the process) has actually worked to suppress the ongoing but rarely if ever admitted practice of situating the Qur'ān. Not admitting the worldly nature of religious knowledge and its mediatedness has led to many rampages of ideological prowess and historical rewriting.

As can be seen in Saleh's work, any commentary worth its weight in paper was written by exegetes who, without admitting it, injected their own prejudices into their interpretations, not relying solely on tradition. It was the fact of *ikhtilāf*, and the inability of keeping difference from creeping into readings, that first led Sunnī Shafī'ī and finally the Shī'ī al-'Allama to concede the necessity of *ijtihād*. What Gadamer has named "the fusion of horizons" has been silently finding its echoes in the Muslim world since the advent of the qur'ānic commentary and theological traditions, and silent creativity in Muslim exegesis is now finally given its own modern hermeneutic voice in Kadivar's writings.

Qur'ānic sciences have had trouble admitting their unavoidable reliance on prejudice and creativity to make sense of revelation. Considering that the mediatedness of knowledge is a lynchpin of postmodernity as defined in Western thought, the question then arises for the new theologian: if a theologian like Kadivar is now willing to admit to the situatedness of exegesis and openly admit the tradition of selectivity, what is it that sets him apart from Soroush, who has consciously moved outside of orthodoxy? Kadivar does not openly question the metanarratives and the foundations of Islam, whereas Soroush does. For Kadivar, interpretations of certain parts of the Qur'ān are suspect (the

*mutashabbihāt*),<sup>147</sup> but he holds that the *muḥkamāt* are beyond reproach, Soroush, however, suggests that even the meanings of the *muḥkamāt* verses, dealing with issues such as the nature of the divine and the afterlife might someday come under question “since even the categories of certainty and ambivalence are subject to change.”<sup>148</sup> All religious knowledge, in the radical position, is human knowledge and contingent. Soroush states, “Divine inspiration originates in a realm beyond time and space,” whereas religious knowledge is a “branch of human knowledge” and “in constant commerce with other realms of human knowledge.” Soroush adds, “Tradition does not yield a sacred knowledge either.”<sup>149</sup>

#### POSTMODERNITY AND POSTMODERN THEOLOGY<sup>150</sup>

The spread of the idea of postmodernism began with a desire to critique the social and political configurations that originated with the Enlightenment. The modernity that

---

<sup>147</sup> The concept of *muḥkam* and *mutashabbih* came about in order to better understand Q 3:7: “It is He who hath sent down unto thee the book, wherein are some verses clear to be understood, they are the foundation of the book; and others are parabolical. But they whose hearts are perverse will follow that which is parabolical within, out of love of schism, and a desire of the interpretation thereof; yet none knoweth the interpretation thereof, except God. But they who are well grounded in knowledge say, we believe therein, the whole is from our Lord; and none will consider except the prudent.” For more on the topic, especially how serving to undermine Q 3:7, some verses of the Qur’ān point to there being only *muḥkam* verses and some other verses point to there being only *mutashabbih* verses, see: Leah Kinberg, “*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashabbihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis,” in *The Qur’ān: Formative Interpretation* (1999).

<sup>148</sup> Soroush, *Reason, Democracy and Freedom in Islam*, 35.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-37.

<sup>150</sup> I have not been able to find anything on Postmodern Islamic Theology per se, but for more on Islam and postmodernity see: Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (2004) and Michael M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (2002). For more on Christian postmodern theology see: Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (1989); Thomas J. Altizer, *Genesis and Apocalypse: A Theological Voyage towards Authentic Christianity* (1990); Robert Detweiler, “Postmodernism,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (1993); Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1982); Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (1988); Nancey Murphy and James W. McClendon, Jr., “Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies” (1989); Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity... What?: Agenda for Theology* (1990); Gary A. Philips, ed., *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible* (1990); Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (1984).

resulted from the Enlightenment, rests on the idea that the world is shaped by reason. As long as the secular and religious sciences remain consistent with the norms of this sacralized reason, they will be able to uncover the essential structures of human thought, life, and discourse. This grand story of the Enlightenment also portrays the uncovering of knowledge as a continuous Hegelian march of progress (moral and material) towards perfection: “Modernity homogenized and leveled reality.”<sup>151</sup> The Enlightenment put its trust in methodology as the path to truth.<sup>152</sup> As a result of modernity, theology’s commitment to methodology, historicity, and the “nuances, ambiguities and complexities of knowing and being” were veiled in a garb of empowerment and self-justification through reason which led to an inappropriate canonization of the “foundationalisms of positivism and empiricism.”<sup>153</sup>

In the West, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein were among the first to question these foundationalist assumptions, and it is from them that postmodernity springs.<sup>154</sup> They set the ground for postmodernity emerging as an ideological condition that affects the practice of everyday life. Postmodernity rejects several postulates that are familiar to modernity.

The first of these rejected postulates is that reason is absolute and universal and is the means for ushering in universal agreement and certainty. Postmodernism is, however, not irrational. Instead, it is aware that what counts as rational depends on the prevailing account of what society calls rational. For some, the capitalist system seems “rational” as

---

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Guarino, “Postmodernity and Five Fundamental Theological Issues,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 654.

<sup>152</sup> This affinity with methodology as paving the path to truth is a characteristic it shares with classical Islamic Theology; it is the basis for general hermeneutics.

<sup>153</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, “Postmodern Theology,” in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Chad Meiter and Paul Copan (Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 2010), 509.

<sup>154</sup> “Heidegger and Wittgenstein constitute the dual-headed Zeus from whom postmodernity springs” (Guarino, “Postmodernity and Five Fundamental Theological Issues,” 655).

it provides the greatest amount of opportunity for the individual to achieve her/his potential in actualizing and achieving happiness. For others, it is an excuse for the legal exploitation of a good portion of humanity. Such rationality, they claim, emerges equally situated in culture and history as any other social concept.

The second postulate of modernity challenged by postmodernity is that individuals are autonomous and able to transcend their place in history, class, and culture. Again, the postmodern perspective stresses that individuals have the power to be agents in creating their own fates, but only to a certain degree. Rather, postmodernism asserts that they are bounded by societal constructs that keep them from achieving the myth of individuality perpetuated by modernity. In fact, it is not even possible for a person to really know her/his own mind completely, let alone control her/his fate. The idea of the “knowing subject” is, according to postmodernism, just a constructed metanarrative at the core of modernity. In contrast, the postmodern self is not a master but is itself a “subject of material and social linguistic conditions of a historical situation that precedes her.”<sup>155</sup>

The final major opposition that postmodernism directs at modernism is that principles such as justice, fairness, goodness, and rationality and procedures such as democracy and rational dialogue are unifying and universal. Moreover, these aforementioned universal principles and procedures are objective and impervious to differences in culture and language, whereas preferences are subjective. Best and Kellner state:

Postmoderns reject unifying, totalizing and universal schemes in favor of a new emphasis on difference, plurality, fragmentation and complexity. When a Modern says “this is the way things are,” a postmodern is likely to respond with “this is how things are for you.”<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Vanhoozer, 11-12.

<sup>156</sup> Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford, 1997), 225.

There is little if any objectivism in the postmodern paradigm as practiced in cultural studies in the West; we are all at least partially affected by our prejudices. Truth is a compelling story told by persons in positions of power in order to perpetuate their way of seeing and organizing the natural and social world. Universal principles and procedures are only universal because they have been constructed to come across as all-embracing through a legitimating metanarrative.<sup>157</sup> It is this last point of opposition, the Lyotardian definition of the postmodern outlook (i.e., the incredulity towards metanarratives), that frames the current study.

Yet applying the term “postmodern” (as understood by Lyotard) to theology creates a seeming inconsistency or paradox. Since a condition for embracing postmodernity is the relinquishing of epistemic certainty and incredulity towards metanarratives, one might ask how possible it is to embrace a preordained, divine story about the human condition and still be called postmodern. In fact, is not postmodern theology a contradiction in terms? The contrary seems to be true, however, as Anderson summarizes, “today, a characteristic of the postmodern condition seems to distinguish itself as a pursuit of a general story in which faith as the condition for truth still shapes human corporate living, acting and thinking.”<sup>158</sup>

Soroush is called a postmodern because he questions the main tenet of Islam. He rejects the centrality of the Qur’ān and redefines the nature of revelation; he abandons the systematizing of *all* reality under a single Muslim frame of reference by denying that there is only one truth or path (i.e., Islam). Notwithstanding, Soroush only has what Pamela Sue Anderson calls a “weak incredulity” about master-narratives: he stays faithful to some doctrinal tenets by marking them as beliefs rather than as ontological

---

<sup>157</sup> Lyotard, xxiii.

<sup>158</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, 510.

truths.<sup>159</sup> Doctrinal tenets are beliefs as opposed to ontological truths. Given that the core of the doctrine rests in the *muḥkamāt*, when speaking of the categories of *muḥkam* (certain) and *mutashabih* (ambivalent) as applied to the Qur’ān, Tradition, jurisprudence, and even the interpretation of history, Soroush explains that “the categories of ambivalence and certainty themselves are subject to change. It is not as though a verse would remain certain or ambivalent forever.”<sup>160</sup> That is, Soroush suggests that even the essentials of Islamic doctrine might one day be deemed obsolete. This reveals Soroush’s skepticism towards the tenets, but it does not mean that Soroush is not a believer. In fact, Soroush is enough of a believer so that some of his incredulity is directed towards secularism, which he argues, robs believers of one source of knowledge. “Even though human knowledge that seeks indubitable certainty has failed,” Soroush maintains, “we can, nonetheless still find truth in God.” We might not be able to find the ultimate truth because our insight into the divine wisdom is limited, and it might not come to us through textual analysis, but God’s wisdom is nonetheless available to us through the avenue of religious experience.<sup>161</sup>

As will be shown in Chapter 3, Islam has staked a great deal on the notion of revelation as the enduring, final word of God. Denying that the Qur’ān is in fact divine speech is no small feat. Through the Qur’ān, the assumption runs that God has communicated himself directly and imparted eternal decisions of His will. With His description of the Qur’ān as unerring and unalterable, He has made sure that revelation would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed down to all generations of

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 511.

<sup>160</sup> Soroush, *Reason...*, 35.

<sup>161</sup> See Soroush, *Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* (2009). The whole premise of this book is to argue that it is the Prophet’s experience (receiving inspiration from God, not revelation) that is central to Islam, not the Qur’ān, and that the experience of receiving inspiration (although special in the case of prophets, in that they feel compelled enough by it to embark on missions to bring people to their respective faiths) can be expanded and continued by believers.

Muslims, the *'umma*. This narrative of the genesis of the Qur'ān places the theological emphasis on notions of presence, identity, continuity, perpetuity, wholeness and integrity, characterizing a long tradition of Muslim theology. In response to the tradition, Soroush contends that if the word of God equates to a literal and stable ontological truth, the orthodox Muslim notion of revelation thus reaches an impasse when faced with contemporary, philosophical trends.

Parallels traced here between postmodern new theology and general hermeneutics can be called to maintain in some sense the universality and normativeness of our understanding of God's will while attempting to simultaneously incorporate horizons of otherness and difference, of plurality and ambiguity. Soroush's postmodern Muslim theology doubts the authority of *any reading* of the Qur'ān as a stable and permanent truth and, furthermore, has robbed the book itself of its status as revelation (in which will be discussed in Chapter 3). But Soroush's "loss of faith in master narratives" need not obviate the community's faith in narratives themselves and in the ability to extract truth from them. It is the narrative of the Prophet and the role of the ordinary citizen in expanding the Prophet's divine mission that Soroush turns to as an alternative. "Every rational thinker," Soroush contends in one of his most controversial sentences, "has their own conception of religion, that is to say their own understanding of God, the Prophet, revelation, felicity, wretchedness, sin and obedience, an understanding that belongs to that believer alone, and results from their reflections and is subjected to constant questioning and revision."<sup>162</sup>

This questioning and revision is a result of a discursive / reflective kind of religiosity—a religiosity that is not pragmatic. Instead, if we identify pragmatic religiosity by its dogmatism, as Soroush states,

---

<sup>162</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 187-88.

On entering the realm of discursive religiosity, dogma is exchanged for doubt and wonder, and as dogmatism is left behind, it becomes easier to head down the road of certitude. Rationality always brings along two hefty companions: one is the tireless raising of whys and wherefore and maybe maybe nots, and the other is a relentless individuality. No rational thinker ever stops posing questions, destroying and rebuilding ceaselessly, and no two rational thinkers are ever identical.<sup>163</sup>

Discursive religiosity according to Soroush, is “unstable and in a state of flux.”<sup>164</sup>

“Constancy and uniformity cannot be expected from discursive religiosity,” states Soroush, adding:

For the discursive believer, worshipping is precisely all this examining, re-examining, rediscovering, doubting and pondering, while sin would amount to submitting uncritically to beliefs, succumbing to popular vulgarities, following superstitions and famous personalities, and refusing to engage in doubt and reflection. And the believer’s felicity lies in the excellence of his theoretical skills. Theologians and exegetes are two of the prominent representatives of this category. This religiosity is reason-based, investigative, reflective, based on choice and free will, wondrous, theological, non-mythical, non-clerical, individualistic, critical, fluctuating and non-imitative.<sup>165</sup>

Soroush has lost faith in the master-narrative of the text-centered theology but has replaced that narrative with a new emphasis on the Prophet as the principal character and each subsequent believer as a new incarnation of the prophetic mission. One cannot help but be reminded of the Protestant nature of Soroush’s replacement narrative.

Soroush has a suspicion of master-narratives and totalizing theories, champions pluralism and understanding of the self as multiple, decentered, and hybrid. He sees religion not so much as a community space, but as a space for negotiating one’s identity through process, performance, and intertextuality. In comparison, for Kadivar religion is composed mostly of non-negotiable edicts that need to be understood and sometimes

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 187.



performed, and even sometimes treated as data that selectively gets left out of the interpretive picture. For Kadivar, however, the Islamic master-narratives, such as the sanctity of the Qur'ān, never come under question.

In an effort to argue against defining Soroush's theology as postmodern, some might dispute that the ideological point of contention between Soroush and Kadivar is not a matter of quality but of quantity. Both agree that the Qur'ān must be read historically. The question is exactly how much of the Qur'ān and the Tradition is contingent, and how much is non-negotiable? The answer to that question can be framed hermeneutically, as outlined above. Kadivar stops at the *mutishabbihāt*, but Soroush extends the selectivity also to the *muḥkamāt*. Denying the *muḥkamāt*, however, is a game changer. The differences between these two positions go beyond mere squabbling about which *ayāt* to selectively disregard. Soroush has made a break with tradition and is not looking to mend it by methodological tweaking.

Postmodern theory is, in this sense, anti-foundationalist, and Soroush aptly rejects foundationalist assumptions about reference and signification in cases like the sanctity of the Qur'ān and the eschatological special status of the Muslim community. Nevertheless, Soroush still holds that there exists an ideal object of the Prophet's interpretation of divine speech, the Qur'ān, and that there is a desire for truth about that object that characterizes the Muslim believer. Thus, he also necessarily believes in metaphysical, first principles about *self* and *God*—a God who is presumed to stand outside the subject who is interpreting his “Word.” And yet, Soroush's theology is grounded in the *presence* of the Godhead as concretized in the Qur'ān, not necessarily in the religious establishment. Soroush states:

Religion offers many blessings to its followers. For believers, religion quickens the blaze of the sublime quest, delivers from inner attachments, grants ascent above earthly concerns, opens the heart's apertures toward the sun of truth, and

induces a sense of utter wonder in the face of the mystery of existence, so that one may hear the call of *Ho-val-haqq* (God is the truth) from every particle of the universe.”<sup>166</sup>

Soroush suggests that the root of the illusion that modernity has erased in humanity’s need for religion is

the belief that the secular and the sacred speak the same language. The truth, however, is that the temporal culture is no substitute for religion, only a tool for understanding the message. Only if the Qur’ān and the Tradition were receptive to just any interpretation (which is not the case) could we see answers in any random collection of teachings.<sup>167</sup>

Soroush’s theology is not only grounded in the Godhead but also in our need for Him. The *self* of each believer is partially defined by its need for the divine, but no matter how scientific or unbiased the *method* of interpretation is, this same self lives in a framework that can never be independent of her/his situatedness, and so no reading can be as authoritative as a religious establishment would like to proclaim. The interpretive context almost always prejudices the interpretation. Soroush and Kadivar agree on this issue. For both, hermeneutics trusts that the object of ultimate truth, the Godhead, actually exists, and that our goal should be gleaning, understanding, and extracting ultimate truths from Him. It is in the method of this extraction of truths that Soroush and Kadivar differ. Soroush holds that true extraction can only be done through experiential means, while Kadivar argues that orthodox methods have access to truth, albeit with some changes.<sup>168</sup> Founding his metaphysics on the Godhead, means that Soroush is a postmodern but is not, however, a Nietzschean. Since there is a stable, extra-subjective foundation from which his theology springs, there exist interpretations that our need for understanding will satisfy, and those interpretations are limited, not infinite. This assertion is in direct

---

<sup>166</sup> Soroush, *Reason...*, 37.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>168</sup> Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 5.

contrast to the deconstructive strand of postmodern belief inspired by Nietzsche and continued in Western cultural studies and cultural critique, which concludes that any text “may include infinite interpretations.” This is not what Soroush suggests, because that definition of the hermeneutic act belies context, history, and the stability of the text itself. For him, the *lubb-e lubāb* (kernel of essential truths) of God’s wisdom, although shrouded in mystery, is nevertheless bounded.

In Nietzsche’s world, the ineffable is nothing but the meager sum of observations. In Soroush’s and Kadivar’s worlds, there exists alongside the mundane and human something divinely irreducible. For Nietzsche, truths and meanings are illusions that are fabricated and introduced into the world through interpretations.<sup>169</sup> In Soroush’s postmodern theology, truths and meanings are the irreducible kernels that appear in the multiple narratives that communicate human and community understandings, as framed in the performances of belief in time and space.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

Some parallels have been acknowledged between the shifts in Soroush’s postmodern theology and Kadivar’s new theology and the traditional and contemporary shifts in Western hermeneutics. These parallels allow for a distinction between the status of the text and that of its readings (i.e., between the text’s meaning and its significance), as well as a distinction between the ability to effect change in its form and impinge on its content and the text’s status as a vessel of revelation with narratives that emerge from encounters with it. These parallels are more than simply imagined. Soroush himself has claimed that, although unaware of *Truth and Method* when writing his *Expansion and Contraction of Religious Knowledge*, he has since found out how much he has in common with Gadamer. Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* is indeed a kindred book to

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 15.

Soroush's project. In *Truth and Knowledge*, Gadamer criticizes the "mania for method" for which modernity was known.<sup>170</sup> Gadamer downplays methodology and warns of not falling into the objectivist traps of modernity—a warning that certainly fits with Soroush's overall program of reclaiming the Qur'ān as a source of religious experience rather than religious orthodoxy. Certainty cannot be expected. Soroush's purpose is not to lay out the one and only, step-by-step method that must be followed in theology; rather, it is to outline the basic framework for doing theology.

Kadivar, too, is interested in expanding theological narratives. His purpose is also not to lay out the one and only, step-by-step method that must be followed in theology; rather, it is to outline its basic framework. Yet he embraces method—a necessary step for making religious experience a narrative about a community in a specific time and place, rather than simply an individual testimony.

The next two chapters of this dissertation will present two of the most important theological issues addressed by reformist thinkers in the Islamic Republic:<sup>171</sup> the nature of revelation (Chapter 3) and the finality of the Prophet and the subsequent superiority of Islam vis-à-vis other religions (Chapter 4).

---

<sup>170</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, 518.

<sup>171</sup> The other publically debated issue, and perhaps the most pressing theological quandary for Iranian Shī'ī theology, is the issue of the *velāyāt-e muṭlaqeh-ye faqīh* (absolute rule of the jurist), which falls under the purview of political theology and thus will not be covered in this dissertation.

### Chapter 3: Revelation Theology

The concept of *velāyat-e mutlaqih-e faqīh* (the absolute rule of the religious jurist),<sup>172</sup> a particularly autocratic solution to the issue of *wilāyah* (religious guardianship) in the post-occultation period, is arguably the greatest innovation in recent Shī'ī history. While the issue of *wilāyah* falls under the rubric of political theology and beyond the purview of this work, the topic of this chapter—Soroush's claim that the Qur'ān is actually the Prophet's interpretation of divine speech—addresses this most controversial theological hypothesis to emerge from post-revolutionary Iran. Classical theology has not subsumed the topic of revelation under the category of political theology, and neither will we in this discussion, but it is important to note that Soroush's revelation theology has far-reaching political implications, some of which will be discussed in this chapter.

Soroush first introduced his revelation theology in 2001 in *Basṭ-e Tajrubeḥ-ye Nabavī* [*The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*],<sup>173</sup> a book which was published a few months after he left Iran in self-exile and in which he elevated the position of the Prophet and downgraded the centrality of the Qur'ān. Islam, according to Soroush, centers not around the Qur'ān but around the Prophet's personality, because unlike what has classically been held, the words contained in the Qur'ān are in fact already mediated by the Prophet's culturally situated consciousness.<sup>174</sup> Our next encounter with this controversial claim, that the Qur'ān is not the unmediated word of God comes by way of

---

<sup>172</sup> For more on the history of the notion of *velāyat-e motlaqeh-e faqīh* (absolute rule of the jurist), see: Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (2008).

<sup>173</sup> All quotations taken from *Basṭ* in this chapter are from the recent English translation: Abdolkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*, ed. Forough Jahanbakhsh, trans. Nilou Mobasser (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

<sup>174</sup> I do not know what Qom's reaction was to *Basṭ-e Tajrubeḥ-ye Nabavī*, and it is one of the issues I will be investigating for the expanded book version of this dissertation.

an article written by ex-Ayatollah Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari:<sup>175</sup> *Qerā'at-e Nabavī az Jahān [Prophetic Reading of the World]*. The article was published in the summer (August) 2007 edition of the quarterly *Madreseh*, in which Shabestari, like Soroush, tries to challenge the unqualified and categorical orthodoxy of the Qur'ān as “*kalām Allāh*” and made an effort to problematize the issue.<sup>176</sup> Shabestari dealt with the Qur'ān as a “singular reading of the world by the Prophet”—that is, a *reading* essentially established on, and rooted in the divine revelation (*wahy*), but not equivalent to it.<sup>177</sup>

On December 26, 2007, only four months after Shabestari's article, Soroush conducted a now famous interview in Holland with Radio Netherlands Worldwide, later

---

<sup>175</sup> Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari was born in 1936 in Shabestar, a city in the Eastern Azarbaijan province of Iran. He entered the Hawza (religious seminary) in 1951, where he studied for eighteen years. In 1969, at the request of Dr. Seyyed Mohamamd Beheshti and two authoritative Shī'ī clergymen (unnamed in his blog's official biography), he was appointed Manager of the Islamic Center in Hamburg (Islamisches Zentrum Hamburg), one of the oldest Iranian Shī'ī centers in Europe. In the nine years he spent in Hamburg, Shabestari learned fluent German and touched on aspects of modern European culture and thought, including modern philosophy and Christian theology (all of which served to form his interest in Islamic-Christian dialogue). Sensing the stirrings of revolution Shabestari returned to Iran in 1978 and entered the political arena. He began writing politico-cultural articles for a number of well-respected journals and magazines, and his lectures were broadcast on the national network. He also began publishing his famous bi-monthly journal on theoretical foundations of Islamic thought and culture, *Andīshah-ye Islāmī [Islamic Thought]*. The journal publication ended after a few months, however, when its financial support dried up; while being generally supportive of the 1979 revolution, it also criticized its more radical trends. Shabestari was elected representative of Eastern Azerbaijan in the first Iranian parliament, siding with the parliamentary camp critical of extant extremist political tendencies. After only a short time in parliament, he distanced himself from direct politics and accepted an invitation by the Iranian Ministry of Science to join the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Tehran, where he chaired the Department of Comparative Theology and Religion for many years. After nineteen years of service and in spite of the Faculty's need for esteemed professor, Shabestari was forced to retire from the University in 2006, along with several other reformist professors in the Iranian education system. He was invited to teach by universities abroad, including two in Germany and Austria, but he rejected the invitations due to ill health. Shabestari now works at the Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, where he has been a member of the Supreme Council and chaired the Department of Theology and Sects (*Kalām wa Firāq*) for many years. An interesting side note is that Shabestari defrocked himself in the late 1990s. For further biographical details, see Shabestari's blog: *Qerā'at-e [Reading]*, “Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari: A Brief Biographical Portrait,” <http://mojtahedshabestari.blogfa.com/post-39.aspx>. For more on Shabestari's ideas, see: Farzin Vahdat, “Post-Revolutionary Islamic Modernity in Iran: The Intersubjective Hermeneutics of Mohamad Mojtahed Shabestari” (2004).

<sup>176</sup> Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, “Qerā'at-e Nabavī az Jahān” [Prophetic Reading of the World], *Faslnāmah-ye Madreseh [Madreseh Quarterly]* 6 (2007): 92-100.

<sup>177</sup> Shabestari has since written eight more tracts on the topic. His views will not be dealt with in this dissertation, though my plan is to incorporate his work on the topic in later efforts.

published in *Zemzem*, a leading Dutch magazine on the Middle East, North Africa and Islam.<sup>178</sup> This interview wrested attention away from Shabestari's contentious piece and moved the controversy (begun by Soroush himself in 2001) to a new level of explicitness. Soroush's views about revelation generated more than thirty newspaper and scholarly articles in late 2007 and early 2008 and inspired a protest against his claims. Apparently, this protest was at least partially instigated by Ayatollah Hussein Nouri-Hamadani, who during one of his lectures in the *Hawzeh-ye 'Ilmiyeh-ye Qum* (Qom seminary) compared Soroush to Salman Rushdie and said that if what Soroush had said was intentional (*az rūy-e gharaz*), then "*taklīf-e dīgarī dārim* [we have another kind of responsibility]."<sup>179</sup> This was Nouri Hamadani's way of calling Soroush an apostate and proposing appropriate legal action against him, which is classically understood to be the death penalty. The protest was held by Qom seminarians, where chants of "'azā 'azāst imrūz rūz-e 'azāst imrūz, Imām Zamān, ṣāhib 'azāst imrūz [mourning, mourning we have today / today is a day of mourning / The Twelfth Imam is sitting in mourning today]" were overheard.<sup>180</sup> The metaphorical image of the Twelfth Imam in mourning equates Soroush's claims about the Qur'ān with the killing of a member of the Prophet's family, or possibly the death of Islam itself. At the end of the protest, a statement was read which said among other things that "without a doubt, this *fitna* (religiously troubling or seditious act) is a continuation of the insults of Zionist Americans and the publishing of offensive

---

<sup>178</sup> Michel Hoebink conducted the interview with Abdolkarim Soroush in English for Radio Netherlands Worldwide, December 26, 2007. A Dutch translation of the transcript was published in the magazine *ZemZem* as "The Word of Muhammad: Abdolkarim Soroush on the Koran" (2007). The original English transcript was published online at *ZemZem*, Online Edition, <http://www.zemzem.org/zemzem/?q=node/21>. A Persian transcript was published online by Radio Zamaneh at <http://www.radiozamaneh.com>.

<sup>179</sup> "Soroush dar Intizār-e Sarnivisht-e Salman Rushdie?" [Is Soroush Awaiting a Similar Fate as Salman Rushdie?], February 2008, <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>, accessed March, 2009 [no longer available].

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

caricatures,<sup>181</sup> and this is all to curtail the ever-growing interest of the world in Islam and our dear Prophet.”<sup>182</sup> The hoopla culminated in a seminar held in Qom, called “Wahy, Kalām-e Ilāhī yā Bashārī?” [Revelation, the Speech of God or Man?] in June 2008. It seems from a news report published in Iran about the gathering that the main result of this seminar, at which Soroush was absent, was his being accused of “Christianizing” Islam, where the Prophet (Jesus is considered to be a Prophet in Islam) is the central figure and the text (Bible) a work of human interpretation of Jesus’ encounter with the divine. Soroush, it was claimed, “was trying to Christianize Islam by elevating the position of the Prophet of Islam and marginalizing the Holy Book.”<sup>183</sup>

In the following pages I will present an introduction to orthodox revelation theology, followed by analysis of Soroush’s early position on the topic in *Bast-e Tajrobeh-ye Nabavī* as well as his later position, according to his interviews and writings in 2007 and 2008. It should be emphasized that Soroush is not pronouncing the death of metaphysics or claiming that Islam was *fabricated* by the Prophet. On the contrary, he claims that the Qur’ān was first and foremost conceived by the Almighty.

The biggest point of contention between Soroush’s conception of revelation and the orthodox view is that for Soroush the word of God was not *heard* by the Prophet but rather, was *written* on Muhammad’s heart. Soroush claims that Muhammad received the Qur’ān through inspiration. As for the differences that theologians have traditionally maintained between revelation (*wahy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*), Soroush claims those to be a false distinction. Revelation is essentially an inspiration, but an inspiration that is given

---

<sup>181</sup> This allusion refers to the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy, which arose after twelve editorial cartoons, mostly depicting the Prophet Muhammad, were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005.

<sup>182</sup> “Soroush dar Intizār-e...” <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>, accessed March, 2009.

<sup>183</sup> “Neshast-e ‘ilmi-ye ‘Wahy Kalām-e Ilāhī yā Bashārī’ dar Qum Barguzār Shud” [The conference of “Revelation God -Speech or Human-Speech took place in Qom], June 2008, accessed November, 2008, <http://www.dr.soroush.com> [no longer available].



to a person assigned with a mission to rewrite his society and change the world. As such, it was not the exact word of God that got relayed to the *‘umma*, but Muhammad’s interpretation of that primary message. Finally, the discussion of Soroush’s position will be followed by Kadivar’s reaction to Soroush, as presented mostly in 2009.

## REVELATION AS UNDERSTOOD CLASSICALLY

There are two main types of communication or “mutual understanding” between God and man in Islam: one is linguistic, or verbal—that is, “through the use of human language common to both parties,” classically understood by the orthodoxy to mean the Arabic language and the act of *tanzīl* (sending down)<sup>184</sup> of *kalām Allāh* (the word of God). The second means of communication between God and man is non-verbal and takes place through the use of “natural signs” on the part of God (manifestations of God’s greatness in the natural world).<sup>185</sup> The word *āyah* (sign) applies to both signs in the natural world and divine utterance and, as Izutsu mentions, which is in fact why the Qur’ān “calls the revealed words, *ayāt* [plural of ayah] without distinguishing them from other ‘signs’ of a non-linguistic nature that are also called *ayāt*.”<sup>186</sup>

The subject of revelation is, however, only the linguistic *āyah*. The linguistic *ayāt* “form by themselves, a very particular class, which is better designated by the technical term of revelation or *wahy*.”<sup>187</sup> The nature and structure of *wahy* is in many ways

---

<sup>184</sup> “Words derived from the . . . root *NZL*, like *nazala*, *nuzūl*, *nazzala* and *anzala*, all relate to the ideas of ‘coming down,’ ‘descending,’ or ‘sending down,’ and have a strong place-related physical connotation. In the Qur’an, they are used much more often than the words derived from *WHY*. . . the various qur’anic occurrences of these two groups of terms convey the clear image . . . of a solemn or even awe-inspiring communication, literally originating ‘from on High’: ‘If We had sent down this Qur’an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humble itself and split apart by the fear of God’ {59:21}” (Yahya Michot, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 180).

<sup>185</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 133.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

different than the nature and structure of the nonverbal *ayāt* and has been given a special classification and much theological treatment in Islam. Revelation is treated as “something extraordinary, something mysterious, the secret of which cannot be disclosed to the ordinary human being.”<sup>188</sup> Whereas anyone with “normal capacity of ‘proper understanding’ can have access to God’s natural signs, revelation can only be ‘sent down’ to an intermediary, a prophet.”<sup>189</sup> But revelation is also “essentially a linguistic concept,” and it “means that God spoke.”<sup>190</sup>

The one thing that stands out as mysterious in the case of *wahy* is that it has been “sent down” (varying cognate nouns being, *nuzūl*, *inzāl* and *tanzīl*). This downward movement in Islam’s cosmological horizon can be witnessed throughout the Qur’ān. “We sent down the [Qur’ān] in Truth, and in Truth has it descended.”<sup>191</sup> This is because while God rules over the heavens and the earth, He who is in heaven, rules from above.<sup>192</sup> The other frequent use of the Arabic root *n-z-l* in the Qur’ān, after God’s sending down his word, occurs with the verb denoting rainfall, apparently a pre-Islamic poetic use of the root, according to Zamakhshari,<sup>193</sup> creating a symbolic connection between life-giving water and life-giving word.<sup>194</sup> Another use of the word in the pre-Islamic era was in relation to the speech of the poet, or the speech of the soothsayer. But unlike the source of revelation, “the agent of the poetic *tanzīl* was the *shaytān* (Satan).”<sup>195</sup> Other uses of *n-*

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Q 17:105.

<sup>192</sup> Q 67:16. *Rabb as-samawat* [God of the heavens] is also a frequent name of God.

<sup>193</sup> Abu al-Qasim al-Zamakhshari (born 466 A.H./1074 A.D.) was one of the most famous Mu’tazilite medieval Muslim scholars.

<sup>194</sup> Stefan Wild, “We have sent down to thee the book with the truth . . .’ Spatial and Temporal Implications of the Qur’anic Concepts of *nuzūl*, *tanzīl*, and *inzāl*.” In Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur’an as Text* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 142.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 144.

z-l include, for example, in Q 9:26, where God “sends down” his *sakīna* (peace) and in Q 3:151, Q 6:81, Q 7:33 and Q 22:71, where he “sends down” his *sulṭān* (authority).

*Tanzīl* was also a temporal affair, in that the sending down of the Qur’ān follows the biography of the Prophet. *Surahs* that were sent down earlier in Mecca and those that were sent down later in the Prophet’s life when he became an established statesman in Medina are incontestably distinct in nature.<sup>196</sup> Without detailing the differences reflected in the verses belonging to each era (something not relevant to the current study), I will move on to a second, very important aspect of the temporal nature of the Qur’ān: the issue of *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz* (the guarded tablet).

The seemingly confusing concept of the *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz* revolves around two verses in the Qur’ān, namely Q 2: 185, which says, “the month of Ramadan, wherein the Qur’ān was sent down (*anzalnāhū*) to be a guidance to the people,” and Q 97:1, where God says, “Behold, We sent it down (*anzalnāhū*) on *al-Laylat al-Qadr* (The Night of Power).” The confusion arises from the apparent contradiction between the historical reality of the Qur’ān being sent down to the Prophet during his twenty three years as the messenger of God and the belief that it was also sent down in one night. To resolve the contradiction, some commentators—among them al-Zamakhshari—divided the act of “sending down” into two stages. In the first stage, the holy word was sent down in one piece from the seventh heaven to the first (i.e., the closest realm to mankind and earth). In the second stage, scribes were garnered to write the whole of the Qur’ān on a tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*) during *Laylat al-Qadr*, or the first of Ramadan. From then onward

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 148. Wild states that the reason why the current arrangement of the Qur’ān (i.e., verses from earlier revelation are placed at the end of the text, while verses from later revelation are placed at the beginning) does not reflect this chronology remains unknown (Ibid., 149).

Gabriel took the written pieces to Muhammad to recite to him as they became necessary.<sup>197</sup>

Revelation in this linguistic capacity has two separate aspects. One of them concerns the fact that it is *kalām* (speech, or *parole* in Saussurian terminology) as opposed to *lisān* (language, or *langue* in Saussurian terminology),<sup>198</sup> and the other has to do with the fact that, of all the languages in which the word of God could have been sent down, the chosen one turned out to be Arabic. “The Arabic language was chosen by design and not by accident,” as the Qur’ān emphasizes in several places.<sup>199</sup> The Qur’ān, according to Stefan Wild, “is the most meta-textual, most self-referential holy text known in the history of world religions,” as it repeatedly reflects on “its own divine origin” and marvels at “its other-worldly textual nature,” in both form and content.<sup>200</sup>

The fact that the *ayāt* are *kalām Allāh* can be seen in the following two verses in the Qur’ān. In Q 9:6 we read: “If anyone of the polytheists comes to you [O Muhammad] seeking thy protection as a client, make him thy client so that he may have the chance of hearing God’s speech [*kalām Allāh*].”<sup>201</sup> In Q 2:70-75, in reference to Mosaic law, as revelation, we see: “Can you have any hope that they [the Jews] will submit to you when

---

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>198</sup> *Langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) are linguistic terms used by Ferdinand de Saussure. *Langue* is the phenomenon of language explained as a system of signs. This understanding is useful when we are speaking of language in a social and impersonal context. The rough equivalent in Arabic would be *lisan*, as in *al-Lisān al-‘Arab* (the Arabic Language). *Parole* on the other hand, describes the individual, personal phenomenon of language as a series of speech acts made by a linguistic subject. Its rough equivalent in Arabic is *kalām*, as in the *kalām* of person X, or in this case, Allāh. Specifically in Saussurian terms, the *parole* that takes place between two people is such that one person plays an active role and the other a passive role. For more on *langue* and *parole*, see: F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1972).

<sup>199</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 152.

<sup>200</sup> Wild, 140. Based essentially on Q 17:88, which states: “If the whole of mankind and *jinn*s were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur’ān they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.” Since the second half of the third century A.H. (ninth century A.D.) the technical term *i’jaz*, literally meaning “the rendering (of something) incapable and powerless,” has been used to describe the inimitability of the Qur’ān in content and form.

<sup>201</sup> Q 9:6.

a party of them used to listen to God's speech [*kalām Allāh*], then changed it arbitrarily and consciously after they had understood it?"<sup>202</sup> In Q 73:5 God, addressing Muhammad, says, "Verily, We are going to cast upon thee a weighty word!"<sup>203</sup>

The Arabic word used here for "word" is *qaul*. As Izutsu points out, "It should be noticed that here, God refers to his own revelation by means of a word which is the commonest of all words of human speech act, *qaul*" The verb *qala*, for which *qaul* is the noun, meaning "someone said something," is one of the words most frequently used in the Arabic language. In another instance we see, as in Surah *al-Shūrā*, the words of God referred to by the word *kalimāt* (words): "And God will wipe out the falsehood and establish the truth as Truth with his words."<sup>204</sup> From these examples we might get the sense that God has *actually spoken* to his prophets, and that the Qur'ān is referring to the actual words revealed to Muhammad and Moses ("party of them" refers to Jews who had heard God's word through Moses, but then chose to corrupt it).

Apart from the fact that in classical Islam we are ontologically dealing with God's *speech*, that word is also thought to have intentionally been "sent down" in Arabic. Two verses specifically point to this claim. Surah *al-Ibrahim* mentions that the Qur'ān was sent to the Prophet in "*lisān qaumihi* (language of his tribe)"<sup>205</sup> and "*Arabīyan mubīnan* (clear Arabic)."<sup>206</sup> The transmission / channeling / transference of the word of God is thus claimed to have been carried out in Arabic. This has traditionally guaranteed that revelation was in speech form and in fact clarifies that the language of that speech was specifically Arabic.

---

<sup>202</sup> Q 2:70-75.

<sup>203</sup> Q 73:5.

<sup>204</sup> Q 42:23-24.

<sup>205</sup> Q 14:4.

<sup>206</sup> Q 16:103.

In order to be able to talk about the mysterious and extraordinary category of speech (God's speech, or *kalām Allāh*) Izutsu notes that we need to realize that the category has two different semantic points of emphasis: God and speech. When we look at *kalām Allāh* from the angle of God, then revelation "is not a speech act in the natural and ordinary sense of the word."<sup>207</sup> Revelation from this viewpoint becomes a "theological mystery, incapable of being grasped by human analytic thought . . . that does not allow of analysis; it is something only to be believed in."<sup>208</sup> But if we realize that in so far as it is God's *speech*, "it must have all the essential attributes of human speech."<sup>209</sup> This distinction becomes very important in understanding Soroush's claim.

What does it mean for revelation or *wahy*, in so far as it is *speech* as such, to have attributes of human speech? Izutsu claims that it is essential for any speech act (i.e., *parole qua parole*) that the two entities in "communication share a common set of signs."<sup>210</sup> This common set of signs is in our case the Arabic language. The other essential point is that the two entities "belong to the same category of being."<sup>211</sup> While the first precondition for communication is satisfied in the case of communication between God and Muhammad (it is assumed that the speech is "sent down" in Arabic) our entities are not of the same ontological category. The semantic structure of *wahy* contains an element of mysteriousness because it comes from what seems to us to be incomprehensible. No linguistic communication can happen between two beings that are not ontologically matched unless something extraordinary happens to one or both of them. Either speaker, who is assumed to have a higher order of being, needs to descend and somehow assume the attributes of the hearer, or "the hearer should undergo a deep

---

<sup>207</sup> Izutsu, 154.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

personal transformation under the overwhelming influence of the spiritual force of the speaker.”<sup>212</sup>

According to tradition, in general, the Prophet is said to have perceived revelation in one of two ways: either by being approached by Gabriel, or without an intermediary. According to tradition, during the times that Muhammad was not approached by Gabriel, he experienced revelation in panoply of ways: “The Apostle of God heard a sound like the humming of bees near his face; thereupon Qur’ān, 23:1 was revealed to him.”<sup>213</sup> Also: “On the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar I asked the Prophet: ‘Do you perceive the revelation?’ He answered, ‘Yes, I hear sounds like metal being beaten. Then I listen, and often I think I will die (of pain).’”<sup>214</sup> Saḥiḥ al-Bukhārī quotes the Prophet as having said, “It comes as the ringing of a bell; this kind is the most painful. When it ceases, I retain what was said. Sometimes it is an angel who speaks to me as a man, and I retain what he says.”<sup>215</sup>

The most interesting and very famous Tradition going back to the time of ‘A’ishah is mentioned again by Bukhari: “Al-Harith b. Hisham asks the Prophet, saying, ‘O Apostle of God, how does the revelation come to you?’ The latter replied, “Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell (*mithla salsalati al-jarasi*). And this is the most painful manner of revelation to me; then it leaves me and I have understood (*wa ‘aitu*) from that noise (*dawiyy*) what He (God) meant to say.”<sup>216</sup> The word *wa ‘aitu* (meaning, “I have understood”) is quite significant in this *hadīth*. As Ibn Khaldun notes about what

---

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>213</sup> Sunan al-Tirmīdhī, “On Sūra 23:1,” in *Tafsīr* (n.d.) n.p., quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>214</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, ii, 222, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>215</sup> Saḥiḥ al-Bukhārī, *Bad‘ al-Wahy*, *bāb* 2, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53

<sup>216</sup> Izutsu, 176.

Muhammad is trying to convey: “While he is actually receiving revelation, he does not have the consciousness of hearing any intelligible words spoken; all that he hears is something like a mysterious, indistinct noise (*dawīyy*), but the moment it ceases and he himself returns to the level of normal human consciousness, he realizes that the noise has already transformed itself into distinct meaningful words.”<sup>217</sup>

There are also *hadīths* about how others perceived Muhammad receiving revelation. For example: “Muhammad covers his head, his color grows red, he snores as someone asleep, or rattles like a young camel; after some time he recovers.”<sup>218</sup> Muhammad’s color grows livid (*tarabbada lahū wajhuhū*).<sup>219</sup> He falls into lethargy or a trance (*subāt*).<sup>220</sup> “When Muhammad received a revelation . . . this caused him much pain, such that we perceived it. That time he separated himself from his companions and remained behind. Thereupon, he covered his head with his shirt, suffering intensely, etc.”<sup>221</sup> Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr said, “Sūrat al-Mā’ida was revealed to the Apostle of God while he was riding on his camel. The beast could not bear him any longer so he had to descend from it.”<sup>222</sup> “‘A’isha relates—and this is considered one of the most authentic *hadīths* about revelation—I saw him as revelation came down upon him on an extremely cold day. His forehead was running with beads of perspiration.”<sup>223</sup> Therefore, it seems as though this supernatural communication did not only cause Muhammad to “undergo a

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>218</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ḥaḍīdj*, *bāb* 17, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>219</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, *Ḥudūd*, nos. 13, 14, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>220</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, vi, 103, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>221</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, i, 464, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>222</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, ii, 176, quoted in A.J. Wensinck and Andrew Rippin, “Wahy,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Paul Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), Vol X1: 53.

<sup>223</sup> Izutsu, 168.



deep personal transformation” but in fact caused, at times, the “keenest of pain and torture, not only mental but also even physical.”<sup>224</sup>

Regarding the times when Muhammad was approached by Gabriel, there are five references in the Qur’ān to the appearance of what Izutsu calls the “Almighty Being” that transmitted to him Allāh’s words.<sup>225</sup> The details of this Trustworthy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Amīn*) or Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Quds*), Gabriel, are not given. But the method of transmission is hinted at in Q 26: 192-195; the act of *tanzīl*, we are told, is performed onto the Prophet’s heart. Surat *al-Najm* follows: “By the Star when it goes down, Your Companion is neither astray nor being misled, Nor does he say [aught] of [his own] Desire. It is no less than inspiration<sup>226</sup> [*wahy*] sent down to him: He was taught by One mighty in Power, Endued with Wisdom: For he appeared [in stately form] while he was in the highest part of the horizon: Then he approached and came closer.”<sup>227</sup> Surat *al-Takwīr* states: “And [O people!] your companion is not one possessed; And without doubt he saw him [*ra’āhū*] in the clear horizon. Neither doth he withhold grudgingly a knowledge of the Unseen. Nor is it the word of an evil spirit accursed.”<sup>228</sup>

This mysterious and majestic being who made himself visible to Muhammad and transmitted to him the divine word was at first (i.e., in the Meccan period) simply called by the symbolic name of Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Quds*): “Say the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord in truth, in order to strengthen those who believe and as a Guide and Glad Tidings to Muslims.”<sup>229</sup> The entity is also called *Rūḥ al-Amīn* (the Trustworthy

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>226</sup> The translations I use for the Qur’ān in this chapter are all by ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Here, he translates the word *wahy* not as “revelation,” but “inspiration.” (The Holy Qur’ān. Trans. ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali. [Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2000]).

<sup>227</sup> Q 53:1-8.

<sup>228</sup> Q 83:22-25.

<sup>229</sup> Q 16:102.

Spirit): “Verily this is a revelation [*tanzīl*] from the Lord of the Worlds: Which the Trustworthy Spirit [*Rūḥ al-Amīn*] has brought down [*nazala*] upon thy heart [*‘Ala qalbika*], that thou mayest admonish. In the perspicuous Arabic tongue [*bilīsān ‘Arabīyin mubīn*].”<sup>230</sup> What is useful to note here is how the mysterious being brought down the message not into the Prophet’s ear or on his mind but “upon [his] heart.” This is again one of the points to which Soroush attaches much importance. “Later in Medina, this ‘Holy Spirit’ comes to be identified as the Angel Gabriel [*Jibr’īl*]. And in many of the authentic *hadīths*, the divine messenger who brought down revelation to Muhammad is said to have been, from the first, *Jibr’īl*.”<sup>231</sup>

It is now possible to see revelation as a three-point communication (God→Angel Gabriel→The Prophet), but in fact the next phase of the communication process is the transmission of the word of God to the public, or *tablīgh*. As Izutsu points out, this creates an interesting and important linguistic problem. The Prophet needs to memorize and transmit what he has heard through Gabriel, word for word. The primary duty of the Prophet from the moment he hears the Qur’ān is to keep it in memory so that he may relay it to his people without altering even a word. The Prophet seems to have been aware of the sensitivity of this issue as reflected in the Qur’ān: “Move not thy tongue concerning the [Qur’ān] to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to promulgate it: But when We have promulgated it, follow thou its recital (as promulgated): Nay more, it is for Us to explain it [and make it clear].”<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Q 26:192-95. Stefan Wild points out how equating the word *tanzīl* with revelation is “as problematic as it is inevitable.” The word *nuzūl* although not qur’ānic, he claims, is “vital for a correct understanding of the Qur’ānic hermeneutics of God’s speaking to man” (Wild, 137).

<sup>231</sup> Izutsu, 178.

<sup>232</sup> Q 75:16-19. See also: Q 20:113-14.

Izutsu reads this verse to mean that God himself is telling the Prophet not to worry about making mistakes, assuring Muhammad that all he needs to do is “wait until the revelation assumes a definite verbal form, and follow the wording passively.”<sup>233</sup>

The orthodox views on revelation portray the Qur’ān as the unmistakable word of God and the Prophet as the passive vessel for the message’s delivery. In what follows a different picture is presented by Soroush’s early positions on revelation, a message that only become even more clearly radical in Soroush’s later pronouncements on the matter.

### **EARLY SORUSH**

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Soroush’s theology can be divided into two distinct moments. The first is the distinction he makes between religion *qua* religion (which in the case of Islam has traditionally been centered on the sacred nature of the Qur’ān) and religious knowledge. The second, the topic of this chapter, is his demotion of the place of the Qur’ān as the primary source and the elevation of the personality of the Prophet as the core of Islam. According to early Soroush, Islam is the “totality of the Prophet’s gradual, historical deeds and stances . . . the Prophet’s personality is the core; it is everything that God has granted to the Muslim community . . . religion *is* the inward and outward experiences of the Prophet. Anything that he does *is* the right thing to do.” This theory, in effect, is the culmination of Soroush’s theology. The following seven points highlight Soroush’s early revelation theology and Prophetology.

#### **Point 1: The Substance of Religion Is Experiential in Nature**

The starting point of Soroush’s investigation into the nature of religion begins with the following series of questions: “What is the essence of religions? What is it that belongs to no other discipline and is fully and essentially religious? Does religiousness

---

<sup>233</sup> Izutsu, 181.

have its own field of knowledge—as do mathematics, philosophy or psychology—with its own particular theorems and concepts? Do religious propositions have their own particular and distinctive properties?”<sup>234</sup> The orthodox response to this question has invariably been that the Book, or the word of God, is what gives religion its unique essence, what sets it apart from worldly knowledge and gives its propositions its distinct property. Soroush disagrees and holds that in fact religion per se has no epistemological terrain that distinguishes it from other fields of knowledge. “Religion is a composite of propositions, each of which belongs to a different discipline” (e.g., philosophy—especially ethics—history, grammar, rhetoric, etc.), and that “it is even difficult to classify motives as religious.”<sup>235</sup> Instead, he suggests that the substance of religion, any religion—that which cannot be deconstructed into its worldly constituent parts and has nothing to do with earthly disciplines—“hinges on something of the nature of religious experience.”<sup>236</sup>

What is the nature of this religious experience? In order to speak about religious experience Soroush first lays out what he thinks are the three kinds of religiosity, presenting them in normative order: 1) *pragmatic / instrumental* religiosity, 2) *discursive / reflective* religiosity, and 3) *experiential* religiosity.

In pragmatic, or instrumental, religion, “a belief or practice’s ultimate purpose, utility and outcome (this-worldly or other-worldly) are of paramount importance to the believer. It is religion for life rather than life for religion. In its other-worldly form it wears the garb of asceticism and Sufism, and in its this-worldly form, the garb of politics and statesmanship.”<sup>237</sup> It is important to note that, although Soroush (as will be discussed

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>236</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 203.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 182.

shortly) is a great supporter of the mystic path, he nonetheless points out that mysticism itself carries a baser, less desirable, pragmatic form.<sup>238</sup> Pragmatic religion is “causal (not reasoned),<sup>239</sup> hereditary, deterministic (not arising from choice and free will), emotional, dogmatic, ritualistic, ideological, identity-bound . . . outwardly superficial, collective-communal, legalistic-juristic, mythic, imitative, obedient, traditional and habitual.”<sup>240</sup> Here the *number* of good deeds becomes the measure of the intensity or the diluteness of conviction: the number of times you have performed the *hajj*, how frequently you pray, whether or not you attend Friday prayers, the amount of alms you give. This type of religiosity loses the capacity to tolerate dissent and is prone to casting out and excommunicating people. This is the religiosity of the clergy, and those who imitate them. These are believers who “don’t have the courage to look at the transcendent for themselves.”<sup>241</sup>

A higher order of religiosity is the discursive or reflective kind. Soroush states, “If we identify pragmatic religiosity by its dogmatism, discursive religiosity can be identified by a lack of dogma or by a sense of rational wonder.”<sup>242</sup> In fact, it is only through relinquishing the realm of dogma and “exchanging it for doubt and wonder that we can head down the road of certitude” and mysticism (the next and highest level of

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Soroush uses the distinction between cause (*‘illat*) and reason (*dalīl*) frequently. Something is caused if one has no say in its outcome. A person who is born into a Shī‘ī Muslim family automatically takes on that identity. The *cause* of her being Shī‘ī is accidental and not intentional, but a person who, through reasoning, makes good or bad choices wills her present and future. If she becomes Shī‘ī, the *reason* is deliberation. (Soroush, *EPE*, 76).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 182-83. Soroush further divides the pragmatic into the *learned* and *laypeople*. While the layperson is ruled by emotions in their practical religiosity, the learned person is led by reason. Soroush even further divides the learned pragmatic believers into the *otherworldly* and *this-worldly*. While the other-worldly pragmatic believers (mainly clerics) are concerned about pragmatic moves to guarantee a prosperous afterlife, the this-worldly learned pragmatic group seeks movement and change in this world “rather than truth, which is precisely the main attribute of ideologies” (Ibid., 184). Soroush places most modern religious intellectuals and reformers like ‘Alī Sharī‘atī, Seyyed Jamal al-Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Seyyed Qutb in this final category. (Ibid., 185).

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 186.

religiosity).<sup>243</sup> Discursive religiosity is saturated with rationality and, as such, brings along a tireless need for raising questions, and a relentless individuality. Rational thinkers never stop posing questions; they destroy and rebuild ceaselessly. “Every rational thinker has their own conception of religion, that is to say their own understanding of God, the Prophet, revelation, felicity, wretchedness, sin and obedience, and understanding that belongs to that believer alone results from their reflections and is subjected to constant questioning and revision.”<sup>244</sup>

Soroush is in effect suggesting that, within the general boundaries set initially by God and interpreted by the Prophet in the seventh century, there could be many Islams, each tailor-made based on the practitioners’ (or groups of practitioners’), possibly transitory, understanding of the Prophet’s personality.<sup>245</sup> Discursive religiosity does not succumb to uncritical beliefs, does not follow famous personalities, superstitions, or popular vulgarities. Theologians and exegetes are two of the representatives of this category. Their belief is based on investigation, reflection, choice and free will; it is non-mythical, non-clerical, individualistic, and critical; it is filled with fluctuation. In fact, it is in a constant state of flux, and tends to be non-imitative. Constancy and uniformity cannot be expected from this kind of religiosity. In fact, for a discursive believer it is precisely this act of reflection, rediscovering, reexamining, doubting and pondering that amounts to the worship of the Almighty.<sup>246</sup>

Experiential religiosity, the highest order of worship, is the type of religiosity that leads to certitude (the other two led to dogmatism and wonder, respectively). Experiential religiosity is

---

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>245</sup> The issue of polysemy and “many Islams” will be revisited in Chapter 4’s discussion about pluralism.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

passionate, revelatory, certain, individualistic, deterministic, quintessential, reconciliatory, ecstatic, intimate, visual, saintly, mystical, and mysterious. Here God is graceful, alluring and beloved. The Prophet is the ideal (*murād*), a contemplative man (*mard-e bātinī*) and a model of successful religious experience. To follow him is to share his passions, to extend and repeat his experiences, and to be drawn into the magnetic force of his personality field . . . Here sin is that which muddies, weakens or destroys the devotional link, the power of discovery and the state of union. And worship is that which, tinder-like, feeds the flames of ecstasy. Heaven is the experience of union, and hell the bitterness of separation . . . Here secularity means experiencing being as deaf and blind, void of divinity; a kind of atheistic existentialism. The certainty that is unattainable in discursive religiosity is picked like a fruit from the tree of experience here, and the free will that was seen as virtue there now gives way to the passionate compulsion of love . . . the guardian addresses the believer's heart not his mind or emotions.<sup>247</sup>

This passage echoes Sufi thought and its experiential religious epistemology, which have been part and parcel of Islamic culture and theology since the second century A.H (eighth century A.D.). Some have even argued that it was the dominant hermeneutic in the Iranian milieu until the inception of the Safavid dynasty, and that it was only after Shah Ismail's conversion to Shī'ism in the early 1500s that Iran began a tenuous relationship with its Sunni Sufi sects, a tension that carried on over to post-revolutionary times.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 190-91.

<sup>248</sup> For more on the tension between Sufis and clerics in Safavid Iran, see: Kathryn Babayan, "Sufis, Dervishes and Mullahs: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* (1996); Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (2003).

The Islamic Republic has always had a tenuous relationship with its Sufi population, but more recently, after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first successful bid for presidency in 2005 the Islamic Republic of Iran has amped up negative treatment of its Sufi population. On November 11, 2007 clashes were reported between police and Basij paramilitary troops on the one side and members of Iran's largest Sufi order, the Ne'matollahi Gonabadi, on the other. Security forces were reported to have bulldozed parts of the Sufi monastery in Borujerd, known as Hosseiniyeh-ye Ne'matollahi Gonabadi. On June 25, 2011, Jaras reported that fourteen members (*darāvīsh*; pl. of *darvīsh*) of the Gonabadi Silsileh had been flogged for disrupting public safety (*bar ham zadan-e amniyyat-e umūmī*). The punishment was in response to protests against ill treatment of order members by Gonabad's prosecutor general in 2010. These incidents are especially alarming because Ne'matollahi Gonabadi is the Sufi order whose teachings most closely resemble orthodox Shī'ī Islamic tradition. For further details on the 2007 incident see: Ron Synovitz and Alireza Taheri, "Iran: Clashes Highlight 'Demonization' of Sufi Muslims," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 16, 2007, accessed July 19, 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=4742edf92d>. For more on the Ne'matollahi Sufi order, see: Massoud Homayouni, *History of the Nematollahi Sufi Order in Iran, 1799-1992 A.D.* (1993).

Soroush tells us that the most desired form of religiosity is the experiential one, but what exactly is experiential religiosity? In the West, the unreasonableness of belief in God, the claim that belief in God is not rational, or conversely, defenses that it is rational, approaches that recommend groundless belief in God, or philosophical fideism,<sup>249</sup> and justified belief through religious experience, all fall under the rubric of religious epistemology. Reformed epistemology, the view that justified belief can be based on religious experience, is advanced by the likes of Alvin Plantinga (whose work Soroush quotes)<sup>250</sup> and Nicholas Wolterstorff. These thinkers contend that belief in God does not require the support of propositional evidence in order to be rational. Neither is the belief in God groundless. Belief in the divine is grounded in characteristic religious experiences, examples which are beholding the sublime divine majesty from a mountain top, or the sense of awe one feels when noticing the creativity manifested in the beauty of the flower.

Other sorts of religious experiences involve a sense of guilt (and forgiveness), despair, the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, or more relevant for our discussion, a perception of direct contact with the divine (i.e., mysticism). Religious experience understood this way is typically taken as self-authenticating. The experience of many believers is so vivid that they describe it with sensory metaphors: they claim to see, hear, or be touched by God. The character of religious experience is belief in a cognitive faculty that can be trusted when induced by the appropriate experiences; that is, one is permitted to trust one's initial alleged religious experience as veridical, just as one must trust that others of one's cognitive faculties are veridical.<sup>251</sup> Richard Swinburne alleges

---

<sup>249</sup> Fideism is an epistemological theory that holds that faith is independent of reason, and that faith is superior at arriving at particular truths than reason.

<sup>250</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 120.

<sup>251</sup> Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-91.



that it is also reasonable to trust what others tell us unless, and until, we have good reason to believe otherwise.<sup>252</sup> So, it would be reasonable for someone who did not have a religious experience to trust the truthfulness of someone who did claim to have a religious experience. That is, it would be reasonable for everyone, not just the subject of the alleged religious experience, to believe in God on the basis of that alleged religious experience.

It is also worthy to note that the kind of religiosity one engages in depends on one's capabilities. Not everyone has the mental capacity, individuality or courage to engage in the doubting and questioning that discursive / reflective religiosity requires. Not everyone is able or has the courage to achieve union with the Almighty.<sup>253</sup>

## **Point 2: The Accidentals of Religion Were Essential to the Prophet's Experiences**

Soroush claims that the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge, which happens as a result of new development in extra-religious knowledge (Soroush's first theological moment), is not limited to the here and now; even the experiential substance of religion sent down to the Prophet was contingent upon and colored by the accidentals of the age and place in which it was revealed. The contingent nature of knowledge applies even in the case of contact with the divine.

What does Soroush mean by the "accidentals of religion"? The Arabic language, a majority of what is said in the Qur'ān (those verses that refer back to specific incidents), the fact that Muhammad was an Arab, and the Arab culture with which the Qur'ān is imbued, are all accidentals, local and temporal—not universal and permanent. Soroush points out that the essence of religion, what he calls the "essentials," never occurs without the "accidentals."<sup>254</sup> "With its spirit, its *muḥkamāt* (unambiguous principles) and

---

<sup>252</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (1984), 21.

<sup>253</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 89.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

indisputable elements remaining intact, the Qur'ān was revealed and realized gradually; in other words, it had a historical genesis. Someone would go to the Prophet and ask him a question. Someone would insult his wife. Someone would set alight the flames of war. Some would accuse the Prophet of being insane . . . The Jews would do something, the Christians another thing.”<sup>255</sup> These accidentals, although external to the kernel of Qur'ānic truth, have nonetheless exercised a profound influence and played a fundamental role in shaping the content of the Qur'ān.

Soroush suggests that because religion is a human affair, “the Qur'ān could have been much more than it is,” that it could have figuratively even had a “second volume.”<sup>256</sup> If the Prophet had lived longer and encountered more events, his reactions and responses would inevitably have grown and possibly even become different, and the accidentals would have occupied an even greater share of the Qur'ān. Many instances and events did not happen at the time of the Prophet, so he did not give an answer to, or take a position on them.

“If ‘those who fought with Muhammad’ had not accused ‘A’isha of having an adulterous relationship, would we have the verses at the beginning of *al-Nūr* Surah [Chapter 24]? If the wars of the confederate tribes had never occurred, would we have the *al-Aḥzāb* Surah [Chapter 33]? These were all contingent events in history whose occurrence or non-occurrence would have been much the same. But, having occurred, we now find traces of them in the Qur'ān . . . when we say that religion is human and gradual and historical, we mean nothing other than this.”<sup>257</sup>

Not only is the Arabic language an accidental in Islam and in the Qur'ān, but so is Arab culture:

---

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

The fact that the Qur'ān speaks of the presence in heaven of dark-eyed *hūrīs*<sup>258</sup> (not blue-eyed women) and portrays them as sheltered in their tents (Q 55:72); that it calls to the people to consider how the camel [and not some other animal] is created (Q 88:17); that it refers to warm-weather fruits with which the Arabs were acquainted with: the banana (Q 56:29), the date and the pomegranate, (Q 55:68), grapes (Q 80:28), the olive (Q 80:29), and the fig (Q 95:1); that it uses the lunar calendar (the month of Ramadan for fasting, *Dhu al-Hajja* for the *hajj*, the “*harām*” sacred months for refraining from war and so on); that it speaks of the Quraysh tribe and “their composing for the winter and summer caravan” (Q 106 1-2); that it refers to Abu-Lahab and his wife who “upon her neck [was] a rope of palm fibre” (Q 111:5); that it describes the presence in the heaven of “uplifted couches and goblets set forth and cushions arrayed and carpets outspread” (Q 88:14-16); that one of the phrases it uses to convey the coming to an end of all things on Judgment Day is “the pregnant camels shall be neglected” (Q 82:4); that it mentions the Arab tradition of burying girls alive: “the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was slain” (Q 82:8-9); that it likens the flames of hell to bright yellow camels and speaks of “sparks like golden herds” (Q 77:32-33); that it refers to animals that were well-known to the Arabs, such as horses, mules, camels, donkeys, lions, elephants, pigs, snakes, etc. and mentions such things as wool, cotton, camphor, ginger and 70-cubit chains, all objects of daily use for the Arabs; as well as many other similar examples, which can be found through a diligent exploration of the Qur'ān and the noble *Sunna* of the Prophet.<sup>259</sup>

The same can be said of the use of many non-Arab words (Hebrew, Greek, Persian, Syriac, etc.) that appear in the Qur'ān and number more than two hundred. What Soroush is referring to is how the language of the Qur'ān is basically repositioning already familiar words and concepts by creating new central and peripheral relationships between them.

Think of words such as *shukr* (thanksgiving), *ṣabr* (patience), *ne'mah* (blessing), *mun'im* (beneficent), *tavakkul* (trust), *taubah* (repentance), *ma'siyah* (sin), *du'ā'* (prayer), *'ebādah* (worship), *taqwā* (piety), *kufr* (disbelief and rejection of God), *islām*

---

<sup>258</sup> The *hūrīs* are pure beings, created to provide heavenly pleasures, and are mentioned in various verses of the Qur'ān. In Q 52:20 and 44:54 we are told that believers will have *hūrīs* as wives, that they will be “spotless virgins, amorous, like of age” (Q 55:34-39, Q 78:33 and Q 38:52), that they will have “swelling breasts” (Q 78:33), and that neither man nor *jinn* will have touched them (Q55:56 and Q55:74). For more on the *hūrīs*, see: A.J. Wensinck, “Hūr,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam* (2002).

<sup>259</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 71.

(submission to God), *imān* (faith), *irtidād* (apostasy), *wilāyah* (guardianship), *tasbīh* (glorification of God), *jihād* (struggle), and many more. These words and their meanings belonged to the Arabs and were products of their culture and world-view. Nonetheless, within Islam and with reference to the new source of authority, they took on a new spirit and hue. In other words, the Prophet of Islam used the bricks at his disposal within Arab culture to construct a new structure which is related to that culture but also surpasses it.<sup>260</sup> As the Qur’ān says, “And We have made the Qur’ān easy to understand and remember. Then, is there any that will receive admonition?” (Q 54:32) Religion by way of its accidentals brought about new judgments, formulations and word systems.

### **Point 3: The Accidentals Have No Lasting Authority**

Accidentals of religion are temporal in nature. They made their way into the doctrinal core, but they could easily have been left out if the Prophet had encountered other issues instead. As such, accidentals “don’t have lasting authority.”<sup>261</sup>

### **Point 4: Islam Is Founded on the Prophet’s Divinely-Sanctioned Personality**

If the accidentals are contingent, what are the essentials of religion, according to Soroush, and do they (unlike the accidentals) have lasting authority? The essentials are nothing other than the “teachings” of the *muḥkamāt*, which “all issue from one source, (prophetic revelation).”<sup>262</sup> Islam can be exclusively described as “the Prophet’s spiritual and social experiences, and it is therefore subject to him, and since these [experiences] are not arbitrary, but are founded on the Prophet’s holy and divinely-sanctioned personality, it becomes binding on all his followers, as well as the Prophet himself.”<sup>263</sup> The Prophet reached that level of consciousness within which God dwells in one’s sight

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 16.

and over one's faculties at all times. Soroush says that despite what has traditionally been imagined about the process of revelation Muhammad was not a passive vessel but an active participant. He was in fact the impetus behind the "sending down" of the revelation. He was the one who commanded its descent.<sup>264</sup>

#### **Point 5: The Prophet's Religious Experience Is the Same as Reception of Revelation**

What exactly happened during this process of revelation? Traditionally, as I mentioned earlier, revelation having originated from the Almighty and mediated through the angel Gabriel, although a mystery at the detailed level, is understood to have been heard by the Prophet in the Arabic language. Upon hearing the word of God Muhammad is believed to have acted as a passive conduit, memorizing the message, word for word without any change and then relaying it to his people. Soroush, however, suggests that what Muhammad was experiencing was nothing more than a religious experience: "This religious experience is exactly that which, in the case of the prophets, is known as 'reception of revelation.' And so . . . the Prophet did have a role in the delivering of the teachings."<sup>265</sup> "Let me add in passing," Soroush continues, "that viewing divine discourse as nothing but the prophetic discourse is the best way of resolving the theological problems of how God speaks (*kalām-e bari*)."<sup>266</sup>

The quintessential constituent of a prophet's personality and prophethood and his unique capital is that divine revelation of what is described today as the paradigm case of "religious experience." In this experience it appears to the Prophet as if someone comes to him and proclaims messages and commands to him and tells him to convey them to the

---

<sup>264</sup> Soroush notes that Sultan Valīd (Rumi's son) agrees on the centrality of the personality of the Prophet: "Because that which the Prophet considers right is acceptable to and cherished by Him, God wants what he wants" (Baha al-Din Valad, *Ma'aref: Majmu'eh Sokhanan va Mava'ez baha aldin Valad*, compiled by Nijab Mayel Heravi, 1367, Reprint [Tehran: Mawla Publications, 1987], 309-10, quoted in Soroush, *EPE*, 34.

<sup>265</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 198.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

people. The Prophet is filled with such conviction on hearing these commands and messages, he feels such certitude and courage, that he prepares himself to stride forth and carry out his duty single-handedly in the face of the most bitter attacks, enmities and hardships.<sup>267</sup>

What then is the role of Gabriel? Soroush proposes: “It was not he [Muhammad] who was under Gabriel’s sway, but Gabriel, who was under his [Muhammad’s] sway. It was he who would make the Angel appear. And, when he wanted to, the Prophet could go beyond the Angel, as the experience of the Mi’raj testifies.”<sup>268</sup> Soroush, in good Sufi fashion, uses lines 3800-3805 from Rumi’s *Masnawi* to make his point, but there is also proof for his point in other works.<sup>269</sup>

According to Soroush the prophetic experience was constantly renewed throughout the Prophet’s twenty-three years as the messenger of God. It was not as if the Prophet experienced revelation once. The blessing of revelation rained down upon him constantly, “giving him ever greater strength and flourishing. Hence the Prophet grew steadily more learned, more certain, more resolute, more experienced; in a word, more a prophet.”<sup>270</sup> In fact, Soroush suggests that it wasn’t only the Prophet’s experience that expanded. Through the questions they were asking the prophet and the problems they were posing—questions and problems that would induce the Prophet to ask for revelation—“the people were never mere observers, even in the loftiest aspects of religiosity, such as revelation itself.”<sup>271</sup> This twenty-three year process of prophethood was a period of growth and spiritual and social expansion for all those involved—the Prophet and his *‘umma*. Must this expansion stop just because revelation has stopped?

---

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

## Point 6: Being Religious Means Expanding the Prophetic Experience

What does it mean to be religious? Soroush considers religiousness and religiosity and their continued endurance to hinge on religious experience. He sees the Prophet as the recipient of these experiences, as agent and guide, and as a result Soroush considers the evolution and endurance of religion to hinge in the endurance of Muhammad's "prophetic experiences."<sup>272</sup> In the absence of the Abrahamic Prophets "the inward and outward prophetic experience must expand and grow, thereby enriching and strengthening religion."<sup>273</sup> Historically, it has been the mystics, the Sufis, who have carried the experiential mantle, among whom Soroush cites Hafez, Rumi, al-Ghazzali, Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari, and Seyyed Heydar Amoli. They are the ones "who find vicarious rapture in the Prophet's rapture."<sup>274</sup> They are the ones who stride in the Prophet's shadow and follow the path of the master. Each and "every one of these experiences is unique and singular, and therefore, magnificent, precious and laudable."<sup>275</sup> The era of prophethood has ended, however. Because the Prophet of Islam was the seal of all the prophets, we are no longer able to take anyone's word to be the indisputable truth in religion. This character of being the "seal of the prophets" relates to Muhammad's *personne juridique* (*shakhsīyyat-e huqūqī*), rather than his *personne physique* (*shakhsīyyat-e haqīqī*). The Prophet's *personne juridique*, that aspect of his personality that was bequeathed a mission and the guardianship of the 'umma, causes his personality to be his proof and argument. It is the weight of the fact that he is chosen by God and speaks on His behalf that aids the 'umma to believe his lofty claims. If the principle of finality<sup>276</sup> is assumed, we need to realize that this finality is an attribute of *prophethood*

---

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>276</sup> Principle of Finality is the claim that Muhammad is the final and seal of the prophets. For Soroush, the concept of finality is an intra-religious claim, not an extra-religious one. In other words, arguments based

only and not religion, and that this finality applies not to the *personne physique* of the Prophet but to his *personne juridique*. This guardianship is what ceased with the cessation of prophethood. We do not accept anyone's word now unless they give us reasons and appeal to laws. The religious experiences of the Prophet became "binding on others,"<sup>277</sup> but in his absence others' religious experiences cannot be binding because the "experience of mystics is solely for their own theoretical and practical benefit, most certainly not binding on others, and liable to criticism and improvement like any other human product."<sup>278</sup> After the Prophet of Islam, no one's feelings, experiences and certitudes are religiously binding on others, nor do they constitute the last word. The prophet-fertile era is over, but this was not the case with the Prophet. "They, themselves, by virtue of their personality as prophets were the backing for their words and commands. They were their own proof . . . This is the prophetic legal mission," states Soroush.<sup>279</sup> As a guardian deriving his authority from God, a prophet constitutes all the proof and force that is necessary to back his word.

Soroush, at the core a Sufi, as will become further evident as we proceed, has nonetheless brought under question a totalitarian aspect of Mystic Islam.<sup>280</sup> The mystics' claims to divine knowledge and authoritative pronouncements are subject to debate and doubt. No one's word will ever carry as much weight as that of the prophets. This is very different from the traditional, deferential relationship between the *pīr* / *murshid* / *sheikh* (Sufi master) and his students. Soroush is redefining the nature of authority and guardianship even within the Sufi context.

---

on reason and experience cannot prove the necessity of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, just as the completeness of the religion of Islam cannot be proven on this basis (Soroush, *EPE*, 50).

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 41.



How is it then that those who wish to expand the prophetic experience do so? Soroush defers to Ibn 'Arabī's discussion about the guardianship of the *wali* (guardian) in this context and says,

The *walī's* vision (*kashf*) does not surpass the contents of the Prophet's Book and revelation. Junayd<sup>281</sup> said that our knowledge is bound by the Book and the *Sunna* and another said, any discovery that is not underwritten by the Book and *Sunna* is false. Hence, the *wali* will not arrive at any discovery that is not of the nature of an understanding of God's scripture . . . Hence, the *wali* will not utter a precept that violates the precepts of religious law. Nonetheless, on occasion, the inspiration comes to him to place a number of components alongside one another to form an aggregate that was not to be found in religious law, although all the individual components were to be found therein . . . This level of law making is permissible for the *wali*, and, if you were to ask specifically where in religion God has granted this right to *awliya*, the answer lies in the Prophet's words when he said, if anyone establishes a worthy tradition, he shall be rewarded for it, as will anyone who abides by it until Judgment Day . . . This is a *wali's* share of prophethood, and it forms a component of prophethood, just as true visions are components of prophethood.<sup>282</sup>

If the concept of finality applies only to prophethood and Islam is in fact in need of being expanded, then how are we to make sense of verses like the following: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you" (Q 5:3)? Soroush defers to another great thinker Fakhr al-din al-Razi<sup>283</sup> to explain the meaning of this verse:

Those who accept the validity of analogy have said that what is meant here by religion being perfected by God has made known His specific precepts about some actions in the Text, whereas He has made known His precepts about some others by providing us with the instruments of analogy. It is as if God has divided things into two categories, those that have direct precepts and those for which the

---

<sup>281</sup> Junayd al-Baghdadi (215 A.H./830 A.D.) was one of the great early Muslim mystics and is a central figure in many Sufi orders.

<sup>282</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah* [Meccan Illuminations] (Beirut: Sadir Pub., 1970), 3:56, quoted in Soroush, *EPE*, 48.

<sup>283</sup> Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, or Imam Razi, was a Sunni polymath and theologian of the Ash'ari school, born in 544 A.H./1149 A.D. in Ray (now part of the Province of Tehran), Iran. He is known for his major work, *Tafsir-e Kabir* [The Great Commentary], an eight-volume commentary on the Qur'ān also titled *Mafatih al-Ghayb*.

precepts must be derived from the first category by analogy. And since God has commanded the use of analogy and made it incumbent on believers to apply it, he has in fact made his precepts clear about all things in advance. Hence, religion is perfect / complete.<sup>284</sup>

For Soroush, the above discussion about the completeness of Islam, demonstrates that there is no contradiction between assuming minimalism and assuming perfection. It is religion's<sup>285</sup> aim and mission *only* to provide these minimums (whether in the realm of precepts, in the realms of ethics, in terms of a world-view and of religious knowledge, and in terms of guidance in general. A “religion that has provided these minimums has performed completely and is no way lacking.”<sup>286</sup>

If we now replace Imam Razi's word “analogy” (*qiyas*) with the word *ijthād* (independent legal reasoning), which has a more general meaning and is accepted by both Sunnis and the Shī'ī *'ulema'*, then we will have the sum total of what classical and modern commentators have achieved in their attempts to prove the perfection of religion. The message of finality means that we should understand religion and the purpose of religion in such a way “as to leave the door open to its dynamism and vitality. And the very minimum that we can do to make religion dynamic is to see it as minimal.”<sup>287</sup>

### **Point 7: The Best Way to Be a Non-Imitative Believer Is to Be a Scholarly Gnostic**

The highest form of piety, and this seems to be the path Soroush has chosen for himself, is “scholarly Gnosticism”—to be one “who proceeds with criticism and questions” and has “a probing kind of faith.”<sup>288</sup> One has to “peel away the accidentals and incidentals” in order to “deconstruct religion's historical body.”<sup>289</sup> It is only through this

---

<sup>284</sup> Fakhr al-Din Muhammad al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978), 358.

<sup>285</sup> This use of the word “religion” is different from its uses as “religion *qua* religion” and as a concept with an essence. “Religion” in this context means all things related directly to the sciences of the Qur'ān, like *fiqh*, exegesis, theology, ethics, et cetera—including religious experience.

<sup>286</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 113.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 91.

probing Gnostic path that one can continue the mission of the Prophet. Soroush, in an interesting instrumental comment, suggests that the only way to keep religion from disintegrating and going down the path of secularization is to “find a mechanism that perpetuates the Prophet’s presence and experience.”<sup>290</sup> He states, “The task for the religious scholar is to identify the whole range of accidentals that has penetrated the very core of the essence of Islam and imposed its own nature on it.”<sup>291</sup> In a possible jab against the Islamic Republic’s general negative stance towards Sufis, Soroush verbalizes his frustration at the limitations the regime imposes against Sufi tendencies by saying, “If we accept that there is a type of religiosity that begins with criticism and questions, we cannot construct a barrier halfway down its path and ask the Gnostic believer to proceed no further. We have to accept that there is also a probing type of faith as well an imitative one. This probing faith will find, and has found, its own way.”<sup>292</sup>

Soroush’s revelation theology/prophetology in his 2001 work *Bast-e Tajrobeh-ye Nabavi*, can be summarized in the following two points: 1) the Prophet’s personality is the singularly pivotal point around which Islam was born as a religion and 2) the Qur’ān is already an interpretation of the Prophet’s and not the direct word of God. Downplaying the interpreted nature of the Qur’ān, Soroush in that work accents the role of the Prophet as the activator of the Qur’ān. In 2007, however, with caustic bluntness, Soroush presents the two ingredients of his neo-Sufi theology in their totality and without hesitation.

---

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 200. Soroush defines secularism as the acting on the basis of non-religious motives, explaining the world, life and human beings on the basis of non-religious concepts and constructs, and discovering the independence of such constructs as science and politics from religion (Ibid., 196).

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 235.

## LATER SOROUSH

In his December 26, 2007 interview with Radio Netherlands Worldwide<sup>293</sup> Soroush drew attention to four main features of his revelation theology: 1) “revelation is ‘inspiration [*ilhām*],’”<sup>294</sup> 2) that the Prophet’s reaction to *wahy* was much like that of a poet’s,<sup>295</sup> 3) that “the Prophet played a pivotal role in the production of the Qur’ān,”<sup>296</sup> and 4) that “revelation may be wrong in matters that relate to the material world and human society.”<sup>297</sup> Soroush had already presented two of these four claims in *Baṣṭ-e Tajrobeh-ye Nabavī [The Expansion of Prophetic Experience]*—the relationship between revelation and inspiration, and the Prophet’s essential role in the production of *wahy*. While he had hinted at the role of extra-religious information in interpreting qur’ānic content in his discussion about accidentals of religion,<sup>298</sup> in the 2007 interview he explicitly states that the Qur’ān contains certain inaccuracies. He also expands on the nature of the Prophet’s production of the Qur’ān by comparing it to poetic divination.

Soroush claims that *wahy* (revelation) and *ilhām* (inspiration) are qualitatively the same thing. What is different is not the status of the message, but the role of the messenger: that the prophets’ experiences were deeper and that they were also inspired to have the inclination (*meyl*) to spread God’s message. Is Soroush’s claim reasonable?

In the Qur’ān, *wahy* sometimes denotes revelation in the form of communication without speech, presented as an exceptional modality of God’s speaking to His creatures, meaning that prophets are not the only recipients of *wahy*: the bees (Q 16: 68) and heaven and earth (Q 41:12) are also spoken of. Nor is God the only source of *wahy*: the Satans

---

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 271-75.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 17.

(*shāyāṭīn*) among humans and *jinn* also inspire via *wahy*, as in Q 6:121: “The Satans inspire (*yuhūna*) their friends to dispute with you; if you obey them, you are idolaters.”

But we also have instances where the Qur’ān is spoken of as the “literal” word, as opposed to communication without speech. This identification of the literal message as the product of *wahy* is fully developed in a passage such as Q 29:45, which associates “the Book” with *wahy*: “Recite what has been revealed (*ūhiyā*) to thee of the Book.” Q 62:7 speaks of an Arabic Qur’ān as the product: “And so we have revealed to thee an Arabic Qur’ān.” In this usage, the word may be seen to be functionally equivalent to *tanzīl*, the word frequently used with the image of a literal “bringing down” of a message. And so it is possible to conclude that *wahy* is a difficult term in the Qur’ān, and that a search for a single meaning for the word has proved frustrating to scholarship, given that within it there is not only a reference to the source of the revelation, but also to its agents.

In the Qur’ān, the word *ilhām* (inspiration) appears only in 91:8: “And inspired it [*fa alhama-hā fujūra-hā wa taqwā-hā*] [with conscience of] what is wrong for it and [what is] right for it.” By far the most important use of *ilhām* is in connection with the doctrine of saints. Here, the Sufi tradition and orthodoxy make a distinction of authority explicit in the two ways Allāh reveals himself: to men individually by knowledge cast into their minds (*ilhām*) and generally by messages sent through the Prophets (*wahy*). In the first case, saints especially are the recipients of this *ilhām* because their hearts are purified and prepared for it. It differs from intellectual knowledge (*‘ilm-e ‘aqlī*) in that it cannot be gained by meditation and deduction, but is suddenly communicated while the recipient cannot tell how, whence or why. It is a pure gift from the generosity (*fayḍ*) of Allāh.<sup>299</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> For more on the Sufi nature of *ilhām*, see: Alan Godlas, *Sufism’s Many Paths* (2000); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975); Leonard Lewinsohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. I: “Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)” (1999).

Yet, here arises the deeper epistemological issue: what is the status of the recipient of that revealed knowledge? In the traditional understanding of *wahy* not only do we know that the source is outside the prophet, namely God, but that this information is also known to the prophet himself. Soroush's suggestion that *wahy* is equivalent to *ilhām* obscures the lines a bit. Abdullah Nasri, in one of the many articles published during late 2007 and early 2008 as a result of Soroush's Dutch interview, suggests that Soroush is claiming that *wahy* is being generated from within the Prophet.<sup>300</sup> In that same interview, Soroush points out that:

The question of whether the inspiration comes from outside or inside is really not relevant, because at the level of revelation there is no difference between outside and inside. The inspiration comes from the Self of the Prophet. The Self of every individual is divine, but the Prophet differs from other people in that he has become aware of his divinity. He has actualized its potential. His Self has become one with God. Now don't get me wrong on this point: This spiritual union with God does not mean that the Prophet has become God. It is a union that is limited and tailored to his size. It is human size, not God's size. The mystical poet Jalaluddin Rumi describes this paradox with words: 'Through the Prophet's union with God, the ocean is poured into a jar.'<sup>301</sup>

Reminiscent of the concept of *fanā'* in Sufism, Soroush suggests that at the moment when the prophet is receiving his *ilhām* he has become so close to God that his internal voice is that of God's.<sup>302</sup> That is, in either case, the issue is not revealed knowledge, but closeness (*qurb*). Here, traditional definitions of the state of the knower become critical.

There are two allied definitions given to the Sufi term *fanā'*: 1) the passing-away of all things from the consciousness of the mystic, including himself, and its replacement by a pure consciousness of God and 2) the annihilation of the imperfect attributes (as distinguished from the substance) of the creature and their replacement by the perfect

---

<sup>300</sup> Abdullah Nasri, "Ātash bar Kharman-e Nabuvvat" [Setting Fire to the Haystack of Prophethood], January 2008, accessed January 2008, <http://www.dr.soroush.com> [no longer available].

<sup>301</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 273.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

attributes bestowed by God.<sup>303</sup> What is at stake in Soroush's attempt to taper the gap between the authority of the Prophet and the mystic becomes evident in Mustafa Husseinī-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's negative reaction in March 2008. Husseinī-Ṭabāṭabā' argues that, according to the *'urafā* (the mystics), a *sālik* (one who is searching) who leaves (*az khalvat be dar āmadan*) the path of ascetism (*kashf o shuhūd*) in order to take up political and social life, as was the case with the Prophet, and gets caught up in worldly affairs witnesses the lessening and eventual cessation of his ascetic sensitivity. Since we know that even though the Prophet was caught up in the affairs of the people for twenty-three years, he nevertheless continued to receive a constant stream of what is called *wahy*. We therefore cannot compare *wahy* with gnostic contemplation.<sup>304</sup>

But the state of revelation must be further specified. Accordingly, Soroush points to *baqā'*, which means 1) persistence in the new divinely bestowed attributes and 2) a return to the mystic's consciousness of the plurality of the creaturely world.<sup>305</sup> The second follows from the first, since, in this tradition, being with God means also being with the world that has been created by God and in which He is manifested, however imperfectly. "The Sufis generally regard this state of *baqā'* as being more perfect than that of mere *fanā'*, and this is the meaning of their dictum that sobriety supervenes on intoxication."<sup>306</sup> This "return" to the world is, Sufis emphatically state, not a simple return to the pre-*fanā'* state of the mystic since the experience provides an altogether new insight. Instead, it helps one to perceive the world's inadequacies and endeavor to make it more perfect."<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Baḳā' wa-Fanā'," in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul J. Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1:951.

<sup>304</sup> Mustafa Hussienī Tabāṭabā'ī, *Vahy va Mukāshifeh 'Irfānī?* March 2008, accessed April 2008, <http://www.dr.soroush.com> [no longer available].

<sup>305</sup> Rahman, 951.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

Soroush's use of the doctrine of *baqā'* throws into bold relief the distinction between the mystical and the prophetic consciousness. Whereas the ordinary mystic stops at *fanā'* and does not wish to return to the world, it is the function of the prophet, despite what Husseinī-Ṭabāṭabā'ī finds problematic, to be the mystic par excellence according to Soroush's interpretation—that is, it is the prophet's function to be constantly both with God and the world, to transmute the course of history through the implementation of the religio-moral divine Truth.

Soroush then proceeds to show how the Prophet's reaction to *wahy* was much like that of a poet's. In his first response to Ayatollah Ṣobḥānī, his most ardent critic during this period, Soroush borrowed from 'Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī<sup>308</sup> to clarify that *wahy* is not a *shu'ūr-e marmūz* (mysterious understanding) but a *honar-e marmūz* (mysterious creative talent)—using art in a sense more closely related to artisanship or making.<sup>309</sup> This is supported by his recourse to yet another extension of the agentive side of prophetic revelation. *Ilhām*, Soroush claims, can be experienced by many, be they artists (poets for instance), gnostics, or finally, prophets. In each case it is not an internal process but an external one that characterizes what the result of that revelation will be—not just an inner state, but something directed externally, at the community. *Wahy* is *ilhām*, or religious experience that poets, artists and gnostics experience, but at a higher, more refined level (*sahth-e bālātar*).<sup>310</sup> When asked by Ayatollah Sobhani whether he was equating *wahy* and poetry, Soroush responds, “For understanding the unfamiliar concept of *wahy* we can

---

<sup>308</sup> Grand Ayatollah 'Allāmeḥ Seyyed Muḥammad Hussein Tabāṭabā'ī (b. 1892 - d. 1981), famous for his commentary *Tafsir al-Mizān*, was one of the most prominent clerics of contemporary Shī'ī Islam. He was considered the main *marja'* of his time upon Ayatollah Borūjerdī's passing.

<sup>309</sup> Soroush, “Bashar and Bashīr: Soroush's First Response to Ayatollah Sobhani,” in *EPE*, 292. Grand Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani (b. 1930) is an Iranian Twelver Shī'ī *marja'* and an influential theologian, who is a senior member of the high council of Qom seminary. For more on Ayatollah Sobhani, see: Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices* (2001).

<sup>310</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 292.



use the more understood and accessible concept of poetry or, more generally, human creativity. This is only a means to better imagine an alien concept. Did not al-Ghazzali contend that, to better understand *wahy*, we can envision the human's often encountered experience of satanic temptation?"<sup>311</sup>

In his third claim, Soroush divides the Qur'ān into two parts, claiming that while the *muhkamāt* are accurate, the scientific and historical parts of the Qur'ān are susceptible to error. Soroush maintains that certain parts of the Qur'ān are inaccurate: "Those parts of the Qur'ān that have to do with the characteristics of God, life after death, and the rules of worship are not susceptible to error, but *wahy* has made mistakes about life on earth and human society . . . What the Qur'ān says about historical events, other religions and scientific truths do not necessarily have to be true."<sup>312</sup>

Soroush takes issue, for instance, with stories about the prophets, calling them fables—that is, stories that need to be read allegorically.<sup>313</sup> This is despite that fact that in Q 20:99 we find: "Thus do We relate to thee some stories of what happened before: for We have sent thee a Message from Our own Presence." He also finds verses such as Q 37: 1-10, which seems to set up a relationship between comets and *shayātīn* (devils),<sup>314</sup> or Q 2:275-81 which seems to claim that madness could be caused by *jinns* to be problematic. Commentators, he claims, have used *ta'wīl* when necessary to make sense of the verses they felt incommensurate with scientific findings, but they do not go far

---

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>314</sup> 37: 1-10: "By those who set the ranks in battle order (1) And those who drive away (the wicked) with reproof (2) And those who read (the Word) for a reminder, (3) Lo! Thy Lord is surely One; (4) Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of the sun's risings. (5) Lo! We have adorned the lowest heaven with an ornament, the planets; (6) With security from every forward devil. (7) They cannot listen to the Highest Chiefs for they are pelted from every side, (8) Outcast, and theirs is a perpetual torment; (9) Save him who snatcheth a fragment, and there pursueth him a piercing flame. (10) Then ask them (O Muhammad): Are they stronger as a creation, or those (others) whom we have created? Lo! We created them of plastic clay."

enough.<sup>315</sup> For instance `Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, when commenting on 37:1-10, suggests that “perhaps these are examples of the metaphors that God uses and what is meant by the sky is the kingdom of heaven, which is home to the angels, and what is meant by meteor is celestial light that drives away devils. Or, perhaps it means that devils attack truths in order to upend them, and the angels drive them away with the meteors of truth and repel their falsehoods.”<sup>316</sup>

Why is this *tafsīr* not enough for Soroush? Because for Soroush these amount to mere stabs at patching up the “incongruities between the Qur’ān and human inclination,” and as such, they are just not good enough.<sup>317</sup> “It is as if the late Ṭabāṭabā'ī had forgotten that the projectiles were being hurled at the devils from the lower sky, not the kingdom of heaven,<sup>318</sup> since according to Q 37:6, “We have indeed decked the lower heaven with beauty [in] the stars.” Why is it so hard for Soroush to believe in an omnipotent God who can produce all of existence and at the same time exist without us being able to prove his existence? Or, why is it so difficult for Soroush to believe that madness can be caused by some other form of invisible being called *jinn*, or that devils can be driven away meteors? The answer is because Soroush believes that, despite what orthodoxy has come to uphold, the prophet was not told all the secrets of the universe and was not privy to all of God’s creation. As a result, Muhammad’s interpretations of God’s perfect message, the message that was written on his heart, is riddled with cultural misunderstandings.

---

<sup>315</sup> The meaning of *ta'wīl* is very similar to *tafsīr*. Apparently they were used interchangeably up until the third century A.H (ninth century A.D.). However, a close scrutiny of multitude definitions of the two terms in a wide variety of sources reveals that *ta'wīl*, in the understanding of most scholars, was based upon reason and personal opinion (*ra'y*), whereas *tafsīr* was based upon material transmitted from the Prophet himself, his Companions, or the Successors in the form of *ḥadīth*; hence, the former is generally defined as *tafsīr bi 'l-ra'y* (interpretation by the use of reason), while the latter as *tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* (interpretation according to what has been handed down) (I. Poonawala, “*ta'wīl*,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 10:390).

<sup>316</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 298.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Heaven is purported to have seven levels, and the angels are thought to reside in the higher ones.

The orthodox argument for working through scientific inconsistencies has been that we cannot, as of yet, understand the truth in the words of the Qur'ān about madness and the galaxies because our current understanding of the world is limited. We can only judge the truth in the Qur'ān based on our own understanding of the world, which is at any time, at best, incomplete. Soroush's response is that God meant for there to be error in the Qur'ān; He simply chose a Prophet, and the Prophet made mistakes according to his understanding of the times. This is how the program of prophecy works. These errors do not reduce the importance of the real message because the real message was that of *tawhīd* (oneness of God). The Qur'ān thus is not here to teach us astronomy or medicine.<sup>319</sup>

Soroush then makes his final move, claiming that the Prophet was instrumental in creating the Qur'ān. Orthodoxy claims that the function of the prophet with relation to *wahy* is one of passivity. He had neither a role in its content (*mazmūn*) nor its rendition (*sūrat-dihī*). Soroush asserts, however, that the prophet actually had “a pivotal (*mehvarī*) role in the production of the Qur'ān.”<sup>320</sup> As noted earlier *wahy* is a type of *ilhām*. *Ilhām* is, however, not a verbal communiqué but a kind of knowledge cast into the minds and written on the hearts of those whose hearts are purified and prepared to receive it. In this way, Soroush proposes that the content of the Qur'ān is from God (*mazmūn*), but that the rendition (*sūrat-dihī*) is from the Prophet. What does this rendition entail exactly?

Soroush says that when we read the Qur'ān, we are left with no choice but to believe the Prophet had a hand in its production:

The Prophet's personality plays a large role in the molding (*shekl-dādan*) of the Qur'ān. The history of his life, his mother, his father, his childhood, even his psychological states have played a role in the Qur'ān. When we read the Qur'ān,

---

<sup>319</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 298.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

we sense that the Prophet is at times rejoicing and joyful and extremely eloquent, while at other times melancholy and quite ordinary sounding in his utterances. All of these have left their imprint on the Qur'ān. This is what I call the human aspect of *wahy*.<sup>321</sup>

Abdolālī Bazargān<sup>322</sup> points out that there is not even one verse in the Qur'ān where the Prophet addresses his audience with his own words.<sup>323</sup> The Qur'ān has made sure to inform us that Muhammad did not know what a book was or what faith was (Q 42:52), that he had in fact not read a book in his life and had not written a single line (Q 29:48), and that he was only given the *wahy* as pointed out in Q 7:203: “If thou bring them not a revelation they say: ‘Why hast thou not got it together?’ Say: ‘I but follow what is revealed to me from my Lord: this is (nothing but) lights from your Lord, and Guidance and Mercy, for any who have faith.’”<sup>324</sup> Bazargan continues by saying that,

for example, the Prophet was given the command *qul* (say), 332 times, and so he used *qul* in the Qur'ān in the form presented to him. We also have in the Qur'ān not just a praise and glorification of the prophets but at the same time an admonitory tone (19 times they have warned him against hasty judgments), and at least four times he has been asked to ask for forgiveness in relations to topics like his judgment among the people, his tolerance of his adversaries, *tawhīd* (oneness of God) and *qiyāmā* (afterlife), and sometimes he has even adopted a threatening tone, nine times he has been warned against obeying the non-believers (*lā taṭi' al-kāfirīn*), the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqīn*), the unaware and the straying majority (*al-ghāfilīn*).<sup>325</sup>

Of course, there are instances where we see the phrase, “*qāla rasūl Allāh*” (said the Prophet), but the speaker is God and not the Prophet. Bazargan calls the Qur'ān

---

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>322</sup> Abdolālī Bazargān (b. 1943 in Tehran, Iran), son of Mehdi Bazargān, Iran's first post-revolutionary prime minister, is a liberal politician, writer and intellectual, who is the current leader of Freedom Movement of Iran. He is one of five major figures in the Green Movement to author a manifesto calling for the resignation of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He was elected as leader of Freedom Movement on March 24, 2011 to succeed Ebrahim Yazdi, who resigned on March 20, 2011.

<sup>323</sup> Abdolālī Bazargān, “‘Havā yā Hudā’ dar Kalām-e Wahy,” February 2008, accessed March 2008, <http://www.dr.soroush.com> [no longer available].

<sup>324</sup> Q 7:203.

<sup>325</sup> Bazargān., 5-6.

“*khodānāmeḥ*,” or the book or letter of God,<sup>326</sup> “which is scattered throughout with pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘We,’ where sometimes the angels speak, sometimes the prophets become the speakers and sometimes even *Iblis* (Satan). So the orator is not unitary.”<sup>327</sup>

For Soroush, the metaphysics of those he calls *khoshkeh-faqīhan* (bookish jurists) is a metaphysics of remoteness and detachment (*bu’d*). In contrast, his metaphysics is one of *qurb*, or intimacy and warmth. The picture that he accuses Ayatollah Sobhani of depicting of the relationship between God and the Prophet is one in which the Prophet is confronted with a mechanized speaker, (or even a recording device, where the orator is removed from the presence of the audience altogether) speaking down at him. A divine apparatus is thus equated with a human managerial system. Trying to reconcile modernity and Islam, Soroush has tried to create a theory of religion in the Western meaning of the word according to the Sufi world view. In so doing, however, he has yet to respond to self-reflexive verses such Q 69:44-46, which state, “And if the messenger were to invent any sayings in Our name, We should certainly seize him by his right hand, And We should certainly then cut off the artery of his heart: Nor could any of you withhold him [from Our wrath].”

#### KADIVAR RESPONDS TO SOROUSH

Mohsen Kadivar began responding to Soroush’s revelation theology only after Soroush’s interview with Radio Netherlands Worldwide in 2007. Since that time, he has presented his critique of Soroush’s revelation theology in an interview and in four separate talks.<sup>328</sup> The interview and talks cover, not just his position on Soroush’s

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>328</sup> The list of the interview and talks are below can all be found on Mohsen Kadivar’s official web site, <<http://www.kadivar.com>> (accessed May 2011), except for *Hussein: Modāfe’ -e Kalām Allāh* (Hussein the Defender of God-Speech) which is an audio file and made available to author by Dr. Kadivar. Talks:

innovations, but also the reflections of the late Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri. Montazeri wrote a tract in response to Soroush shortly after Soroush's interview with Radio Netherlands Worldwide, which he later expanded into his book *Safir-e Haqq va Safir-e Vahy* [*The Ambassador of Truth and the Soundbox of Revelation*] in Winter 2008.<sup>329</sup> As will become clear, Kadivar's discussions about the topic do not engage with Soroush's claims in a very detailed manner. He has suggested that writing about the topic is something he means to do in the future.<sup>330</sup>

### Kadivar's Position

Kadivar's position is best represented by his talk "Qalb-e Islām" [The Heart of Islam], given on December 20, 2008.<sup>331</sup> Finding the proximity of the Christmas holiday to be fortuitous, he makes an obscure reference to Soroush's prophetology by pointing out that it is in fact Christianity that revolves around the being of Christ, and that it is

---

*Tala'lu-e Cherāq Dīn* (The Radiance of the Light of Religion), December 26, 2009 (the night of 'Ashūrā'), presented in the memory of Ayatollah Montazeri (7<sup>th</sup> eve of his passing), The Center of Light and Knowledge, NJ. Another talk, *Namāyandeh-ye Islām-e Haqīqat* (The Representative of the Islam of Truth), commemorating Ayatollah Montazeri was broadcast for a group of students gathered at the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA, on the same night; *Hussein: Modāfe'-e Kalām Allāh* (Hussein the Defender of God-Speech), January 18, 2008, Husseiniyeh-e Ershad, Tehran, Iran. *Qalb-e Islam* (The Heart of Islam), December 20, 2008, Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA, USA; Interviews: *Bayānīyeh-ye Panj-Nafareh va Manzarha-ye Motefāvit-e Dīnī dar goftīgū ba Mohsen Kadivar* (The Five-person Manifesto and Different Religious Positions in Discussion with Mohsen Kadivar), Interviewer Bahareh Azadi with Jaras News Agency, January, 16, 2010.

<sup>329</sup> Montazeri's book is by far the most engaging analysis of Soroush's theory, as it not only shows how his theory is not supported by the Qur'ān and the hadīth but, more importantly, attacks the theory's foundation. Soroush underpins his theory by proposing that he is not the first Muslim to this kind of prophet-centered revelation theory. He claims that many of the medieval notables have come to same conclusions. What Montazeri does is systematically attack this particular claim. Since this is a comparative work between Soroush and Kadivar, using Montazeri's work as reflecting Kadivar's position might seem out of place. In the interview he conducted about the topic, when asked if he agrees with his teacher's position, Kadivar answers, "*Shāgerd dar in mas'aleh hamānand-e ustadash mīandīshad* [the student thinks like his teacher when it come to this issue]" (Mohsen Kadivar, "Bayānīyeh-ye Panj-Nafareh va Manzarha-ye Motefāvit-e Dīnī dar Goftīgū ba Mohsen Kadivar" [The Five-Person Manifesto and Different Religious Positions in Discussion with Mohsen Kadivar], interview by Bahareh Azadi, Jaras News Agency, January, 16, 2010.)

<sup>330</sup> Personal communication on May12, 2011.

<sup>331</sup> *Qalb-e Islam* [*The Heart of Islam*], December 20, 2008, Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA.

Christ that is the center and the heart of Christianity. This reference to Christianity could be construed as an effort to point a finger at Soroush for attempting to “Christianize” Islam in an effort to modernize it. In the case of Islam, however, Kadivar insists that the heart of Islam is the Qur’ān.

Kadivar launches into a methodological critique of Soroush’s position by asking who it is that sits in judgment on theological discussions. Does the scientific world judge theological debates, or do the debates have to live up to an internal standard? Is it in fact possible to conduct discussions about theology from the outside and in essence pay no heed to what the Qur’ān and the Sunna have said about Prophetology and revelation and the centrality of the Book?<sup>332</sup>

Whatever one decides to define as a precept in Islam, Kadivar insists, must either be supported by the Qur’ān, the Sunna and our rational capacity—or not denied by them. In order to arrive at a valid conception about revelation, we have no choice but to ask the following questions: “How has the Qur’ān defined itself? How has it defined the nature of *wahy*? . . . Being aware of what the Qur’ān says about *wahy* and the Prophet is a necessary condition for conducting theological research.”<sup>333</sup>

It is true, says Kadivar, that the concept of *becoming* a Muslim began with trust in the person of the Prophet, but it is also important to keep in mind that the message of the trustworthy (*amīn*) Muhammad was the Qur’ān. If the Qur’ān itself says that the message it contains is directly from God and given to Muhammad to be relayed without any sort of interference, and if we indeed trust the word of the Prophet (as Soroush has pointed out that he does), then we must trust what he has also brought to us: the Qur’ān.

---

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 2.

“Studying relevant verses in the Qur’ān allows us arrive at the following points: 1) that the Qur’ān is revelation and not the interpretation of revelation, 2) that Muhammad was nothing but an ordinary human being who was nonetheless elected to prophethood, 3) that revelation was sent to the “heart of the Prophet” in the form of *inzāl* (a sending down of) either directly from God, or via Gabriel, 4) that revelation was sent in Arabic, 5) that revelation was not sent when Muhammad willed it and that the Prophet had no control over the act of *nuzūl* (descent), 6) that revelation is not human speech but divine speech; 7) that revelation is immune from the devils’ hands, 8) that the Qur’ān does not contain error, and 9) that the Prophet was not the creator of revelation (*fā’il-e ān*) but was able to receive revelation (*qābil-e vahy būdeh*).

In short, Kadivar’s main issue with Soroush is the same epistemological objection that I present in Chapter 4 on religious pluralism: judgments about religion must primarily proceed through intra-religious discussion. Kadivar does not have an answer for charges of epistemological irresponsibility, and the fact that his arguments beg the question remains unresolved.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

In his attempt to theorize Sufi piety, Soroush has come up with a theology, a theory of religion steeped in orthopraxy. In the heart of Soroush’s theory of religion, we find that the personality of the Prophet and not the Holy Qur’ān constitutes the heart of Islam. The echo of this axiomatic statement dominates the rest of his theory. Claiming that it was the Prophet who rendered God’s will into speech means that the Qur’ān as we know it was already an interpretation, situated and contingent and (most importantly) open to error and revision. No longer is it necessary, in Soroush’s lexicon, to tread warily and stealthily in the domain of *ijtihād*. It is no longer obligatory to apologize for entering one’s subjectivity into the interpretive process since the Qur’ān itself, being but one



interpretation, is no longer sacrosanct. This is the most foundational of Soroush's postmodern positions.

In comparison to Soroush's highly postmodern neo-Sufi theology, in which he mixes Mu'tazilite rationality and Sufi mysticism, Kadivar is unwilling to even concede, as he claims some theologians have done in the past, that the Qur'ān shares the stage with the Prophet in a symbiotic relationship that resembles not the earth with the sun, but an ellipse with two centers.<sup>334</sup> For Kadivar, the Qur'ān is the nonnegotiable heart of Islam.

The two theological points grappled with in this study are revelation theology and the salvation of non-Muslims according to Muslim theology. Chapter four concentrates on the 1999 national uproar about religious pluralism, presented as a solution to the reality of religious diversity in the world by Soroush. As has been shown in the case of revelation and shall be shown for the case of religious pluralism, both cases shore up the contention that Soroush approaches theology from a postmodern orthopraxy while Kadivar sits on the very edges of orthodoxy.

---

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 1.

## Chapter 4: The Issue of Religious Pluralism

The goal of this chapter is to unpack Soroush's soteriology. As a by-product of this theological study, it will also present Soroush's groundbreaking epistemological pluralism (his theory of religious epistemology)—the fact that he endorses a plurality of truths as opposed to a singular truth.<sup>335</sup> As we shall see, there are arguably two main examples of Soroush's dedication to the idea of pluralism: one, that he finds the bases for social / national / ethnic unities to be at best unstable, and two, that he supports a fragmented and decentered self and multiple and conflicting identities. Both are crucial in fact for understanding his theory of religion.

Although religious pluralism is the main issue at hand, the chapter will also pursue examples of Soroush's positions on social and cultural pluralism as they emerge along the way. Since pluralist tendencies have become a hallmark of the postmodern condition, such diversions away from the main thread of the chapter's argument on eschatological theology into Soroush's socio-cultural thought seem justified in the hope of further acknowledging him as a postmodern thinker. This chapter ends with a glimpse at a hermeneutic innovation about which Ricœur and de Certeau have theorized, and which help us understand how Soroush's writings on pluralism mimic his own theory. These writings are hybrid and pluralistic in nature, and this hybridity has a strangely transformative effect on his audience. The discourse of religious pluralism championed by Soroush and rejected by Kadivar thus emerges in this optic as yet another example of how Soroush speaks from a postmodern position, while Kadivar enters the conversation from the edges of orthodoxy.

---

<sup>335</sup> Ghamari-Tabrizi states that, in the famous debate between Soroush and Kadivar, "Soroush stood for plurality of truths and Kadivar for the unity of truth" (*Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran* [London: I.B. Tauris, 2008], 225).

Before I move to the core of my argument, let me begin this chapter by presenting short introductions to Western scholarship on the topics of 1) religious pluralism and the classical understandings of the finality of Islam and the Prophet, and 2) the place of the *‘umma* in relation to “other” people of the Book. These beginnings will allow me to pursue the debate between Kadivar and Soroush, as well as their other writings, in more nuanced ways. In similar ways, the allusions to Soroush’s socio-cultural pluralistic tendencies throughout this chapter help to profile what is at stake in their respective views on religious pluralism and the future of Islam.

### **RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

As calls for global human rights increase, the discussion about religious diversity and the responses to it have also turned global during the last fifty years. The observable realities of religious diversity throughout the world beckon religious scholars of all persuasions to ask questions of the following nature: Does the reality of the apparent religious diversity require a response to justify belief in any single creed? Can a person who acknowledges religious diversity remain justified in claiming just a single perspective as correct? Can it justifiably be claimed that only one religion offers a path into the eternal presence of God? Is it justifiable to claim that, although a few other religions offer a path to God, that one’s own religion is still the best means of attaining salvation? Answers to these questions are relevant not just to the academic study of religions; the responses to these questions have come to increasingly impact how we treat others, both personally and on a global level. According to Ghamari-Tabrizi, it is exactly the emergence of such non-academic questions into the Islamic world that have driven Soroush to engage in the topic.<sup>336</sup>

---

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 224.

Most authors in this field work with three models that show what is at stake when one religion contemplates its reaction to these questions: religious *exclusivism*, religious *inclusivism*, and religious *pluralism*.<sup>337</sup> No matter the difference in scholarly approach, there seems to be some general agreement about the concepts of exclusivism and inclusivism. Exclusivism is the view that one religion has it mostly right, while all the other religions go seriously wrong. An exclusivist Jew or Christian would therefore consider Islam not as a continuation of the Abrahamic message but as a false religion. In clarifying their exclusivist Christian positions, for instance, Alston and Plantinga claim that epistemic obligation requires an awareness of the seeming religious diversity, and that this awareness does in fact have an impact on an exclusivist, which can range from causing minor uneasiness to significantly reducing the believer's level of confidence in the truth of certain beliefs to even causing belief abandonment.<sup>338</sup> In contrast, inclusivists believe that religions or sects other than one's own carry some amount of the truth, of which the complete version is nonetheless found in one's own doctrine.

The third model, pluralism, however, has been subject to growing debate as a much more complex epistemological claim. To nuance such discussions of pluralism, a recent work by Paul Knitter is useful for summing up the various theological trends in addressing pluralism and classifying Christian approaches to it. Knitter posits four models to capture various dynamics in a pluralistic religious framework: *replacement*, *fulfillment*, *mutuality* and *acceptance*; he touches on a fifth category but does not actually categorize it, as he describes essentially what Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens refer to in

---

<sup>337</sup> For further information on these divisions, see Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (2010).

<sup>338</sup> William P. Alston "Religious Diversity and the Perceptual Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 442–46; Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189.

a similar study as *relativistic pluralism*.<sup>339</sup> Each of these models shows trade-offs of authority, belief, and credibility in cultural fields considered pluralist.

For the present study, it is critical to note that Soroush specifically denies agreeing with the elements of this fifth category, thus making it crucial to understanding the very specific thrust of his work. Therefore, I will also include Anthony, Herman and Sterkens' designation of relativistic pluralism as I now turn to discuss Knitter's categories. As I read them, Knitter's replacement and fulfillment models coincide with the respective, traditional definitions of exclusivism and inclusivism outlined above. The mutuality model (i.e., the first kind of pluralism Knitter addresses) presents a kind of pluralistic encounter among religions based on underlying, often amorphous, commonalities.

The person who best represents Knitter's model of plurality defined as mutuality is John Hick, who is incidentally the most influential proponent of religious pluralism. At the heart of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is his assertion that an Ultimate Reality, which he calls "the Real," is the actual ground for all religious experience.<sup>340</sup> Hick resolves the dilemma of the diversity and contradiction between the different conceptions of the Real in different religions by borrowing from Kant. According to Hick, Kant "distinguish[ed] explicitly between an entity as it is in itself and as it appears in perception."<sup>341</sup> Hick applies Kant's distinction to religious phenomena and proposes a distinction between the Real (as it actually exists) and the Real as perceived and experienced by individuals within a particular tradition.<sup>342</sup> Therefore, the reason that individual religious traditions have conflicting conceptions of the Real is that none of them has direct access to it.

---

<sup>339</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

<sup>340</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2005).

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

Rather, all perceptions of the Real are mediated through a unique religious tradition which acts as a conceptual lens.

Putting his hypothesis into the Abrahamic context, Hick proposes that each concrete “historical divine personality—Jahweh, the heavenly Father, the qur’anic Allah—is a joint product of the universal divine presence and a particular historically formed mode of constructive religious imagination.”<sup>343</sup> In other words, religious beliefs come partially from experience of the Real and partially from one’s own imagination. Knitter’s apt critique of Hick’s model is that “this model tends to disregard the fact that common grounds are often identified from the perspective of one’s own religious framework.”<sup>344</sup> Referring to Hick’s body of work, Soroush rejects his disregard for difference in *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*, stating:

The historical existence of religions is indisputable, but the existence of a common essence or spirit among them is more open to dispute; in fact, it is virtually impossible to prove. Religions are not individual instances of a universal known as “religion” and, rather than having a common quidity, they simply bear a family resemblance, like the members of a family whose eyes, eyebrows, mouth, cheekbones and figures are more or less alike, but have no common core.<sup>345</sup>

The second of Knitter’s models for pluralism, the acceptance model, is, as Knitter says, “characteristic of the postmodern era and underscores that differences between religions are real and that their particularities are opportunities for reciprocal enrichment and growth . . . This model espouses the fact that ‘the many’ *cannot* be melted into one.”<sup>346</sup> It insists that if we seek to remove diversity, as Hick’s system suggests we

---

<sup>343</sup> John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 159.

<sup>344</sup> Francis-Vincent Anthony, et al., “Interpreting Religious Pluralism: Comparative Research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu Students in Tamil Nadu, India,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 18 (2005): 157.

<sup>345</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 67.

<sup>346</sup> Knitter, 45.

should, we will end up destroying the vitality of religions altogether. Knitter identifies three different perspectives within the acceptance model:

1. *Post-liberal, cultural-linguistic perspective*

George Lindbeck, who launched this trend, claims that religious experience is shaped by religious language. Our experience, Knitter suggests, is determined by the common religious language. Religions cannot claim to give us a clue about ultimate reality according to this outlook; they only serve as a framework for understanding everything else by setting up a common language.<sup>347</sup>

2. *Plurality of ultimate perspective*

Represented by S. Mark Heim, this perspective holds that differences between religions are not just language-deep; rather, they reach into the very soul of religions. Difference in religions may also point to differences in the Divine Ultimate. Real differences between religions present the potentiality for us to learn something new.<sup>348</sup>

3. *Comparative theological perspective*

Represented by Francis X. Clooney and James L. Fredericks, this perspective claims that the foundations for a theology of religions are to be found in dialogue rather than in theology. One must be committed to one's own religion but at the same time open to the fact that there might be truths to be found in other religions also. Comparative theologians, Fredericks claims, "are open to the tensions arising from 'double claims' . . . between our commitment to the Christian tradition, on the one hand, and at the same time to the allure of other religious traditions."<sup>349</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Knitter, 169.

These three complementary perspectives on the acceptance model underline the importance of religious diversity and tend to downplay any assertions of the importance of common underlying elements. Soroush's position falls generally within this acceptance model and seems specifically closest to the *plurality of ultimate perspective* category. Soroush argues for a plurality of truths, but does he, like Heim, hold that differences between religions point to differences in the Divine Ultimate? This difference will require independent attention to Soroush's position to demonstrate how, albeit postmodern in nature, his position is different from all of the ones delineated by Knitter. Soroush's pluralism is not of the kind represented in the work of these other theorists.

In Chapter 6 of Soroush's *Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*, a chapter which earlier had comprised his introductory essay to *Serāṭhā-ye Mustaqīm [Straight Paths to God]*<sup>350</sup> (1998), Soroush accepts Hick's rendition of religious pluralism as an "authentic plurality"<sup>351</sup> and one of the many ways Rumi had justified religious pluralism. Soroush surpasses Hick, however, to introduce other, more important "pillars underpinning plurality"<sup>352</sup> via a systematic and repeated unveiling of sections of Rumi's *Masnavi*.<sup>353</sup> Why Rumi? Because, according to Soroush, "Rumi must be given the last word" on the topic of plurality:

---

<sup>350</sup> *Sirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* is a Qur'ānic term that means "straight path." In an Islamic context it has been interpreted as the "right path" or the "path of truth" (i.e., the way which pleases God). By pluralizing the word "path" Soroush in effect says that there is more than one path to God. According to Ghamari-Tabrizi, "by pluralizing the Qur'anic phrase 'Straight Path,' Soroush broke both modernist and orthodox traditions of Islamic theology" (*Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran*, 224).

<sup>351</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 133.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>353</sup> The *Masnavi* (also *Mathnawi*) is Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi's (1207-1273 A.D.) magnum opus. It is one of the most widely known and influential works of both Sufi and Persian literatures and is sometimes referred to as the second Qur'ān. It is a series of six books of poetry totaling about 25,000 verses, or 50,000 lines. It is a spiritual writing that teaches Sufis how to reach their goal of achieving union with God. (Jalalu'ddin Rumi, *Masnavi*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London: Messrs Luzac & Co., 1925-1940).



I emphasize Rumi's work on this subject, first because I consider him to be the Seal of the Mystics (*khātam al-`urafā*) and, secondly, because I find his manner of expression the sweetest and most telling.<sup>354</sup>

Soroush begins by using Rumi's wisdom to defy orthodoxy, which is a commonplace in Islam. In this account, orthodoxy has only ever considered the religions of the Book (i.e., those which fall within the Abrahamic tradition) worthy of explication and to that end has maintained that the reason for successive versions of God's word has been due to evolutionary necessity and corruption. Humanity was not ready for Qur'ān until the seventh century A.D. Each period has seen a message, commensurate with the understanding of the people of its time. Another classical reason given for the existence of successive versions of Abraham's religion is corruption. Earlier versions underwent distortions and alterations and consequently a readjustment of the word was needed and granted by God.

Soroush says that religious diversity "is not just a matter of changing social conditions or of one religion being distorted and then being replaced by another."<sup>355</sup> Utilizing Rumi's use of the term *manzar* (perspective, or point of view), Soroush introduces the first pillar on which Rumi's theory of religious pluralism stands. Soroush proposes an independent approach to pluralism when he cites *Masnavi* 3:1256: "From the place of view (*manzar*), O (thou who are the) kernel of Existence, there arises the difference between the true believer [Muslim] and the Zoroastrian and the Jew."<sup>356</sup> Rumi says, according to Soroush, that "the difference between these three does not lie in any disagreement over the truth and falsehood, but precisely in the difference between their perspectives; and not in the perspectives of the believers at that, but in the perspectives of

---

<sup>354</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 127.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

their *prophets* [emphasis added],” since it is the prophets that initially introduce the religion to the people and it is they who are the reference by which standards are set.<sup>357</sup>

As I demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the importance placed on the prophets’ role in defining their religions runs through Soroush’s work: “There was only one multidimensional truth and the prophet’s viewed it from three different angles . . . and these view points [sic] are all one and the same.”<sup>358</sup> Soroush gives Rumi’s perspectival theory further depth. Rumi’s allegory of how a group of people formed different impressions of an elephant in the dark shows that there are many versions of the same ultimate reality (to borrow a term from Hick) out there but none of those renditions are complete. What Rumi is trying to tell us, Soroush says, is that “we are all groping in the dark” but will “never grasp reality in its entirety . . . everyone sees that reality and understands it to some extent and from a particular angle, and they describe it to exactly that extent.”<sup>359</sup> This same sentiment is also found in the first few lines of the *Masnavi*, thought to hold the main message of the work at large: “the breath which the flute-player puts into the flute—does it belong to the flute? No, it belongs to the man (the flute-player).”<sup>360</sup> Soroush adds, “We are all flutes held against the lips of truth, and truth breathes into us. And even if we were flutes with mouthpieces ‘as wide as the universe,’ we would still be too narrow for the truth to tell its full tale.”<sup>361</sup>

Soroush admits that Hick “makes this same point but using the Kantian noumena/phenomena<sup>362</sup> distinction.”<sup>363</sup> Hick’s use of Kant revolves around the concept

---

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 127-28.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>360</sup> *Masnavi*, 2:1783.

<sup>361</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 128. The parable of Moses and the Shepherd (*Masnavi* 1:1720-1815) is yet another example of the same outlook.

<sup>362</sup> The *noumenon* is an object or event that cannot be known with the use of the senses. The term is used in contrast to *phenomenon*, which refers to anything that appears to, or is an object of, the senses.

<sup>363</sup> Hick, 146-63.

of antinomies. Kant's antinomies of pure reason can be used to show why we are unable to effectively compare religions. To be able to prove that my religion has more truth content than yours, it is necessary to reach beyond the perspective of personal beliefs into a vantage point from which the totality of all religions can be surveyed. This is equivalent to stepping out of the *noumenal* and into the *phenomenal* realm in order to judge the noumenal as the realm of creation. Comparing religions, an activity belonging to the phenomenal world, creates a Kantian antinomy.

Starting from this epistemological assertion, Soroush begins his debate with Kadivar by highlighting this same antinomy, suggesting that the human mind is unable to determine the superiority of any one religion. To have a scientific discussion about religion, it is necessary to carry on religious debates from a scientific and extra-religious standpoint.<sup>364</sup> This was a radical enough statement in itself in the Islamic Republic of Iran, but Soroush goes even further to suggest that even engaging in extra-religious debate soon uncovers the fact that it is patently impossible to make any definitive claims about religion, regardless of one's epistemological position. "Belief assessment in the face of religious diversity will never resolve debate over conflicting religious perspectives in an objective manner."<sup>365</sup> In other words, if we assume that issues of self-consistency and comprehensiveness have been taken care of, there exists no set of criteria that will allow us to resolve most religious epistemic disputes (either between or within religious perspectives) in a way that is neutral and does not end up "begging the question."<sup>366</sup>

---

<sup>364</sup> Extra-religious knowledge is knowledge contained in the natural and social sciences and the humanities.

<sup>365</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, *Pulūrālism-e dīnī: munāzireh-e Duktur 'Abdolkarīm Surūsh va Hujjat al-Islām Muḥsin Kadīvar* [Religious Pluralism: A Debate between Abdolkarim Soroush and Hujjat al-Islam Mohsen Kadivar] (Tehran: Rūznāmeḥ-i Salām, 1999), 12.

<sup>366</sup> "Begging the question" is a logical fallacy in which the proposition to be proven is assumed implicitly or explicitly in the premise. Kadivar argues that Islam is the final and most complete religion and is the best

But Soroush does not agree with Hick's position, calling it a kind of "negative pluralism," a kind of pluralism where "something is always lacking."<sup>367</sup> Soroush prefers "positive pluralism," a pluralism that is based on the belief that "existing alternatives and rival [religions] are unique in kind and irreducible."<sup>368</sup> It is for this purpose that he gives more value to Rumi's second pillar of understanding religious pluralism. Soroush calls this second pillar "the immersion of truth within truths," "the heart and kernel" of Rumi's stance on religious pluralism.<sup>369</sup> In *Masnavi* 6:1636 Rumi says, "Nay, the truth is absorbed in the truth; hence seventy, nay, hundred sects have arisen."<sup>370</sup> Soroush interprets this verse of the *Masnavi* to mean:

The subdivisions of religions into sects and the multiplicity and plurality of religions themselves [do] not lie in distortions, conspiracies, the ill doings of ill-wishers, the falsifications of falsifiers or the infidelity of the infidels (although no creed is free from any of these things). The division and subdivision of religions is not a question of the accumulation of deviation upon deviation, Rumi maintains, but the product of the labyrinthine nature of the truth and the immersion of truths within truths. He teaches us that it is the accumulation of truths and their intricate interconnectedness and the difficulty of choosing between these truths that leads to authentic and unavoidable diversity. It is imperative to take this point to heart, to alter one's view and aspect, and, instead of seeing the world as consisting of one straight line plus hundreds of crooked and broken lines, to see it as consisting of an aggregate of straight lines which meet, run parallel and overlap: truths immersed in truths. And does the fact that the Qur'an describes the prophets as following a right path—in other words, moving along *one* of the straight paths and not *the* straight path—not substantiate this [emphasis in original]?<sup>371</sup>

The Qur'ānic verses Soroush is referring to above are those addressing Abraham and Muhammad: "He rendered thanks for His favors, so that He chose him and guided

---

way to salvation because the Qur'ān and the Prophet tell him so. For more on this position in the Christian context see: Michael Peterson, et al., *Reason and Religious Belief* (2002), especially pp. 40-53.

<sup>367</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 137.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>370</sup> *Masnavi* 6:1636

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 136.

him to a straight path [*ilā širāṭin mustaqīm*]" (Q 16:121); "by the Wise Qur'ān that you are sent upon a straight path [*`alā širāṭin mustaqīm*]" (Q 36:3-4); "that He may guide you to a path that is straight [*yahdīka širāṭan mustaqīmā*]" (Q 48:20). Although there might be many more verses in the Qur'ān that speak to the existence of a straight path than there are ones that contain the term "the straight path," two of the most widely recited verses that form part of the daily prayer clearly point to what seems to be a unitary path (*al-širāṭ al-mustaqīm*):

*Ihdinā al-širāṭ al-mustaqīm širāṭ al-ladhīna an`amta `alayhim ghayr al-maghḍūb `alayhim wa la ḍālīn* [Lead us on the straight path, the path of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not astray] (Q 1:6-7).

Soroush unfortunately does not explain how he dismisses what seems to be a designated singular path in the very first verses of the Qur'ān.

But what does the existence of many truths really mean? Soroush says that he "has consented to plurality and accepted it," and acquiesces that there is "no other alternative" because "religious texts and experiences naturally admit of a multitude of interpretations," that "reality is intricate and multifaceted" and that "divine providence and protectiveness dictate multiplicity and rivalry."<sup>372</sup> In other words, reality is made in such a way that every non-imitating believer who searches for an answer will have alternative readings of the divine and that these "existing alternatives and rivals" to our own religious views "are unique in kind and irreducible. None of them can be swallowed up or dissolved by any others, and each of them has incommensurable particularities; like multiple, correct, irreducible answers to a single question."<sup>373</sup> Does this mean that there are an infinite many number of valid readings? Have we stepped into a Nietzschean

---

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 137.

world within which there exist an unlimited number of interpretations? Does Soroush's postmodernism in some ways resemble deconstructivism in its conclusion that any text "may include infinite interpretations"? When Soroush says, "Every rational thinker has their own conception of religion, that is to say their own understanding of God, the Prophet, revelation, felicity, wretchedness, sin and obedience; an understanding that belongs to that believer alone, [resulting] from their reflections and [subject] to constant questioning and revision"<sup>374</sup> does he mean to say that *any* view of the core concepts of Islam are acceptable? If this were true he would not advise us, as Rumi does, to proceed on the path of this rational and discursive religiosity without a master. It is the master that determines what is permissible and what is not. Soroush states,

It is true that guidance is impossible without a guide; nevertheless, this guide may operate visibly or invisibly. He may be near or far. Be that as it may, his business is assistance. We must keep our eyes fixed on the ultimate destination (viz. salvation), for the starting point and the journey do not matter much here and do not have their own laws.<sup>375</sup>

That is, there is a correct path and an incorrect path. Although there are a multitude of paths, there is only one destination and not all paths lead us to the goal.

The nature of acceptable paths becomes even clearer as Soroush turns again to Rumi for help. A guide is needed but we are not always aware of the guide's presence. Rumi advises a friend who had come to him for advice to "seek a master and warns him against embarking alone in the spiritual journey's fearsome trail," Soroush writes. He continues:

[Rumi] considers it impossible to travel this road without the assistance and effort of masters, and adds that, even people who seem to have had no master and have nonetheless managed, in rare instances, to get somewhere, have secretly benefited

---

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 138.

from the solicitude of an unseen master and have supped at the table of an invisible but hospitable guide.<sup>376</sup>

“The starting point and the journey do not matter,” which is also clear from Rumi’s allegory of the camel. The story can be summarized as follows: A man loses his camel and as a result spends his days searching for it. At times, he finds a sign from his lost camel, and that encourages and assures him that the camel can eventually be found. At other times, hearing news that is potentially negative makes him go weak in the knees. Another person, in imitation and without actually having lost a camel, walks in the first person’s footsteps. Like him, the imitator tries to locate his camel by asking others. The true seeker and the false imitator continue for a while until finally the lost camel is reunited with its owner. But, lo and behold, the imitator finds that next to the true seeker’s camel stands another camel, at which point he says, “My evil deeds have become pious acts entirely—thanks [to God]! Jest is vanished and earnest realized thanks [to God]! Since my evil deeds have become the means to [my] attaining unto God, do not then throw any blame on my evil deeds.”<sup>377</sup>

By “all roads” Soroush understands Rumi to mean that “the true and the false both lead to guidance (*hidāyat*) and deliverance (*nijāt*). God will take any honest student of the righteous path by the hand and deliver them to the destination. The honest for sure, but even the dishonest who is nonetheless looking, is not left without her or his share and portion of divine mercy and pardon. The insistence here is on the ‘sincerity of the seeker’ and the existence of the ‘unseen guide’ instead of the path and a visible, religious guide.”<sup>378</sup>

As for the last category, Knitter only points out that “relativists are people for whom the notion of truth is either so broad, or so diversified, or so distant, that they can’t

---

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 1:3005-08.

<sup>378</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 139.

ever trust themselves to know whether they, or anyone, really have the truth.”<sup>379</sup> This is what Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens call *relativistic pluralism*. In the relativistic pluralism model, all religions are held to be of equal value and significance, irrespective of common or different elements among them.

Relativism is in fact what Kadivar accuses Soroush of during their debate:

What I wanted to show is that believing in antinomies in religious matters is incompatible with the core of our Shī‘ī beliefs. Also, when we speak of the text it isn’t true that all parts of the text have many interpretations. Some do but one cannot argue that all verses do. It is not possible to beat everything in the Book and *Sunna* with the same stick of inextricable ambiguity (*ibhām-e nāzudūdānī*). To be able to say that everything in Islam is a text and that, as a result, it can be read multiple ways just opens the door to absolute relativism.<sup>380</sup>

When asked about the issue in an interview published in *Şerāṭha-ye Mustaqīm* (later published in *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*), Soroush defines relativism as the suggestion that “everything is relatively true,”<sup>381</sup> denies that he is a relativist by calling his method “critical rationalism” and claim that the misunderstanding between what he does and relativism is caused by conflating two distinct epistemologies.

In Soroush's reading, relativist epistemology contends that all knowledge is *caused* knowledge, while critical rationalist epistemology is more inclined to think that the attainment of knowledge is more a matter of *reasons*. What Soroush means by “causes” are the “non-rational factors” that make ideas and actions emerge.<sup>382</sup> If a person is a Muslim because s/he has converted into the faith after much thought and contemplation, their knowledge has come to them by way of reason, but if s/he born into

---

<sup>379</sup> Knitter, 16.

<sup>380</sup> Soroush and Kadivar, 67.

<sup>381</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 158.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.



a Muslim family and remain one by way of chance, their faith was caused and not reasoned. Soroush holds that when we look at great post-Enlightenment thinkers like Bacon, Marx, Freud, Foucault and Habermas we see “how they have all demonstrated in one way or another how non-rational factors (of the nature of causes) play games with rationality (and reasons), thereby distorting and tarnishing it.”<sup>383</sup> This does not mean that Soroush does not think that culture, geography, emotions, interest, internal and genetic factors, the subconscious, power and the like do not distort and influence perceptions and consciousness. When Soroush is pushed to form an opinion about an issue (e.g., what position to take in light of the reality of religious diversity), it is reason that plays the primary role in the attainment of knowledge for him. “However, when reasons have completed their work and arrived at parity,” as was the case with ranking religions according to truth value (it was not possible to rank religions because they belonged in the noumenal world), “causes come into play.”<sup>384</sup> In other words, Soroush admits that he could have just as easily been a Christian and been on a divine path, but he is on a Sufi path because he was born a Muslim.<sup>385</sup> Soroush’s dedication to pluralism is not because “any religion will do.” It is because he has carefully reasoned his way through alternatives and come to the conclusion that there is no better choice. Pluralism is not a caused view for Soroush; it is a reasoned one. Thus, Soroush is a religious pluralist who can be classified under Knitter’s general “acceptance” model. His is a positive pluralism that denies relativism, celebrates difference, and argues for a restricted plurality of truths.

---

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

## CLASSICAL POSITION

I turn now to a presentation on the classical Muslim scholarship that addresses religious pluralism in terms of the salvation of the “Other” in Islam. Most of the discussion about religious pluralism in classical Islamic theology has centered on salvific theory, which poses the question: Who shall be saved in light of divine mercy? If the answer to this question is only Muslims, then the position medieval scholars held would be considered exclusivist. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to discussing the 1999 debate between Soroush and Kadivar, in light of Soroush’s other writings in defense of pluralism both religious and cultural.

According to Muhammad Khalil, the standard view regarding prophethood and salvation in classical Islam was that “Muhammad’s path is *the* ideal path [emphasis in original].”<sup>386</sup> This could engender an inclusivist position regarding salvation, as the ideal path for one group does not necessarily mean doom for all else. As Khalil shows, however, this is in fact not the case; classical orthodoxy held an exclusivist position on religious diversity. Among the thinkers that Khalil uses as his case studies (al-Ghazālī, Ibn Arabī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā, and Seyed Qutb), some maintained more than others that divine mercy would intervene at the last minute and save non-Muslims from everlasting hellfire.

Al-Ghazālī, Ibn `Arabī, and Rashīd Ridā (particularly the first two, who held Sufi leanings) made efforts to create loopholes for the salvation of non-Muslim communities. But other scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, “do not seem to leave much room for Divine mercy on the Day of Judgment for any sane, adult non-Muslim who had received the Message.”<sup>387</sup> An important note to make here is that those

---

<sup>386</sup> Muhammad Hassan Khalil, “Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of ‘Others’” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2007), 221.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

who have never come in contact with Islam (i.e., had not received the Message) were not considered subject to judgment. Although Khalil initially claims that “Divine mercy, always finds a way—*some way*—to make its presence felt in *all* the case studies [emphasis in original],”<sup>388</sup> he ends his dissertation with the conclusion that “despite the fact that the majority of case studies examined here argue otherwise, we can only conclude that the view of a never-ending punishment in hell and the prohibition of some from ever receiving pleasure in the Afterlife has tended to be the norm, rather than the exception” for the non-Muslim Other.<sup>389</sup>

In consequence, the dominant classical Sunni position on the issue of the salvation of the Other seems to have been exclusivist according to Khalil’s study.<sup>390</sup> As far as divine mercy goes, another interesting observation by Khalil is that although mercy is clearly emphasized and “arguably given priority in Islamic Scripture, it almost seems as if any discussion of the salvation of non-Muslims involves apologetic reinterpretations of specific qur’ānic verses and *hadīths*.”<sup>391</sup>

## THE DEBATE

In 1999 a debate on the topic of religious diversity and the salvation of the non-Muslims took place between Soroush and Kadivar inside Iran. The debate revolved around the following question posed in *Serāthā-ye Mustaqīm* [Straight Paths to God] the year prior, about the topic: “As Muslims, what should our response be to the reality of religious diversity?”<sup>392</sup> The debate began with Soroush’s introduction of the Kantian

---

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>390</sup> An even more apt Shī’ī study on the topic will be included in the expanded book version of this dissertation. I have not been able to find a secondary source on this topic, so the study will have to be done using primary sources. It would also be important to establish what the contemporary dominant Shī’ī position is on the issue of salvation of the ‘Other.’

<sup>391</sup> Khalil, 224.

<sup>392</sup> Soroush and Kadivar, 2.

concept of antinomies. Belief assessment, according to Soroush, “can never resolve debate over conflicting religious perspectives in an objective manner;” a claim with which Kadivar repeatedly refused to engage.<sup>393</sup> One can argue that because no more than one among a set of incompatible truth claims can be true, Kadivar is only justified in continuing to maintain that his claim of justified inclusivism is true if he possesses non-question-begging justification for believing that Soroush’s incompatible claim is false. But the point is exactly, as Soroush points out, that no disputant in religious conflicts possesses such justification—no disputant can be justified in holding his own claim to be true because it is essentially impossible to prove a religious claim once we step outside religious boundaries. And this is exactly what Kadivar refuses to recognize.

Soroush points out that we have no choice but to conclude that in the absence of objective, non-question-begging justification in religious disputes, disputants do not have justification for supposing the claims of others to be false, or their own to be true.<sup>394</sup> In an effort to bridge their epistemological gap and speaking intra-religiously, Soroush suggest that these antinomies can even be seen within Islam in the area of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).<sup>395</sup>

One *faqīh* (jurist) knows all the reasoning behind a certain edict. *Faqīh* number two uses [reasoning] but is not convinced and steadfastly defends his personal reading and judgment. The third *faqīh* does the same. This is how differences of opinions come about and continue to linger. The disagreement between the three is not from a lack of intelligence, virtue or piety. The same situation holds for different sects. Assuming that Shī‘ī scholars hold the ultimate divine truth, why have Sunni scholars not accepted the Shī‘ī reasoning and converted? If we were to assume that both sects have sought the truth, have been ordained on average with the same kind and amount of intelligence throughout the ages, then one reason

---

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 12, 25 & 68.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 13. Regarding the Christian context, David Silver (“Religious Experience and the Facts of Pluralism” [2001]) and J. L. Schellenberg (“Religious Experience and Religious Diversity: A Reply to Alston” [2000]) come to similar conclusions and suggest that those partaking in religious debate should provide independent evidence (i.e., evidence that does not beg the question) for the claim that they have a special source of religious knowledge.

<sup>395</sup> Soroush and Kadivar, 68.

why divisions hold between the sects could be that we are wrong as Shī'īs . . . or that every single Sunni has been under the influence of passions and desires.<sup>396</sup>

A third choice is that the strength of our reasons for choosing our paths are of the same magnitude . . . In the end, we have to say that Sunni and Shī'īs are just two different interpretations of the same religion. This is the explanation I choose. Any other choice is problematic, and this is why I suggest that we have no choice but to be pluralists.<sup>397</sup>

Kadivar responds that “plurality in *fiqh* is an extricable quality [of jurisprudence]. If we were all of sudden placed in the presence of one of the Fourteen Innocents (*chahārdah ma'sūm*),<sup>398</sup> the source of all these disagreements would vanish because they would respond to all our questions about truth and reveal the divine will.”<sup>399</sup> This is in fact the same response he had given when speaking of extra-religious antinomies.

When speaking about Islam, it is the Qur'ān and the Fourteen Innocents that have the final word. The main question Kadivar poses to Soroush by way of a rejection of his extra-religious discursive methodology is “*cherā az hekmat-e khodā ghāfelīd?* [Why do you not take notice of God's wisdom?]”<sup>400</sup> Kadivar continues,

The criterion for distinguishing truth from falsity has been given to us; it is the word of the prophets and the words of the final Prophet containing the most truth. There is a reason why the Jews didn't accept Muhammad's words despite his miracle [the Qur'ān]: it's called rebellion and greed. Understanding this denial, this negation, this disavowal of God's truth as an antinomy is falling short of what is expected of you [*kam lotfī*].<sup>401</sup>

Soroush responds by saying that he also believes in the sinlessness (*'iṣmat*) of the Prophet and holds great value for his words. However, Soroush states,

---

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> The Fourteen Innocents are the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve Imams. In Shī'ī thought they are sinless.

<sup>399</sup> Soroush and Kadivar, 69.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 50.

Innocence is an extra-religious affair, meaning that in order to accept the sayings of a prophet, it is logically necessary to see him without sin. This is a prerequisite of being able to see him as a prophet. In other words, we are not convinced of the fact that the Prophet is sinless, we believe his words because we *believe* [emphasis added] that he is sinless and immaculate and chaste. If we take the sinlessness of the prophets as one of our foundational beliefs, then prophets fall outside the purview of those who can epistemologically commit error.<sup>402</sup>

That is, it is just as epistemologically responsible for us not to accept the Prophet as sinless and as a result not accept his position. Both choices come from outside religion. Soroush thus accused Kadivar of engaging in extra-religious reasoning without being aware of doing so.

Kadivar asks if Soroush truly believes that it is not possible to assume that one side (Sunni, Christian, Jew, etc.) is more affected by their desires and greed than the other side (Shī'ī)?

Is it really not possible to think of one side as being in the wrong and the other as justified in their position? Is it not possible that the reasons presented by one side are preferable to the ones presented by the other?<sup>403</sup>

No, Soroush responds; rather, we can only say that there is disagreement between these two groups:

Either *both* [emphasis added] groups are grappling with their desires and greed and are just as susceptible to human weakness, or they both have reasons for what they believe in. In either case, we are in the same position; neither side has a stronger reason for winning the argument. Whatever epistemological rule we come up with is reflexive.<sup>404</sup>

After repeated returns to this same argument throughout the debate, Soroush finally expresses his frustration by saying, “Don’t say that God has messed up the brains of those who defy us. Give me a real reason. Remember, whatever theory you come up with is

---

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>403</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 86.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

reflexive. Don't keep repeating that the reasons one group gives are weak, while those of the other group are strong. This is not an answer; this is exiting the topic."<sup>405</sup>

Kadivar asks Soroush point blank: "Is it true that in your opinion there isn't necessarily a single truth in this world?"<sup>406</sup> Soroush responds by saying "yes, that is exactly the case"<sup>407</sup>:

There is no singular discovery of meaning that can be called 'the truth.' There is a multiplicity of truths. In fact this multiplicity is the same as the discovery of these different meanings . . . The genus [of what we understood in orthodoxy to be truth] has changed, it is now the *tafsīr* of one's personal experiences.<sup>408</sup>

Kadivar, revealing what has really been worrying him about the concept of religious pluralism, admits that "a person who arrives at antinomies in the extra-religious arena cannot believe in the truth of any one particular religion."<sup>409</sup> Since pluralism works with a plurality of truths, faith is made obsolete.<sup>410</sup> With the advent of the plurality of truths and religious pluralism there will no longer be any reason for believing in any one religion. Soroush allays Kadivar's fears by reassuring him that people do not become religious because they have rationally come to the conclusion that their religion has the most truth-value, but because it generates meaning in their lives. In fact, Soroush adds, it is epistemologically impossible for us to decide the comparative value of religious truth-content because we are not provided with the kind of information needed to make such a judgment.<sup>411</sup>

The debate ends with participants thanking each other and neither Kadivar or Soroush having been convinced of the other's position.

---

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>410</sup> Soroush and Kadivar, 45.

<sup>411</sup> Soroush, *EPE*, 79.

## THE RHETORIC OF PRE-REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGUES

Perhaps the most interesting effect of Soroush's discussion about religious pluralism is the transformative effect the physical reading of his material or listening to his debate with Kadivar had on his audience. Before delving into these transformative effects of Soroush's discourse, it would be instructive to look at the nature of his rhetoric and compare it to the rhetoric of pre-revolutionary ideologues. The 1970s introduced a new trend, the democratization of the interpretive process. Thinkers like 'Alī Sharī'atī<sup>412</sup> and Mehdi Bāzargān<sup>413</sup> redefined who could and could not engage in speech about religion. They helped desacralize religious discourse, a mode of engagement that was until then reserved only for classically trained clerics. Today, it seems as if the Qur'ān and its supporting textual infrastructure are no longer a *special* language. Divine language has been subsumed under human language and, as a result, human / non-religious approaches / theories are being legitimately applied to it. Reading and interpreting divine intentions is now open not only to the traditional cadre of the classically learned but also to lay intellectuals and even the non-intellectual government officials. Soroush, although classically trained in the *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (qur'ānic sciences), has not been anointed by the authority of the establishment, yet speaks authoritatively about Islam and is considered one of the main theorists of the religion—so much so that symposia are held in Qom to debate his work.

Not only have religious intellectuals like Sharī'atī and Soroush widened the definition of Islam by infusing non-scriptural material (i.e., extra-religious material) into

---

<sup>412</sup> Dabashi calls Sharī'atī the "Islamic ideologue par excellence" (*Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* [New York: NYU Press, 1993], 102).

<sup>413</sup> Mehdi Bāzargān (1907-1995) was a prominent Iranian scholar, life-long pro-democracy activist, and Iran's first prime minister after the Islamic Revolution. He was a well-respected religious intellectual known for his honesty and expertise in the Islamic and secular sciences; he is credited with being one of the founders of the *rowshanfekrī-ye dīnī* (Islamic intellectual) movement in Iran.



the process of “reading” the text of the Qur’ān, but they have also changed its manipulation—a change in form and rhetorical mode of discourse. While the classical exegetic format is the argumentative, descriptive study of the text, from the first *āyah* all the way to the end, the predominant trend in symbolic creative hermeneutics since the 1960s is the monograph, a work of scholarly writing focused on a single subject.<sup>414</sup> Monographic *tafsīrs* are not new; they have a history in qur’ānic studies.<sup>415</sup> But the likes of Sharī’atī and Soroush turned them into political tracts. Alongside this change in form is a change in rhetorical mode. A recurring characteristic of the pre-Revolutionary (1960s and 1970s) monographs was their heavy-handed use of narrative to manipulate the interpretation of historical events, core religio-cultural symbols and Islamic identity. In narratives, a story is created in a constructive format (as a work of writing, speech, poetry, prose, pictures, song, motion picture, etc.) that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events. Consider, for example, the narrativization of the Hussein paradigm.<sup>416</sup>

The martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of the prophet, captured the imaginations of the Shī’ī community almost immediately after his death. The “Karbala narrative,” as Aghaie calls it, is a “systematic reconstruction of the historic battle of Karbala.”<sup>417</sup> The general consensus is that this narrative has served as one of the central

---

<sup>414</sup> For examples of English translations of monographs published in the 1960s and 1970s, see: Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad, *Plagued by the West [Gharbzadegī]* (1982); ‘Alī Sharī’atī, *Fatima is Fatima*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (1981); Mehdi Bāzargān, *Work and Islam [Kār dar Islām]* (1979). A good review of these thinkers’ works can be found in Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (1993).

<sup>415</sup> For more on the different kinds of classical *tafsīr* see: Walid Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach” (2010).

<sup>416</sup> The Shī’ī interpretive process does not restrict its sources to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah but also includes the lives and sayings of the twelve Imams, who are believed to be the Prophet’s legitimate heirs.

<sup>417</sup> Hussein, grandson of the Prophet and third Imam of the Shī’ī, was believed to have been martyred at Karbala (current day Iraq) during a battle of the same name that took place on Muharram 10, 61A.H. (October 10, 680 A.D.). This highly uneven battle pitted a small group of supporters and relatives of Hussein against a large military detachment from the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid I, whose caliphate Hussein had refused to recognize. Hussein and all his male supporters were killed in battle,

sources for Shī'ī symbols and rituals.<sup>418</sup> The dominant Karbala narrative in Iran from the fifteenth century to the 1960s seems to have been the one devised by Vā'iz Kāshifī. According to Vā'iz Kāshifī's *Rawzat al-Shuhadā* (1502), Hussein had foreknowledge of his death at Karbala and invited martyrdom upon himself in order to set a virtuous example for future Shī'ī generations. The enemy in Kashifī's narrative is the unjust Other, or in this case, "the *munāfiqūn* (hypocrite Muslims), among whom the Sunnis were the most prominent."<sup>419</sup> The true believers are those who "remained loyal to Hussein, and they are the ones who will be rewarded through worldly and heavenly bounty as a result of their loyalty and of their steadfastness in tolerating the oppression and injustice they encounter in the world."<sup>420</sup>

Kashifī's message is one of quietism, where he preaches silent resilience in the face of injustice and "does not use the events of Karbala as a political role model for literal emulation."<sup>421</sup> That is, he does not advise the masses to take up arms against the illegitimate government of Shah Isma'il Safavi as Hussein had done against Yazid.<sup>422</sup> Instead, the events at Karbala represent an ideal for commemoration through ritualistic weeping and mourning. Having had foreknowledge of Hussein's martyrdom several accounts, according to Aghaie, "record that the prophet and Hussein promised earthly

---

including his infant son. The women and surviving children were taken as prisoners. The dead are regarded as martyrs by the Shī'ī, and the battle holds a central place in Shī'ī history and tradition. The battle is commemorated annually during a ten day period in the month of Muharram by the Shī'ī as well as many Sunnis. The event culminates with the death of Hussein on the tenth day ('Ashūrā).

<sup>418</sup> For further information on Shī'ī symbols and rituals, see: Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (1978); Kamran Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative: Shi'i Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s" (2001); Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving the Karbala Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (2006); David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (2000); Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad* (2003); Vali Nasr, *The Shi'a Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (2006).

<sup>419</sup> Kamran Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative (2001): 154.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Before the great occultation (*gheybat al-kubra*) of the Mahdi (the Twelfth Imam) the Shī'ī state was only considered legitimate if ruled by one of the Imams. After the occultation the only legitimate state is the one the Mahdi reinstates upon his return at the end of time.

rewards (*thawab*) to anyone who shed tears for what Hussein had suffered.”<sup>423</sup> However, the climactic moment of the narrative, Hussein’s martyrdom (itself a symbolic act) did not become a call to arms in the face of worldly injustice. “Narratives like Kashifī’s are not explicit efforts to contest the legitimacy of the ruling elites.”<sup>424</sup> In fact, as Aghaie points out, Kashifī’s narrative “stresses the inappropriateness of active political mobilization in the face of political injustice.”<sup>425</sup> In line with classical Shī‘ī political theology it was the role of the Mahdī (the twelfth Imam) to deliver the people from political oppression.

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, Vā’iz Kāshifī no longer “fit the political mood of the time.”<sup>426</sup> Ṣaliḥī Najafābādī, a religious scholar who had studied with Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1960s, took up the interpretive challenge and revolutionized Kāshifī’s quietist narrative. Najafābādī encouraged Muslims to actively emulate Hussein, not simply to mourn for him. In 1968 he wrote *Shahīd-i Jāwīd (The Immortal Martyr)*, in which he reinterpreted the Karbala paradigm in a more “politically activist light.”<sup>427</sup> He spoke primarily about the need to “defend Islam from corruption” and from *bid’a* (innovation), a common charge brought against the Shah as a result of his Westernizing policies.<sup>428</sup> What was unusual in what Najafābādī did was to insist that the only way Hussein could have “achieved [his] objective was by seizing power from the Umayyads and taking over the government.”<sup>429</sup> He also denied the quietist argument that Hussein’s actions enjoined people to become better Muslims through the endurance of hardship and

---

<sup>423</sup> Aghaie, 154.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 158.

sacrifice. Thus, by highlighting certain aspects of Hussein's character and mission, Najafābādī rewrites the events by recreating a new version of the Karbala narrative.<sup>430</sup>

Although Najafābādī's narrative encountered much resistance among the 'ulamā', his unconventional interpretation of the event at Karbala served to inspire some clerics (Mutahhari, for instance)<sup>431</sup> and one particular ideologue of the revolution, 'Alī Sharī'atī. A Sorbonne-educated doctor of philology, Sharī'atī kept Kashifī's core narrative but introduced a radically new meta-narrative into the story material, one largely derived from Marxist concepts of universal class struggle and anti-imperialist rhetoric. Sharī'atī, like Kashifī, agreed that the Hussein movement was for the purposes of "promoting good and discouraging evil, and also for the purposes of revitalizing the spirit of Islam that was in danger of extinction."<sup>432</sup> But unlike Kashifī and more in line with Najafābādī's sensibilities, Sharī'atī concentrated more on the method of achieving change.<sup>433</sup> His was a theology of action and liberation and not just an invitation to mourning, and the method proposed by the movement was martyrdom in the face of oppression.<sup>434</sup>

In summary, Najafābādī's narrative of the tragedy of Hussein and his followers "created an oppositional discourse that made justice and injustice a central theme of Shī'ism."<sup>435</sup> The manipulation of the narrative led to a reordering of socio-political priorities. The Pahlavi regime and its international allies (mainly the United States) were seen as the imperialist powers representing injustice on the one hand, and the suffering masses represented by the populace of the third world, Islamic world and Shī'is in

---

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> For more on Motahhari see Chapter 2, footnote 32.

<sup>432</sup> Aghaie, 168.

<sup>433</sup> Sharī'atī argued that the political motivations attributed to Hussein by Najafābādī did the movement more justice than so-called traditional narratives because Najafābādī's was the only "false interpretation" that called for action and did not ignore the historical fiction of the moment (Ibid., 169).

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 174.

particular were seen as the just and righteous. Thus, “a set of symbols originally used as a vindication of the Shī‘ī cause became a vindication of oppositional movements in Iran.”<sup>436</sup>

### SOROUSH’S TRANSFORMATIVE RHETORIC

As we see, the political debates of the 1960s and 1970s were about a political theology that wove revolutionary rhetoric by manipulating the symbolic martyrdom of the greatest of Islamic warriors. The post-revolutionary era, in contrast, and in particular, the post-war (Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988) period, is characterized by a move away from symbolic rhetoric and into the realm of theory-building, reflected in a shifting perspective regarding the ontology of the text in the 1990s and beyond. In the new rhetorical mode, the symbolic is minimized, and while maintaining the monographic format, thinkers have begun highlighting exposition and argumentation instead of narrative. This does not mean that they do not use narrative, but it does not dominate their hermeneutics. Soroush’s rhetoric style is a mixed prose and verse genre called *prosimetrum*. Prosimetrum is “a text composed in alternating segments of prose and verse . . . Typically the verse portions serve as lyric, emotive, or personal insets within a philosophical or narrative frame, often with connectives between prose and verse sections.”<sup>437</sup> Scott-Meisami points out that this particular genre has a long history in Persian intellectual thought. In her account, up until the nineteenth century, poetry

remained the central genre, to which all others are in some sense poor relations . . . it is considered perfect speech, superior to prose because of its metricality and the coherence of its parts, its universal appeal, its ceremonial functions, its relationship to music, its eloquence, its importance as a source of knowledge, etc. . . . Prose is loosely organized and follows the thought; poetry is highly organized

---

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>437</sup> Alex Preminger, et al., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 981.

and works through heightened language to create a sense of wonder and produce an emotional effect.<sup>438</sup>

Through studying the works of Ahmad al-Ghazālī, Rāvandī and Sa'dī's *Gulistān*, Meisami shows the effect of the prosimetric work as a whole on the audience. The “author’s didactic purpose” is served by this genre because the poetry’s “affective nature . . . engender[s] wonder and produce[s] an immediate response,” while information is conveyed via prose.<sup>439</sup> “The authority of the poetry as poetry is based both in its affective quality and on its status as the highest form of eloquence.”<sup>440</sup> In this instance the “artistic prose seeks to approach the poetic, from which it takes inspiration, to exploit to the fullest the resource of the language.”<sup>441</sup> This didactic and highly poetic genre is the rhetoric milieu within which Soroush operates.

The prosimetrum genre in the hands of Soroush has had the potential to be didactic and affective enough to engender what de Certeau calls a “complex form of transformation” for his audience, a transformation that works through speech itself. When speaking of revolution, revision and challenge at the end of his essay, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, de Certeau addresses the manner in which speech itself can be a transformative event, replacing the political revolution with a symbolic one.<sup>442</sup> De Certeau speaks of how what in the past would be called “real transformation” has now become virtual change. Soroush’s use of hybridity, not just in the intermingling of prose and poetry but also in his mixing of Sufi and Western epistemologies, creates a

---

<sup>438</sup> Julie Scott-Meisami, “Mixed Prose and Verse in Medieval Persian Literature,” in *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 296.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>442</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 10.

hybrid rhetoric that has achieved just this kind of transformation experience for a whole generation of Iranians.

De Certeau, however, does not allow the uncertainties of a virtual victory to go unregistered: “Speech is neither effective occupation nor the seizure of power.”<sup>443</sup> He recognizes that rhetorical gestures only turn political and ethical values into aesthetic ones; nevertheless, this is the only way forward that he can see. He states, “Out of failure and a lack of resources a virtual triumph is fashioned which, for the moment, curtains the void, the hole. It is fashioned out of words.”<sup>444</sup> Having been caught in a similar situation where the only tool at hand for which one might not have to pay as high a price as free speech, Soroush uses aesthetics to bolster, or as some have argued, to instigate a reformist movement.<sup>445</sup>

Investigating Soroush’s rhetoric in his 1998 book *Serāthā-ye Mustaqīm*, and in the Kadivar debate of 1999, a hybrid rhetoric can be detected, composed as it is of both Western and Sufi statements.<sup>446</sup> This new presentation of Islam, this new hybrid way of being a Muslim, is at once devout, rational and mystical, containing belief structures that have (even to this day in the West) been traditionally construed as incongruent. The statements in Soroush’s works, cited in this chapter, should seem inappropriate and incompatible when used to support each other but they are not.<sup>447</sup> What Soroush has done by way of intermingling these seemingly jarring statements and making the exercise seem natural and unproblematic, is to lend interchangeable credibility to different ideological positions (Sufi, Western and Islamist), and in doing so codify a hybrid identity.

---

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> For more on Soroush, see Chapter 1, footnote 3.

<sup>446</sup> “[Soroush] skillfully wedded his Sufi language of skepticism with the Kantian neo-positivism of Karl Popper, to whose liberal political philosophy he subscribed” (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 201).

<sup>447</sup> In fact, this is the nature of Soroush’s post 1989 writings.

Soroush has actually spoken about hybrid identities before in his essay *The Three Cultures*.<sup>448</sup> In that essay, he speaks about how Iranian culture is actually an “overlapping cultural web” of Pre-Islamic, Islamic, Persian and Western ways of being, and that “whatever solutions we divine for our problems must come from this mixed heritage to which our contemporary social thinkers, reformers, and modernizers have been heirs, often seeking the salvation of our people in the hegemony of one of these cultures over the other two.”<sup>449</sup> It is in this essay that Soroush denies the stable bases of social / national / ethnic unities and supports a fragmented and decentered self and multiple and conflicting identities. Soroush, while acknowledging the indivisible nature of Ancient Persian culture form the Iranian psyche, warns against the hazards of Nationalist extremism. He recognizes that Islam is the dominant culture among the three competing customs but invites his audience to “come to terms with Western culture” (the supposed enemy of Islam according the revolutionary rhetoric) and “move beyond” the discourse of *Gharbzadegī* (West-toxification).<sup>450</sup>

In a fascinating discussion about identity, Soroush then asks the following question: “Where among these three cultures does our identity lie?”<sup>451</sup> Soroush answers that it lies in all three. The source of our problems, Soroush contends, “is the baneful

---

<sup>448</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, “The Three Cultures,” in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans. and ed. Mahoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156-70.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 158-62. “West-toxification” was a term used by Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (variously translated in English as *westernstruck*, *weststruckness*, *westoxification* and *occidentosis*) in a book by the same name, *Plagued by the West* (1982), clandestinely published in Iran in 1962. In the book Āl-e Ahmad developed a stinging critique of Western technology and, by implication, of Western civilization itself. He argued that the decline of traditional Iranian industries and culture is the result of Western hegemonic practices. The notion became part of the 1979 Revolution’s ideology, an ideology which emphasized nationalization of industry, independence in all areas of life from both the Soviet and the Western world, and self-sufficiency (*khodkafāi*) in culture and economics. Āl-e Ahmad and later Ali Shari’atī proposed a “return to the self” (*bāzgasht-e be khīstān*) as a remedy to westoxification.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 162.



equation of identity with rigidity.”<sup>452</sup> “One must seek purification in exchange with others” instead of “using the pretext of persisting in one’s identity to continue a slovenly and secluded life.”<sup>453</sup> What causes fear of other cultures, Soroush maintains is the “lack of a strong cultural digestive system and also the misconception that each culture is an indivisible monolith”—that accepting one part “equals accepting the whole.”<sup>454</sup> There is no “eternal cultural identity,” Soroush argues; cultures must be given room to grow to “achieve self-awareness,” to be allowed to “peek out of the cozy blanket of” their boundaries and strive for the ability to look at oneself with a self-reflective eye (*chashm-e `ibrat*).<sup>455</sup> Once a person starts looking at their culture in this way, it becomes impossible to embrace age-old ways without having to “examine, revise and adjust” them.<sup>456</sup>

In his debate with Kadivar and writings on religious pluralism, Soroush clarifies further his theory of religion and his position on the salvation of non-Muslims in Islam, which is an old theological question and falls under the purview of *kalām*. Also, he again embarks on a cultural discussion; this time, however, his position comes to this discussion not as theses to be defended (as was the case in *The Three Cultures*) but by way of methodology—his rhetoric. If in *The Three Cultures* Soroush talks of the overlapping presence of pre-Islamic, Western and Muslim cultures in Iran, when speaking about religious pluralism he methodologically uses the two languages of Continental and Analytic Philosophy and Sufism to make his point. Reading the pages where these (as we have been led to believe) epistemologically incompatible epistemologies are used alongside each other, one realizes how well they work together. Perhaps as Soroush states in *The Three Cultures*, “Rebellion against oneself is also part

---

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 165.

of one's 'self.' Rectifying one's identity is part of one's identity. Becoming, is also a part of Being. And this implies causing oneself and one's culture to move . . . If movement means anything, it means avoiding imitation."<sup>457</sup> Soroush refuses to imitate even in speech and breaks epistemological boundaries. He believes that we are at once simultaneously indebted to Western ways of knowing and Being and Islamic ways of knowing and Being, where Islamic language manifests in its Sufi incarnations.

To suggest that reading Soroush's works somehow magically changes the reader is a farfetched idea for some. In "From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II" Ricœur explains that the world of the text is the means by which the reader attains self-understanding. This self-understanding is achieved by appropriating the work through the "distanciating" effect of writing, which divorces the work from the author's intentions.<sup>458</sup> Ricœur suggests that the text creates its own world, and it is then up to the reader to inhabit that world, finding within it realities that explains her/his own particular situation.

By peppering his work with Western thought and Sufi poetry, Soroush creates a space where the reader has the opportunity to reconcile seemingly disparate ways of being -- to perform his own kind of philosophical pluralism as well as asserting it. As in real life, these seemingly incongruent ways of being are in tension with each other, but Soroush's methodology points to a solution in grappling with this tension. The effect Soroush has on those with hybrid identities, for example, "thinking" Muslims in Iran who seek to be intentional about their choices as Muslims, and who are more than likely familiar with Western thought, is to create a world in which these disparate ways of understanding (the ineffable) can coexist (e.g., Sufism and Kantian liberalism). A reader can witness these less than complementary ways of being intertwined, mirroring

---

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>458</sup> For further information see Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

everyday life in the safe environment of a page, and at least momentarily, apprehensions about being pluralistic in the makeup of the self gradually dissolve. In fact, apart from the arguments he gives in the debate and interview and writings on the topic, this is another way Soroush invites the thinking Muslim to religious pluralism.

### **SOME CONCLUSIONS**

Contemporary Western theories of religious pluralism hold, at a minimum, that we are not able to speak definitively about the salvation of non-coreligionists. In its most permissive version (Hickian), religious pluralism allows for equal chance of salvation regardless of religion as long as one stays true to internal precepts. The dominant classical position on the issue has been that those who have been exposed to Islam and have rejected it are met with never-ending punishment in hell and are prohibited from ever receiving pleasure in the Afterlife. Kadivar, as a representative of the reformist orthodox Shī'ī camp holds a similar view. People of the Book can be saved, but he says nothing about what happens to those who refuse the message of Islam.

Soroush openly defies this orthodoxy and contends that to assume that there is one truth presented by the Prophet of Islam is naïve. There is a plurality of truths, and by that he means that every non-imitative, thinking Muslim practicing discursive / reflective religiosity has the capacity of coming up with their own understanding of what the Islamic sources say about God, the Prophet, revelation, felicity, wretchedness, sin and obedience. This is an understanding that belongs to that believer alone and is a consequence of their reflections—an understanding that is constantly being revisited and updated in light of new questions and information. This pluralist, discursive and individualistic way of looking at religiosity is inspired by Rumi, but when put forth by

one of today's leading Muslim thinkers it becomes revolutionary, especially in an environment like Iran, where the state-sanctioned form of Islam is the only legal option.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Post-1990s reformist Iranian theological debates, called *kalām-e jadīd*, have consisted of issues such as *wilāya* (guardianship), revelation theology and soteriology. Apart from the topic of *wilāya*, which falls directly under the purview of political theology and is not covered here, the study of the other two themes have revealed a reformist movement that is torn between at least two theories of religion, two forms of Islam—one that stays bound to classical precepts, and another that breaks with tradition completely while still calling itself Islam. *Kalām-e jadīd*, or new theology, has become the discourse within which these two Islams have come to be represented and debated. Reformist seminarians and religious intellectuals are either working (to differing degrees) within a “theology of selectivity” (e.g., Montazeri, Yousefi-Eshkevari, Sane’i, and Kadivar) or have decided to reread/reformulate some of Islam’s core tenets with their “postmodern theology” (e.g., Soroush and Shabestari). Although the topic of this dissertation is not political theology per se, the discourse around revelation theology and soteriology illuminate what is particularly political about theology in this era, and how theological debates need to be seen directly as potential interventions into ideal path(s) to self-realization, forms of polis, and the political logic of citizenship.

The fact that a postmodern movement bent on shattering religiously foundational precepts exists in Iran is surprising in itself; that it has garnered the amount of support it has signals the wide-ranging receptiveness of Iranian reformist intellectual communities towards discourses that question not just metanarratives but specifically metanarratives of the religious kind. Soroush and Shabestari are ready to have traditional Islam engage directly and unapologetically with Western thought, even at its peril. Islam, they insist, must make sense to the modern mind in order for it to survive. “Adapting” the tradition to a new era has not worked because there are deep inconsistencies between classical

understandings of Islam as a system of thought and our contemporary sensibilities. The young generation can sense these inconsistencies and finds it difficult to maneuver through life in the jarring space created by the juxtaposition of these two ways of being. Postmodern theology is a call for an Islam that “works” as opposed to an Islam that “recaptures original purity.” In fact, postmodern Islamic theology questions the authority of the “original” voices and interpretations that have over time become standardized, be they interpretations of the *aṣḥāb* (the Prophet’s inner circle) or the Prophet himself. The true historical picture of Islam according to Soroush is very different from that which we are accustomed: a prophet was chosen by the Almighty, and his heart was imprinted with the divine message. The Prophet then interpreted and rendered (*ṣūratdihī*) that imprinted message into a world view that made sense to him and shared it with the people he was commanded to direct.

The Prophet having interpreted and rendered the Qur’ān means that it is no longer necessary to tread warily and stealthily in the domain of *ijtihād*. It is no longer obligatory to apologize for entering one’s subjectivity into the interpretive process since the Qur’ān itself, being but one interpretation, is no longer sacrosanct. Neither is it necessary to consider the Muslim community as inherently worthy of salvation. The fact that Muhammad was given the last series of divine messages is a fact, but that does not give the Muslim community any advantage today. At this day and age, whether someone achieves salvation ultimately depends on the nature of their personal relationship with the divine and not on what religion they belong to. This is a fundamentally atypical picture of Islam, one that acknowledges the central role of the Prophet and his finality but rejects the pivotal place of “The Book” Muhammad relayed from God and the special status of the Prophet’s followers in relation to “Others.”

One of the most interesting results of Soroush's postmodern theology is the democratization of the interpretive process. Soroush contends that to assume that there is one truth presented by the Prophet of Islam is naïve. There is a plurality of truths, and by that he means that every non-imitative, thinking Muslim practicing discursive / reflective religiosity has the capacity of coming up with their own understanding of what the Islamic sources say about God, the Prophet, revelation, felicity, wretchedness, sin and obedience. This is an understanding that belongs to that believer alone and is a consequence of their reflections—an understanding that is constantly being revisited and updated in light of new questions and information. This pluralist, discursive and individualistic way of looking at religiosity is inspired by Rumi, but when put forth by one of today's leading Muslim thinkers it becomes revolutionary, especially in an environment like Iran where the state-sanctioned form of Islam is the only legal option.

In comparison to Soroush's highly postmodern neo-Sufi theology, in which he mixes Mu'tazilite rationality and Sufi mysticism, Kadivar sees the Qur'ān as the nonnegotiable heart of Islam and Islam containing more truth content than other religions, resulting in its followers being more likely to achieve salvation. The dominant classical position on the issue of salvation has been that those who have been exposed to Islam and have rejected it are met with never-ending punishment in hell and are prohibited from ever receiving pleasure in the Afterlife. Although he says that People of the Book can be saved, he chooses to say nothing about what happens to those who refuse the message of Islam.

What ultimately sets postmodern theology apart from its counterparts is that it takes the direct human intuition of God's presence in the world seriously and thus begins with respect for the religious experiences of others. It considers God's continuing

creative energy at work through ongoing divine communication. The word is not final anymore; it is *jārī*, or flowing, even through the common practitioner.

A fuller version of the discussion presented here would also need to accommodate the conception of ethics in the works of Kadivar and Soroush. The first step would be to show the classical connections between ethics—a field of study that has traditionally fallen under the purview of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and theology. Once that is accomplished, the goal would be to present Soroush’s postmodern ethical theory. Traditionally, moral progress is thought to be possible via the marshaling of wisdom in the Qur’ān, the *sunna* (the life and sayings of the Prophet and the Imams), and the use of reason (divinely ordained rational self-development). Soroush’s rejection of the sanctity and timelessness of the Qur’ān and the *sunna*—that is, his reframing and historicizing of religious authority—shatters the Qur’ān’s totalizing and timeless power over defining what is “good,” or the importance of the *sunna* in Shi’i thought. Soroush recasts Islamic ethics in postmodern terms as a non-qur’ānic / non-tradition-based endeavor that finds its compass in the mundane ethical practices of the culturally contingent, average citizen. Soroush suggests that the Islamic ethical master-narrative that casts ethics as “fit for God,” “ideal morality,” “an imagined inviolate morality,” “even if there is such a thing,” must be subordinated to an ethics “fit for the servants of God.”<sup>459</sup> In other words, moral exceptions (conduct expected only from gods and prophets) should not set the rules of behavior because they “sit above mundane, everyday life” and “do not solve any real human problems . . . where different situations require different mores and manners.”<sup>460</sup> Soroush suggests that we should abandon ideas of “universal morality” and embrace the fact that “even if there is such a thing as ideal morality, it is the same as actual morality,”

---

<sup>459</sup> Soroush, *Reason...*, 108.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.



and to top it off, that this actual morality is contingent on the particular culture from which it stems.<sup>461</sup> Kadivar, however, remains true to classical ideas that regard the Qur'ān and *sunna* as supreme, reason as supplementary, and ethics as monolithically applicable to all humanity once derived from the three sources.

Another closely linked discussion that deserves further attention is a study of Soroush's and Kadivar's views on political theology. Soroush's work signals a turn, a break, or even a possible schism in Iranian theology in its outlook on governmentality. The bulk of Kadivar's work falls within this category, and he has done much in categorizing and scrutinizing Shī'ī literature related to *wilāyā*. When compared to Soroush, however, Kadivar's position falls in line with modern sentiments. Kadivar places his trust and faith and personal investment in big politics and hence in the Nation-State (especially of an Islamic nation-state, although he has been backing away from this position since late 2010). Soroush believes in a separation not only of religion from politics but also an investment in micro-politics, identity politics, local politics, and the necessity of ever present institutional power struggles.

This dissertation was centered on Soroush's work and included Kadivar's responses as a means to give an introductory view to the two main strands of *kalām-e jadīd* in Iran. A more complete picture of *kalām-e jadīd* would have to include more thinkers on each side. I hope, nonetheless, to have introduced *kalām-e jadīd* as an integral part of the larger contemporary debates about Islamic theology.

---

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

## Bibliography

- Abbas, Hassan. "Islam versus the West and the Political Thought of AbdolKarim Soroush." *Al-Nakhlah* (2006): 1-6.
- Abdo, Genevieve. "Rethinking the Islamic Republic: A 'Conversation' with Ayatollah Hossein 'Ali Montazeri." *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 1 (2001): 9-24.
- and Jonathan Lyons. *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty-First-Century Iran*. New York: John Macrae Book, 2003.
- Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005.
- 'Arabī, Ibn. *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah* [Meccan Illuminations]. Beirut: Sadir Pub., 1970.
- Abrahamian, Ervand. Book Review: *Political Thought in Islam, Vol. 1*, by Mohsen Kadivar. *Islamic Law and Society* 8, no.2 (2001): 295-98.
- Adamson, Peter and Richard C. Taylor. *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Adib-Moghaddam, Arshin. *Iran in World Politics: The Question of Islamic Republic*. New York: Colombia University Press, 2008.
- Afshari, Reza. *Human Rights in Iran: The Abuse of Cultural Relativism*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Aghaie, Kamran Scot. "The Karbala Narrative: Shī'ī Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 151-76.
- Ahmed, Akbar S. *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Ahsraf, Ahmad and Ali Banuazizi. "Iran's Tortuous Path toward 'Islamic Liberalism.'" *International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 237- 56.
- Akhavi, Shahrokh. *The Middle East, the Politics of the Sacred and Secular*. New York: Zed Books, 2009.
- Āl-e Ahmad, Jalāl. *Plagued by the West [Gharbzadegi]*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Alinejad, Mahmoud. "Coming to Terms with Modernity: Iranian Intellectuals and the Emerging Public Sphere." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 1 (2002): 25-47.

- Allen, Diogenes. *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.
- al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad. *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978.
- Alston, William P. "Religious Diversity and the Perceptual Knowledge of God." *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 433-48.
- Altizer, Thomas J. J. *Genesis and Apocalypse: A Theological Voyage towards Authentic Christianity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.
- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammed Abdul. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Trans. David Streight. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Anderson, Norman. (Sir J.N.D). *Law Reform in the Muslim World*. London: Athlone, 1976.
- Anderson, Pamela Sue. "Postmodern Theology." In: *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Eds. Chad Meister and Paul Copan, 509-20. Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 2010.
- Anonymous. "Iran: The Revenge." *New York Review of Books*. Online edition, November 5, 2009. <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/nov/05/iran-the-revenge/?page=1>>. Accessed July 15, 2011.
- Anthony, Francis-Vincent, Chris A. M. Hermans, and Carl Sterkens. "Interpreting Religious Pluralism: Comparative Research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India." *Journal of Empirical Theology* 18 (2005): 154-86.
- Appleby, R. Scott. "The Fundamentalist Factor." *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life* 11, no. 8 (2001): 8-9.
- Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini: Iran under his Successors*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 4 (2002): 719-31.
- Ashraf, Ahmad and Ali Banuazizi. "Iran's Tortuous Path toward 'Islamic Liberalism.'" *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 237-56.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud. *Devotional Aspects of (Ashura) in Twelver Shi'ism*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1978.

- . *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of (Ashura) in Twelver Shi'ism*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1978.
- . “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmi Shi’i *tafsīr*.” In *Approaches to the History of Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 177-98. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Ayubi, Nazih N. “Islamic State.” In *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, Vol. 3, 171-72. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Azimi, Fakhreddin. *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Bakhtiari, Bahman and Augustus Richard Norton. “Voices within Islam: Four Perspectives on Tolerance and Diversity.” *Current History* (2005): 37-45.
- Bar-Asher, Meir M. *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. Boston: Brill; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1999.
- Barlas, Asma. “Reforming Religious Knowledge.” *Daily Times*, April 24, 2005. Online edition: <[http://drsoroush.com/English/News\\_Archive/E-NWS-20050424-Daily\\_Times.html](http://drsoroush.com/English/News_Archive/E-NWS-20050424-Daily_Times.html)>. Accessed July 15, 2011.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Babayan, Kathryn. *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2003.
- . “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran.” In *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Miller, 117-38. London: I. B. Tauris, 1996.
- Bāzargān, Mehdī. *Work and Islam [Kār dar Islām]*. Houston, TX: Free Islamic Literature, 1979.
- Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamic Turn*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Bayat, Mangol and Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi. “The Usuli-Akhbari Controversy.” In *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi’ism in History*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, 280-86. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989.

- Bayhom-Daou, Tamima. *Shaykh Mufid*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.
- Bazargān, Abdolalī. “‘Havā yā Hudā’ dar Kalām-e Vahy.” February 2008.  
<<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>. Accessed March 2008 [no longer available].
- Bearman, P., Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, eds. *Encyclopædia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn*. New York: Guilford, 1997.
- Betti, Emilio. *Teoria generale della interpretazione [A General Theory of Interpretation]*. Milano: Giuffrè, 1955.
- Boroujerdi, Mehrzad. *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- . “The Paradoxes of Politics in Post-Revolutionary Iran.” In *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. John L. Esposito and R. K. Ramazani, 13-27. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Calder, Norman. “Doubt and Prerogative: The Emergence of an Imāmī Shī‘ī Theory of Ijtihād.” *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 57-78.
- . “*Ikhtilāf* and *Ijmā’* in Shafī‘ī’s *Risāla*.” *Studia Islamica* 58 (1983): 55-81.
- . “Uṣūl al-Fiqh.” In *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, Vol. X1, 931. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*. Trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Cole, Juan. “Shī‘ī Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered.” *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1985): 3-34.
- Dabashi, Hamid. “The End of Islamic Ideology: Iran.”  
<[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2267/is\\_2\\_67/ai\\_63787340/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_2_67/ai_63787340/)>. Last modified Summer 2000. Accessed July 12, 2011.
- . *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.

- Daiber, Hans. *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy*. Boston: Brill, 1999.
- Dallmayr, Fred. "Islam and Democracy: Reflections on Abdolkarim Soroush." *Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) 2001 Proceedings*.  
<[http://drsoroush.com/English/On\\_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20010407-Islam\\_And\\_Democracy-Reflections\\_On\\_Abdolkarim\\_Soroush.html](http://drsoroush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20010407-Islam_And_Democracy-Reflections_On_Abdolkarim_Soroush.html)>. Accessed June 29, 2011.
- Detweiler, Robert. "Postmodernism." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath, 456-61. Oxford, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- Doull, Floy E. "Peace with Islam." *Animus* 9 (2004): 1-23.
- Eftekhari, Roza. "Zanan: Trials and Successes of a Feminist Magazine in Iran." In *Middle Eastern Women on the Move*, 15-22. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Middle East Project, 2003.
- Eickelman, Dale F. "The Coming Transformation of the Muslim World." *Foreign Policy Research Institute WIRE* 7, no. 9 (1999): n.p.
- Esposito, John L. and R. K. Ramazani, eds. *Iran at the Crossroads*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Ess, Josef van. *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Farhi, Farideh. "Religious Intellectuals, the 'Woman Question,' and the Struggle for the Creation of a Democratic Public Sphere in Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 315-39.
- Fazili, Yousra Y. "Between Mullahs' Robes and Absolutism: Conservatism in Iran." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 30, no.1 (2010): 39-53.
- Feldman, Noah. *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Filali-Ansary, Abdou. "Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Challenge of Secularization." *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 76-80.
- Firestone, Rueven. "Disparity and Resolution in the Qur'ānic Teachings on War: A Reevaluation of a Traditional Problem." *The Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 1-19.

- Fischer, Michael M. J. and Mehdi Abedi. *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
- . *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Trans. Colin Gordon, et al. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Gardet, Louis. “‘Ilm al-Kalām.” In *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 201. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Ghamari-Tabrizi, Behrooz. *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008.
- Gheissari, Ali and Vali Nasr. *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Gibb, H. A. R. *Modern Trends in Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1947.
- Gleave, Robert. *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shī‘ī Jurisprudence*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000.
- . *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbari Shī‘ī School*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Godlas, Alan. *Sufism-Sufis-Sufi Orders: Sufism’s Many Paths*. 2000.  
<<http://www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.html>>. Accessed July 21, 2011.
- Guarino, Thomas. “Postmodernity and Five Fundamental Theological Issues.” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 654-89.
- . “Revelation and Foundationalism: Toward Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness.” *Modern Theology* 6, no. 3 (1990): 221-35.
- Hallaq, Wael. “Was the Gate of *Ijtihād* Closed?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 3-41.
- Hand, Natalie. “America and the ‘Islamic Revival’: Reconstituting U. S. Foreign Policy in the Muslim World.” Senior Capstone, American University, School of International Service, 2004.
- Hardy, Roger. *The Muslim Revolt, a Journey through Political Islam*. New York: Colombia University Press, 2010.

- Hashemi, Nader. *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. 2nd ed. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.
- Hayes, David. "Iran between Revolution and Democracy." *openDemocracy*, April 11, 2005. <[http://drsoroush.com/PDF/E-CMO-20050411-Iran\\_between\\_revolution\\_and\\_democracy.pdf](http://drsoroush.com/PDF/E-CMO-20050411-Iran_between_revolution_and_democracy.pdf)>. Accessed July 12, 2011.
- Hefner, Robert, ed. *Modernity and the Making of Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Heyking, John von. "Mysticism in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought: Orhan Pamuk and Abdolkarim Soroush." *Humanitas* 19, no. 1-2 (2006): 71-97.
- Hick, John. *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- . *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Hirsch, E. D. *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Hoebink, Michel. "Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush." Radio Netherlands Worldwide, December 26, 2007; original English transcript, *ZemZem*, Online Edition, <<http://www.zemzem.org/zemzem/?q=node/21>>; Dutch translation, "The Word of Muhammad: Abdolkarim Soroush on the Koran," *ZemZem* (2007); Persian transcript by Zamaneh, <<http://www.radiozamaneh.com>>. Accessed July 20, 2011.
- The Holy Qur'ān*. Trans. 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2000.
- Homayouni, Massoud. *History of the Nematollahi Sufi Order in Iran, 1799-1992 A.D.* (1993). 4th, revised ed. London: Mawlana Centre, 1992.
- Hunter, Shireen T., ed. *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009.
- Hyder, Syed Akbar. *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- International Crisis Group (ICG). "Iran: The Struggle for the Revolution's Soul." *ICG Middle East Report* 5 (2002): 1-56.



- Izutsu, Toshihiko. *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*. Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964.
- Jahanbaksh, Forough. "Abdolkarim Soroush: New Revival of Religious Sciences." *ISIM Newsletter* 8, no. 1 (2001): 21 and "The Emergence and Development of Religious Intellectualism in Iran." Last modified 2004. <[http://drsoroush.com/English/On\\_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20040000-Religious\\_Intellectualism\\_in\\_Iran.html](http://drsoroush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20040000-Religious_Intellectualism_in_Iran.html)>. Accessed July 11, 2011.
- Jalaei-pour, Hamidreza R. "The Emergence of a Modern Intellectual Climate and the Change in the Ideological Scene: 1988-1996." PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 1997.
- . "Religious Intellectuals and Political Action in the Reform Movement." Paper presented at the Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran Conference, Princeton University, October 21, 2000.
- Jonbesh-e Rah-e Sabz* (Green Path Movement website). <[www.rahesabz.net](http://www.rahesabz.net)>. Accessed July 12, 2011.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. "Beyond Words and War: The Global Future of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2010): 882-95.
- Kadivar, Mohsen. *Baha-ye Azadi: Defa'iyat-e Mohsen Kadivar [The Price of Liberty: Text of Mohsen Kadivar's Defense in the Special Clerical Court]*. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney Publications, 1999.
- . "Bayānīyeh-ye Panj-Nafareh va Manzarha-ye Motefāvit-e Dīnī dar Goftigū ba Mohsen Kadivar" [The Five-Person Manifesto and Different Religious Positions in Discussion with Mohsen Kadivar]. Interview by Bahareh Azadi, Jaras News Agency, January, 16, 2010. <<http://www.kadivar.com>>. Accessed May 2011.
- . *Hukumat-i vila i [Theocratic Government or Government by the Guardian]*. Tehran: Nashr-e Nay: 1998.
- . *Hussein: Modāfe'-e Kalām Allāh [Hussein the Defender of God-Speech]*, January 18, 2008, Husseinīyeh-e Ershad, Tehran, Iran. [Kadivar, personal collection; audio recording.]
- . "Interview on Ayatollah Khamenei," December 20, 2010. *Rooz* 1443, July 23, 2010. Online edition: <[roozonline.com](http://roozonline.com)>. Accessed July 27, 2010.

- . “Montazeri was the Voice of the People.” Online at:  
<<http://kadivar.com/Index.asp?DocId=2602&AC=1&AF=1&ASB=1&AGM=1&AL=1&DT=dtv>>. Accessed July 15, 2011.
- . “Mas’aleh-ye Bardehdarī dar Islām [The Issue of Slavery in Islam].” Paper presented at Second International Symposium on Human Rights, Mufīd University, Qom, Iran, May 18 2002. Also online.  
<<http://kadivar.com/Index.asp?DocId=598&AC=1&AF=1&ASB=1&AGM=1&AL=1&DT=dtv15>>. Accessed June 5, 2011.
- . “Mas’aleh-ye Huqūq-e Gheyr-e Musalmānān dar Javāmi‘-ye Islāmī [The Issue of the Rights of Non-Muslims in Muslim Lands].” Paper presented at International Conference in Reframing Islam: Politics into Law, Irish Center for Human Rights, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland, September 1, 2005.
- . *Namāyandeh-ye Islām-e Haqīqat [The Representative of the Islam of Truth]*. Broadcast to the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA. <<http://www.kadivar.com>>. Accessed May 2011.
- . *Nazariyaha-yi dawlat dar fiqh-i Shi'a [Theses on the State in Shi'i Jurisprudence/Law]*. Tehran: Nashr-e Nay, 1997.
- . *Qalb-e Islam [The Heart of Islam]*, December 20, 2008, Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA. <<http://www.kadivar.com>>. Accessed May 2011.
- . “Rawshanfekrī-ye Dīnī va huqūq-e Zanān [Religious Intellectualism and the Rights of Women].” *Ā'in* 1 (2003): 9-17.
- . *Tala'lu-e Cherāq Dīn [The Radiance of the Light of Religion]*, December 26, 2009. The Center of Light and Knowledge, NJ. <<http://www.kadivar.com>>. Accessed May 2011
- Kamrava, Mehran. *Iran's Intellectual Revolution*. Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Katz, Stanley N. “Gun Barrel Democracy? Democratic Constitutionalism Following Military Occupation: Reflections on the U. S. Experience in Japan, Germany, Afghanistan and Iraq.” Paper presented at The Bodek Lecture, University of Pennsylvania, May 14, 2004.
- Keddi, Nikki R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Kermani, Navid. “Iran’s Quiet Revolt.” *Correspondence*, no. 7 (2000-01): 28-9.

- Khalil, Muhammad Hassan. "Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of 'Others.'" PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007.
- Khosrokhavar, Farhad. "The New Intellectuals in Iran." *Social Compass* 51, no. 2 (2004): 191-202.
- . "Liberal Islam: Prospects and Challenges." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 3 (1999): 11-9.
- Khosropanah, Abdolhossein. *Kalām-i Jadīd*. Mo'asseseh-e Hekmat Novīn-e Islamī, n.d. [English version may be *Modern Theology*, 4th ed. Qom, Iran: Qom Islamic Seminary Publication, 2009.]
- Kinberg, Leah. "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashabbihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis." In *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 283-312. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999. Originally published in *Arabica* 35 (1988): 143-72.
- Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.
- Kohlberg, Etan. "Some Notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qur'ān." In *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on His Seventieth Birthday*, Vol. 5, ed. Samuel Miklos Stern, Albert Habib Hourani, and Vivian Brown. *Oriental Studies*, 209-24. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972.
- Korom, Frank J. *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Kurzman, Charles. "Critics Within: Islamic Scholars' Protests against the Islamic State in Iran." *An Islamic Reformation?* Ed. Michealle Browers and Charles Kurzman. New York: Lexington Books, 2004.
- . "Critics Within: Islamic Scholars' Protests against the Islamic State in Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 341-59.
- Lawson, Todd. "Akhabāri Shī'ī Approaches to Tafsīr," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*. Ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, 173-210. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 1993.
- Leaman, Oliver and Sajjad Rizvi. "The Developed Kalām Tradition." In *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, 77-96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

- Lewinsohn, Leonard, ed. *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. I: Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300). Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature 10. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979.
- Madelung, Wilferd. "Imamism and Mu'tazilite Theology." In *Le Shî'isme imâmite: [Actes du 2e] Colloque [d'islamologie du Centre de recherches d'histoire des religions] de Strasbourg (6-9 mai 1968)*, ed. Toufic Fahd and Robert Brunschvig, 13-29. Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1970.
- Mahdi, Ali Akbar. "The Student Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15, no. 2 (1999): 5-46.
- Majd, Hooman. *The Ayatollahs' Democracy: An Iranian Challenge*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2010.
- Masood, Ehsan. "Faith, Reason and Science." *TWAS Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (2003): 5-7.
- Matsunaga, Yasuyuki, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Post Revivalist Islam in Iran." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 317-29.
- McDermott, Martin J. *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid*. Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq, 1978.
- McKnight, Edgar V. *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Michot, Yahya. "Revelation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, 180-96. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Meister, Chad and Paul Copan, ed. *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 2010.
- Milani, Abbas. "The New Democrats [An Intellectual History of the Green Wave]." Last modified July 2009. <[http://drsoroush.com/English/On\\_DrSoroush/E-CMO-2009-07-04-NewDemocrat.html](http://drsoroush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-2009-07-04-NewDemocrat.html)>. Accessed July 12, 2011.
- Milani, Mohsen M. "Reform and Resistance in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani, 29-56. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "Challenges and Complicities: Abdolkarim Soroush and Gender." In *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, 217-46. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

- . “The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought and Strategies for Reform.” *HAWWA: Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-28.
- . “Religious Modernists and the ‘Woman Question’: Challenges and Complicities.” In *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran since 1979*, ed. Eric Hooglund, 77-95. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.
- Modarressi, Hossein. “Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shīʿī Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey.” *Studia Islamica*, no. 59 (1984), 141-58.
- Mokhtari, Shadi. “The Search for Human Rights within an Islamic Framework in Iran.” *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 469-79.
- Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shīʿī sm*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Mottahedeh, Roy P. “Wilayat Al-Faqih.” In *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Vol. 5, ed. John L. Esposito, 531-32. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, ed. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. New York: Continuum, 1985.
- Murphy, Nancey and James W. McClendon, Jr. “Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies.” *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (1989), 191-214.
- Naqvi, Ijlal. “The Resilience of the Traditional Clergy to the Hardline Challenge in Post-Revolutionary Iran.” *Al-Nakhlah* 1 (2003): 1-7.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*. Ed. Mehdi Amin Razavi. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996.
- and Oliver Leaman, eds. *History of Islamic Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- and Mehdi Amin Razavi, eds. *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Nasr, Vali. *The Shiʿa Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2006.
- Nasri, Abdullah. “Ātash bar Kharman-e Nabuvvat [Setting Fire to the Haystack of Prophethood].” January 2008. <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>. Accessed January 2008 [no longer available].
- Nawas, John A. “The *Mihna* of 218 A.H./833 A.D. Revisited: An Empirical Study.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 4 (1996): 698-708.

- Newman, Andrew J. "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran, Part 1: 'Abdallāh Al-Samāhijī's "Munyat Al-Mumārīsīn." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 55, no. 1 (1992), 22-51.
- Nu'mānī, 'Alāmah Shiblī. *Tārīkh-i 'Ilm-i Kalām: 'Ilm-i Kalām Jadīd*. Tehran: Chāp-i Rangīn, 1949.
- Oden, Thomas C. *After Modernity...What?: Agenda for Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.
- Ormiston, Gayle L. and Alan D. Schrift, eds. *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- . *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Paidar, Parvin. "Gender of Democracy: The Encounter between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran." Paper Number 6 presented at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme on Democracy, Governance and Human Rights, October 2001.
- Panjwani, Farid. "The 'Islamic' in Islamic Education: Assessing the Discourse." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 7, no. 1 (2004): 1-11.
- Peterson, Michael, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger. *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Phillips, Gary A., ed. *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible*. Semeia 51. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990.
- Pinault, David. *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- Poonawala, I. "Ta'wīl (a.)." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 3., eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 390. New York: Brill, 2002.

- Preminger, Alex, et al. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Puya, Azam. "The Development of Tafsir from Other-Worldly to Worldly Orientation." Speech Presented in Germany, 2005. <  
[http://drsoroush.com/English/On\\_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20050718-The%20Development%20of%20Tafsir.html](http://drsoroush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20050718-The%20Development%20of%20Tafsir.html)>. Accessed July 15, 2011.
- Rahman, Fazlur. "Baḳā' wa-Fanā'." In *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 951. New York: Brill, 2002.
- Rajaei, Bahram. "Deciphering Iran: The Political Evolution of the Islamic Republic and U. S. Foreign Policy after September 11." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 1 (2004): 159-72.
- Rajaei, Farhang. *Islamism and Modernism: The Changing Discourse in Iran*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007.
- Rakel, Eva Patricia. *The Iranian Political Elite: State and Society Relations, and Foreign Relations since the Islamic Revolution*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2008.
- . "The Political Elite in the Islamic Republic of Iran: From Khomeini to Ahmadinejad." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no.1 (2009):105-25.
- Razavi, Shahra. "Islamic Politics, Human Rights and Women's Claims for Equality in Iran." Special Issue: The Politics of Rights: Dilemmas for Feminist Praxis. *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 7 (2006): 1223-37.
- Ricœur, Paul. *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
- Ridgeon, Lloyd. "Introduction: Iranian Intellectuals (1997–2007)." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 261–65.
- Rippin, Andrew. *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999.
- Roemer, H. R. "The Safavid Period." In *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, 189-350. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

- Roy, Olivier. "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran." *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 2 (1999): 201-16.
- . *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- . *Secularism Confronts Islam*. Trans. George Holoch. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Rumi, Jalalu'ddin. *Masnavi*. 8 vols. Ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. London: Messrs Luzac & Co., 1925-40.
- Sadri, Ahmad. "Challenging the Government of God: The Iranian Reform and Its Permutations: How Fundamentalism Gave Birth to Its Opposite." *The Iranian*, December 14, 2002. Online edition:  
<<http://www.iranian.com/AhmadSadri/2002/December/Reform/index.html>>.  
Accessed June 29, 2011.
- Sadri, Ahmad. "The Iranian Autumn of Discontent with Religion." *Sightings*, The Marty Anton Cetner for the Advanced Study of Religion, March 3, 2011.  
<[http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive\\_2011/0303.shtml](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive_2011/0303.shtml)>. Accessed July 15, 2011.
- Sadri, Ahmad. "Kadivar, Mohsen." In *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Vol. 3, ed. John L. Esposito, 288-90. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Sadri, Mahmoud. "Sacral Defense of Secularism: Dissident Political Theology in Iran." In *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi, 180-92. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- . "Sacral Defense of Secularism: The Political Theologies of Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 257-70.
- and Ahmad Sadri. "Let the Occasional Chalice Break." *The Iranian*, October 26, 1998. Online edition.  
<<http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/Oct98/Soroush/index.html>>. Accessed June 29, 2011.
- Saleh, Walid. "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12 (2010): 6-40.
- Savory, Roger. *Iran under the Safavids*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.



- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972.
- Schacht, Joseph. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.
- Schellenberg, J. L. "Religious Experience and Religious Diversity: A Reply to Alston." *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 151-59.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Schirazi, Asghar. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*. Trans. John O'Kane. London: I.B. Tauris, 1997.
- Schmid, Peter D. "Expect the Unexpected: A Religious Democracy in Iran." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2003): 181-96.
- Scott-Meisami, Julie. "Mixed Prose and Verse in Medieval Persian Literature." In *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl, 295-320. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997.
- Shabestari, Mohammad Mojtahed. "Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari: A Brief Biographical Portrait." *Qerā'at-e [Reading]*. <<http://mojtahedshabestari.blogfa.com/post-39.aspx>>. Accessed July 20, 2011.
- . "Qerā'at-e Nabavī az Jahān [Prophetic Reading of the World]." *Faslnāmah-ye Madreseh [Madreseh Quarterly]* 6 (2007): 92-100.
- . *Qerā'at-e [Reading]*. Online blog. <<http://mojtahedshabestari.blogfa.com>>. Accessed July 20, 2011.
- Sharī'atī, 'Alī. *Fatima is Fatima*. Trans. Laleh Bakhtiar. Tehran: Shari'ati Foundation, 1981.
- Shirley, Edward G. "The Theory of Expansion and Contraction of Religion." *Foreign Policy*, no. 96 (1994): 75-93.
- Silver, David. "Religious Experience and the Facts of Pluralism." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 49 (2001): 1-17.
- Sobhani, Ayatollah Ja'far and Reza Shah Kazemi. *Doctrines of Shi'ī Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2001.
- Sokol, Moshe. "How Do Jewish Thinkers Interpret Religious Texts?" *Modern Judaism* 13, no. 1 (1993): 25-48.

- Soroush, Abdolkarim [alt: *Abdolkarim*]. *Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*. Ed. Forough Jahanbakhsh. Trans. Nilou Mobasser. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- . “Islamic Revival and Reform: Theological Approaches.” In *Reason, Democracy and Freedom in Islam*. Eds and trans. Mahoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, 26-37. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . “Neshast-e ‘ilmi-ye ‘Wahy Kalām-e Ilāhī yā Basharī’ dar Qum Barguzār Shud [The Conference of “Revelation: God -Speech or Human-Speech took place in Qom],” June 2008. <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>. Accessed November, 2008 [no longer available].
- . *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shari’at: Nazariyyeh-ye Takamol-e Ma’rifat-e Dini [The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Shariah: The Theory of Evolution of Religious Knowledge]*. Tehran: Serat Cultural Center, 1994.
- . *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*. Ed. and trans. Mahoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . “Soroush dar Intizār-e Sarnivisht-e Salman Rushdie? [Is Soroush Awaiting a Similar Fate as Salman Rushdie?],” February 2008. <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>. Accessed March, 2009 [no longer available].
- . “The Three Cultures.” In *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*. Eds. and trans. Mahoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, 156-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- and Mohsen Kadivar. *Pulūrālism-e dīnī: munāẓireh-e Duktur ‘Abdolkarīm Surūsh va Hujjat al-Islām Muḥsin Kadīvar [Religious Pluralism: A Debate between Abdolkarim Soroush and Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Kadivar]*. Tehran: Rūznāmeḥ-i Salām, 1999.
- Swinburne, Richard. *Faith and Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Synovitz, Ron and Alireza Taheri. “Iran: Clashes Highlight ‘Demonization’ of Sufi Muslims.” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 16, 2007 <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=4742edf92d>>. Accessed July 19, 2011.
- Tabātabā’ī, Mustafa Hussienī. “Vahy va Mukāshifeḥ ‘Irfānī?” March 2008. <<http://www.dr.soroush.com>>. Accessed April 2008 [no longer available].

- Taylor, Mark C. *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Tilman, Nagel. *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*. Trans. Thomas Thornton. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000.
- Usman, Jeffrey. "The Evolution of Iranian Islamism from the Revolution through the Contemporary Reformers." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 35 (2002): 1679-1730.
- . "Religious Modernity in Iran: Dilemmas of Islamic Democracy in the Discourse of Mohammad Khatami." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 650-64.
- Vahdat, Farzin. "Post-Revolutionary Islamic Discourses on Modernity in Iran: Expansion and Contraction of Human Subjectivity." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 599-631.
- . "Post-Revolutionary Islamic Modernity in Iran: The Intersubjective Hermeneutics of Mohamad Mojtahed Shabestari." In *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki, 193-224. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- and Mohsen Kadivar. "Post-Revolutionary Discourses of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar: Reconciling the Terms of Mediated Subjectivity, Part I." *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, no.16 (2000): 31-32; Part II published in no. 17 (2000): 135-57.
- Vakili, Valla. "Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush." *Council on Foreign Relations, Studies Department Occasional Paper Series*, no. 2 (1997): 1-27.
- Valad, Baha al-Din. *Ma'aref: Majmu'eh Sokhanan va Mava'ez baha aldin Valad*. Compiled by Nijab Mayel Heravi, 1367. Reprint: Tehran: Mawla Publications, 1987.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God)." In *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 3-25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- , ed. *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. *Islam and the Integration of Society*. London: Routledge & Paul, 1961.

- Wensinck, A. J. “Ḥūr.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, C. E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 581. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- and Andrew Rippin. “Wahy.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Vol. X1, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 53. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Wild, Stefan. “‘We have sent down to thee the book with the truth . . .’ Spatial and Temporal Implications of the Qur’anic Concepts of *nuzūl*, *tanzīl*, and *’inzāl*.” In *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild, 137-53. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.
- , ed. *The Qur’an as Text*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.
- Winter, Tim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Wright, Robin. “Iran’s Greatest Political Challenge: Abdol Karim Soroush.” *World Policy Journal* 14, no. 2 (1997): 67-74.
- . “Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation.” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 64-75.
- Ziai, Hossein. “Islamic Philosophy [*Falsafa*].” In *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, 33-76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Zysow, Aron. “Ejtehād.” In *Encyclopedia Iranica*. December 15, 1998. Online Edition: <<http://iranica.com/articles/ejtehad>>. Accessed June, 8, 2011.