

Qur'an & Politics

A STUDY ON THE ORIGINS
OF POLITICAL THOUGHT
IN THE MAKKAN VERSES

ELTIGANI ABDUL-QADIR HAMID

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

THE QUR'AN AND POLITICS

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Thought in the Makkan Qur'an



ELTIGANI ABDELGADIR HAMID

TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY

ABDUL-WAHID LU'LU'A



THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
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And say, “My Lord! Advance me in knowledge.”
(The Qur’an, 20:114)

Read! In the name of your Lord, Who created – created man out of a
clot of congealed blood. Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful –
He Who taught [the use of] the pen, Who taught man that which
he did not know. (The Qur’an, 96:1–5)

It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers,
when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and
intelligence, that you may give thanks [to God]. (The Qur’an, 16:78)

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FOREWORD



Of knowledge, we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has great pleasure in presenting this treatise on the origins of political thought and the Makkan Qur'an.

The Arabic edition, *Uṣūl al-Fikr al-Siyāsī Fī al-Qur'an al-Makki*, which was published in 1995, generated a positive response and we hope that this English edition, will prove equally as successful. It is an important addition to IIIT's Qur'anic studies project. This work is a study of the origins of Islamic political thought, and the philosophy of politics. It uses a unique methodology to argue that the major elements of the Qur'anic social and political thought are securely anchored in the Makkan verses of the Qur'an.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last nineteen years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Dr. Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid, who, throughout the various stages of the book's production, co-operated with the editorial group at the London Office. We would also like to thank the translator, Professor Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a for providing the initial translated manuscript as well as the editorial and production team at the London Office and all those who were involved in the completion of this book: Sylvia Hunt,

Sohail Nakhooda, Shiraz Khan, Dr. Maryam Mahmood, Melissa Dyson, Hagga Abugideiri, Kareema Altomare and Alexandra Grayson. May God reward them, the author, and the translator for all their efforts.

Dhu al-Qa^cdah 1424
January 2004

ANAS AL-SHAikh-ALI
IIIT, London, UK

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'anic discourse presents and deals with its major themes in a variety of ways. It is possible to identify three levels:

1. The Qur'an presents the cosmic, social, and human phenomena, in different degrees of detail. This may be observed in the treatment of family affairs such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.
2. It presents general goals and values without going into detail, such as when it mentions the procedure of consultation, the realization of justice among people, and similar themes. In these cases, the details are left to the interpretation of the scholars.
3. The Qur'an formulates general lines of thought, and defines the perspectives and standards of interaction. This approach is most frequent when dealing with cognitive matters, whether in their entirety or in their specific cosmic and natural fields. In these cases, while overlooking the details, the Qur'an may point to the consequences of evading the rules discussed.

The Qur'an approaches the issue of "political thought and political science" as part of a comprehensive discourse which establishes their general goals and frames of reference. It is then left to the human mind to complete these with what it has learned from experiences in history and what the scholars understood from the Text about how to deal with reality.

Political thought is a human mental experience, which, like any other thought that regulates the affairs of life, is based on combining known premises in order to reach unknown conclusions. Since people's thinking stems from their overall world view, their references, methods, and theory of knowledge will be determined by their own particular doctrinal foundation and ideals. Thus Muslims will have their own political thought which stems from their own world view, which, in turn, is based on the Qur'anic origins of that thought. It is no wonder, then, that the author of this work has chosen to refer to

the Qur'an, for it is the only and absolute source in which the origins of Islamic political thought can be found. He then examines the various aspects of that thought and its effect on the social and historical Islamic reality, and addresses the issues raised by the different branches of political science.

This study, undertaken by Dr. Eltigani A. Hamid (former Director of the Department of Islamization of Knowledge at the Ministry of Higher Education in Khartoum, Sudan) is a good example of serious research in the field of the human and social sciences which consider the Qur'an to be a primary source of the origins of knowledge. These sciences and their methodology underwent a series of crises as a result of the deconstructive trends that arose in the periods of modernity and post-modernity, and led to the annihilation of history, liberalism, and even humanity itself.

Such deconstructive thought could lead only to nihilism or absurdity, or both, but never to reconstruction, as this would require a comprehensive world view. Thus, once humankind had tried to reconstruct its systems of thought, and failed, it had to resort to moral and spiritual resources. The Qur'an is the only source that can provide the grand view that will enable the post-modern human being to reconstruct the systems of thought. Indeed, the Qur'an can reconstruct the human being: "He created you from a single person; created, of like nature, his mate, and from both scattered countless [like seeds] men and women" (4:1). It can also reconstruct the universe, after it has been divided into provinces and countries that fight against one another, and suffer from war, hunger, and fear, in order to turn it into a wide and safe abode for man. Finally, it can reformulate the philosophy of the human, social, and natural sciences, and, in doing so, help them surmount their current crises. Those engaged in the human sciences are therefore urged to turn to the Qur'an and follow its directives when attempting to build their own philosophies and theories. However, it is important to note that the Qur'an does not present ready-made theories. It only provides guidance towards the discovery of theories and rules on which human beings can base their knowledge.

To add the attribute "Islamic" to any kind of thought or knowledge is not the concern of this work, which attempts to place itself in

an Islamic framework that depends, to a large extent, on the Qur'an. Moreover, describing any thought as "Islamic" does not suggest that it is above criticism or that the infallibility of the Qur'anic text should be projected onto the human thought – even if the latter depends on the Text alone – for it remains a relative thought, possibly accurate or inaccurate. Indeed, all human thought is open to criticism: people will accept it or reject it according to their own reading and understanding of the Holy Text.

It is essential that the study of the origins of any aspect of human thought in the Qur'an must take place within the limits of the Qur'anic methodology. It is therefore necessary to define the issue under discussion within this cognitive methodology. Indeed, it is well known that the concept of politics in Islam is not the same as that current in contemporary political science. It is a concept which stems from different cognitive origins and develops within a different frame of reference, where cultural dimensions affect all the levels of existence – from that of the individual and the family, to the establishment of society, the formation of a nation, and the setting up of a state.

This treatise has been read and widely praised by several scholars. The author has tried to present some aspects of this very important theme which will prove helpful to the scholar and student alike. The Qur'an is ever resourceful and helpful in every serious and scholarly research. We wish the author every success, and may Allah reward his worthy efforts.

DR. TAHA JABIR AL-ALWANI

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ARABIC EDITION

In our contemporary Islamic world, the difficulty is not in writing a book, but in having it published and distributed. In fact, the difficulties encountered may be so great that they deter one from writing at all. This is almost what happened to me, for I finished writing this book in 1983, yet had to wait until 1995 before the original Arabic version could see the light of day. In 1984, I was awarded an M.A. in Political Philosophy from Khartoum University for my work, but I then had to put it aside for several years because I was occupied with another project. From the time I started writing this book until the present day, I have been coming back to the Qur'an, searching and enquiring, over and over again. I make no secret of the fact that the intellectual and psychological enjoyment I found in the process is incomparable, and that the Qur'anic "phenomenon" has become the center of all my studies ever since I undertook this research.

Before proceeding with my work, I would like to clarify certain points. First, I do not intend to use as evidence Qur'anic verses which explain the sociopolitical phenomenon and rely on that to support one argument or another, as such evidence cannot go further than the cognitive surface. This has been a common practice among some scholars, who, after analyzing a particular social (natural or psychological) phenomenon, and reaching certain "scientific" conclusions, turn to look for verses, hastily pulled from the Qur'an, to support their argument. I have not chosen this method because I assume that the Qur'anic text is a "phenomenon" in itself whose content and context need to be closely and carefully examined and analyzed in order to be able to extract from it the knowledge and "key" concepts that could help in understanding certain social phenomena. Thus, I "follow" in the light of the Qur'anic verses rather than proceed before them, hoping that in so doing they will enlighten the dark avenues of my

research and open up the doors of understanding, providing me with the keys of knowledge that I need.

Second, this study is specifically about the origins of political thought. It is not a study on the political history of Islam, or the forms of the Islamic state. Moreover, my research into the origins of political thought is strictly limited to the Makkan surahs of the Qur'an, and does not include any of the verses revealed in Madinah or the legislations and events pertinent to that locale. Neither does it include the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs or the following events and developments in thought, institutions, and relations. Furthermore, by being a study of the origins which precede the policies, it is situated in the field of political philosophy and not in that of political science – a difference which can be well appreciated by the specialists. Therefore, I hope the reader will not expect to find these elements, as I did not intend to present them in this book.

I would also like to mention the fact that many useful books on political thought in Islam have been published since I wrote my book. Yet, despite their great number, these books do not deal with the same subject as my thesis, as hardly any of them focuses exclusively on the Makkan surahs of the Qur'an in search of a philosophy of politics.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Ibrahim Ahmad Omar (former Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at Khartoum University), who kindly supervised the first draft of my research, and without whose help, generosity, and patience, the project would not have been completed. My thanks also go to the staff of the Institute of Research and Social Studies (Khartoum) for all their assistance, and to my two special friends, Ahmad Kamaluddin and Abdelwahab el-Effendi, who hosted and assisted me in many ways. And last, but by no means least, special gratitude is due to my wife, Nawal, for her help in checking the verses of the Qur'an, and for her patience and encouragement. As for the one who filled my heart with love for the Qur'an – my father – I find no reward better than presenting this modest effort to his virtuous soul, in loving memory, praying Allah to forgive him and to multiply the reward for his good deeds.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

It has been remarked that to leave a book without a preface is similar to arriving at someone's house for dinner and being conducted straight into the dinning room. As with the visitor, a reader may prefer to know a few things about his host, the author, including how and why he wrote the book.

My interest in the Qur'an began in my early life. That interest grew out of an intense fascination with the Arabic Language and the poetic potential it contains. My interest in philosophical issues and political theory started when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Khartoum-Sudan in the late 1970s and early 1980s. What immediately struck me, while I was wrestling with the courses on Philosophy, was that many of the same philosophical issues were also addressed in the Qur'an; albeit in a different form. It appeared to me then, as it does now, that if I could probe into the Qur'anic hermeneutic and build a bridge between the Qur'anic language and the philosophical discourse, I could open new avenues of knowledge by helping students of both disciplines to dialogue intelligently with each other.

For a "traditional" *mufasssir* (commentator), of the Qur'an, this endeavor might seem as an "encroachment" by the social sciences, philosophy, and politics on what was once the exclusive domain of *tafsir*. For a "traditional" political theorist, this study might also appear the same; an "encroachment" from the religious quarter on his domain. Hence, I would expect skepticism and criticism from both sides. Whatever the case may be, such an "encroachment" can have a positive effect on all of us, myself included. Hopefully, it will propel both the *mufasssir* and the philosopher to examine not only their positions, but also their methodologies. If it succeeds in raising the question of how capable the *mufasssir* and the political theorist are at

exchanging their ideas and questioning their sources, that would be a sufficient reason for supposing that such a work is worthwhile. For, as Isaiah Berlin once put it, unless we have some notion of what, how and why other men are thinking, feeling, and doing, we will continue to walk in the dark and will be faced by the unpredictable and sometimes appalling consequences of one another's activities. It goes without saying that we are now witnessing horrifying consequences that result from the assertions of certain Qur'anic commentators and political theorists, who have failed to communicate with each other.

Revising the translated edition of this work forced itself on me while I was engaged in other commitments. I hope it will not retain the marks of that distraction. No attempt has been made to update or add new material, though I had to track down the original sources of most of the quotations I used in the original Arabic edition, and to provide other missing information.

I must record a debt of gratitude to Professor Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a who has translated this work from Arabic. His creative rendering has "nearly" made me believe that this is what I wanted to say. I say "nearly" because translation necessarily entails omission and reduction. Reading the draft, I had to reinsert what he has left out. I had to leave out some of his sentences and expressions and replace them with my own in what came to be a silent struggle between us; albeit a struggle that proved to be important for the clarity and understandability of the text.

I am grateful to Dr. Fathi Malkawi, who generously offered to read the initial Arabic manuscript, and displayed sympathetic curiosity about it. I am also grateful to Dr. Jamal Barzinji who initiated the whole project of translating this work, and to Louay Safi who patiently took on the administrative burden and helped to speed the book to completion. Mrs. Kareema Eltomare and Mrs. Hagga Abugideiri deserve my thanks for checking the endnotes and inserting my last minute corrections into the final manuscript. The author alone is, of course, responsible for any errors which might have remained uncorrected.

DR. ELTIGANI ABDELGADIR HAMID

CHAPTER ONE

Conceptual Clarifications

1.1 POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political thought deals with the issues posed by the political community. But what is the political community? And what is politics? A community is described as “political” if it has an authoritative body which can issue certain rules of behavior, which are then promulgated, adopted, applied, or enforced by that body. These rules are generally obeyed and their sovereignty is recognized – willingly or not – and they are considered the only rules which define material reward or punishment.¹ As for politics, it is defined by Webster (1993) as “the art or science of government,”² and by Robert’s dictionary (1972) as “the art of governing human communities.”³ The modern definition of politics, however, covers the government of the state and that of other human organizations, where “government” means organized authority and implies the institutions of leadership and authoritative allocation of values.⁴

Judging by these definitions, political thought is concerned with authority in general. Is it, for instance, acquired by mutual consent, or by coercion? How is it to be practiced? And what type of relationship exists between an individual and authority? Is it one of subjection, rebellion or dialogue? Political thought is also concerned with constitutional law, which regulates the relations among legislative, judicial, and political institutions (the constitutional form of the state). It is also concerned with the mutual influences between the permanent formal institutions and the changing currents of opinion in society (institutions of public opinion, labor unions, and corporations). All these issues are described in Islamic political jurisprudence as *al-aḥkām al-sultāniyyah* (the government ordinances). However they are not my main concern in this work. Similarly, matters relating to the institution of the *imāmah* (religious leadership), such as the

necessity of its establishment, its form, or the agencies and ministries that are connected with it, will not be discussed. That is the field of political science and its more specialized subdivisions.

1.2 THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

This work is about the origins of political science, and as the word origins indicates, it focuses on what lies beyond the issues of political science. Indeed, whereas political science deals with authority and its impact on the various groups in society, with formal relations among institutions, and the informal relations between political parties and the government or other agencies, our study will concentrate on the origins on which these issues are based. It is a study of the origins of political thought, and, consequently, a study of the philosophy of politics, rather than the empirical political science or any of its detailed branches.

The word “origin” (*aṣl*, pl. *‘uṣūl*) in Arabic etymology admits of such usage. Semantically, “origin” is “that on which you build.” As an idiom, the word means “the preferred, the endorsed, the rule, and the evidence (*dalīl*).”⁵ This last term is used in books on the origins of Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, uses the word “origins” to mean “the evidence of the commands,” namely, whether the religious commands related to human actions classify the latter as obligatory (*wājib*), proscribed (*maḥẓūr*) or permissible (*mubāḥ*). We are also concerned with the other meaning of “origins,” that is, evidence indicating the intention behind these *aḥkām* in a general way.⁶ Shaikh Abd al-Wahab Khallaf says that the origins of Islamic jurisprudence designate

the knowledge of principles and methods, which leads to the formation of practical legal judgments from the detailed evidence. The field of the origins of jurisprudence is the comprehensive legal evidence [in the Qur'an and the Sunnah] which supports the generally stated judgments.⁷

I will be using al-Ghazālī's definition of the word “origins” to mean “evidence”.

However, our field will not deal exclusively with the judgment of human deeds. For instance, I will not look into a person's actions in

the performance of rites, to see whether they are obligatory or permissible; nor am I interested in those performed in his/her capacity as a husband/wife or as a partner in a trade contract. Rather, I will examine the actions of the state – which is the main power concerned with public affairs in society – and focus on its legitimacy and intents, on the principles of evaluation that determine what is good or bad about the existing political institutions and the political action, as well as on its objectives and relations. My work is an inquiry into which public action is considered good or bad in relation to other value systems endorsed by Islam. For instance, I will look into the principle of political authority, and determine to whom that authority should belong initially, and what evidence we have to support that view. I will also study the principle of obedience that is demanded of the individual, discuss the origins of that obedience, and specify the rights of the individual as opposed to those of the community. Moreover, I will try to see whether these rights are in conflict with one another, and if they are, then I will look for a way to eliminate that conflict in order to achieve social cohesion. I will examine the major social objectives on which the political institutions rely to justify their existence and the practice of their power, in order to find out if these objectives can secure the “supreme good” for all members of society. Finally, I will examine the nature of that “supreme good:” who defines its limits, and by what authority? These and similar questions form an introduction to the issues and questions I intend to study in this research about the origins of political thought.

1.3 THE MAKKAN SURAHs OF THE QUR’AN

Having explained what I mean by political thought and its origins, I will now turn to the Makkan surahs of the Qur’an that constitute the basis of this research.

First, it should be mentioned that this study is not intended to be part of the controversy about the definition of the Makkan and the Madinan Qur’an. I have adopted the predominant view among religious scholars that the Makkan Qur’an comprises the verses that were revealed before the Prophet’s emigration (*hijrah*) to Madinah, even though some of them were revealed outside Makkah.⁸ Moreover, by

choosing to deal exclusively with the Makkan surahs, I am not encouraging a partition of the Qur'an, or even declaring that such partitioning is possible. Neither do I assert that the Madinan Qur'an does not include any principles of political thought. A differentiation between the subjects of the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an is neither absolute nor decisive. Rather, and especially after the completion of the Revelation, the subjects appear to be interconnected and complementary in presenting and supporting the meaning, to the extent that differences in the time and place of Revelation do not mark a sharp contrast between the Makkan and the Madinan surahs. Indeed, I believe that all that which was revealed in Makkah or Madinah, inside the city or outside it, in summer or winter, forms one single network, and that it is almost impossible to take some verses out of their context in the surah, and refer them to their geographical or historical locale, without distorting the construction or disturbing the meaning. This special feature of composition is, in itself, an aspect of the Qur'anic (*i'jāz*) inimitability.⁹ This being the case, it is necessary then to explain why I have chosen to deal exclusively with the Makkan Qur'an as a field of study of the origins of political thought.

The first reason is the assumption that since the Qur'an is a unified logical, linguistic, and stylistic composition, then it is only natural that the Qur'anic directives, which constitute the essential bases of the Book, be given first, namely in the Makkan surahs. This also means that the Makkan surahs will be predominantly concerned with the origins, whereas the Madinan surahs will be predominantly concerned with detailed legislation. However, this general nature of the Makkan surahs should not mislead us into thinking that the entire Makkan Qur'an is but a theoretical preamble to the Madinan Qur'an, which alone contains the basic constitutional material.

A second reason for resorting solely to the Makkan Qur'an is that I am looking for the rules and principles that will help to identify the directions and major objectives towards which both human society and political action are guided prior to the rise of institutions and the regulation of relations. In other words, I am looking for the *ummahāt* or "mother sources" on which the Islamic political society was to be built.¹⁰

These basic political principles could be seen as the opening address

to the Quraysh, who were to be converted from *jāhiliyyah* (period of ignorance before Islam) to Islam. Indeed, it would be somewhat absurd if the branches and ramifications of politics (or any form of knowledge) are to be established before its principles. Similarly, if Islam was to herald the birth of a new society that was better than that of the Quraysh, it is only natural that the inaugural addresses should be about a good and just society, and its ascendancy over evil and unjust societies. These addresses would also have to consider the values of good, evil, and justice, and their connection with monotheism. This requires a normative “criterion” for the evaluation of human actions, which will necessarily be based on a comprehensive vision of life that includes this world and the hereafter. In my opinion, all these issues are at the center of the Makkan Qur’an, by virtue of its historical precedence, logical arrangement, and circumstantial exigency.

A third reason for restricting my study to the Makkan Qur’an is that many Western scholars (and others who follow them) have noticed that the Makkan surahs refer extensively to resurrection and the Day of Judgment, which are the ultimate symbols of reward and punishment. Yet, these scholars have failed to notice that belief in the Resurrection is part of the Islamic creed from which stem the origins of political thought and all other Islamic values. Consequently, when they search the Makkan Qur’an for references to political thought, as they conceive it – namely, a political thought that is exclusively related to “this” life and does not take into account the Resurrection – clearly, they cannot not find any. They affirm that the pessimistic Makkan surahs are entirely devoted to warnings about the destruction of the world, and do not contain a political creed that could constitute a nucleus addressing social life and intent upon regulating it and putting it to good use. They also declare that this political creed appeared only at a later stage, as a result of the historical developments experienced by the Prophet after his emigration to Madinah. These scholars, therefore, focus on the *hijrah*, which they considered to be a moment of fundamental change in the content of the message rather than a mere outward change in the form of that message or an extension of the Makkan framework, as the Muslims interpret it.

The claim of these Western scholars relied on the following basic premises:

1. that religion is a complex psychological phenomenon based on a variety of factors. It can be detected only within its historical circumstances, and should therefore be explained only within its historical framework.

2. that Islam, as a religious phenomenon, is a result of various causes. Some of these are related to the assumption that Islam is a universal moral system. Others are related to the assumption that Islam is mainly a legal and ideological system that evolved step by step into its final form.¹¹ In other words, Islam, whether as a creed or a social system, has, like all other social systems, gradually perfected itself.¹²

3. that the Makkan Qur'an, by virtue of its historical precedence over the Madinan Qur'an, included but a few raw ideological premises, which only later were to develop into a new religion. Moreover, because such premises center on the Hereafter, calling believers to relinquish the pleasures and palaces of this world, Muhammad's mission appears to be limited to warnings about the end of the world and the reality of the Day of Reckoning. His view of the world seemed to be very pessimistic and he did not appear to have any interest in or hope for this earthly world.¹³

4. that the Makkan Qur'an, or rather the entire Makkan period, was no more than an attempt to develop religious inclinations within a small community, and that the message propagated by Muhammad at that time did not indicate a new religion. However, after his emigration to Madinah, the essence of his message took a different turn, and he no longer spoke like someone overwhelmed by visions of the other world. The new situation made him a fighter, a statesman, and an organizer of the new community. It was then that Islam took its final shape as a system, and that the seeds of its social, juridical and political systems started to sprout and grow.¹⁴

These claims were entertained and defended by the famous Hungarian orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1920), notably in his book *Creed and Shari'ah: A History of Theological and Legislative Development in Islam*, in which he stated that Islam developed in accordance with the psychological and historical situation. The two orientalists, Franz Buhl and Tor Andrae, followed a similar argument, asserting that the Makkan Qur'an contains only one central theme,

which is the fear of Hell. Professor Montgomery Watt initially disagreed with their theory, only to revert later to an opinion close to that of Goldziher. Indeed, he asserted that Muhammad at first considered himself to be sent to the Quraysh in particular. However, when, despite all his efforts, the Quraysh did not believe in him, and the inhabitants of Ṭāʾif also rejected him, he fell into a depression and his reliance on human companionship waned.¹⁵ The deteriorating situation in Makkah forced him to look further, and he spent the following three years trying to establish firm relations with the rival bedouin tribes of Ṭāʾif and Yathrib.¹⁶

Only a few Muslim scholars support such a strong denial of the presence of the origins of Islamic political thought in the Makkan Qurʾan, and they are all among the scholars considered to be extremists in their opinions and theories.¹⁷ There are also some Muslim scholars who do not accept the evolutionary doctrine, although they do state that the Makkan Qurʾan offers only a brief presentation of the political creed, given in the form of general principles and a basic theoretical framework to be applied in the Islamic State of Madinah. Explaining the Islamic political creed in terms of this evolutionary doctrine has many repercussions. One of these is that the emigration phenomenon acquired much significance as a central part of the religious program: the theoretical framework conceived in Makkah was to be implemented by realistic political action in Madinah to complete the structure of Islam as an established religion and state.

Assuming the existence of the origins of political thought in the Makkan Qurʾan, it is clear that I do not follow either of these opinions. The reasons for this will be detailed in the following chapters, though I will briefly outline them here. Basically, I do not agree with the first view, which contends that the religious phenomenon is a psychological one that reflects the social reality alone. Nor do I see Islamic political thought as a product of the social history of the Quraysh. Similarly, I cannot accept the assertion that the warnings given in the Makkan Qurʾan about the Day of Judgment and the destruction of the world reflect a pessimistic attitude on the part of Muhammad toward the possibility of establishing the ideal political values. As for the second view, I do not believe that the

political principles presented in the Makkan Qur'an are merely an abstract philosophical structure to be later realized in Madinah. Rather, I see the Makkan Qur'an as an intricate structure within which revealed principles were strongly interconnected with the current historical realities. I do not see any gulf between the principle and the action, except on occasion when it was impossible to act, and intensive efforts were required to create and encourage more favorable circumstances. Naturally, it cannot be asserted that all the political principles revealed in Makkah were too difficult to apply, and had to be postponed until the emigration to Yathrib.¹⁸ There were many reasons for the delay in the application of these principles:

1. These principles were not revealed all at once, and there was no stipulation that they were either to be applied all together immediately or postponed.
2. Islam is a process of *sa'ī* (striving) and not a process of suspension, which means that every step undertaken during the Makkan stage was a positive move toward gaining political power and discovering the means by which this power could be consolidated according to Qur'anic principles.
3. A careful study of the Prophet's life shows that he applied most of the political principles in Makkah itself, prior to his emigration to Madinah. In fact, his emigration was neither a strategic aim, nor an essential part of the religion, but was merely one of the measures undertaken to establish the new religion and obtain political support.

1.4 THE COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT OF BEING

Since the social phenomenon is an integral part of life, to explain it, one has to resort to a fundamental principle which could explain life itself; its limits, and its objectives, and provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the world and the nature of human relations and what they entail in terms of duties, rights and proscriptions. The question one may ask is whether such a principle can be found within the network of social relations, or whether it must be acquired from some other source, and, if so, which source? Although various schools of thought offer answers to these questions, this study will limit itself to two major schools: Plato's Idealism and Islamic Monotheism.

1.4.1 *Plato's Idealism and its Impact on Political Thought*

According to Plato, thought is the fundamental and most important reality of existence, because if it happens to be lacking, the whole concept of existence collapses. He elaborated on this point in his theory of ideals (from which is derived the term “idealism”), in which he maintained that because ideals were not related to time or place, “they are not created.”¹⁹ For instance, when the Sun of Truth and Good is shining, the “eye” of the soul can see the world of ideals, just as the physical eye can see an object with the help of sunshine.²⁰ Then, after beholding the realities of things as they are in the world of ideals, the philosopher has to return to the cave (which represents real life and human social relations). The principle according to which Plato explained social life is therefore one that exists outside the cave, that is, outside the network of social relations. Furthermore, since the philosopher alone has access to the world of ideals and can still comprehend the realities of things, he is the only individual capable of administration and legislation in society.²¹

Aristotle disagreed with Plato on this point. He thought that the concept of absolute ideals was ambiguous and based on indefinite qualities. Therefore, it could not be taken as a solid basis to explain life or give it meaning and direction.²² Life cannot be explained by a concept that has no clear qualifications and is itself in need of explanation.

Hence, Aristotle replaced the concept of ideals, which states that the absolute reality of things is found in the world of ideals, with the concept of essence, which asserts that everything has an essence, and that the reality of things is inherent in their essence. Thus, unlike Plato, who said that the ruler must come out of the social cave to see the reality of things in the world of ideals – whereby he becomes a king-philosopher qualified to lead the republic – Aristotle asserted that the individual, the society, and the state are all entities striving to realize their existence; and that the law, which is legislated by the ruler and administered in society, does not come from the world of ideals, but is “discovered and taken from the world of social reality.”²³ The fundamental rule used by Aristotle to explain the life phenomenon is therefore not found “outside the cave” (as Plato would say), but inside the social sphere, where every entity endeavors to realize its essence.

Aristotle continued attacking Plato's idealism and built in its place a purely realistic ideology. However Plato's idealism found new life and support in the concept of the "sacred origin of life," which was heralded by the revealed religions. It also found backing in the idea of natural law, which was put forward by some Christian theologians.²⁴ The reason for this was that Plato's idealism attempted to base the law on an ideal source more sublime than those from which stemmed ancient pagan creeds. Although Aristotle accused this source of law of ambiguity, it gained support when the Hebrew prophets insisted that the laws of a given society be based on divine authority. They emphasized the sacred and divine nature of the bases of legislation and the philosophy of the human community, which are embodied in divine laws preserved in a revealed book and protected by a temple and a priest. This creed, together with Plato's idealism, became the traditional religious references for the Christian Church and State. However, over time, the Roman Christians subjected the law of the Lord to the whims of the ruler and exploited it for their own political and personal gains. They endowed the kings with a divine right over the people, and gave the clergy the right to monopolize and interpret the word of the Lord, to trade in "pardon cheques," to excommunicate opponents, and to commit other deviations well known in the history of the Roman Empire.²⁵ This led to the emergence of rejectionist schools of thought that tried to separate the Church from the law, restrict its authority, and deny it any rights of supervision and control. This, in turn, led to the re-emergence of the natural law, which was meant to be distinct and independent from the ecclesiastical law, which was monopolized by the clergy and the monks.²⁶

According to the natural law theory, there is a law that is inherent in the nature of social relations. It is a fixed and infinite law, which, like all the laws that govern nature, does not change with time and place. Moreover, it is to be discovered, not initiated, by the mind. Human reason has to examine social relations to deduce this natural law from them, and then formulate its own positive laws on that model. The closer the positive laws are to natural law, the closer they come to perfection.²⁷ Natural law has become the legitimate source of political authority in society, as well as a normative criterion by which to determine major social objectives and examine and evaluate

political institutions. For instance, the Declaration of Human Rights, as drafted following the French Revolution, was based on the principles of natural law.²⁸

The German philosopher George Hegel (1770–1831), who carried the banner of Plato's idealism in one hand and Aristotle's concept of progress in the other, gave natural law renewed support and significance. He maintained that there was an "absolute spirit" which was the source and secret of life (hence the similarity with Plato's idealism), and that it manifested itself through dialectic progress (hence its resemblance to Aristotle's theory).²⁹ He also believed that history is part of a "grand design" that surpassed the plans and actions of leaders and politicians. This theory was based on the premise that the essence of cosmic and human reality was a spirit, and that history was a continuous process to realize that spirit in the material reality. Human actions and emotions were mere tools used by the absolute spirit to express and realize itself. Hegel called this process "the cunning of history." Therefore, he did not believe that the origins of political thought resided in people's ideas and notions, but that they were derived from the domination of the absolute spirit which underlay political events, historical incidents, and human thought. He also believed that the state was an almost perfect embodiment of the absolute spirit in material history, and that it represented the most sublime type of political organization.³⁰

Just as Aristotle rejected Plato's idealism, separating it from political philosophy and ascribing it to realistic materialism, both Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and Karl Marx (1813–1883) opposed Hegel's idealism and ascribed it to realistic materialism. Indeed, Marx believed that the human mind and spirit were nothing but matter, and similarly that the essence of reality was not a spirit but matter itself, in a state of dialectic movement between one social class and another, and developing, not toward the realization of the state, but toward the extinction of the state and the emergence of absolute communism.³¹ He believed that human history, in its essence, was a history of the struggle of classes, which moved in accordance with the "grand design" in a dialectic process towards a purely classless society governed by the principle which says: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his need."³²

Thus, despite their differences, Hegel and Marx agreed that there was a “grand design” underlying all incidents and events, and that it was the duty of scientists to examine these incidents and events in order to discover or deduce from them the content of that grand design. These statements were, in essence, similar to those who supported the natural law theory.

The natural law theory, and what it included of Hegel’s idealism, was severely attacked by the schools of positivism and historicism. The positivists, whose views were crystalized in Europe in the nineteenth century, essentially criticized the fact that the natural law was accompanied by ethical principles that the naturalists regard as axioms. Indeed, the positivists considered the link between ethical values and the law to be illegitimate. They always strove to liberate social sciences from normative values, and to separate politics from ethical values, so that politics could be based on mere facts, in the same way as natural sciences. They also maintained that social scientists and researchers should be detached from social objectives as well as from any aimless preoccupation with the absurd. In other words, such scholars – whether as citizens or mere human beings – must suppress their purposive or teleological tendencies and value judgments because these would destroy their scientific neutrality and prevent them from perceiving reality as it is.³³

The British philosopher, David Hume (1711–1776), who blatantly delineated this position, said that any proposition that did not center on theoretical analysis of quantity and number, or on empirical arguments pertaining to real existential facts, was mere sophistication.³⁴ Similarly, a group of positivist philosophers declared that objective empirical science had annihilated the discipline of political philosophy, which included normative theories. They also stated that it was necessary to stress the distinction between values and facts.³⁵

The other attack against the natural law theory was made by the historicist school, which also appeared in Europe in the nineteenth century. This school tried to present a new approach to history, and offered a new way of using history to oppose the teleological historical design advanced by both Hegel and Marx. The historicist school stated that history could provide a method that would replace the methods of analysis and the generalizations used in the natural sciences, and could

be applied in the study of social sciences. This new historical method derived scientific and ethical criteria from the system of "historical evolution," which meant that the various stages of evolution could be defined and evaluated. This method was based on the premise that there was a model or law of progress in nature, and that it could be discovered if the subject were suitably presented. This model or law would also apply to the general progress of society and any other aspects of civilization. Understanding the design/method of historical progress made it possible to distinguish the significant from the trivial, and to obtain a criterion of values from a historical perspective, which could fill the gap that occurred following the collapse of the natural law theory. Without resorting to ethical principles, the historical method could thus define the necessary stages of ethical and social progress on which to base its theories.³⁶

The historicist school of thought is based on the fundamental assertion that the essence of social beings cannot be grasped without adopting the historical program to study the social changes throughout history. This intellectual trend was called "historicism" by Karl Popper (1902–1994), who believed that, if it were to be extended further, it would lead to a worship of history.³⁷

The historicists' main criticism of the natural law theory was its assertion that the ideal political system could be established at any time or in any place, irrespective of the current circumstances; whereas they believed that the only legitimate way to understand political systems and institutions was the historical approach. They maintained that these political systems and institutions were merely the natural outcome of their past, and that there was no natural law that was general, fixed, and unchangeable. The law changed according to the needs and circumstances of every nation: it was a creation of the environment and a product of development; it had no objective to realize, and there was no rational will directing and modifying it. It developed from within and could not be developed.³⁸

The natural law theory was under continual attack by these two schools until the entire European cultural atmosphere of the nineteenth century came to be dominated by neutral historical objectivism. A spirit of great optimism prevailed among the intellectuals of the time, thanks to the possibility of discovering and understanding the

underlying facts of history. This material was used as the basis of all intellectual and social structures, for it constituted the only objective and tangible foundation, it was not affected by the subjectivities of the self, and it transcended all measures and criteria.

The German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who was one of Hegel's eminent students, played an important role in expanding this neutral outlook by stating that a historian should merely present the facts as they were.³⁹ After him, generations of historians – German, British, and French – succumbed to this approach. They were encouraged to do so by the positivist philosophers, who considered history to be one of the natural sciences, using observation, experimentation, and documentation alone to reach their conclusions, thus avoiding the interference of metaphysics and mysticism. They were also helped by the British empiricists, who emphasized the experimental nature of knowledge, and the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity. This led to the prevalence, in the European academic circles, of the idea that history was a record of historical facts compromising, in their essence, objective material that is independent of the conclusions deduced from them. These conclusions are merely points of view, which, obviously, everyone is entitled to have. Nevertheless, the historical facts are like holy entities, which should not be tampered with and must be presented in their original form.⁴⁰

Thus far, I have tried to show the necessity of having a fundamental rule based on a comprehensive world-view, which can define life and its aims and set a standard of criteria for human relations so as to explain social phenomena. I have also mentioned the fact that Plato's school of idealism was one of the major intellectual schools that tried to formulate a comprehensive concept of life, the world, and human and social objectives. I have traced the development of this school in European history, and shown how idealism gradually gave way to realistic materialism, which branched into various forms all opposed to the idea of natural law because it was perceived as the last trace of idealism including morality and religion. Realistic materialism then gave way to positivism and non-teleological neutral historicism.

In the following section I shall present the views of Islamic monotheism, which are very different than those of Plato's idealism. Indeed,

its comprehensive concept of life and the world provides answers to the criticisms raised against Plato's idealism, as well as opposing realistic materialism (in its various forms), by modifying its opinions and concepts concerning the philosophy of history and politics.

1.4.2 *Islamic Monotheism and its Impact on Political Thought*

Contrary to Plato's idealism, Islamic monotheism maintains that the material from which the world is formed is a reality that exists independently of reason. However, contrary to realistic materialism, Islamic monotheism does not mean that this material is a common cause of all phenomena of existence. Rather, it transcends both matter and reason, toward an eternal and infinite cause, considered to be the basic principle underlying the source of all that we can comprehend of this world on both the material and the abstract levels.⁴¹ The existence of this infinite cause, God, is a necessity of being. He has made Himself known by His Names, His Attributes and His deeds, which were revealed through His chosen prophets and recorded in Revealed Books. When people believe in this One Transcendental God, and accept His supreme sovereignty over their private and public affairs, their belief or monotheistic creed will be the source of a comprehensive vision of the world and life, and will provide the mold that shapes and regulates human relations.

The Islamic belief (or Islamic monotheism) is, therefore, a system of normative values which acts as a criterion for identifying the major social objectives, evaluating institutions and justifying the claims of legitimacy. It justifies political power as well as the use of force and the right to obedience. Rule and sovereignty are in the hands of God alone. Furthermore, the writing and enforcement of laws are not restricted to a particular philosopher or a particular category of people – as stated by Plato in his *Republic*.⁴² Indeed, Islamic monotheism rejects the idea that philosophers are endowed with a perfect mind, and that they can be entrusted with legislation and the management of social affairs, based on the assumption that they are specialists in the understanding of the higher social objectives of the community and can formulate the values to engender progress and regulate all the relations within that community. Instead, it recognizes a messenger who mediates between the Creator and His creation, conveying and

explaining His Message. He has no legislative authority nor command of obedience, except in his position as messenger of the One Who commands surrender and submission.

The Shari'ah (or Divine Law) which is revealed to the messenger does not resemble the natural law, which is acquired by intuition, induction, or experimentation. Rather, it is a direct injunction addressed to the human mind and will, to which they may submit or against which they may rebel. The religious law is not inherent in the nature of things, nor is it deduced from the nature of social relations. It is a law with an objective content and clear language that is well defined and easy to understand. Moreover, it does not emanate from a source of unknown attributes or ambiguous existence (like Plato's world of ideals), but descends from a Source of known qualities, constant presence, and acknowledged sovereignty.

Some scholars have called this school of thought *divine realism*, in order to distinguish it from Plato's idealism and realistic materialism.⁴³ However, we prefer to refer to it as *Islamic monotheism*, because this term expresses the fundamentals of the Islamic creed, which was revealed to all the prophets and messengers, from Adam to Muhammad. It is based on the recognition of and surrender to the One God, Who possesses absolute attributes and unquestioned sovereignty, and Whose injunctions to the human race were revealed to the messengers and recorded in the Books.⁴⁴

This clarification shows that the objections raised against Plato's idealism, namely, concerning the ambiguity of its source of authority, cannot be leveled at Islamic monotheism. However, when one compares monotheism and the natural law theory, despite monotheism's criticism of the latter, there are several points of resemblance between them. For instance, Islamic monotheism does not forbid anyone from stating that there is a law inherent in the nature of social relations, which the human mind can discover and use as guidance, especially since it is a religion that appeals to the mind. Yet, it refuses to endow the human mind with divine powers, such as entrusting it with the office of legislation, because legislation and sovereignty are the prerogatives of God alone. However, this does not imply blind adherence, for legal obligation is based on the mind and is invalid without it.

Furthermore, some of the criticisms made by positivists and historicists against the natural law theory may also be directed at Islamic monotheism. For instance, the positivists' criticism of the fact that the naturalists demand that legislation be attached to moral principles, could be more strongly directed at Islamic monotheism, which not only espouses such moral principles, but also considers them to be the bases of human society and a necessary adjunct to legislation and politics. In response to this criticism, monotheists could nevertheless say that the separation of politics from moral values – as advocated by the positivists – is not logically sound. Indeed, as any philosopher may assert, the mere existence of political science, even in the neutral form advocated by the positivists, implies a distinction between what is political and what is non-political in public social affairs. In other words, it implies a definition of the political act. Yet, a political act cannot be defined without reference to the society in which it occurred and the state or the individuals that performed that particular act. Similarly, a society or a state cannot be adequately defined without reference to its aims, which would, in turn, imply an admission of a 'criterion' by which that society may be judged. Thus, politics is reduced once more to normative values.⁴⁵ Moreover, the separation of political facts from moral normative values is not even supported by neutral experimental science, which would expect a value judgment to be connected with an overall vision of life, the universe, humankind, science, and politics.

The objections of historicists to the natural law theory are more serious and demand a closer look – not with the view of defending that theory, but with the hope that by studying the nature of those objections, we can reach a better understanding of the theory of Islamic monotheism. The basic criticisms made were, firstly, the fact that the philosophers who supported the natural law theory asserted the existence of a natural law which was universal, fixed, and unchangeable, and that there was a rational will which directed and adapted that law in accordance with certain metaphysical objectives. The second criticism was that these philosophers consequently saw the ideal political system as a fixed system that could be established in any time or place.

As such, these objections could also be directed against Islamic

monotheism as it implies fixed and unchangeable laws, and its law is controlled by an *external* power that can adapt it to suit certain metaphysical objectives. Islamic monotheism is also an ideal law, independent of historical circumstances. However, all these objections collapse once it becomes clear that Islamic monotheism is governed by two dimensions: one that is fixed and unchangeable, and the other that is expedient and changeable.⁴⁶ Indeed, all the religious laws revealed to and conveyed successively by messengers throughout history constitute the developing aspect of a religion that takes into account the interests of the human race and the changes in its historical circumstances, whereas the origin of the religion, which represents the fixed aspect, is not prone to historical or any other changes. Thus, the Shari'ah provides ample space for changes in circumstances, and does not relate every event to a legal text, because, as the Muslim scholars say, "texts are limited and events are unlimited." However, these changes in circumstances are not given the power to initiate the laws and political objectives or to control society.

If the historical school would like historical developments to be considered when delineating the political principles in society, these considerations are (already) specified, fully acknowledged, and practiced in the monotheistic law. However, if the historical school demands, in addition, that the fixed origin of the religious creed be subjected to historical circumstances, it would amount to demanding people to believe in and revere history rather than to believe in and revere Allah. The fact that Islamic monotheism rejects this aspect of historicism should not be interpreted as a means to undermine the Islamic creed. If that were so, the difference between Islam and historicism would be that of axiomatic principles that are espoused by choice and adopted by belief, and could not be settled by rational or historical argumentation.

When some philosophers and scholars, influenced by the historical school, studied monotheism as manifested in its final message, they did not observe the above-mentioned distinction between the fixed and the developing dimensions of the Islamic creed. In fact, they totally ignored its fixed and absolute dimension, and concentrated on the developing or historical dimension as the only axis around which all the other aspects of religion revolved. As historicists maintained

that systems, institutions, and their inherent thought were the outcome of their past and an inevitable product of their historical circumstances, these philosophers followed suit by saying that Islam, as the concluding message of monotheism was – both as a belief and a law – a natural outcome of the historical developments in the Arabian Peninsula and the particular psychological, historical, and practical circumstances with which Muhammad was involved. They based their argument in particular on their assertion that the Makkan period and the verses of the Qur'an that were revealed at that time do not mention any political principles or positive values that would encourage people to build a society and a civilization. In fact, they maintained further that the Makkan Qur'an is dominated by a pessimistic spirit, warning people about the impending destruction of the world and threatening them with eternal damnation.

The essential aim of this book is to prove that the Makkan Qur'an, in particular, constitutes a basic doctrinal source for both political and social philosophy, and that the repeated references to the Day of Judgment do not contradict its philosophical and political content. If it succeeds, then the assertions of historicists and evolutionists will necessarily have to be withdrawn, and the two dimensions of Islamic monotheism will be confirmed – namely, that one is fixed and doctrinal, whereas the other stems from within the creed and evolves in accordance with its overall concepts and transcendental axioms.

Whereas some scholars have tried to show the similarities between evolutionary historicism and Islamic monotheism, others have tried to highlight their differences and have declared that Islamic monotheism disrupts the historical sequence and ignores its significance. However, this can be totally refuted, for the Qur'an itself mentions the concepts of succession and alternation among peoples as necessary laws of political sociology. The Qur'an employs and nurtures historical consciousness and does not disrupt or disdain it.⁴⁷

To examine further the relationship of Islamic monotheism with history, we may read the following verses from the Makkan Qur'an:

It is He Who has made you inheritors in the earth. If, then, any reject [Allah], their rejection [works] against themselves: their rejection but adds to the odium for the unbelievers in the sight of their Lord; their rejection but adds to [their own] undoing. (35:39)

Your Lord is Self-Sufficient, full of Mercy: if it were His Will, He could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom He will as your successors, as He raised you from the posterity of other people. (6:133)

It is He Who has made you inheritors of the earth, and Who has raised some of you above others in ranks so that He may try you in the gifts He has given you. For your Lord is quick in punishment; yet He is, indeed, Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (6:165)

These verses are not addressed specifically to believers or non-believers, but to humankind in general. They clearly indicate that historical developments are the product of the free endeavor of human beings, and may lead to the establishment of a flourishing civilization or to its destruction and annihilation, and its replacement with the civilizations of other peoples. The historical development indicated in these verses by the succession and renovation of generations sounds similar to Darwin's idea of the "survival of the fittest," which was later developed by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), Auguste Comte, and Karl Marx, each adapting it to his own field of study. However, this similarity is merely superficial. Indeed, Comte maintained that evolution was based on a rational tendency, inherent in the universe, which led automatically and definitely towards continual progress. Every historical stage is therefore closer to maturity and good than the previous one.⁴⁸

However, the Qur'an does not support this assertion, and it is also belied by historical events. Moreover, there is nothing in the Qur'an that suggests that monotheism is a message which rejects history *per se*. Rather, the Qur'an invites the Prophet and those who follow him to draw lessons from history. The general objective of the Qur'anic narratives is not to entertain, but to link the Prophet, his Companions and Successors with the historical dimension and to teach them wisdom by making them aware of the experiences of previous peoples throughout history. Al-Qurṭubī understands the verse "We have caused the Word to reach them, so that they may receive admonition" (28:51), to mean that God sent the Word to humankind by successive messengers. On the other hand, Abū 'Ubaydah and al-Akhfash understand it to mean that God had completed the conveyance of the word.⁴⁹ Yusuf Ali explains this verse (28:51) in the following way:

Before this verse was revealed, the Quraysh might have said that the Word of Allah had come to the Hebrews in their tongue or in Greek which was used by the Hebrews in the time of Jesus. Now that Word is brought to their own doors, in their own Arabic tongue, by a man of their own race and family. Surely they have no excuse for remaining strangers to the higher moral and spiritual law.

These interpretations of the Qur'anic verses were not unknown to the Muslim historians. For instance, Ibn al-'Athīr says, enumerating the benefits of history:

When kings and those in high positions of authority comprehend what [the history books] relate about the deeds of the unjust and oppressive rulers, and see how their deeds are recorded in [history] books and reported by successive generations, and then ponder over the infamy and unpleasant criticism those deeds had provoked, the destruction those rulers had wrought upon their countries, the loss of life and wealth, and the widespread corruption and evil ... they will be repulsed by what they read and will refrain from committing similar deeds. Similarly, when they read about rulers reputed for their just and righteous deeds and how they caused their countries to flourish and their wealth to multiply, they will be pleased with what they read and will try to follow the same path. They will also benefit from the knowledge of the good counsel followed by those good rulers, who protected their countries against enemies, and saved their beautiful towns and great kingdoms. If [history books] contained nothing more than that, it would be honor enough.⁵⁰

This passage clearly shows that Ibn al-'Athīr connects history and politics. In fact, he suggests that history should be used by "kings and those in high positions of authority" because he feels – rightly – that a proper knowledge and understanding of history would help to understand social laws, and would, in turn, help to protect towns and kingdoms by warding off all harm and aggression.

To say this, Ibn al-'Athīr must have examined the Qur'anic narratives. Indeed, though brief, his statement reflects the original Islamic view of history and its philosophy. Anticipating the comments made centuries later, it is an early reply to the assertion that "Islam intended to uproot everything connected with paganism in pre-Islamic Arabia," – an assertion that relies on the hadith: "Islam effaces whatever came before it." This issue of eradication discouraged many

scholars from pursuing their studies of the pre-Islamic era, and encouraged them instead to efface all possible connections with the old order. In other words, they did not differentiate between that which was connected with paganism, like idols and images, and that which was connected with culture, literature and history. In doing so, they followed the example of the Christians in Europe in the early sixth century AC. The unfortunate result of this attitude was the loss of annals covering the pre-Islamic period, and the assumption that Islamic history, or rather the history to which Muslims can refer, began with the Year of the Elephant.⁵¹ However, this claim can easily be refuted by pointing out the fact that major Muslim historians, such as Ṭabarī, Ibn al-'Athīr, Ya'qūbī and many others, did not begin their historical accounts with the Year of the Elephant, but with the history of creation – not only of Adam and Eve, but also that of the Throne, the heavens and the earth, prior to the creation of the human race.

This idea of the *historicity of religion* is similar to the idea of the *mythicality* of the Qur'an. Those who assert that the Qur'an is a myth are trying to restrict it to the past, without allowing it to be carried into the present. Indeed, those who state that the history of Islam began with the Year of the Elephant, want to restrict it and sever it from the past, so that Muslims cannot benefit from the lessons that can be drawn from the history of monotheism. However, the Qur'an itself refutes the assertion that the Revelation of Islam eradicates and disregards all earlier history, and affirms that it is a guiding light that is connected to the entire history of humanity. The Qur'an did not come to erase all that preceded it in the way of thought, social institutions, and development in order to start an Islamic life from nothing. Rather, Islam came to join and resume the cycle of revealed religions. Thus, every value that is right and good is acceptable in the Islamic value-system, because it is the fruit of one of the other branches of monotheism.

Some of the early Companions believed that Islam must begin at a "point zero," or, in other words, that in order to undergo a "second birth," anyone who embraces Islam must be completely severed from his/her past.⁵² They would therefore ask the Prophet whether particular pre-Islamic values, relations, and institutions could be carried over to the new Islamic life. They asked him whether there was

continuity between pre-Islamic and Islamic situations or whether there should be a complete break between them in every aspect of life, including the relationship between pre-Islamic social history and the new social reality of the Ummah.

We read in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in the section entitled “The case of the unbeliever who embraces Islam:”

Abū Shihāb relates that he was told by ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr that Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām told him that he had asked the Prophet: “In the time of *jāhiliyyah*, I used to practice some religious acts like alms-giving, manumission and helping relatives. Do these acts carry a reward?” The Prophet replied: “You have embraced Islam following your good deeds.”

In another anecdote reported by Muslim, Ibn Ḥizām responded to the Prophet’s comment by saying: “I swear that I will do in Islam everything I did in *jāhiliyyah*.”⁵³

Commentators differ greatly about the meaning of the Prophet’s reply. Some say that unbelievers who become Muslim will not be rewarded for the deeds that they performed before embracing Islam, in the same way that they will not be punished for their sins. Others say that unbelievers who embrace Islam and die as Muslims will be rewarded for all their good deeds, even those performed before entering Islam. They quote a hadith in which the Prophet says that an unbeliever who becomes Muslim will have all his previous good deeds rewarded and all his previous bad deeds pardoned. This seems to be the predominant view among Muslim scholars,⁵⁴ which clearly indicates that Islam does not exclude good deeds and institutions, but encourages and enhances them after taking them out of their aimless condition and placing them into one of awareness within the monotheistic frame of reference. The deeds that Islam came to remove were only those of evil.

Another anecdote in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* relates that Abū Shamāsah said:

We went to visit ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ when he was in the throes of death. He wept for a long time, and turned his face to the wall. His son said to him: “Father, why do you cry? Didn’t the Prophet himself give you the good news of happiness in the Hereafter?” He [‘Amr] then turned over and said: “The best of our savings [for the Hereafter] is the *shahādah*, that

is, declaring that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. But I used to stride about in a three-layered robe, and nobody hated the Prophet more than I did, and nobody wanted to capture him and kill him more than I did. Had I died in that condition, I should have been in Hell. But when I was blessed with Islam in my heart, by the grace of God, I came to the Prophet and said: 'Extend your right hand, I want to swear my fealty.' When he extended his hand, I pulled back mine. He said: 'What is the matter with you, 'Amr?' I said: 'I want a promise.' 'What promise?' he asked. I said: 'That I should be pardoned.' He said: 'Did you not know that Islam effaces what came before it, and that emigration effaces what was before it, and that pilgrimage effaces what went before it?'⁵⁵

This explains the difference between the case of 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ who wanted a pardon for his sins in *jāhiliyyah*, and that of Ḥakīm ibn Hizām who asked about the recompense for his good deeds before entering Islam. The two demands are obviously different, though they are both concerned with deeds done before Islam. The Prophet further explained that embracing Islam does not efface both good and evil deeds: Islam espouses and rewards the values of good and right, and pardons the evil deeds. It is reported that during the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet destroyed all the idols, because they were symbols of falsehood and paganism, while saying: "Truth has come; falsehood has perished." Later, religious scholars were of the opinion that idols made of gold, silver, iron, or lead, could be sold and the money used for a good purpose, provided that they were turned into raw metal first.⁵⁶ Thus, Islam does not annihilate things categorically, but reorients their purpose to bring human beings closer to their Lord instead of estranging them from Him.

Noticing the huge psychological change that occurs when a person embraces Islam, the late Sayyid Quṭb overlooked the issue of the adoption of and reward for previous good deeds. Instead, he stated that the Companions were a unique generation that would never recur in history. Although this may be acceptable as a form of praise and recognition of their supremacy, Quṭb went as far as saying that their generation put an end to previous history, and that all that preceded them was *jahilite* and sheer evil that should be buried and forgotten. This is an incorrect view of the philosophy of history from the Islamic perspective described earlier. However, if this statement were to be a

summary of Quṭb's ideology – which we believe to be the case – then it would lead to a political philosophy and a program of social change that are very close to the program of radical uprooting and revolutionary upheaval. In his book, *Milestones on the Road*, he affirms in the chapter entitled “A Unique Qur’anic Generation:”

1. The presence of such a large number of Companions as those who followed the Prophet is a unique phenomenon. Although other similar charismatic individuals were known throughout history, a phenomenon of this nature has never been seen again.

2. The Companions were unique individuals for two reasons: (a) their source of inspiration was the Qur’an alone; and (b) by receiving their inspiration from that source alone, they completely severed themselves from *jāhiliyyah* and “underwent a rebirth to start an Islamic life as if from ‘point zero.’”

3. After the generation of the Companions, other sources of knowledge were added to the original Qur’anic source, such as Greek philosophy and logic, Israelite argumentation, Christian theology, and Persian mythology. The resulting mixture was to affect the entire succeeding generations, none of which resembled in the least that of the Companions.

4. Quṭb concludes that resorting to the pure source that inspired those men is our only means to formulate correct values, style of government, politics, economics, and requirements of life. Thus, it becomes essential to disconnect ourselves from “our” *jāhiliyyah*, with all its good and bad components – though Quṭb sees hardly any traces of good in *jāhiliyyah* – and resort to that original source with the desire to receive and obey, and not to study for mere enjoyment.⁵⁷

To follow the program suggested by Sayyid Quṭb would lead to problems, because, as John Locke states in his theory of knowledge, it is not possible to resort to the Qur’an with purely blank minds,⁵⁸ if we do so, as our understanding will (automatically) be tainted with experiences emanating from our own specific historical, social, and situational reality. It is true that we should not approach the Qur’an with preconceived ideas and theories in an attempt to prove and support them. However, despite every effort on our part, and no matter how hard we try to be objective, our understanding of the Qur’an is bound to be influenced by our own experience. This cannot

be avoided. Similarly, it is inevitable that there will be an inner conflict between the facts offered by the Qur'an and those offered by other sources. On the other hand, the Qur'an itself refers to other sources, and engages its reader with other cultures that have values, relations, and institutions that are *jahilite* in origin and orientation. Moreover, we hardly ever find in the Qur'an an abstract idea that can be singled out and applied as such, except in the area of rituals and specific prescriptions, which are not open to rationalization or interpretation. The conflict that arises from the discrepancy between one historical incident and another, or one form of application and another, is also unavoidable. Close examination of the different historical situations and circumstances is therefore essential before any application can be attempted. For instance, it would not be wise simply to quote and apply the experience of Ṣāliḥ or Mūsā (Moses). Rather, one should study the Text closely in order to understand its intents and general philosophy, and review the experiences of messengers and nations as thoroughly as possible, in order to sift out what is limited by situational reality. Only then can one discern which aspects of those experiences are conveyable and useful to our purpose. This is exactly what is referred to in the Qur'an as *'ibrāh* or historical wisdom. Mawdūdī, supporting this idea, says:

Anyone wishing to study in depth the Qur'ānic view-point on any particular problem of life should, first of all, study all the significant strands of human thought concerning that problem. Ancient and modern works on the subject should be studied. Unresolved problems where human thinking seems to have gotten stuck should be noted. The Qur'ān should then be studied with these unresolved problems in mind, with a view to finding out what solutions the Qur'ān has to offer.⁵⁹

Therefore Quṭb's claim that the cycle of religion began with the revelation of the Qur'an, and that the cycle of human history began with the Companions' generation cannot be true. Indeed, Muhammad was not the first prophet, nor did the religious message begin with him. Rather, human history began with Adam and his descent to earth; then successive messengers were sent, and they were obeyed by some generations (such as that of the Companions) and rejected by others.

Moreover, it cannot be said that the Qur'an does not mix with

earlier cultures and philosophies. Although the Qur'an is a revealed Book, and is therefore unlike all other sources, when one examines the issues that it covers and the methods that it espouses, one can see clearly how it resorts to common sense, acknowledged moral norms, human reason, and the lessons and social laws learned from history – which are all products of initial monotheism. No source of knowledge or method of human intellect is totally free of these components.

Similarly, it is obvious that the minds of the Companions were not devoid of traces of previous experiences, especially when one considers the fact that most of them were physically and mentally mature when they chose to enter Islam and follow the Prophet. Their minds must have been impregnated with all the various sources of knowledge available at the time, whether local, international, pagan, or Abrahamic. It is thus clearly absurd to say that they relied on this pure source – the Qur'an – alone.

In his call for immunity against mixed cultural sources, Sayyid Quṭb mentions the incident when the Prophet snatched a page of the Torah from the hands of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He interprets this to mean that the Prophet wanted to put the Companions in a period of intellectual incubation and pure formation, and not expose them to distorted ideas. It is not clear whether, in saying that, Quṭb was influenced by what he had read about the Chinese Cultural Revolution or by Springler's theory, which states that every culture is a special organic structure (though this does not mean that such a culture has no connection with other cultures preceding or following it).

Moreover, the Qur'an does not consider the earlier Scriptures, including the Torah, to be alien sources which must be shunned. On the contrary, it affirms that the principles of monotheism which it espouses are found in all previous revealed Scriptures, and that the Qur'an endorses those principles. The Qur'an quotes the Israelite testimony about the genuine prophethood of Muhammad:

The unbelievers say: "You are no messenger." Say: "God and those who have knowledge of the Book are enough witnesses between me and you." (13:43)

Say: "Do you not see: if [this teaching] is from God, and you reject it, and a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity

[with earlier scriptures] and has believed while you are arrogant, [how unjust you are]? Truly, God does not guide an unjust people.” (46:10)

The monotheism heralded by Muhammad is described as having been announced “in the revealed Books of former peoples” (The Qur’an, 26:196), “in the Books of the earlier [revelations] – the Books of Abraham and Moses” (The Qur’an, 87:18–19). Some of those who were affected by Jewish and Christian Scriptures (such as ‘Abdullah ibn Sallām), embraced Islam despite the fact that these Scriptures were distorted, or perhaps because of this fact. They were not mistreated, nor was their previous knowledge renounced or their Scriptures confiscated by the Messenger. No incident has been reported in which the Torah was burned or barred from circulation. The Qur’an has no misgivings about the ancient Scriptures – even after they were distorted and contaminated with Greek and Persian cultures. Nor does it shun the people who believe in those Scriptures. It challenges only the rabbis and monks because they used to reveal some parts of their Books and conceal others, for fear their falsehood might be exposed. The Qur’an says: “Say: ‘Bring the Torah and study it, if you were men of truth’” (3:93).

The anecdote Quṭb mentioned about the Prophet snatching a page of the Torah from ‘Umar’s hand is not endorsed by reliable books of Hadith, and is, in itself, highly questionable.⁶⁰ Indeed, ‘Umar did not know Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic. If he had learned anything from Jewish books, it must therefore have been translated into Arabic – which is highly improbable at that early time – and he would have needed the help of Jewish rabbis. However, the Jews who lived in the desert and towns of the Ḥijāz did not have a detailed knowledge of the Torah or the ancient languages. They had, over the years, adopted a bedouin lifestyle that was very different from that of their cultural origins, and were consequently hardly capable of preaching Judaism. Any effort that ‘Umar might have made to learn more about Judaism – if he ever tried – would therefore have been labor lost. If the anecdote is to be entertained, perhaps this is what aroused the Prophet’s displeasure.

Nevertheless, there was a general tendency to accuse the Jews of falsehood. Indeed, they used to assert their knowledge of the ancient books and religions. Because the bedouin of the Arabian peninsula were illiterate and knew little about the Abrahamic religion, the Jews

assumed a type of semi-holiness and acquired a cultural authority which made it difficult to ascertain the truth of what they said. Their assertions could not be checked because the sources of their knowledge were not available at the time, and since some of their learned men knew Hebrew as well as Arabic, they had acquired the authority and legitimacy to translate, explain, and interpret the Divine Law. Al-Bukhārī quotes a hadith, in which Abū Hurayrah says:

The People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and explain it to the Muslims in Arabic. The Messenger said, “Do not believe the people of the Book and do not disbelieve them. Say: ‘We believe in Allah, in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you.’”⁶¹

This is, of course, the objective stance, for it would be better to suspend judgment if one (like ‘Umar and others) had no access to the required means of scientific research into religious matters.

Another reason why the Muslims did not trust the Jews was that they often sided with the unbelievers against the Prophet and tried to use their Scriptures to oppose Islam. Al-Bukhārī reports that Ḥamīd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān heard Mu‘āwiyah talk to a group of Quraysh in Madinah and mention Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. Mu‘āwiyah said: “Ka‘b was one of the more truthful reporters among the People of the Book, though we suspect him at times of being a liar.”⁶² Thus, even after he embraced Islam, this Jew remained suspect in the eyes of the Muslims when he reported hadiths. However, because such suspicion and apprehension could easily turn into blind prejudice against anything coming from a Jewish source, the Prophet advised his Companions to be rational and fair-minded, and told them that they should neither accept everything, nor reject everything on the basis that it was all falsehood. This not only clearly indicates that the Prophet recognized the existence of some truth in the Jewish lore, but it also shows that Islam did not close the door against the Jewish heritage so that nothing of it could penetrate the generation of the Companions – as Quṭb alleges.

I would like to conclude this chapter by returning to the concept of succession and the fact that the believers who are to inherit the earth after *jāhiliyyah* – as they are required to do by the Qur’an – do not have to start the cycle of monotheism from “point zero.” Rather,

every good action achieved by the *jahilites*, from experience or induction, will be consummated in Islam and can be employed in the establishment of the new faith. Islam adapts intentions and objectives to relate them to the objectives and motives of monotheism. This cannot be achieved by uprooting and destruction, nor can it necessarily be done by intellectual incubation and self-containment. All these concepts will be examined in greater detail when the Prophet's endeavors to establish the first Islamic state are discussed in Chapter Three.

Critically examining the Western, secular, approach to formal education the author contests the value of an education system focusing solely on the intellectual and physical aspects of human development. The methodological aim and structure of this approach are compared to those of Islam which she notes gives credence to the importance of spiritual and religious factors, as well as scholarly ones, with the overall objective of forming a whole and holy human being who, instead of resisting the paradoxes of life, uses their interrelatedness as a means of personal and societal development. One interesting factor examined within the broader framework of the study is the area of female spirituality, an element, which the author argues, is vastly under-represented in prevalent Islamic literature.

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