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Signature:

Philip Christopher Dorroll

Date

Modern by Tradition: Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī and the New Turkish Theology

By

Philip Christopher Dorroll

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions

Dr. Vincent Cornell

Advisor

Dr. Scott Kugle

Committee Member

Dr. Gordon Newby

Committee Member

Dr. Devin Stewart

Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa J. Tedesco, Ph.D.

Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

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By

Philip Christopher Dorroll

M.A., Indiana University, 2009

Advisor: Vincent Cornell, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate Division of Religion

West and South Asian Religions

2013

Abstract

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Liberal reformist Islamic theology has a long history in the Republic of Turkey. This tradition has roots in the late Ottoman period and remains influential in Turkey. Despite the importance of this tradition of thought, it remains understudied due to the predominance of certain analytical paradigms in the study of Islam in Turkey. These paradigms assume that modernity and Islamic tradition are inherently incompatible. Previous studies have therefore neglected Islamic thinkers in Turkey who do not see modernity and Islamic tradition as incompatible. This dissertation aims to address this gap in the scholarly literature by analyzing the works of a group of contemporary liberal Turkish theologians and discussing their interpretation of an important ninth century Sunnī dogmatic theologian, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī. This dissertation will argue that the use of premodern traditions of Islamic thought to support modernity demonstrates that modernity and tradition are not dichotomous, but that modernity is predicated upon specific reinterpretations of tradition.

Chapter One analyzes the dichotomy posited in the scholarly literature between tradition and modernity and utilizes the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer to demonstrate that tradition and modernity should not be seen as dichotomous, but that change and reform should be seen as rooted in tradition itself. Chapter Two analyzes the works of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī and attempts to identify the aspects of his theology that are most interesting to modern Turkish commentators, specifically his realist and empiricist theological epistemology. Chapter Three analyzes the reception of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's theological ideas by his later followers, and argues that his realist epistemology was abandoned by later Māturīdī tradition. Chapter Four discusses how Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī came to be identified with modern Turkish national tradition and analyzes the key elements of the modern rediscovery of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's realism by a school of liberal Turkish theology that I refer to as "Turkish Neo-Māturīdism." Chapter Five details the political aspects of the "Turkish Neo-Māturīdī" school of thought, including its posited ideological enemies and the ideological interventions it makes into Turkish politics.

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result of my extraordinary experiences living and studying in Turkey at various times since 2006. It reflects some of the most pressing questions that have animated my interest since I first began studying religion. I first owe my thanks to my advisor Vincent Cornell, who has with great patience guided me through every step of this process, and has along the way provided innumerable helpful suggestions and comments, and helped me immensely in turning my obscure sounding translations of some difficult Arabic texts into readable English. He has in addition helped to render my own English writing into readable English. I owe him enormous thanks for all the time and effort he has put into my success, from beginning to end. My dissertation committee, Scott Kugle, Gordon Newby, and Devin Stewart, has given me the tools and suggestions to turn this project into a successful basis for future research and publishing. I also owe great thanks to my M.A. advisor, Kevin Jaques, who helped me start on the path that I am now completing. I also will always appreciate the dedication of my undergraduate professors who encouraged me to begin this journey in the first place: Stacy Holden, Jacqueline Marina, and Thomas Ryba.

Above all, I owe my greatest thanks to my brilliant partner Courtney, who has supported me in all that I do and has been the foundation of all of my successes. She has helped me in more ways than I can possibly acknowledge. This, and any future works that I have the privilege to write or undertake, are dedicated to her.

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INTRODUCTION: MODERNITY AND SECULARISM IN THE STUDY OF ISLAM
IN MODERN TURKEY

We cannot stop now. We will surely go forward, because we must. The nation must clearly know that civilization is a fire so powerful that it burns those that are indifferent to it; it obliterates them.

-Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1925¹

Kemalist and Islamist Dichotomies

Modern Turkey is the result of a vision. This vision was a determined and radical incarnation of a long series of social, political, and economic reform programs that had begun in the closing centuries of the Ottoman Empire. These programs included experiments with modern notions of citizenship, constitutionalism, gender equality, secularization, and nationalism.² The invasion of Anatolia by the Allies following World War I spurred a national resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a war hero of the battle of Gallipoli. The “national struggle” (*Milli Mücadele*) ended with the total expulsion of Allied forces from Anatolia and the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Atatürk became the new nation’s first president, and

¹ Mustafa Selim İmece, *Atatürk’ün Şapka Devriminde Kastamonu ve İnebolu Seyahatları, 1925* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959), 18.

² On the significant continuities between Ottoman reforms and the Kemalist political program, see Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1964); Paul Dumont, “The Origins of Kemalist Ideology,” in *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*, ed. Jacob M. Landau (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 25-44; Şerif Mardin, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey,” in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, eds. Ali Kazancigil and Ergun Özbudun (London, UK: C. Hurst and Company, 1981), 191-219.

implemented a social revolution called the “Turkish Revolution” (*Türk İnkılabı*) that took Ottoman political and social reforms to an extreme conclusion by abolishing all vestiges of Ottoman institutions in the country, including the Caliphate, the Sultanate, religious law, and the madrasa system, replacing them with a nationalized education system, a secular law code and court system, and a secular parliamentary democracy.

Modern Turkey was founded on these dramatic changes. Every Turkish government elected since 1950 has been bound to uphold them and has had to deal with their effects. This dissertation argues that the shift to liberal democracy in the period of the early Turkish Republic had important roots in an influential strain of Turkish theological modernism that has been neglected in previous studies of the relationship between religion and modernization in modern Turkey. Theoretically, this dissertation is concerned with the interaction between social modernity and religious tradition, in particular how certain traditions of Turkish Islamic modernist theology used Islamic tradition as a crucible for socially modern changes such as the adoption of secular democracy. A consideration of Kemalist modernity will open the path that our analysis of modern liberal Turkish theology will follow.

Modernity was the goal of the Turkish Revolution. Kemalist philosophy argued that Turkey and the rest of the Islamic world was slipping behind the West in both technological and moral progress at an alarming rate. In this view, outmoded religious and cultural institutions prevented the Turkish people from fully participating in the inexorable advance of world civilization, a state of individual freedom, social equality, and technological progress. In the Kemalist view, the Ottoman approach of piecemeal reform (*ıslahat*) was insufficient to meet the pace of modern transformation. Revolution,

inkılap, was needed, a term that Paul Dumont insightfully describes as implying “radical change executed with order and method. Unlike *islahat*... it does not apply to partial improvements in certain limited sectors of social life, but rather attempts at social metamorphosis.”³ According to the Kemalist program, this metamorphosis involved the wholesale adoption of modern civilization: “For a Kemalist, to be an *inkılabcı* [revolutionary] meant to devote oneself to the cause of modernization and to struggle relentlessly to transform Turkey into a rapidly advancing country capable of playing an important role in the chorus of European nations.”⁴ This move toward modernity was a shift from the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge, from the backwardness of Ottoman lethargy to the dynamism of republican social transformation. As Sina Akşin explains, “Philosophically, Kemalism is a movement of...enlightenment” with a humanist component.⁵ Modernity was totalizing for the Kemalists: to live in it meant prosperity and harmony, to live without it meant decline and chaos.

Kemalism politicizes the notion of modernity in the Schmittian sense of the term. According to Carl Schmitt, the “political” refers to the most basic antagonistic distinction in human existence, the distinction between friend and enemy. The notion of the political expresses the conflict that occurs when another group of people threatens one’s way of life, thereby setting up an irreconcilable relationship of opposition between

³ Dumont, “Kemalist,” 34.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sina Akşin, “The Nature of the Kemalist Revolution,” in *The Turkish Republic at Seventy-Five Years: Progress, Development, Change* (1999): 16.

the two parties.⁶ For Kemalism, modernity is political in this sense: it is not a morally neutral state but is an ultimate moral good that one either rejects or accepts. To reject modernity constitutes a direct threat to those who accept it, a threat that for the good of the nation must be eliminated. This politicization of modernity results in what Hasan Bülent Kahraman aptly describes as the “politics of culture” in Kemalism.⁷ Certain cultural forms are given political value, i.e., they are grouped according to a friend-enemy distinction. It may be better, then, as Çağlar Keyder suggests, to describe Kemalism as “modernizationist” instead of simply “modernist.”⁸ To borrow a phrase from Talal Asad, for the Kemalists “modernity is a project,” a project with absolute normative and moral value that can only be supported or opposed.⁹ It has friends and enemies, but no neutral observers. It is, as Mustafa Kemal observed, a burning fire whose moral inexorability consumes all who oppose it.

Paradoxically, some challenges to Kemalist modernity adopted the Kemalist dichotomy between the modern versus the traditional and the secular versus the religious. These challenges came from primarily conservative Islamist movements that rose to prominence between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s before their popularity fell in the wake of widespread support of the pro-democracy, center-right alternative

⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 27.

⁷ Hasan Bülent Kahraman, “From Culture of Politics to Politics of Culture: Reflections on Turkish Modernity,” in *Remaking Turkey: Globalization, Alternative Modernities, and Democracy*, ed. Fuat E. Keyman (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2007), 48.

⁸ Çağlar Keyder, “Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 48.

⁹ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13.

offered by Turkey's current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party.¹⁰ They assumed the Kemalist politicization of modernity, but reversed its moral value. For them, modernity was at best a worrying social development and at worst the greatest calamity to befall the Muslim community in centuries. These conservative movements equated modernity with Kemalism and Westernism, arguing that both were inherently oppressive and antithetical to religion. They were led by a vanguard of Islamist intellectuals who argued for the fundamental incompatibility of Islam and modernity; Ali Bulaç's work is perhaps the most well-known example of this type. Bulaç famously equates feminism, the notion of universal human rights, capitalism, and secularism as vehicles of Western hegemony and therefore argues that Turkey must turn to Islamic notions of the state to preserve its moral and cultural independence from foreign domination.¹¹ For Bulaç and others of his type the religion of Islam, not modernity, is the answer to the needs of social development and progress: to stand in their way meant destruction. For the Turkish Islamists, it was modernity, not tradition that had to be overcome.

These early Islamist movements were part of a larger questioning of the Kemalist political and social paradigm that became part of mainstream intellectual

¹⁰ On the (sometimes problematic) incorporation of radical Islamists into center-right democratic parties in Turkey, see Michelangelo Guida, "The New Islamists' Understanding of Democracy in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 11:3 (September 2010): 347-370; and Binnaz Toprak, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 6:2 (June 2005): 167-186.

¹¹ See Ali Bulaç, *Din ve Modernizm* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1995). On this intellectual movement in general see Sena Karasipahi, *Muslims in Modern Turkey: Kemalism, Modernism, and the Revolt of the Islamic Intellectuals* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Michael E. Meeker, "The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey," in Richard Tapper, ed., *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics, and Literature in a Secular State* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 189-219; and Binnaz Toprak, "Islamist Intellectuals of the 1980s in Turkey," *Current Turkish Thought* 62 (1987), 1-19.

discussions following the 1980 military coup. Since that time, open debate on the nature of Kemalism and how it should be understood has become central to Turkish intellectual life.¹² As M. Hakan Yavuz has shown, this plurality of ideological voices was a result of the implementation of economic and social liberalization after 1980.¹³ Economic liberalization mobilized religious discourse in Turkish politics by economically empowering business owners drawn from more conservative areas of Turkey, such as central Anatolia, who previously had been kept in check by the traditional Kemalist statist economy. The rise of the new “Anatolian bourgeoisie,” an increase in print and broadcast media, and the upward mobility of the religious sectors of Turkish society were the products of economic liberalization. While anti-Kemalist Islamist thinkers had existed before the beginning of economic liberalization in the 1980s, their ideas first gained wide public currency with the expanded economic, social, and political power of conservative Turkish Muslims. At the same time, liberal proponents of universal human rights critiqued Kemalism’s suppression of individual liberties in the name of national unity.

A wealth of primarily anthropological studies has grown up around anti-Kemalist Islamist movements, presenting them as the authentically Islamic alternative to

¹² On this point in particular see Reşat Kasaba, “Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 15-36; Halil M. Karaveli, “An Unfulfilled Promise of Enlightenment: Kemalism and its Liberal Critics,” *Turkish Studies* 11:1 (March 2010): 85-102; and Keydar, “Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s.” Esra Özyürek also points to an interesting development among secularists of nostalgia for the period of classical Kemalism in the 1930s, a nostalgia that has developed in the past few decades as Kemalism has lost its ideological hegemony. See her *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹³ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 100.

Kemalist modernization. As Catharina Raudvere demonstrates, these Islamist movements are often allied with Sufi religious associations that had long been suppressed under Kemalist rule. The oppression these Sufi groups suffered naturally led many of their members to the conclusion that Kemalism and even modernity itself are sources of injustice, which facilitated their ideological alignment with Islamist intellectuals such as Bulaç. As Raudvere also points out, while most Turkish citizens seem to see no essential contradiction between life in a secular democracy and Islamic practices per se (excepting, of course, the widespread objection to state suppression of religious symbols such as the headscarf), these Islamist groups perceive modernity and Islam as fundamentally incompatible, and often construct an idealized version of the Ottoman Islamic past which they set against the alleged moral turpitude of the secular Kemalist republic.¹⁴ At the same time, conservative Islamist groups and conservative Sufi *cemaats* (religious associations) participate in modern structures of governance through their formation of civil society organizations and participation in democracy, a dynamic that expresses a more fundamental “secularization of a religious disciplinary practice” that Brian Silverstein analyzes in detail.¹⁵ Silverstein’s work demonstrates how Islamic spiritual practices, such as Sufism, have been adapted to fit a secular republican mode of personal piety.

Most contemporary scholarly literature on Turkish Islamic movements (with the notable exception of Silverstein’s work) has emphasized the anti-modern stance of these movements. Nilüfer Göle, for example, has commented extensively and insightfully on

¹⁴ Catharina Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 35; 72; 104.

¹⁵ Brian Silverstein, *Islam and Modernity in Turkey* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

how the construction of a notion of an Islamic lifestyle that includes conspicuous modes of consumption and dress (most notably the headscarf) pose a challenge to Kemalist modernity: “Veiling reminds us that there is a forbidden, intimate sphere that must be confined to private and never expressed in public. Therefore, by refusing to assimilate Western modernity and by rediscovering religion and a memory repressed by rationalism and universalism, the Islamic subject elaborates and redefines herself.”¹⁶ Modes of dress and social interaction (such as mixed gendered public spaces) are targeted for rebuke by Islamists because these are the culture spheres through which (and over which) Kemalism asserts its dominance.¹⁷ Yet Göle asserts that “the question that needs to be asked is not whether Islam is compatible with modernity but how Islam and modernity interact with each other, transform one another, reveal each other’s limits.”¹⁸ The attempt to find the “limits” of Islam and modernity and determine how they affect each other represents a rejection of any absolute moral value that may be assigned to the notions of Islam or modernity, tradition or change. It is a post-modern rejection of the secularization thesis, as well as a rejection of the ideology of the kind of high modernism represented by Kemalism itself.

However, though the attempt by scholars of modern Turkey to define the boundaries of Islam and modernity rejects the moralizations of Kemalism, it does not reject the *dichotomies* of Kemalism. Islam and modernity are still construed as discrete entities that bear no essential or constitutive relationship to each other. Göle continues:

¹⁶ Nilüfer Göle, “The Quest for the Islamic Self within the Context of Modernity,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 90.

¹⁷ Nilüfer Göle, “Islam in Public: New Visibilities and Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002): 177.

¹⁸ Nilüfer Göle, “Snapshots of Islamic Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129:1 (Winter 2000): 94.

“One common feature of these [Islamist] authors is their effort to redefine Islamic ‘authenticity’ in a manner that is no longer apologetic before Western modernity.”¹⁹ Yet this begs the following question: Why should “Islamic authenticity” and “modernity” (of any kind) be assumed to be dichotomous? Göle asserts, “Decentralizing the West and reflecting on modernity from its edge, from a non-Western perspective—and an Islamic one at that—can spell out the limits of modernity, generate new conceptualizations, and raise questions concerning modernity.”²⁰ I certainly do not mean to argue that Göle is incorrect in these assertions; however, her language (featuring terminologies such as “edge” and “limits”) clearly hints at the assumption of a dichotomy between Islam and modernity, the same dichotomy posited by radical Kemalists and radical Islamists alike.

Most recent scholarship on Islam in Turkey turns on this analytic dichotomy, which at the same time assumes a bifurcation between the notions of “tradition” and modernity. This dichotomy obscures certain Islamic traditions of thought in modern Turkey that do not recognize such a dichotomy. A consideration of how the notion of “Islam” is typically treated in modern scholarship on Turkey will reveal the points at which this dissertation seeks to enter these discussions. Carter Findley’s most recent book, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* is an attempt to write an interpretation of modern Turkish history that does not rely on secularist assumptions. Findley’s work gives special attention to important Islamic figures and movements (such as Fethullah Gülen and Said Nursi) in the formation of modern Turkish civil society and cultural discourse. He identifies two main ideological elements whose relationship constitutes

¹⁹ Ibid., 96.

²⁰ Ibid., 91.

the primary dialectic of modern Turkish history: “a comparatively radical, secularizing current and a more conservative, Islamically committed current.”²¹ He also recognizes that these two strains often interact, yet remain basically oppositional to each other: at “critical moments” in modern Turkish history, the two become oppositional and demand exclusive allegiance.²² Findley describes his project as “an analysis of the dialectical interaction across time of the two macrohistorical trends, in each of which cultural, social, economic, and political forces converge.”²³

İsmail Kara, one of the leading Turkish commentators on Islam in Turkey and currently a professor at Marmara University’s Faculty of Divinity, uses a very similar analytical dichotomy. In his most recent work *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslam* (Islam as an Issue in the Republic of Turkey) he sets out a vision of modern Turkish history that is similar to Findley’s. Kara delineates two main lines of thought that represent how Islam has been treated in modern Turkish history. The first line originated in the early republican period, and treated Islam as part of a broader nationalist project. While at first republican and late Ottoman intellectuals utilized Islamic nationalism to rally the populace during the Turkish War of Independence, after the conclusion of the war with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) a closed cadre of elites led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk began to enforce a rigid secularist agenda.²⁴ This group attempted to reinterpret Islam to fit a narrow nationalist program, and lacked the necessary sensitivity to Islamic history to formulate a stable relationship between the

²¹ Carter Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 18.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 22.

²⁴ İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslam* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2008), 14.

new state and religion. The second strand of thought that Kara identifies is composed of individuals who take seriously the role of Islam in people's lives, and who practice the tradition themselves. This category includes Sufi groups, devotional associations (*cemaatlar*), folk associations, and pious intellectuals.²⁵ According to Kara, these groups overwhelmingly favor both democratization and loyalty to the state, despite the existence of some extreme fringe groups and the enormous political diversity of Muslims in Turkey. For Kara, most forms of Islamic practice in Turkey are committed to the preservation of the state and democratic society, despite their ideological differences over how this should be framed or enacted. Within this second group, it is the steady but quiet piety of Sufi groups that has begun to normalize the presence of religion in Turkish civil society, much to the chagrin of the Kemalist intellectuals.²⁶

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (a professor in the History Department of Hacettepe University) also focuses on the social development of the strains of thought that Kara and Findley identify, and helpfully places them in their historical context.²⁷ Ocak is highly attuned to the social effects of the Kemalist period on Islamic thought and practice in Turkey, and points out that due to the rise of the nationalist state and its control of religion, the concept of Islam became restricted to modes of worship and personal piety. What was left of the Ottoman Sufi orders and provincial Ottoman 'ulamā' made new attempts to interpret Islam in this environment (Said Nursi being the most famous example), and their intellectual efforts have been the foundation of Islamic

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁷ Found in the 2009 edition of his frequently reprinted book, *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam: Yaklaşım, Yöntem ve Yorum Denemeleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları).

intellectual culture in Turkey ever since.²⁸ However, Ocak points out that after the rise of Marxist thought in the 1960s, the traditional elements of Islamic thought, focused as they were on issues of worship, faith, and religious practice, were found to be inadequate to deal with the most pressing issues of social concern. Consequently, a new class of activist Islamist intellectuals emerged to meet this need.²⁹ As Ocak points out, these revivalist intellectuals, who focused on discussions of the Islamic state and Islamic politics, usually did not ground their discussions in the Islamic textual tradition, but instead relied on translations of other thinkers from outside Turkey, such as Sayyid Qutb. These discussions became popular in the 1980s after the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and dominated Islamic intellectual discourse into the mid-1990s, after which the question of the Islamic state fell out of fashion.³⁰

In the study of contemporary Turkish Islamic thought as well, the field of inquiry has almost completely been dominated by works dedicated to the origins and impact of socially conservative or anti-modernist Islamic thinkers who have gained prominence since 1980, such as Fethullah Gülen and his followers. The success of the socially conservative Gülen movement has been studied intensively in recent years, due to its status as the most powerful Islamic organization in Turkey.³¹ Considerable

²⁸ Ibid., 99-100.

²⁹ Ibid., 101.

³⁰ Ibid., 102-3. The decline in popularity of the notion of Islamic state was also undoubtedly due to the spectacular electoral success of the Islamic center-right platform of the AKP at the expense of radical Islamism after the soft-coup of 1997.

³¹ See especially Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (New York, NY: Springer, 2010); M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003); M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

attention has also been paid to Said Nursi, the founder of the Nur movement that Gülen continues.³² Other studies of modern Turkish Islamic theology have focused on revivalist and conservative Islamist intellectuals, such as Ali Bulaç, who unlike the members of the Nur movement, display an avowed hostility toward the West, modernity (construed as inherently Western), and the Kemalist conception of the secular state.³³

The impact of such thinkers is unquestionable, yet many of these scholarly works strongly suggest that an Islamist orientation is typical of all Islamic theology in Turkey. I will argue in this dissertation that the exclusive attention paid to the works of conservative thinkers is due to a trope that posits a stark differentiation between tradition and modernity, which focuses scholarly attention only on those thinkers who accept this dichotomy (the ideological bases of this dichotomy will be outlined in Chapter One). In other words, the paradigm that dichotomizes tradition and modernity in the study of Islam in Turkey cannot accommodate theological approaches that are both traditional and modern at the same time. For example, they do not deal with the approaches of modern Turkish theologians who utilize traditional textual discourses to support modern epistemologies such as liberal democracy. I would also argue that this is a major reason for the neglect of “liberal” and “progressive” Islamic thought in Western scholarship on Turkey, a lacuna that has only recently begun to be addressed,

³² See especially Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2009); and Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005).

³³ See especially Sena Karasipahi, *Muslims in Modern Turkey: Kemalism, Modernism, and the Revolt of the Islamic Intellectuals* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2009) and Michael Meeker, “The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey,” in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics, and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 189-219.

despite the fact that this type of liberal theology has existed for decades.³⁴ This dissertation will focus on an important group of liberal Turkish theologians who have not been discussed in recent scholarly conversations. Their existence has been hard to discern due to the disorienting influence of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity that causes scholars of Islam in modern Turkey to posit a sharp distinction between pious thinking and secularist thinking; this trope has caused an almost exclusive focus on thinkers who uphold this dichotomy by supporting some version of anti-modern and anti-Western Islamic revivalism.

However, there has existed since the beginning of the Turkish Republic (and in the late Ottoman period as well) a line of thinking that does not posit such a stark division between the traditions of classical Islam and the epistemological premises of modern society. This line of thinking is associated with divinity faculties of Turkish universities. Not only is the work of Turkish divinity scholars intellectually interesting, but it is also part of a line of Islamic thought that is highly influential in Turkish society. Divinity faculty attendance has increased dramatically since the 1980s, and this group of Islamic theologians is the direct heir to a specific stream of liberal Islamic theology that coalesced around the formation of the national Turkish university system. In fact, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, this stream of liberal Islamic theology has been influential in shaping the teaching and understanding of Islam in Turkish academia since its very beginnings. This tradition of Islamic liberalism first emerged in

³⁴ On contemporary liberal Islamic thought, see *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998); *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2004); and *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, eds. Kari Vogt, Lena Larson, and Christian Moe (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

support of a secular and democratic Turkey under Kemalism. Since the 1980s and the questioning of the Kemalist paradigm, the contemporary advocates of Turkish Islamic liberalism have retained and deepened their support for secular democracy, even if their work at times implies a critique of the Kemalist state's policies. The story of Islamic theological liberalism in Turkey is the story of how a particular school of classical Islamic theology came to undergird the project of secular modernization in modern Turkey.

Modernity and secularism are inseparable in the Turkish context. For Kemalism, secularism (*laiklik*) is the cornerstone of social and political modernity. For Turkish Islamists, this is the component of Kemalism that is most deleterious to Turkish society and Islamic practice. However, for the influential strain of liberal Turkish Islamic thought mentioned above, secular modernity and Islam are not simply “compatible” but actually imply each other. For these thinkers, secular modernity embodies the essence of Islamic social ethics. Secular modernity can actually be shown to be rooted in classical Islamic theological concepts, according to their arguments, and furthermore it is the “Turkish” legacy of Islamic theological thought that comprises the most fertile ground for the development of the kinds of democratic freedoms that modernity delivers. By analyzing these theologians' works, then, this dissertation will attempt a reading of the secular that does not view it as dichotomous with the religious. Instead, the secular will be seen to be compatible with religious principles, in this case Islamic theological principles.

In *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad argues that the notion of the secular is determined by regimes of power and negotiated by

individual practices. Neither the religious nor the secular possesses an essence unto itself, but each concept is continually redefined in order to demarcate spheres within which certain actions and attitudes may be deemed acceptable. Asad writes: “I am arguing that ‘the secular’ should not be thought of as the space in which *real* human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of ‘religion’ and thus achieves the latter’s relocation. It is this assumption that allows us to think of religion as ‘infecting’ the secular domain or replicating within it the structure of theological concepts.”³⁵ In other words, Asad argues that the “religious” and the “secular” are not dichotomous spheres of human existence that must be opposed to each other in order to consolidate control over the limited territory of human life. He points to the weaknesses of the modernist thesis of progress, a thesis assumed in Turkey by Kemalism and then reversed by Islamism. We might rephrase his quote in the following way to better illustrate this dissertation’s approach to the relationship between the religious and the secular: “The ‘religious’ should not be thought of as the space in which *real* human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of ‘secularism’ and thus achieves the latter’s relocation.” The religious does not require the elimination of the secular in order to express itself, or vice versa. Indeed, for the Turkish Islamic theologians in question, secularism and modernity are required for religion to be able to properly express itself, and at the same time they are seen to be rooted in classical religious tradition. Logically, the two share a relationship of mutual predication.

Asad’s argument shows how the relationship between secular modernity and religion can be harmonized, in contrast to most current studies on Islam in Turkey.

³⁵ Asad, *Formations*, 191.

Indeed, this approach stands in contrast to the approach of both the Islamists and the Kemalists, for whom the relationship between the secular and the religious antagonistic and agonistic. Asad reveals a third option for the understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, which is the option that has been pursued by the current of liberal Islamic thought in Turkey. Rather than asking if Islam and modernity are compatible, they seek to ask a different question: How can modernity be seen to be predicated on Islam? In other words, can Islam and modernity be understood not as two distinct entities but instead as notions predicated upon each other? Can tradition, in this case Islamic theological tradition, constitute the ground of modernity itself, instead of being seen as an alien force that must be resisted? For this group of Turkish Islamic theologians, the answer to this question is yes. This dissertation will examine their reasoning and the roots of their ideas.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, *Recovering the Traditional in Contemporary Islamic Theology*, will explore the theoretical dichotomy between “tradition” and “modernity” that I argue has obscured the existence of liberal Islamic theology in Turkey. I argue that this widely-accepted dichotomy in the humanities and social sciences is based on certain ideologies of the Enlightenment and modernization theory and in fact ignores the fundamental continuity between tradition and modernity. Utilizing the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, I attempt to show how the concept of tradition implies the possibility and necessity of continual change. In other words, continuity is the necessary ground of change; likewise, tradition is the necessary ground of modernity and not its

antithesis. Gadamer's contextual epistemology describes how knowledge is created in a context of discursive relationships that precede the knowing subject. This pre-existent universe of concepts and conceptual relationships is how Gadamer understands "tradition." These concepts constitute the starting point for all intellectual reflection, and in doing so ground the forward movement of change and reform. "Tradition" and its correlate "modernity" are therefore two sides of the same coin, two modes of historicity that exist on the same level of epistemology. Tradition is constituted by movement toward the perceived-to-have-been, whereas modernity is constituted by movement toward the anticipatory, grounded in the consciousness of the present moment. The dialectical relation between the two constitutes change. What is important about the application of Gadamer's theories of epistemology to the Turkish Islamic modernist theologians is that they demonstrate how liberal and change-oriented interpretations of Islamic sacred tradition are in fact authentic, because the very act of reform is presupposed in, enabled by, and grounded in tradition itself. Gadamer shows that the transformation of ideas is part of tradition and therefore opens the way to view Islamic theological modernism (or what I refer to as Islamic theological modernity) as "traditional" as any other reading of Islamic sacred tradition.

Chapter Two, *Roots of Turkish Theological Modernity, I: Notions of Paradox, Change, and Continuity in the Work of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī*, discusses the medieval Islamic theologian that modern liberal Turkish theologians refer to when they interpret Islamic sacred tradition: this is the tenth-century Ḥanafī Sunnī religious thinker, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944).³⁶ This chapter shows how Turkish theological modernist

³⁶ Throughout the dissertation, all translations from Arabic or Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted.

theologians reinterpret Māturīdī's theological text *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (*The Book of Unity*) by focusing on his theological epistemology. Māturīdī's theological epistemology is based on the notion of a world in constant change or flux (*taqallub*) that is accessible to human reason (*'aql*) through the medium of empirical experience (*'iyān*). Māturīdī's epistemology suggests the notion that knowledge is a field of objective inquiry used to establish knowledge of phenomena not directly observable by the senses. Thus, his epistemology prioritizes a notion of empiricism that helps theologians understand the changes that characterize the world in which we find ourselves. I argue that Māturīdī's epistemology is based the notions of empiricism and historicism, and thus can be understood to possess a "proto-modern" character. I refer to this approach as Māturīdī's "theological realism." Māturīdī's distinction between religious truth (*dīn*) and a world that is constantly changing, and his claim that these two poles of reality can be known and distinguished through the rational analysis of empirical evidence, makes his theology attractive to modern liberal Turkish theologians. As will be seen in the fourth and fifth chapters, these proto-modern dimensions of Māturīdī's theology are used by Turkish liberal theologians to elaborate a vision of Islamic theological modernity wherein modern social institutions such as liberal democracy are grounded in an interpretation of classical Islamic theology.

The third chapter, *Roots of Turkish Theological Modernity II: Paths Not Taken in Māturīdī Thought*, traces the history of the Māturīdī school of Sunnī dogmatic theology that developed after Māturīdī's death in the tenth century. It contrasts the proto-modern and philosophically realist tendencies of Māturīdī's own thought with the textualist and rationalist theology of his contemporary, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d.

936), who developed the most historically influential school of Sunnī dogmatic theology. This chapter traces how Māturīdī's theological realism was misunderstood by his successors throughout the medieval period and was eventually abandoned. Instead, the textual rationalism of the Ash'arī school came to dominate orthodox Sunnī theology from the thirteenth century onward. The most famous and influential systematizer of Māturīdī's theology, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 1115) played a major role in this process. I show how at turns Nasafī edited, ignored, and contradicted the key elements of Māturīdī's theological realism in order to construct an interpretation of Māturīdī theology based on Ash'arī metaphysics. Unlike Māturīdī's own theology, Ash'arī metaphysics posits an occasionalistic view of the world that undermines the legitimacy of empirical knowledge. The domination of Ash'arī theology continued during the Ottoman period from approximately the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. However, I also discuss certain intra-Sunnī theological controversies and other evidence that demonstrate that some Ottoman theologians continued to maintain the superiority of Māturīdīan realism against Ash'arism. The activity of openly Māturīdī theologians in a time of Ash'arī dominance demonstrates the continuing viability of Māturīdī's theology, despite its neglect in the preceding centuries. The work of these Ottoman Māturīdīs foreshadowed the revival of Māturīdī's theology in the successor state founded in Anatolia after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey.

The fourth chapter, *Reason and the Rediscovery of Māturīdī in Contemporary Turkey: Articulating a National Turkish Tradition of Islamic Theology*, traces the history of modern Islamic theology in Turkey by examining its roots in the late Ottoman world, the emergence of Turkish nationalism, and the rise of Turkish Islamic academia.

This chapter describes how a version of liberal Islamic modernism flourished between the 1920s and the 1950s (i.e., the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Turkish Republic) due to its strong intellectual roots in Ottoman intellectual movements and the support of the secular Kemalist state. I show how late Ottoman Islamic liberalism came to be identified with notions of Turkish nationhood, producing a tradition of Turkish Islamic modernism that identified reformist Islamic thought with the heritage of “Turkish Islam.” This newly-delineated notion of a uniquely Turkish Islamic tradition came to include Māturīdism, as Māturīdī was the premier dogmatic theologian of the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law (the school of law given state sponsorship under the Ottomans) and also lived in Central Asia, the area that Turkish nationalists identified as the Turkish homeland. I argue that in the crucible of Turkish nationalism and late Ottoman Islamic reformism a new strain of Islamic theology was born that drew on Māturīdī tradition as a way to elaborate a vision of secular democracy with traditional Islamic roots. This theological tradition became foundational in Turkish Islamic academia with the establishment of a system of divinity faculties (*ilahiyat fakülteleri*) in Turkey to replace the Ottoman system of madrasas. Contemporary Turkish theologians in the divinity faculty system continue to make use of Māturīdī in elaborating liberal Islamic theological projects, and their continuity with the use of Māturīdī in the earliest generations of Islamic theologians in republican Turkey constitutes a strain of thought that I term “Turkish Neo-Māturīdism.”

Through the use of Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political, Chapter 5, *The Concept of the Political and the Uses of Māturīdī “Rationalism” (Akılcılık) in Contemporary Turkish Theology*, continues my analysis of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs

by discussing their positionality in the contested world of contemporary Turkish Islam. I argue that these theologians' works overlap with Kemalist critiques of religion when they argue against Islamic conservatism in contemporary Turkey. The chapter argues that the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs' frequent use of the term "rationalism" (*akılcılık*) to describe their project refers to a theology of religious reform and political liberalism that is grounded in the proto-modern elements of Māturīdī's theological epistemology. In the minds of the contemporary Turkish Māturīdīs, this Māturīdian "rationalism" (more accurately understood in English as a kind of political and social liberalism) is pitted against socially conservative Islamic ideologies in Turkey that are anti-modernist and anti-reformist. This chapter also identifies the political uses of Māturīdī in contemporary Turkish theology in the more conventional sense of the term, showing how Māturīdian theologians in Turkey use Māturīdī to argue for the legitimacy of secular democracy. While all of these theologians, like most Islamic intellectuals in Turkey, agree on the need for a secular democratic state, they often disagree on the nature of that state. While most Turkish Māturīdīs elaborate a vision of secular liberal democracy that constitutes a subtle critique of the aggressive laicism of the Kemalist state, others use Māturīdī to defend the Kemalist state itself.

The conclusion of the dissertation, *An Islamic Theology of Liberalism*, takes on the issue of authenticity and interpretation in the modern Turkish Māturīdī tradition. It explores the ways in which the modern Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs can be understood as liberals in the political sense and as neo-traditional interpreters of Islamic theology. In fact, their liberalism is a product of their reading of Islamic theology. This section discusses how their theology constitutes an Islamic theology of liberal democracy that is

more closely aligned with Anglo-American notions of individual liberties and the secular state than with the French Enlightenment inspired notions of secularism in Kemalism. As discussed in Chapter Five, the adoption of this notion of secularism in the Turkish context signifies a critique of Kemalist laicism. In outlining their theology of liberal democracy, the Turkish Māturīdīs identify elements of Māturīdī's theology (such as empiricism) that share in some of the key assumptions of modern epistemology. Māturīdī's theology can be described as having "proto-modern" characteristics, but it cannot be described as fully modern because it does not explore the political implications of its epistemological theories. These implications are developed by modern liberal Turkish Islamic theologians in an Islamic theology of liberal democracy, a project that demonstrates the Gadamerian insight that even radical change is grounded in tradition.

CHAPTER ONE
RECOVERING THE TRADITIONAL IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC
THEOLOGY

The Tradition/Modernity Dichotomy: Legacies of Enlightenment and Modernization Theory

Conceptions of modernity and pre-modernity, understood as “the traditional,” have long played a central role in the study of religion and religious history. This dichotomy between the modern and the traditional is, however, flawed in certain fundamental ways. Its historiographic implications are usually triumphalist, sometimes apocalyptic. As such, this dichotomy does damage to dimensions of fundamental continuity between the very notion of the traditional and the modern, dimensions that are in fact central to the experience of religion itself. This chapter will show how Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics demonstrate that the modern is not possible without the traditional, and that rootedness in the traditional actually enables radical change. Gadamer shows that tradition is not antithetical to change: instead, change is not possible without tradition.

The central argument of this analysis is that the flaws of the traditional/modern dichotomy obscure certain key features of modern religious movements, and that better theorizing is necessary to understand how contemporary Muslims relate to past intellectual heritages. As discussed in the Introduction, this dichotomy is also a feature of much of the existing literature on Islam in modern Turkey due to the influence of the secularization thesis. The tradition/modern dichotomy, then, is a common feature of

innumerable academic discussions, yet in order to focus on its most problematic aspects it will be helpful to critically analyze one of the most influential conceptions of modernity and premodernity, the social theory of Anthony Giddens. The purpose of this analysis is not meant to discount the entirety of Giddens' important work, nor to lay the blame for the existence of these problematic dichotomies solely at his feet. Rather, the emphasis on one problematic assumption of Giddens' theory of modernity, his understanding of the notion of tradition, is meant to highlight and critique a dichotomy widely assumed throughout the humanities and social sciences that obscures crucial aspects of the study of religion in the modern (and premodern) world.

Giddens' theory of tradition is based on a fundamental discontinuity between what is modern and all that came before it: "The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order, in quite unprecedented fashion."³⁷ Or as he puts it elsewhere: "Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact."³⁸ Giddens defines modernity as coextensive with, yet not reducible to industrialization: high modernity, or the period following the decline of early modernity's faith in objective reason and human progress, features the same fundamental social changes of industrialization as the previous period but is characterized by a widespread skepticism in the utility and explanatory capacity of grand narratives of technical and moral progress (others might call this post-modernity). The social and institutional changes brought about by

³⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 4.

³⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1.

modernity are most notable for the ways in which they turn techniques of fashioning the self into a reflexive project that interacts with and is mediated by multiple claims to authority. These modern techniques of self-fashioning include the compartmentalization of human experience (such as sexuality), the analysis of risk and future possibility in the planning of a normalized life, the organization of human activities and processes throughout society, and the option of choosing from disparate options for living out a lifestyle as an “emancipated” individual.

Giddens’ characterizes modernity as drastically different from previous periods of history in its rapidity of social change and in its capacity to fracture dimensions of human subjectivity to a degree not possible before the advent of immeasurably strengthened mediating mechanisms, such as the media. Yet throughout his brilliant analysis of these institutional shifts, Giddens frequently posits a notion of a static “traditional” period of human history that preceded modernity. Giddens frequently refers to modernity as “essentially a post-traditional order.”³⁹ His notion of premodern periods of human history is decidedly less nuanced than his understanding of modernity. Giddens characterizes all premodern societies as “traditional,” arguing that despite their own histories of massive social and institutional shifts, these periods can all be characterized by conservatism and a fundamental orientation toward stagnation. In “traditional” societies “things stayed more or less the same from generation to generation on the level of the collectivity.”⁴⁰

Giddens defines tradition as a major “context of trust relations in premodern cultures” and also as a major component of “ontological security” as it was experienced

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

in the premodern period.⁴¹ He contrasts this with the modern period, in which “trust relations [are] vested in disembodied abstract systems.”⁴² The function of tradition as an ever-present lifeworld within which all premodern human beings acted is seen by Giddens as essentially restricting. As we shall see, the existence of a total context within which human knowing and action takes place is seen as anything but restrictive by other thinkers, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer. However, Giddens’ account of modernity seems to rest on the fundamental teleology of the Enlightenment theory of history, which asserts the inexorable progress of the human race as it moves through successive historical epochs. This seems to be what lies behind his emphasis on the discontinuity between the modern and the premodern. Only by asserting the utter stagnation of the premodern is he able to posit what he calls “the extreme dynamism and globalising scope of modern institutions.”⁴³

Giddens’ characterization of modernity and tradition is fundamentally aligned with the secularization and modernization theses of the mid-twentieth century that posited the inevitable decline of “traditional” institutions vis-à-vis the rise of secularization and modernization. Scholars of modern Turkey have famously operated along the lines of this paradigm. As Niyazi Berkes, the great historian of the modern Turkish nation state, asserted in his 1964 classic *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, “A steady trend toward secularization in traditional institutions is a feature of Muslim societies facing the impact of modern civilization.”⁴⁴ The strict dichotomization of the “modern” versus the “traditional” therefore is deeply implicated

⁴¹ Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, 104-105.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴ Berkes, 3.

in notions of teleology and universal progress. As Immanuel Kant put it, “As a class of rational beings—each member of which dies, while the species is immortal—[humanity] is destined to develop its capacities to perfection.”⁴⁵

Another feature of Giddens’ attitude toward tradition that stems from deep Enlightenment roots is his attitude toward tradition as a mode of authority “exterior” to the knowing human subject. According to Giddens, premodern societies were characterized by a unity of authoritative voices:

[D]iffuse though it may have been, tradition was in an important sense a single authority. Although in the larger pre-modern cultures there may quite often have been clashes between rival traditions, for the most part traditional outlooks and ways of doing things precluded other alternatives. Even where there were vying traditions, involvement in a traditional framework was normally quite exclusive: the others were thereby rejected.⁴⁶

Although not stated outright here, the distressing lacuna in the context of the overriding authority of premodern tradition was the lack of individual reason. Traditional societies were bound by their adherence to a tradition that precluded substantive change.

Modernity, by contrast, is characterized by constant reflexivity: “The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), 31.

⁴⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 194.

⁴⁷ Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, 38. Interestingly, Giddens acknowledges his debt to Hans-Georg Gadamer in his understanding of “the social and linguistic foundations of reflexivity”; Giddens does not however follow Gadamer’s point that reflexivity is a feature of human understanding in general, and thus of *all* human societies, regardless of their particular location in history. See Christopher G.A. Bryant and

For Giddens, coming into modernity is a process of “detraditionalisation,” in which the “routine” social life of tradition is replaced with the active reflexivity of modernity.⁴⁸ This view also seems to build on certain Enlightenment dichotomies, in this case between individual reason and the tyranny of exterior epistemological authority that tradition represents. As Kant famously proclaimed, “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another.”⁴⁹ For Giddens, modernity is clearly in some sense the emergence of the human race from the stifling immaturity of tradition.

Giddens’ views on tradition, however, seem deeply tautological: how can tradition be all-encompassing and always dominant if there were (as he admits) radically different notions of tradition at any given moment? What does it even mean to refer to a “traditional mentality” if the individual traditions that were supposed to have supported it were so diverse and even mutually exclusive? What Giddens is basically saying is that in traditional cultures, tradition dominated even when it had to win out over other traditions. “Tradition” here, i.e., the premodern, has no meaning at all, save its posited natural opposition to the “modern.” In Giddens’ understanding the concept of premodernity becomes merely the repository of the negative side of modernity: ultimately, premodernity becomes the conceptual emptiness that guarantees the

David Jary, “Anthony Giddens: A Global Social Theorist,” in *The Contemporary Giddens: Social Theory in a Globalizing Age*, ed. Christopher G.A. Bryant and David Jary (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 20.

⁴⁸ Nicos Mouzelis, “Exploring Post-traditional orders: Individual Reflexivity, 'Pure Relations,' and Duality of Structure,” in *Theorising Modernity: Reflexivity, Environment and Identity in Giddens’ Social Theory*, ed. Martin O'Brien, Sue Penna, and Colin Hay (London, UK: Langman, 1999), 83.

⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), 41.

apocalyptic apotheosis of modernity, allowing modernity to remain the pinnacle of human history.

Giddens' understanding of "tradition" is therefore characterized by a kind of negative essentialism that utilizes this term as the empty dark space from which the modern world emerged. The radical uniqueness of the modern cannot exist without a foil, and Giddens' utilizes the notion of the traditional as that foil, despite the fact that, as he says, "It is risky business in itself to draw generalised contrasts between the modern era and the whole gamut of pre-modern social orders. The abruptness and extent of the discontinuities between modernity and pre-modern institutions, however, justifies the attempt, although inevitably oversimplifications are involved."⁵⁰

The modernization/secularization thesis (and the dichotomous understanding of tradition versus modernity/reason that it inherited from the Enlightenment) has received criticism from social theorists who challenged its legitimacy. Talal Asad, for instance, attempts to analyze secularity not as a universal good motivated by the universal applicability of Enlightenment rationality, but as a political venture that does not eliminate violence or injustice but simply shifts the spheres in which these may legitimately exist. Rather than assuming the naturalness of the distinction between the secular modern and the religious past, Asad asks how these dichotomies serve certain interests and are used to structure and facilitate the exercise of power, "for it is precisely the process by which these conceptual binaries are established or subverted that tells us how people live the secular-how they vindicate the essential freedom and responsibility of the sovereign self in opposition to the constraints of that self by

⁵⁰ Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, 100.

religious discourse.”⁵¹ Ali Mazrui and others have pointed out that the teleology of these narratives of modernization almost always implies Westernization: in these discourses, “the direction of...progress is toward greater similarity of values, norms, and structures to those of the Western world.”⁵² Mazrui also notes the roots of these theories in biological Darwinism: “In the modern theories of modernization Darwinism has been ‘debiologized.’ It is no longer racial bigotry that is being invoked to explain stages of political growth. What is now invoked is at the most ethnocentric cultural pride.”⁵³ A few years later, Edward Said would elaborate his critique of Eurocentricism in Western scholarship along similar lines.⁵⁴

What most concerns our analysis, however, is how these dichotomies in the understanding of modernity find their expression in the binary between *tradition* and modernity. Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph begin their 1967 study of modern India (*The Modernity of Tradition*) with a brilliant summation and critique of these paradigms. After noting that the field of South Asian Studies was at the time dominated by the assumptions of the modernization/secularization thesis, they point out that “the assumption that modernity and tradition are radically contradictory rests on a misdiagnosis of tradition as it is found in traditional societies, a misunderstanding of modernity as it is found in modern societies, and a misapprehension of the relationship between them.”⁵⁵ Rudolph and Hoeber Rudolph also illuminate the power relationships

⁵¹ Asad, 17.

⁵² Ali Mazrui, “From Social Darwinism to Current Theories of Modernization: A Tradition of Analysis,” *World Politics* 21, no. 1 (1968), 75.

⁵³ Ali Mazrui, “Social Darwinism,” 77.

⁵⁴ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1994).

⁵⁵ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1967), 3.

inherent in these dichotomies, calling attention to the fact that the characterization of modernity as directly opposed to tradition is often a way for a dominant group to assert its sense of superiority over another, whether socially or ideologically:

The separation of tradition and modernity may arise...from the distortions that influence the view held by historically ascendant classes, races, or nations of those that are or were subject to them. Dominant classes, races, and nations attribute causal potency to those attributes associated with their subjection of others. The mirror image of others as the opposite of oneself becomes an element in civilizational, national, and personal esteem...It is as though we would be less ourselves, less this-worldly, masterful, egalitarian, and individualistic if they were less what they are.⁵⁶

This brilliant analysis captures all that is at stake in the tradition/modernity dichotomy. The traditional becomes nothing but the long dark night that precedes the dawn of human enlightenment and self-actualization that is modernity. The modern sense of self demands a vacuous otherized past from which to draw its power as modern. Or as Rudolph and Hoeber Rudolph put it: “We recognize how modern we are by examining how traditional they are.”⁵⁷ Rudolph and Hoeber Rudolph's critique seems to anticipate Giddens' analysis of modern institutions even as it attacks the modernization/secularization thesis of its day: “Such a divorce of modernity and tradition can be and sometimes is compounded by deducing a model of tradition from a model of modernity and proceeding, in the study of modernization in particular traditional societies, on the assumption that the deduced model provides the point of departure for change.”⁵⁸ By contrast, Rudolph and Hoeber Rudolph attempt to “explore [Indian traditions'] internal variation and potentialities for change” in the development

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7. These power dynamics would later be made famous in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8.

of modern Indian politics.⁵⁹ The sociological critiques they level against the modernization/secularization thesis (and some of the Enlightenment strains of thought it implied) occur within the context of a larger philosophical reaction to Enlightenment thought and the valorization of “modernity” that it produced.

Reaction to the Legacies of Enlightenment and Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

As discussed above, the Enlightenment distinction between reason and traditional authority laid the groundwork for what Giddens calls “discontinuist theories of modernity” that map the modernity/tradition dichotomy onto the distinction between reason and authority. One side of the reaction against these theories (such as the famous modernization thesis) involved the kinds of challenges within social theory and sociology mentioned above. However, these challenges to the discontinuist theories of modernity were part of a much larger philosophical revolt against the epistemology of Enlightenment rationalism. It is this movement that Hans-Georg Gadamer takes part in and does much to advance. This twentieth-century movement can be broadly understood as the revival of notions of *context* in philosophical epistemology, or more specifically the acknowledgement that contexts that precede the human subject/knower are determinative of the subject/knower herself. Enlightenment rationality called for an ideally objective stance in the attempt to understand anything; by contrast, twentieth-century critics went to great lengths to point out the impossibility of such complete objectivity in human knowledge and perception. Analyzing briefly some of the most influential of these critiques will help us better understand what is at stake in Gadamer's

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

system, which emerges from a broader intellectual context that conditions its goals and outcomes.

This philosophical critique produced a variety of notions of context that were held to be fundamentally determinative of epistemology and even individual subjectivity. Martin Heidegger and phenomenology more broadly claimed that this context was being in the world, or more accurately, being-in-the-world, the always preexistent situatedness in which the subject finds herself. The human being's orientation toward awareness of her own existence takes the form of a questioning, which is the fundamental state of being-in-itself: "This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of Being, we shall denote by the term 'Dasein'".⁶⁰ Heidegger's search for the foundation of human existence leads him to an analysis of the basic ways in which people are from the very beginning of their lives oriented toward the world outside of them: "The theme of our analytic is to be Being-in-the-world, and accordingly the very world itself; and these are to be considered within the horizon of average everydayness- the kind of Being which is *closest to Dasein*."⁶¹

In other words, Heidegger seeks to outline the world in the most basically phenomenological terms possible, and he discovers that we do not approach the world with "a bare perceptual cognition, but rather [with] that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use."⁶² In other words, "this phenomenological interpretation is accordingly not a way of knowing those characteristics of entities

⁶⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 95.

which themselves are; it is rather a determination of the structure of the Being which entities possess.”⁶³ Heidegger seeks to investigate this structure with a view toward its conditioning by the fundamental orientation of Dasein towards “concerned” interactions with the world, insofar as human beings are ontologically “constituted” in some sense by their always preexisting situatedness in the world in which they dwell. As Jeff Malpas puts it, the driving force behind Heidegger’s thought is the basic fact of “our finding ourselves already ‘there,’ in the world, in place.”⁶⁴ Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world will become decisive for Gadamer's understanding of the givenness of hermeneutic experience, or rather experience as such.

Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault's understanding of the determinative linguistic context of epistemology also has affinities with Gadamer's emphasis on the basically linguistic composition of human understanding. Yet thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault, who are far more easily assimilated to postmodern projects than Gadamer, take their analyses of language in directions that contrast with Gadamer in important (and instructive) ways. Departing from the observation inherited from Saussure’s linguistics that the relation of a sound with a given meaning is arbitrary, Derrida argues that difference is the actual substrate of meaning. The all-consuming linguistic nature of human communication means that self-expression and any other process of meaning-making is fundamentally based on arbitrary relations between signs and meanings that only stand by virtue of their relation to each other, not by virtue of any real relation to a transcendental signified or signifier. The fundamental disjunct, difference, the arbitrariness at the heart of meaning is termed the “trace”: “The Trace is not only the

⁶³ Ibid., 95-96.

⁶⁴ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 6.

disappearance of origin- within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin”.⁶⁵ The existence of this trace of difference at the root of all that seems to have meaning in the world implies the displacement of Enlightenment theories of universal reason, and results in “the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of the onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence.”⁶⁶

In a similar way, Foucault's analysis of knowledge is meant to unseat the sovereignty of Enlightenment understandings of intellectual history that are based on the notion of essential continuity, such as notions of “tradition,” “influence,” and “development.” Foucault suggests an analysis of intellectual history as an historical archive of discursive structures related to each other based on rules of linguistic discursivity, not on any essentialized notion of intellectual tradition or spirit. He proposes to “write a history of discursive objects that does not plunge them into the common depth of a primal soil, but deploys the nexus of regularities that govern their dispersion.”⁶⁷ In his work, Enlightenment appeals to a common standard of human rationality that can be deployed against the great traditions of human thought are completely abandoned. In their stead Foucault places a call for the analysis of linguistic structures devoid of any essential characterization outside of their relations with each

⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 61.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Vintage, 2010), 48.

other, the relations that Derrida showed are the only necessary preconditions for their existence. In a famous encounter with Derrida, however, Gadamer argued that deconstruction of the kind that Derrida proposed would lead to the impossibility of communication itself.⁶⁸ Gadamer, as we shall see, is convinced that change and diversity are made possible by structure, rather than its lack.

Other critiques attempted to rehabilitate concepts consigned to the oblivion of backwardness by Enlightenment reason. Chief among these was the concept of *tradition*, the third plank in Gadamer's hermeneutic epistemology (along with the situatedness of Heideggerian phenomenology and the linguistic conception of understanding). Instead of suggesting a totalizing context of being or of linguistic signs, these critiques filled the void in understanding left by the discrediting of the Enlightenment's insistence on absolute objectivity with the notion of tradition. This rehabilitation of tradition was begun perhaps most ardently by Orthodox Christian theologians eager to defend the validity of “non-Western” traditions of epistemology. In the first half of the twentieth-century Russian émigré theologians such as George Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky developed a religious epistemology that placed all knowledge of divine truth within the context of church tradition, tradition being in Lossky's words “not the content of revelation, but the light that reveals it.”⁶⁹ Tradition (in this Neo-Patristic appeal to the formulations of Byzantine theology) meant the total historical context of the experience of Truth that forms the criteria for all authentic expressions of Christian spirituality.

⁶⁸ Susan Hekman, “The Ontology of Change: Gadamer and Feminism,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 182-183.

⁶⁹ Vladimir Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 133.

This notion of tradition is deeply imbued with notions of authenticity, essentiality, and identity, both in the sense of identifying with a historical tradition and in the sense of demarcating a uniquely Orthodox religious identity explicitly defined against “the West.” It was elaborated as a critique of Enlightenment rationality, here identified as the essence and natural outcome of Western Christian intellectual history itself, and the epitome of its heretical errors. John Meyendorff sums up very well this basic tenet of Neo-Patristic theological self-understanding:

Because the concept of theologia in Byzantium was, as with the Cappadocian Fathers, inseparable from theoria (‘contemplation’), theology could not be- as it was in the West- a rational deduction from ‘revealed’ premises, i.e., from Scripture or from the statements of an ecclesiastical magisterium; rather, it was a vision experienced by the saints, whose authenticity was, of course, to be checked against the witness of Scripture and Tradition.⁷⁰

This mystical memory of the Church that is Tradition constitutes the experiential ground of the reception of truth by the Christian, truth that is witnessed by dogma but not contained conceptually by it. In Lossky’s formulation: “The pure notion of tradition can then be defined by saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the church, communicating to each member of the body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the truth which belongs to it, and not according to the natural light of human reason. This is true gnosis, owed to an action of the divine light.”⁷¹

This theological paradigm replaces the objective human reason of the Enlightenment with a totalizing experience of divine subjectivity as the criterion for truth. Tradition is the essence of the Church itself in its role as transmitter but not

⁷⁰ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1983), 8-9.

⁷¹ Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” 134.

discoverer of truth. However, “the one Holy Tradition, which constitutes the self-identity of the Church through the ages and is the organic and visible expression of the life of the Spirit in the Church, is not to be confused with the inevitable, often creative and positive, sometimes sinful, and always relative accumulation of human traditions in the historical Church.”⁷² Deciding just what exactly is a part of the Tradition, and what is merely part of tradition, has become the crux of inquiry in modern Orthodox theology.

A parallel tradition of thought emerged in Western philosophical circles that viewed the notion of tradition in a way similar to that of the modern Orthodox Neo-Patristic theologians. Exponents of the perennial philosophy, or the doctrine that all religious traditions are historical manifestations of a single divine Tradition, included such influential West European writers as Aldous Huxley, Rene Guenon, Martin Lings, and Frithjof Schuon. Influential contemporary members of this school include the American scholar of religion Huston Smith and the Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Like the Orthodox Neo-Patristic theologians, the perennialists argue that the condition of modernity has weakened humanity’s access to religious truth. In their view, premodern, or “traditional,” societies were imbued with sacralized notions of space and time, and were therefore constantly aware of divine Tradition. The modern world, by contrast, is characterized by the dominance of materialism and therefore has lost the “traditional” capacity to remain in communion with the sacred. The “traditionalist” school, or the perennial philosophy, aims to revive this premodern “traditional” worldview. In the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “the perspective held by the

⁷² John Meyendorff, *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 21.

traditionalists is the same as the worldview within which the religions themselves were born and cultivated over the millennia until the advent of the modern world.”⁷³

Tradition as the eternal message of religious truth, represented in some measure by all religions, is termed “Primordial Tradition” by the perennialists.⁷⁴ According to Nasr, Primordial Tradition “constituted original or archetypal man’s primal spiritual and intellectual heritage received through direct revelation when Heaven and Earth were still ‘united’.”⁷⁵ The essential content of Primordial Tradition is the acknowledgement of the existence of the Divine Unity that constitutes the ground of all being.⁷⁶ In attempting to critique the modern de-sacralization of the world, the advocates of the perennial philosophy reproduce the dichotomy between traditional and modern, positing highly reified notions of both. Their argument essentially flips the modernist implication of the tradition/modernity dichotomy on its head by claiming that modernity is not the apex of human history, but is instead the tragic degradation of tradition, which alone constitutes what it means to be truly human.

Another recent and highly influential engagement with the notion of tradition has emerged in the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre and his understanding of reason as an action undertaken within a given intellectual tradition. MacIntyre's critique of Enlightenment objective reason is incisive: “So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by

⁷³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Traditionalist Approach to Religion,” in *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. William C. Chittick (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 23.

⁷⁴ Frithjof Schuon, “The Perennial Philosophy,” in *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, eds. Martin Lings and Clinton Mannaar (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 247.

⁷⁵ Nasr, “Approach,” 22-23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places.”⁷⁷ Instead, he suggests that reasoned inquiry must of necessity occur within the context of a discrete tradition of thought and operate according to its own internal standards of validation: “There is no standing ground, no place for inquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which has provided by some particular tradition or another.”⁷⁸ To put it even more bluntly, “There can be no rationality as such.”⁷⁹ Innovation and progress occur within traditions when they experience an “epistemological crisis,” which challenges long-held orthodoxies. In these situations, solutions must be found to preserve the dynamism of the tradition and this is what produces intellectual innovation: “To have passed through an epistemological crisis successfully enables the adherents of a tradition of enquiry to rewrite its history in a more insightful way.”⁸⁰ Here again, the absolute objectivity of Enlightenment rationality is replaced with an epistemology that emphasizes the need for knowing to occur in a context, one broader and more definitive than any single human mind can apprehend.

Gadamer's hermeneutics addresses the same problems in Enlightenment rationality that the above critics do. However, Gadamer's hermeneutics contains certain key distinctions from these other critiques that enables the possibility of radical change and innovation while at the same time calling attention to the reality of human

⁷⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

knowledge as a contextualized and at least in some ways preconditioned activity. While the deconstructionism of Derrida seems ultimately to result in the complete disassociation of all meaning from itself, Gadamer attempts to preserve the notion that structures of meaning that precede the human subject are stable across time and help condition the preconceptions that the subject uses when attempting to know something. At the same time, historical hermeneutics does not reify or essentialize tradition as an entity with a fixed social or historical identity in the way that MacIntyre and the Orthodox Neo-Patristic theologians do. For Gadamer, “tradition” is a term used to describe the mechanism of human understanding itself, not a reference to certain historical groupings of people or intellectual movements such as Byzantine Hesychasm or Thomism.

Gadamer's hermeneutics therefore avoids the strong essentialism inherent in both Neo-Patristic theology and MacIntyre's philosophy. It is precisely Gadamer's ability to maintain both a concept of continuity and a concept of change that makes his system so powerful. As Susan Hekman persuasively argues, Gadamer's hermeneutics is based on a fundamental “ontology of change” that acknowledges the “necessary situatedness of human knowledge” while at the same time enabling radical social change within the context of existing relationships.⁸¹ As Hekman points out, “Gadamer's paradoxical conclusion, then, is that our ability to suspend and examine prejudices is a product of our preunderstanding of our historical situatedness, which is in turn a product of the

⁸¹ Susan Hekman, “The Ontology of Change: Gadamer and Feminism,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 190.

tradition in which we live.”⁸² Preexisting concepts in the human mind function like the notion of place in the spatial world: one must always start somewhere, even if one is moving to a totally different place.

The potential for change implicit in Gadamer's understanding of tradition is in fact similar to Judith Butler's account of the location of agency within the social constructedness of the identity of the human subject. Butler's radical social constructionism on the question of gender and sexual identity is often critiqued on the assumption that it completely shuts off the possibility of change or liberation altogether, much in the same way Gadamer was criticized by Habermas on the same grounds.⁸³ In Butler's introduction to her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, she points out that this destabilization of gender categories is meant to “open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized.”⁸⁴ As she explains further, “To the extent that gender norms...establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be ‘real,’ they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression. If there is a positive normative task in *Gender Trouble*, it is to insist upon the extension of this legitimacy to bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal, and unintelligible.”⁸⁵ As she goes on to show, this kind of liberatory movement, like all movement (be it epistemological, philosophical, physical, or even spiritual) must take place in a conditioning but not entirely determinative *context*. “Construction [social or otherwise]

⁸² Ibid., 193.

⁸³ Hekman, “The Ontology of Change,” 182; Hekman also criticizes Butler on this score while proposing Gadamer as a viable feminist alternative to her radical vision of social constructionism.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), viii.

⁸⁵ Ibid., xxv.

is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible.”⁸⁶

This comparison to Butler is apt because it illuminates in a different philosophical key precisely the kind of point that Gadamer is ultimately trying to make: that context is necessary for change, *that continuity is actually the ground of discontinuity* (paradoxical as it may sound). As Hekman puts it, “the conversation that *we are* is always in motion, in flux [emphasis mine].”⁸⁷ Change is not merely possible in tradition, as Hekman argues; nor is change something that tradition can eventually accomplish given the right crisis moment as MacIntyre suggests. Rather, there is no change without tradition. This is the dimension of Gadamer’s system that will be emphasized most forcefully in our analysis of his hermeneutics.

Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Study of Theology

Gadamer bases his philosophical project on two related concerns: first, to discover the unique task of the humanities or human sciences, and second to uncover and critique certain Enlightenment characterizations that distort the nature of the true task of the human sciences. Gadamer founds his efforts on Heideggerian ontology. Gadamer's work attempts to answer the question “How is understanding possible?” He immediately begins with a phenomenological, rather than an objectively rationalist, answer: “Heidegger's temporal analysis of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself. It is in this sense that hermeneutics is used here. It

⁸⁶ Ibid., 201.

⁸⁷ Hekman, “Ontology of Change,” 194.

denotes the basic being-in-motion of Dasein that constitutes its finitude and historicity.”⁸⁸ In other words, Gadamer takes a strong stance against Enlightenment rationality and the claim that humans know things from a universal and objective vantage point; instead, he places human understanding within the utter (and always prior) contextuality of Heideggerian ontology. In this sense Gadamer uses hermeneutics to designate not a method of understanding, but understanding itself: “I have therefore retained the term ‘hermeneutics’ (which the early Heidegger used) not in the sense of a methodology but as a theory of the real experience that thinking is.”⁸⁹

Gadamer’s analysis of hermeneutics is ultimately a gradual unfolding of this initial claim against Enlightenment reason. He critiques certain Enlightenment distinctions that obscure the ways in which the human sciences go about their projects, which in the process obscures the real nature of human knowing itself. Gadamer asserts that the human sciences do not take the world as an exterior object of study (in the way necessitated by the Enlightenment conception of reason) but instead base themselves on “unities of meaning” given to us in experience: “That is what the concept of experience states: the structures of meaning we meet in the human sciences, however strange and incomprehensible they may seem to us, can be traced back to ultimate units of what is given in consciousness, unities which themselves no longer contain anything alien, objective, or in need of interpretation.”⁹⁰ Understanding does not in fact address objects exterior to itself, but rather proceeds from preexisting combinations of signification. So

⁸⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), xxvii.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-7. It is in passages like these that, ironically, Gadamer's debt to Kant becomes most evident. Unlike Kant, however, Gadamer dwells on the generative possibilities that result from the situatedness of human knowledge, rather than searching ways to overcome it.

far this insight mirrors that of Derrida and Foucault on language, Heidegger on ontology, and Butler on agency. Gadamer in other words works to defeat the Cartesian/Enlightenment dualism between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge.

Gadamer sees aesthetic experience, the experience of a work of art, as emblematic of this feature of the human sciences: “The power of the work of art suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence.”⁹¹ In other words, there is a sense in which experiencing a work of art is singular and separate from any other experience, a direct encounter between two things standing (often literally) opposite each other, the person and the work of art. Yet at the same time, a work of art cannot be understood at all unless it is somehow given a significance for our own individual lives, unless it is integrated completely into our sense of self, if only for a moment. A painting has no meaning at all until we decide what it means to us. Gadamer concludes that this type of aesthetic experience in which meaning is only apprehended by relating something to the whole of our existence is actually the essence of all human understanding: “Thus there is no understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read ‘what is there’ and to discover from his sources ‘how it really was’.”⁹² In contrast to thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, for whom “a reflective moment prevails over historical consciousness,” Gadamer rejects “the assumption of distance...that displaces the

⁹¹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁹² Ibid., 252.

fundamental belonging” of the knowing subject to history.⁹³ This characteristic of understanding, that it must always take place in a context of experience, Gadamer terms the “historicity” of understanding: “Neither the knower nor the known is ‘present-at-hand’ in an ‘ontic’ way, but in a ‘historical’ one- i.e., they both have the mode of being of historicity.”⁹⁴

This statement encapsulates Gadamer’s opposition to Enlightenment epistemology and his debt to Heideggerian metaphysics. Gadamer’s opposition to Enlightenment epistemology is derived fundamentally from his “rehabilitation” of the concept of “prejudice,” and his critique of its denigration in Enlightenment philosophy. In Gadamer’s words, “the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself.”⁹⁵ By “prejudice” Gadamer does not mean simply an error in judgment based on preconceptions, but rather *preconceptions themselves*. If it is the case that understanding takes place in the context of a person's overall being-in-the-world, then understanding must always partake in preconceptions in the formation of any new judgment. In other words, one cannot understand anything without certain preconceptions that precede the act of understanding. When looking at a painting, one cannot begin to understand a particular painting without first having a notion of what a painting is in general, which requires a notion of what art is in general, which requires a notion of what things other than art are in general, and so on ad infinitum. As we shall see later, the awareness of these prejudices such that we can move beyond them (for it is impossible to move away from something without first knowing what that something

⁹³ James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), 65.

⁹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 252. Italics in the original.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

is, and knowing *that* it is) constitutes the basic movement of understanding. The Enlightenment notion of pure objective reason obscures this fundamental nature of human understanding: “The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.”⁹⁶

The reevaluation of the notion of prejudice means for Gadamer “the rehabilitation of authority and tradition.”⁹⁷ But again, these concepts cannot be understood with the customary sense of derision and negativity that our Enlightenment legacy has bequeathed to us. Gadamer does not mean by “tradition” the complex of power and coercion that is often implied by this word. Nor does he mean a discrete set of ideas about the world found in the intellectual history of one group of people or another, such as Thomism or Platonism. Unlike the Neo-Patristic theologians or MacIntyre, Gadamer's notion of tradition does not refer to an essentialized complex of ideas and practices thought to be the exclusive property of one group of people or another. Instead, like his concept of prejudice, the term “tradition” has a wider significance for Gadamer. It denotes the complex of preconceptions that precede any act of understanding. This complex refers to the fact that “understanding a text always involves a projection of its meaning on the basis of a partial experience of it.” This is the essential movement of hermeneutic understanding, the “hermeneutic circle,” that replaces preconceptions with newly verified observations.⁹⁸ This complex of

⁹⁶ Ibid., 277.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 278.

⁹⁸ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 1987), 76.

preconceptions brought to the text can also of course come in the form of religious or social traditions; however, Gadamer's use of the term "tradition" does not refer simply to these religious or social formations, but rather to the experience of having preconceptions as such.

Gadamer critiques both the Enlightenment's denigration of tradition and the Romantic essentialization of tradition that arose in reaction to this denigration: "However problematical the conscious restoration of old or the creation of new traditions may be, the romantic faith in the 'growth of tradition,' before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced."⁹⁹ Tradition cannot be reified as an historical object which acts or is acted upon by the knowing subject; it has no separate historical being in itself, but is instead the mode of human being-in-the-world, which is itself historical. Tradition is not the content of history, but the mode of historicity itself. Insofar as historicity is a process, this means that human beings access tradition (again, meaning the preexistent constellation of preconceptions that ground any act of understanding), in every moment, in a partial and finite way: "The general nature of tradition is such that only the part of the past that is not past offers the possibility of historical knowledge."¹⁰⁰

What this rather enigmatic statement means is that there is a distinction between events in the past that have no preexistence in our consciousness (such as events of which we are totally unaware) and events that we have some kind of familiarity with. It is only the latter that are the grist for preconceptions. Human beings, in thinking about

⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282. The Romantic notion of tradition has some key similarities with the thought of MacIntyre and the Neo-Patristic theologians.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 290.

something, cannot do so with a complete appreciation for the entire history of concepts and events that relate to that thing: instead, they form judgments based on the selective elements of historical memory that are available to them at any given moment. In doing so they further extend the field of historical memory that they will have access to in making future judgments. In this way, human knowledge is based on tradition and constantly adds to tradition at one and the same time. Understanding looks both backwards and forwards and it is this double orientation that enables the movement of understanding in the first place. This is why Gadamer describes understanding as an act of participation: “Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is too far dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.”¹⁰¹

The nature of human understanding, then, by virtue of its participation in tradition, constantly possesses the characteristic of forward movement: “Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves.”¹⁰² This is the true meaning of Gadamer’s understanding of the hermeneutic circle: it is the constant movement between past and present, between preconceptions and newly created conceptions. And this movement, since it actively produces new conceptions that will serve as the basis for future judgments, is not a vicious circle but instead constantly moves forward, like a rolling wheel, the spatial expression of circular

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 291.

¹⁰² Ibid., 293.

motion. Claiming that Gadamer's theory is a vicious circle makes as much sense as claiming that because a wheel is constantly rolling over itself it cannot go anywhere.

Gadamer describes the limitations of human awareness in terms of a *horizon*: "Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of 'situation' by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. [...] The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."¹⁰³ Human understanding is possessed of both a historical horizon (that refers to a person's preconceptions and awareness of past events) and a present horizon (that refers to a person's awareness of present conditions). In any event of understanding, these two horizons merge: "In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past."¹⁰⁴ In other words, we can only interpret the past in terms of the present and the present in terms of the past: "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves."¹⁰⁵

Gadamer's insights have fundamental importance for the understanding of theology. This importance can be understood in terms of two points: the first concerning the location of the interpreter in a given historical and social situation, and the second in terms of the possibility for change based on a new reading of a traditional text. First, Gadamer shows that in order to understand a text, we must understand it in terms of our

¹⁰³ Ibid., 301.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 305.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

present and past situations together. There is no way to understand a text *purely* with reference to the historical conditions that produced it: we do not have unmediated access to those conditions: “Understanding tradition undoubtedly requires a historical horizon, then. But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by transposing ourselves into a historical situation. Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation.”¹⁰⁶

The accusation that an exegete is “arbitrarily” attempting to fit the meaning of a text to her own situation is therefore a red herring: this is what *every* interpreter does when she interprets a text, whether she is aware of it or not. This means that the interpreter of a text that asks herself the question, “What does this text mean for me and my situation?” is asking the most fundamental of all hermeneutical questions. According to Gadamer, using traditional theological texts to address very contemporary concerns (such as the moral status of homosexuality, secularity, or various forms of gender relations) is not a deviation from the “original concerns” of the text, but rather the very conditions for understanding it, because they are our conditions. As Gadamer says:

The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he first understands it *per se*, and then afterward uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text—i.e. to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand it at all.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 303-304.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 321.

The second major consequence that Gadamer's hermeneutics has for the study of theology is that it shows that "liberal" theologies that argue for change—even radical change—on the basis of hitherto unused (or underused) interpretations of traditional texts are not simply aberrations or the creation of the arbitrary will of these interpreters. They are instead traditional in the deepest and truest sense of that word. Theologies that argue for gay and feminist liberation on the basis of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospel or the Qur'ān are as traditional as those that do not. The present study will in fact take this insight another step further and suggest that they may even be *more* traditional than their "conservative" counterparts; for it is these theologies that are most conscious of the actual nature of tradition, which is its constant change and variation. If tradition were not continually recreated, and yet preserved at the same time, it would remain unintelligible to us, as unintelligible as indecipherable ancient languages. It is our appropriation and continual transformation of tradition that makes it "tradition" at all, i.e., something that can be understood and changed over and over again by later generations of interpreters. As James Risser puts it, "Preservation has to do primarily with holding open."¹⁰⁸ This holding open leaves in play all the possibilities of traditional texts for future interpretation, something impossible outside of the context of tradition itself.

Theological Modernity in Islam

Gadamer's theory of tradition demonstrates that there can be no modernity without tradition, and vice versa: "tradition" and its correlate "modernity" are simply

¹⁰⁸ Risser, *Voice of the Other*, 73.

two modes of historicity that exist on the same level of epistemology. Tradition is constituted by movement toward the perceived-to-have-been, whereas modernity is constituted by movement toward the anticipatory, rooted in the consciousness of the present moment. Their interaction constitutes a forward intellectual movement. The terms “modernism” or “traditionalism” are therefore imprecise, as they imply that there can exist ideological stances in which modernity and tradition can be radically separated from each other. Gadamer demonstrates that this is ultimately impossible. Instead, “theological modernism” can be perhaps better described as *theological modernity*, meaning a theological orientation that *acknowledges and starts from* the forward movement inherent in tradition. Rather than assigning an ideological value to the modern Turkish theologians studied here (such as the exclusive use of term “liberal” or “reformist”), use of the term “theological modernity” seems to also be descriptive of the theoretical underpinnings of their projects. Yet at the same time, as will be seen in the following pages, these projects also exist in an unavoidable state of political positionality. This is because of their status as specifically Turkish theological projects that participate in certain alignments and ideological conflicts in Turkish civil society. Again, as Gadamer shows us, this positionality does not detract from their use of certain medieval sources, nor does it render their use of these sources inauthentic. Rather, these projects’ utilization of their own social positionality constitutes the very condition for their access to traditional sources.

This study focuses on the contemporary Turkish theological response to the interaction between tradition and the present. The integration of tradition (Islam) and modernity that occurred in nineteenth and twentieth century Islamic reformism and was

espoused in the writings of liberal Muslim theologians can aptly be described as theological modernity, where “modernity” refers to the cultural context of that time period. Theologians such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) turned the rationalism of the Enlightenment against itself while still retaining some of its most striking epistemological features: they claimed that not only were reason, rationalism, and progress the essence of human potential, but they were the essence of *Islamic* potential. These theological “modernists” tore the Enlightenment’s notion of reason from its moorings in European supremacism, and in so doing located the essence of modernity within Islamic tradition itself. Their efforts are worthy of some attention here, as they helped create the climate of Islamic thought that allowed for the possibility of Islamic theological modernity in Turkey (the more specifically Ottoman Turkish roots of this movement will be detailed later in this study).

The challenges of imperialism, modern discourses on knowledge and science, and rapid social change in the Muslim world left Muslim intellectuals with a serious responsibility according to Iqbal: “The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past.”¹⁰⁹ Iqbal credits Afghani for being the most potent Muslim intellectual leader in this regard, calling him “the man...who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task.”¹¹⁰ As Albert Hourani points out, Afghani’s major achievement was to think of Islamic tradition as a tradition as such in order that its resources could

¹⁰⁹ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), 78.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

be most effectively put to use in the historical period at hand. For Afghani, “the centre of attention is no longer Islam as a religion, it is rather Islam as a civilization. The aim of man's acts is not the service of God alone, it is the creation of human civilization flourishing in all its parts.”¹¹¹ Islamic “modernism” was thus, from its very beginnings, oriented toward putting into practice the kind of dialectic between tradition and modernity described so many years later by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Afghani's disciple Muhammad 'Abduh continued in the steps of his master by outlining a modernist Islamic theological vision based on the tradition of Islamic dogmatic theology (*kalām*). What is perhaps most striking about 'Abduh's work, in particular his *Theology of Unity*, is just how easily this is accomplished. In this text, *kalām* proves itself to be very amenable to the rationalism that 'Abduh wants to pursue: “Theology is built on rational demonstration as alleged by each theologian in his spoken case. For in their rationality they only occasionally appealed to dogmatic tradition (*naql*) and then only after establishing the first principles from which they went on yet again to further deductions, like branches of the same stem.”¹¹² 'Abduh's description of *kalām* is highly accurate, and could just as easily describe a modern reformist theological project. He emphasizes the fact that Islamic theology, like the Qur'ān itself, constantly presents arguments and evidence for the claims it puts forth. Islam is a religion that in fact anticipated the enlightened justice of modernity: “Here was a religion which regulated human rights and gave equal respect to persons of all classes,

¹¹¹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 114.

¹¹² Muhammad 'Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), 29.

their beliefs, their dignity and their property.”¹¹³ For ‘Abduh, true Islam represented the best of what modernity had to offer. The only task was for Muslims to recognize these truths within their own tradition.

Muhammad Iqbal's seminal (and at times breathtaking) work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, embraces this mediation between past and present, tradition and modernity, most fully. According to Iqbal, in the modern Muslim world “the only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us.”¹¹⁴ This statement boldly proclaims the essence of Iqbal’s theology: that active change is part of Islamic tradition itself, and that departure from this tradition, while yet remaining within it, is the explicit task of Islamic theological modernity. Iqbal calls this feature of Islamic tradition “the principle of movement in the structure of Islam.”¹¹⁵ This movement refers to *ijtihād*, which Iqbal clearly interprets in a sense wider than its classical one that is restricted to matters of Sharia. For Iqbal, *ijtihād* is the constant movement between contemporary circumstance and ultimate truth in Islamic thought. Islamic thought is a constant and creative attempt to instantiate eternal truth in temporal circumstances.

This is not mere theorizing for Iqbal. His conception of movement within Islamic thought is meant in earnest: he offers the parliament of the then very young Turkish nation state as the epitome of successful *ijtihād*: “Turkey’s *ijtihād* is that

¹¹³ Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 78.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

according to the spirit of Islam the Caliphate or Imamate can be vested in a body of persons, or an elected Assembly. [...] The republican form of government is not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam, but also has become a necessity in view of the forces that are set free in the world of Islam.”¹¹⁶ These forces were the same external threats and social upheavals that Afghani reacted to, and Iqbal approaches them with a complete openness to a radically creative engagement between Islamic tradition and the conditions of modernity. Indeed, Iqbal seeks to make Islam itself the condition for successful modernization in the Muslim world.

Iqbal views the structure of the universe as being based on change and movement: “All lines of Muslim thought converge on a dynamic conception of the universe.”¹¹⁷ Iqbal thus theologially anticipates the hermeneutical insights of Gadamer. Iqbal's conception of Islam unites the eternal truths of Islamic tradition with the contingent realities of the present moment, all within a context of the ceaseless movement of human reflection between past and future. Iqbal looks to the Qur’ān for the basis of this profound theological vision: “And those who strive [*jāhadū*] in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths.”

A number of the theological projects and arguments currently being developed in Turkish divinity faculties follow in this tradition of Islamic “modernism,” or what is here termed “Islamic theological modernity.” These theologians represent a new trend in Turkish Islamic thought: the rising influence of academic theology. Turkish public universities, following the common European model, feature a system of divinity faculties (*ilahiyat fakulteleri*) that focus on the academic study and interpretation of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 124-125.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 110.

Islamic history and thought in addition to the study of other religious traditions and religious studies in general. The number of these faculties and their enrollment has increased dramatically in the past two decades, and academic theological projects are for the first time in modern Turkish history becoming widely known and influential. In addition, the fact that graduates from these faculties most often work in Turkish academia or in the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), the government ministry responsible for approving all religious instruction throughout the entire country, means that the work of these theologians has an enormous impact on the practice of Islam in Turkey. Academic theologians in Turkey engage in a wide array of projects. These include, to name only a few, new methodologies in Quranic and *ḥadīth* interpretation, the study of the religious psychology of Islam, engagement with philosophy of religion, and the study of nearly all schools of Islamic theology and philosophy.

As will be analyzed in more detail later, many versions of Turkish theological modernity originating from these faculties base their projects on the work of Abu Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944), who has a much larger significance outside of this particular movement as a figure of wide repute in orthodox Sunnism and even as a participant in the Turkish cultural and national tradition.¹¹⁸ In the way that Afghani, ‘Abduh, and Iqbal located the essence of rationalism and belief in progressive religious reform within Islamic tradition conceived more broadly, this particular group of thinkers

¹¹⁸ Some Turkish scholars have suggested that Māturīdī himself may have been ethnically Turkish. (see the discussion on this topic in Chapter Four). Others simply consider him a major contributor to a distinctively Turkish tradition of Islamic thought and practice. Nearly all Turkish Islamic intellectuals, however, do seem to agree that besides being a major Sunni theologian, Māturīdī played a particularly significant role in the history of the Turkish nation and Turkish cultural tradition. All agree that there is something particularly “Turkish” about Māturīdī.

(following strains of thought founded at the beginning of the Turkish Republic) asserts that these values are not just inherently Islamic, but inherently *Māturīdī*, and even for some inherently Turkish.

Some brief examples will suffice here to demonstrate how the version of theological modernity under analysis in this study is both related to, and represents an interesting departure from, earlier models of Islamic theological modernity proposed by Afghani, ‘Abduh, and Iqbal. Hanifi Özcan is one of the more striking thinkers in this regard. He is currently professor of divinity within the philosophy of religion section of the Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Divinity in Izmir. His work is relentlessly creative and systematic, and addresses a number of important contemporary issues. Like Afghani and ‘Abduh, Özcan argues that Islam as a system of thought is fundamentally based on reason and evidence.¹¹⁹ Like Iqbal, Özcan argues that change is inherent in the structure of religion itself, and therefore each successive generation of religious believers has not only the right but the obligation to reinterpret the fundamental truths of that religion in light of the temporal and social situation in which they live. Özcan sees religion as a force that must successfully mediate between society (*toplum*) and the individual (*fert/birey*) in fulfilling its ultimate goal, which is satisfying the spiritual needs of humanity.¹²⁰ Religion’s relationship between the social and the individual forms a major theme in the writings of these theologians, who see the task of Muslims as instantiating the eternal truths of Islam within the ever-changing realities of the social

¹¹⁹ Hanifi Özcan, *Matürīdī’de Bilgi Problemi* [The Problem of Knowledge in Māturīdī] (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1998), 213; 208-209.

¹²⁰ See on this point: Hanifi Özcan, “Modern Çağda Dinin Birey ve Toplum için Anlamı,” [The Interpretation of Religion for the Individual and Society in the Modern Age] *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 32 (2007), 131-141; *Matürīdī’de Dini Çoğulculuk* [Religious Pluralism in Māturīdī] (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1999), 55.

world, realities which in and of themselves may often be significant improvements over the lives of previous generations of Muslims. Özcan's work also outlines a theory of change within the *Sharī'a* by elaborating the distinction between what is divine (*ilahi*) and what is human (*beşeri*) within the *Sharī'a* itself.¹²¹ This means that former rulings can be abolished once their original context is no longer valid, and that change itself is prefigured within the *Sharī'a*.¹²²

Sönmez Kutlu, professor of divinity at the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity makes a similar argument. According to Kutlu, Māturīdī's "rationalism" (*akılcılık*) can be utilized to combat the obscurantism and authoritarianism of contemporary conservative Islamic movements within Turkey. Like Özcan, Kutlu argues that Māturīdī's understanding of the relationship between religion (*din*) and Sharia (*şeriat*) points to the possibility of the removal of certain provisions within the *Sharī'a* once the social conditions that originally necessitated their existence are no longer valid.¹²³ Hülya Alper, a female professor of divinity in the *kalām* section of the Faculty of Divinity at Marmara University in Istanbul, also argues that the balance between reason and revelation in Māturīdī's moral thought implies that reason must play a major role in determining the moral status of a situation not found in the texts of the revelation. In such situations, she argues, human reason can derive solutions to new moral problems

¹²¹ Özcan, *Çoğulculuk*, 33; 66; 55.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²³ See Sönmez Kutlu, "Bilinmeyen Yönleriyle Türk Din Bilgini: Imam Matüridi," [Unknown Aspects of the Turkish Religious Scholar Māturīdī] *Dini Araştırmalar* 15:1 (2003): 5-28; "Matüridi Akılcılığı ve Onun Günümüz Sorunları Çözmeye Katkısı," [Māturīdī Rationalism and its Contribution to Solving Present-Day Problems] in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matüridi ve Matüridilik Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı, 22-24 Mayıs 2009*, İstanbul (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2012), 549-575.

by relating these problems to the general principles of good and evil found in revelation.¹²⁴ Māturīdī is also used in a number of other theological projects to underpin the division between religion and politics, or to argue for the necessity for religious tolerance in society.¹²⁵ In other words, today's theologians in Turkey construct versions of theological modernity in ways similar to Afghani, ‘Abduh, and Iqbal, by actively using their own situatedness in time and society to provide insights into the meanings of traditional texts.

Concluding Remarks

Gadamer’s understanding of tradition reveals how the use of Māturīdī in Turkish Islamic theological projects can be seen as a point of entry into the analysis of theological modernity in Turkey. This theoretical framework helps to outline the conditions of Islamic theology in Turkey today, as well as providing a standard by which to understand its development from the republican period, and its roots in even earlier periods. In the words of contemporary Chinese philosopher Li Yuanxing:

¹²⁴ See Hülya Alper, *İmam Matüridi’de Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi* [The Relationship between Reason and Revelation in Māturīdī] (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2010), 205-218.

¹²⁵ On the former see for instance Şaban Ali Düzgün, “Matüridi’de Din, Siyaset Kültürü ve Yönetim Erki (Mülk/Devlet),” [Religion, Political Culture, and Administrative Power (Property/State) in Māturīdī] in *Matüridi’nin Düşünce Dünyası*, ed. Şaban Ali Düzgün (Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2011), 349-369; Sönmez Kutlu, “Bilinmeyen”; “İmam Matüridi’ye Göre Diyanet Siyaset Ayrımı ve Çağdaş Tartışmalarla Mukayesi,” [The Distinction between Religion and Politics According to Imam Māturīdī and the Comparison with Contemporary Discussions] *İslamiyat* 8:2 (2005): 55-69. On the latter see Hanifi Özcan, *Çoğulculuk*; Saffet Sarıkaya, “Matüridi’nin Din Anlayışında Hoşgörü (Diğer Din Mezheplere Bakışı),” [Tolerance in Māturīdī’s Understanding of Religion (His View of Other Religious Groups)] in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matüridi ve Matüridilik Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı, 22-24 Mayıs 2009*, İstanbul (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2012), 108-122.

“Tradition is the matrix of modernity and a participant in its construction.”¹²⁶

Contemporary Islamic theology in Turkey demonstrates how modernity itself is constituted by tradition: what this implies is that modernity and tradition are not discrete historical epochs that separated from each other in the midst of the 18th and 19th centuries, but that “tradition” and “modernity” are found in every period of history. Tradition (following Gadamer) properly refers to the continuity that the present has with the past, and modernity properly refers to the future-orientedness of the present. The mediation between the two in human understanding produces change, both ideological and actual. Abdolkarim Soroush points to this dynamic when he writes, “Islam is nothing but a series of interpretations of Islam.”¹²⁷

What does this imply, then, for the study of Islamic theology? It first implies, as pointed out above, that liberal theologies are as traditional as any other and provide a perfect case study for the dynamics of religious tradition in general, dynamics that constantly produce change within a matrix of continuity. The initial chapters of this study will be concerned with locating these dynamics of change and continuity within the traditionary texts that form the basis for important forms of contemporary Turkish Islamic theology. These contemporary forms of Turkish Islamic theology are then analyzed with special attention to their participation in this historical context, and how their participation in tradition is itself the necessary ground of the theology they propose.

¹²⁶ Li Yuanxing, “Revival of Tradition or Modernization? The Perspective of Subjectivity in the Study of Modernization Theory and a Critique of the Functionalist Approach,” *Chinese Studies in History* 43, no. 1 (Fall 2009), 66.

¹²⁷ Abdolkarim Soroush, “The Changeable and the Unchangeable,” in *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, ed. Kari Vogt, Lena Larson, and Christian Moe (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 14.

Second, this approach implies that when theologians argue about modernity and tradition, these terms may be acting as stand-ins for other concerns. For if it is the case that any interpretive (or in this case more specifically theological) activity takes place within a dynamic of change and continuity, theologians of all types must in some way or another engage with both modernity and tradition. The complete rejection of “modernity” by revivalist theologians thus comes to be seen as a quintessentially “modern” act, as it assumes the kind of dichotomy between modernity and tradition, continuity and change, that can only be conceived within the dichotomization of these two concepts. In other words, Seyyid Qutb is simply the opposite of Anthony Giddens and the messianic self-assuredness of secular nationalism; theocracy does with God what secular nationalism does with the people. Both of these political conceptions depend for their existence on a strict dichotomization between tradition and modernity which, as Gadamer and others have shown, simply does not exist in reality. In examining modern theology, then, we must try to understand what the terms “modern” and “traditional” actually stand for in theological discourse. We will suggest that they refer to specific structures of power, such as patriarchy or secular human rights. The final chapter of this study will attempt to tease out these references in modern Turkish theology, and with the help of Carl Schmitt, try to understand their relationship with political and ideological conflict in contemporary Turkey.

Before examining the work of the Turkish theologians, it is first necessary to examine the traditional roots of Turkish theological modernity. The next chapter will take up the fundamentals of Māturīdī’s theology and how it is based on notions of paradox and change. Having discovered the potentially radical implications of

Māturīdī's theology that will later be appropriated by modern Turkish theologians, the third chapter will examine how these fundamental elements of Māturīdī's system were ignored or obscured by the later Māturīdī theologians that turned his doctrine into a school tradition. This chapter will comprehensively analyze the history of Māturīdism from the end of Māturīdī's life to the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Turkish Republic, showing how Māturīdī's radical notions of change and paradox were progressively eliminated in order to fit his doctrine into a larger conception of Sunni orthodoxy. The fourth chapter will take up the work of the modern Turkish Māturīdīs, showing how their work uses these long-forgotten bases of Māturīdī's theology to engage with questions of secularity, nationalism, and religious reform in modern Turkey. As alluded to above, the fifth and final chapter will reflect on the social and political situatedness of these Turkish theologians by analyzing how their theology fits in with prevailing ideological and political divisions in modern and contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER TWO

ROOTS OF TURKISH THEOLOGICAL MODERNITY, I: NOTIONS OF PARADOX,
CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE WORK OF ABŪ MANŞŪR AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that modern Turkish theologians have “rediscovered” something about Māturīdī’s theology that was obscured by his medieval followers. In a sense, Māturīdī’s theology was “proto-modern,” and this was due to Māturīdī’s theological epistemology. This theological epistemology is founded on Māturīdī’s understanding of reason (*‘aql*). The present chapter will argue, however, that Māturīdī’s conception of reason was much broader than the simple notion of pure reason or strict logical deduction. What Māturīdī means by reason in the broadest sense encapsulates his entire epistemology, an epistemology that attempts to explain how human beings may arrive at objective knowledge without needing recourse to unverifiable forms of authority. This method consists of two components: an explicit empiricism and an implicit historicism. These two components of Māturīdī’s epistemology are part of an overarching philosophical realism that he employs to understand theological problems such as the immanence or transcendence of God and the simultaneous affirmation of human freedom and divine omnipotence. Māturīdī attempts to bridge the logical gap between such apparent contradictions by outlining a theory of perspective, a theory that is a key epistemological component of philosophical realism.

Māturīdī constructed a kind of “theological realism” that established the existence of eternal and unchanging truths such as the oneness of God, but at the same

time remained open to the endless changeability of the world. In fact, as we shall see, Māturīdī utilized the notion of variation and flux (*taqallub*) in the world to prove the existence of the one unchanging God. It is this realism, which combines the affirmation of eternal truth with the premise of contingency in human affairs, that modern Turkish scholars of Māturīdī find so interesting. They characterize this theological position in the same terms that Māturīdī himself does, as a kind of “rationalism” (*akılcılık*). Here “rationalism” refers to the notion that human reflection on religious matters must remain flexible and realistic in the face of the ever changing nature of the world. In the past, Māturīdīan realism was precisely the point where his theology was abandoned by his disciples and the later systematizers of his thought. Today, however, it is the point at which modern Turkish theologians have rediscovered his relevance. This chapter will explore in detail this forgotten component of Māturīdī’s thought.

Introduction: Life and Works

Along with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (873-935), Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī is widely considered one of the founders of Sunni theological orthodoxy.¹²⁸ Māturīdī was probably born in Māturīd, either a neighborhood of Samarqand in modern Central Asia

¹²⁸ General treatments of Māturīdī’s life and work include: Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995); Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Kutlu, “Bilinmeyen”; Ahmet Vehbi Ecer, *Büyük Türk Din Alimi Māturīdī* (İstanbul: Yesevi Yayıncılık, 2007); Ahmet Ak, *Büyük Alimi Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik* (İstanbul: Bayrak Matbaası, 2008); Sönmez Kutlu, *Türklerin İslamlaşma Sürecinde Mürcie ve Tesirleri* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2010), 271-284; Sönmez Kutlu, “Ebu Mansur El-Māturīdī’nin Mezhebi Arka Planı,” in *İmam Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik: Tarihi Arka Planı, Hayatı, Eserleri, Fikirleri, ve Māturīdilik Mezhebi*, ed. Sönmez Kutlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2011), 129-160; Bekir Topaloğlu, “Ebu Mansur El-Māturīdī’nin Kelam Görüşleri,” in *İmam Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik: Tarihi Arka Planı, Hayatı, Eserleri, Fikirleri, ve Māturīdilik Mezhebi*, ed. Sönmez Kutlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2011), 193-220.

or a village near it.¹²⁹ It is generally accepted that he died in 944. Until very recently, almost nothing was known about his life other than the name of his teacher, Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn al-‘Abbās al-‘Iyāḍī (d. ca. 275/888); his birthplace, and some of his works, which include his famous systematic theology *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (Book of Unity)*,¹³⁰ his equally well-known work of Quranic hermeneutics, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*; works of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and refutations of the Mu‘tazila.¹³¹

However, new research published in Turkish and based on recently discovered manuscripts in Istanbul has completely changed the current state of knowledge about Māturīdī’s life and intellectual activities.¹³² Summarizing the information provided by

¹²⁹ Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 18.

¹³⁰ Currently, there are only two complete translations of the sole surviving manuscript of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, both of them into Turkish: *Kitabü’t Tevhid*, trans. Hüseyin Sudi Erdoğan (İstanbul: Hicret Yayınları, 1981) and *Kitabü’t-tevhid Tercümesi*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: İSAM, 2002). Key passages of the work are also found in English in J. Meric Pessagno, “*Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb*: The View of Abū Maṣū‘ al-Māturīdī,” *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, No. 1 (1984): 177-191; “The Uses of Evil in Māturīdīan Thought,” *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 59-82.

¹³¹ Biographical entries on Māturīdī in published works include: ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Abī al-Wafā’ al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-muḍīyya fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muhammad al-Ḥilū (Cairo: Dar Iḥyā’ Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1980-1982), vol. III, entry 1032; Zayn al-Din Ibn Quṭlūbughā, *Tāj al-tarājīm fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya* (Baghdad: 1962), entry 173; ‘Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā’id al-bahīyya fī tarājīm al-Ḥanafīyya* (Beirut: 1998), entry 412. Useful information about his works and intellectual activities is also found in volume two of Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay and Şaban Ali Düzgün (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2004), 471-474.

¹³² These include theological works written by contemporaries of Māturīdī, such as Abū Bakr al-‘Iyāḍī and Māturīdī’s own student Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Sa‘īd al-Rustughfanī (d. 956). The most important of these manuscripts with respect to Māturīdī’s biographical details is a certain Ibn Yaḥyā’s commentary on Abū Salāma al-Samarqandī’s *Jumal Uṣūl al-Dīn*, which includes a wealth of detailed information about Māturīdī’s life and intellectual career. Von Kuegelgen and Muminov establish that this Ibn Yaḥyā was the son of one the other students of Abū Naṣr al-‘Iyāḍī, Māturīdī’s own teacher, firmly placing the text in the tenth century and making it a reliable witness to the events that it describes. The fact that the text also transmits teachings of Māturīdī from his own students such as Rustughfanī also testifies to its reliability. These manuscripts were apparently first described in detail by Anke von Kuegelgen and Ashirbek Muminov; see Von Kuegelgen and Muminov, “Māturīdī Döneminde Semerkand İlahiyatçıları,” in *İmam*

the modern historians Ahmet Ak, Ashirbek Muminov, and Anke von Kuegelgen, the following points are clear: (1) Māturīdī died at the age of one hundred, placing his birth date around 836, making him an exact contemporary of Ash‘arī and (2) Māturīdī was a well-known and respected member of *Dār al-Juzjāniyya*, an institutionalized Ḥanafī center of learning in Samarqand. This school was founded by Abū Sulaymān Mūsā ibn Sulaymān al-Juzjānī (d. 816), a student of Abū Yūsuf (d. 798) and Muhammad al-Shaybānī (d. 804), both famous disciples of the eponym of the Ḥanafī school of law, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767).¹³³ Māturīdī eventually assumed leadership of this school at which he himself used to study, out of deference to his reputation of learning.

The *Dār al-Juzjāniyya* was famous for its theological rationalism and open disdain for cooperation with political authority, which distinguished it from a competing institution in Samarqand at the time, the *‘Iyāḍiyya* (named not for Māturīdī’s own teacher, but his teacher’s son), which in fact followed more closely the theology and exegetical style of the traditionalist *ahl al-ḥadīth* camp. As we shall see, these theological divisions are clearly reflected in Māturīdī’s own works, where he heavily criticizes submission to authority and irrational thought (and that of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* in particular), along with his extensive criticism of the various theological errors of the Mu‘tazila. One detail in particular stands out from this newly gathered biographical

Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik: Tarihi Arka Planı, Hayatı, Eserleri, Fikirleri, ve Māturīdilik Mezhebi, ed. Sönmez Kutlu (Ankara; Otto Yayınları, 2011): 279-191. It seems that at the present time the only other studies of Māturīdī that incorporate this and other recent advances are those being done in Turkish: see also Ahmet Ak, *Büyük Alimi Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik* (İstanbul: Bayrak Matbaası, 2008); “Matüridiliğin Ortaya Çıkışı,” in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matüridi ve Matüridilik: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı, 22-24 Mayıs 2009, İstanbul* (Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 435-451; Kutlu, “Bilinmeyen.”

¹³³See above Ahmet Ak, “Matüridiliğin Ortaya Çıkışı”; Anke von Kuegelgen and Ashirbek Muminov, “Māturīdī Döneminde Semerkand İlahiyatçıları.”

information: it is revealed that Māturīdī once issued a fatwa declaring that anyone who supports an unjust ruler should be considered an unbeliever (*kāfir*). For Māturīdī, this attitude toward unjust authority also includes submission to any type of intellectual authority that involves submission to unverifiable claims of knowledge, such as mystical illumination or arguments from authority alone. This basic intellectual posture of Māturīdī is a good starting point for a study of his theology.

Authority and Epistemology in Māturīdī: Foundations of Theological Realism

Despite his famously obtuse style, Māturīdī gives the reader clear indications of what elements are most important to his theological system. Māturīdī does, as many commentators have pointed out, repeat himself often and seems to scatter important passages haphazardly throughout his main theological text, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. However, he deliberately includes crucial indications of his overall theological framework, even if they occur rather un-systematically. This is because he takes the dialogic framework of Islamic dogmatic theology (*kalām*) extremely seriously, and often places important theoretical passages within the context of a debate with an interlocutor. This leads us to the first major assumption undergirding Māturīdī's theological system: the recognition of religious difference. Following the benediction, the very first sentences of Māturīdī's work state:

We have found that people who bear different affiliations in sect or in religion (*dīn*) do in fact agree, despite their disagreements in religion, upon one principle: that whoever agrees with them is correct, and that whoever agrees with someone other than them is in error. This happens based on the agreement of all of them that each of them has predecessors (*salaf*) on which they depend for tradition

(*muqallad*).¹³⁴

The placement of this passage at the beginning of Māturīdī's work is no accident. Māturīdī here establishes the foundational problematic of his entire system. He confronts the epistemological problem posed by the diversity of religious claims to truth more directly than perhaps any other Islamic theologian of his day, pointing out that he is perfectly aware that his claim to theological truth is not the only one available. Moreover, this realization poses the simple but crucial problem of choosing which beliefs to adopt as true.

Highlighting these opening remarks in Māturīdī's text is vitally important because it establishes the context for his concern for epistemology. This context is the real-world experience of different religious and philosophical beliefs, which in early Islamic Transoxiana included Zoroastrianism (the religion of the elite classes prior to the Arab invasions of the eighth century C.E.), Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and a variety of naturalistic and dualistic philosophical systems. According to V. Barthold, religious minorities were granted a degree of freedom in Samānid Central Asia not found in Pre-Islamic Persia, where the Zoroastrian hierarchy exerted a stronger influence over the state.¹³⁵

Despite the gradual Islamization of the region that took place after the conquests of the eighth century, during Māturīdī's lifetime in the late ninth and early tenth century significant religious minorities remained within the city of Samarqand. A Manichean monastery is reported to have existed in the city in the tenth century, and a small

¹³⁴ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 65.

¹³⁵ V.V. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, ed. C.E. Bosworth (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), 180.

minority of Zoroastrians living within the city was responsible for maintaining the irrigation canals that watered the city.¹³⁶ In addition, there existed a significant community of East Syrian (Nestorian) Christians who were able to freely carry out the practices of their religion.¹³⁷ A large community of Jews, which may have even been larger than the community of Christians in the city, is also attested in tenth and eleventh century sources.¹³⁸ Separate Mu‘tazilī and Karrāmī institutions of learning also existed in Samarqand in this period, and Māturīdī’s teacher Abū Naṣr al-‘Iyāḍī’s great renown in debates with such groups also attests to a pluralistic intellectual environment in Samarqand during the time of Māturīdī.¹³⁹

It comes as no surprise, then, that Māturīdī devotes over one-fourth of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* to analyses and refutations of the views of these multifarious religious groups, including dualistic and naturalistic philosophers, Jews, Marcionites, followers of the Syriac Christian figure Bār Daysān, Manicheans, Zoroastrians, Trinitarian Christians, representatives of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (whom he accuses of anthropomorphism), and the Mu‘tazila. Māturīdī’s recognition of a plurality of religious beliefs does not, therefore, seem to be only an academic exercise but a response to a situation that he felt was very real and urgent. Perhaps the most vivid description of the kind of interfaith debates that took place in the Islamic world in the tenth century C.E. is provided by al-Ḥumaydī’s account of a certain traveler named Ibn Sa‘dī who journeyed from al-Andalus to Baghdad at the end of the tenth century. While in Baghdad, Ibn Sa‘dī visited a *majlis*

¹³⁶ Osman Aydınlı, *Semerkant Tarihi: Fethinden Sāmāniler’in Yıkılışına Kadar* (93-389/711-999) (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2011), 505-507.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 511.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 513.

¹³⁹ Ak, “Māturīdīliğin Ortaya Çıkışı,” 448; Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, 469.

that was attended by representatives from Islamic, Jewish, and Christian denominations and even included atheists and skeptics. During this gathering, the members of the group agreed to only debate with each other on the basis of reason, and not make appeals to any other form of authority (i.e., any form of authority that could not be accepted by all of the participants).¹⁴⁰

The fact that Māturīdī takes this social reality so seriously as a theological problem explains two rather remarkable features of his text. The first is its apparently haphazard structure, which embeds Māturīdī’s own theological insights in the context of a larger conversation being conducted between multiple interlocutors. This feature often makes it difficult to determine exactly what Māturīdī himself is saying on any given topic. His tendency to summarize the position of his opponents in extraordinary detail, and even elaborate on points where he agrees with them, often makes it difficult to locate his own position on any given subject. The second remarkable feature of the text is Māturīdī’s insistence on the absolute objectivity of reason (*‘aql*). The answer to the question of how to arrive at objective truth among a variety of claims is simple according to Māturīdī: one must follow the dictates of reason, which with respect to religion is employed through the analysis of empirical and historical information. The necessity of identifying the truth among a plurality of truth claims becomes the fundamental concern of Māturīdī’s theological system, and marks an important shift in

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Sa‘dī’s horrified description of this rather standard intellectual roundtable is translated by Sydney Griffith in *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 64; on this and other inter-religious polemical encounters of the tenth century see David Sklare, “Responses to Islamic Polemics by Jewish mutakallimūn in the Tenth Century,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 137-161.

emphasis away from simply defending Islamic orthodoxy from heretics, or merely systematizing the creed of venerable ancestors. Recall Māturīdī's use of the term *salaf* (predecessors) in the passage quoted above: what comes after these sentences is his famously potent critique against following traditional authorities (*taqlīd*) instead of rational proofs (*hujjat 'aqlin*).

Māturīdī makes it clear time and again in his text that *any* religious belief must ultimately be based on reasoned arguments and cannot simply proceed from blind adherence to one tradition or another. Simply taking someone else's word for doctrine is not enough: each step of Islamic belief, from the very assumption of the existence of the world and knowledge of it all the way through the prophecy of Muḥammad, must be based on rational proofs. This implies that Māturīdī uses the term *salaf* in this passage almost with derision: adherence to any *salafī* is not true belief at all, because it is not based on individual reason. This is a very unusual use of this otherwise revered terminology in Sunnī Islamic theology, and Māturīdī's text bears out his anti-establishment attitude: despite his extensive training in the Ḥanafī school of theology and law, he only mentions Abū Ḥanīfa four times throughout the course of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, and never declares his allegiance to a school or eponym.¹⁴¹ As we shall see below, for Māturīdī the only authority to which a Muslim is absolutely beholden is the Qur'ān, and even this has to be interpreted rationally.

Evaluating Māturīdī's System: Metaphysics, Epistemology, Theological Anthropology

¹⁴¹ Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 34.

In order to understand Māturīdī's theology in a way that keeps as close as possible to the structure of his writings, our analysis will try to present the theological arguments found in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* with as much deference as possible to his style of writing and argumentation.¹⁴² The epistemological and metaphysical points discussed in these passages are foundational to Māturīdī's system as a whole and thus form a general framework for how he approaches Islamic theology. The present analysis will focus on just how these key metaphysical and epistemological concepts logically imply each other. Following these key points as Māturīdī himself discusses them will allow us to better ascertain the conceptual structure of his theological system.

Praise be to God, the unifier of eternity and divinity, unique in continuity and lordship, possessor of the radiant proof and great riches; He who brought forth created beings through His ability and directs their affairs through his wisdom, according to the pre-existence of his knowledge and will. The entirety of his creation is subject to change through his talents and goodness. He establishes things as He wills. "He is not to be questioned about what He has done; but they will be questioned," according to the foolishness or wisdom that He has established in them— they will be turned away [from evil] by the question and rewarded for [turning away from] foolishness, such that they may prefer wisdom. We ask Him to honor us with His acceptance and that our resolve will be fit for guidance, and that He enlighten our hearts with divine unity, for He is the Praiseworthy, the Glorious.¹⁴³

This doxology of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* alludes to the foundations of Māturīdī's metaphysics and epistemology. God is described here as the one who possesses the "radiant proof"

¹⁴² The analysis in this chapter attempts to go beyond the presentations of Māturīdī's doctrine in Rudolph and Ceric by taking into account all the different facets of Māturīdī's epistemology, including passages that seem obscure or are placed outside of the sections specifically devoted to this topic. It also attempts to relate these various ideas to his metaphysics in order to create a comprehensive picture of Māturīdī's thought that reveals his distinct theological method.

¹⁴³ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 301.

(*al-burhān al-munīr*), which as we will see, alludes to God's role in empowering human reason. The universe is also described as in constant flux or change (*taqallub*), which emerges as the key notion of Māturīdī's metaphysics. The benediction closes with an emphasis on the importance of affirming God's oneness, for if the world is understood as in constant flux and change, the one truth that holds the universe together is divine unity, the oneness and omnipotence of the creator.

Epistemology I: Māturīdī Empiricism

God Most High has created human beings for testing (*miḥna*), in that He has made them a people of discrimination and knowledge, [in order to distinguish] the praiseworthy from the blameworthy. He has made the blameworthy distasteful to their intellects (*'uqūl*) and what is praiseworthy pleasing to them. However, He has [also] created in their minds (*adhhān*), the preference for what is distasteful greater than that for what is good, and the desire for what He forbids greater than [the desire for] what He approves. He calls to them— according to that for which they have been fashioned and for the sake of which they have been honored— to prefer one thing over another; thus He has made distasteful to their intellects the toleration of any model (paradigm) other than [the one they prefer].¹⁴⁴

The importance of reason (*'aql*) in Māturīdī's epistemology is well known.¹⁴⁵ For Māturīdī, reason is what makes human beings human.¹⁴⁶ It is “that according to which

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 301.

¹⁴⁵ On the importance of reason to Māturīdī's epistemology, see J. Meric Pessagno, “Intellect and Religious Assent: The View of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī,” *Muslim World* 69, No. 1 (1979): 18-27; Ulrich Rudolph, “Ratio und Überlieferung in der Erkenntnislehre al-Ash'arī's und al-Māturīdī's,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 142, No. 1 (1992): 72-89; Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 83-92; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, 255-257; Kutlu, “Bilinmeyen,” 14-18; Özcan, *Matüridi'de Bilgi Problemi*, 209; Hülya Alper, *İmam Matüridi'de Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2010). Rudolph accurately notes that reason plays a more commanding role in Māturīdī's thought than in Ash'arī's, though Ceric argues that in Māturīdī's view

they have been fashioned and that in which they have been honored,” the part of humanity that enables it to discern benefit from harm, and truth from falsehood. According to Māturīdī, God created a world where human beings can discern the good through the use of reason: however, this is opposed to their inner desire for what is repugnant, a desire that God also created. Thus, Māturīdī exhorts the reader to cleave to “that for the sake of which they have been honored”—meaning the gift of reason—instead of their baser instincts. Reason is the controlling element of Māturīdī’s epistemology and the guarantor of accurate truth claims. As mentioned above, this is why he so vehemently rejects any claim to truth that attempts to circumvent reason, such as any appeal to traditional authority (*taqlīd*) or mystical inspiration of any sort (*ilhām*).¹⁴⁷

That Māturīdī believed in a very strong sense of objective reason is reinforced by his description of human nature. To return to the translation of the passage under scrutiny:

God has made all of what pertains to [human beings] fluctuate between a harm that is feared and a benefit that is desired, so that it would constitute for them knowledge of whatever is characterized by desiring or fearing. And He has created human beings according to natures that avoid some things and incline toward others, and he has made them foresee in their intellects the good in some of what their nature avoids for the sake of good outcomes, and the evil in some things toward which their nature inclines for the sake of blameworthy outcomes.

reason is meant to elaborate on tradition, to “give a proper meaning” to it (91). Alper’s excellent study of this issue, the most thorough treatment on the subject available, also rightly emphasizes the harmony between reason and prophetic revelation in Māturīdī’s system, such that his view of these two elements cannot be seen to be in contradiction in any sense (213).

¹⁴⁶ On this point see Pessagno, “Intellect and Religious Assent,” 21; and Alper, *İmam Matürîdî’de Akıl-Vahy İlişkisi*, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 69.

He has shaped [human beings] such that they will endure what is detestable to their natures for the sake of a pleasant outcome; [likewise] they may hate that to which they are attracted for the sake of a bad end.¹⁴⁸

This passage further illustrates the divine origin of human knowledge, explaining that God has created the world in such a way that it can be understood by the use of human reason. In addition, God has provided human beings with intellects (*'uqūl*) which they are able to utilize to make rational sense of the world around them. While humans are able to make certain conclusions about the world through their own intellectual efforts, it is God that creates both the world and human nature in such a way as to make this possible. This serves to highlight all the more that Māturīdī is operating from a conception of epistemology that rests on the assumption that human reason can be capable of objectivity, and that this is in fact the outcome of its proper use.

But how does human reason produce knowledge? Māturīdī continues:

[God] has tested [human beings] whereby their intellects reject tolerating [evil] and has awakened [in them] the desire for good works and noble moral deeds through choosing what is good from among [possible] acts and by avoiding what is evil. He has made that through which they are tested of two types: the burdensome and the easy, and the simple and the difficult. [People] experience trial in undergoing each of these together, and there is a touchstone for that toward which they venture, and from which they abstain. Accordingly, [God] established the means (*asbāb*) by which they arrive at the principle (*aṣl*) and by which one is raised to every degree and is granted every virtue. This [principle] is knowledge... according to which God has made the way to it of two types: the first being empirical experience (*'iyān*) which is the most preferable of the sources of knowledge and the one which cannot admit of ignorance...The second is tradition (*samʿ*), whose truth or falsehood is known through the evidence of the senses.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 301.

¹⁴⁹ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 301-302.

The definition of knowledge that Māturīdī offers here is the most concise of the many disparate discussions of epistemology found in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. This definition is important because it reduces Māturīdī’s complex epistemology into its two most basic components: a notion of empiricism and a notion of historicism. These two categorizations (‘*iyān* or *sam*’) constitute the two most basic types of information that are used to constitute knowledge: 1) immediate empirical perception and 2) reliable reports about things that cannot be immediately perceived. While empirical perception (‘*iyān*’) is the most basic of these two categories, *sam*’ (tradition) is composed of reported information, or *akhbār*. These two categories are the first two of the three “means” (*asbāb*) used to establish knowledge.¹⁵⁰

The third of the three *asbāb* is *nazar*, or reasoned reflection conducted by the human intellect. It is the job of reason (‘*aql*’) to organize these inputs into an accurate picture of the world: “As for reason (‘*aql*’), it perceives the actual truths of things (ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’) by means of two perspectives: either by way of that which conveys established impressions, i.e., the senses, or by means of the organization of sensory knowledge and what is demonstrated by evidence (*dalīl*).”¹⁵¹ Unlike the case with most Muslim theologians, primary knowledge for Māturīdī is purely empirical. Sensory input is, as we have seen above, considered the most reliable of these sources of information. Reported information can be considered a form of reliable evidence only if it is deemed sound by rational means. The process of organizing pieces of information into a coherent reflection of reality is reasoned reflection (*nazar*). Reasoned reflection is the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 480

primary function of the human intellect (also ‘*aq̣l*’), that which sets human beings apart from all other creatures on earth.

Māturīdī's exact epistemological schema is at times difficult to work out because he assigns differing values to different elements of it throughout his work.¹⁵² In the beginning of the text, for instance, he argues that knowledge of religion (*dīn*) is based on reason (‘*aq̣l*’) and tradition (*sam‘*).¹⁵³ What this passage and the passages discussed above demonstrate is that for Māturīdī, the only sufficient type of knowledge is reasoned knowledge, and that all other forms of information must somehow be based on reason or in some sense derivative from it. Yet at the same time, he also ascribes absolute value to empirical knowledge (‘*iyān*’), the kind of knowledge experienced firsthand by a knowing subject through the senses. For Māturīdī, sensory input is the most reliable source of knowledge, one which if used properly “is the most preferable of the sources of knowledge and that one which cannot admit of ignorance.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, sensory input is practically a priori and cannot be questioned, provided of course that the senses are determined to be sound.¹⁵⁵ It may be best, then, to understand the term ‘*iyān*’ as “empirical experience,” something more fundamental than simply sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound; it is rather the fundamental experience of the world that is expressed by this term. It is the job of reason to organize sensory impressions into a

¹⁵² The most thorough treatment of Māturīdī's epistemology is Hanifi Özcan's *Matürīdī'de Bilgi Problemi* (see also the works cited above). Our analysis follows Özcan's and Alper's insight that reason is the fundamental controlling element in Māturīdī's epistemological schema.

¹⁵³ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 66.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 223-224. Māturīdī is met with the objection that the senses often err, and are clearly not always reliable. Yet as Māturīdī points out, the only way in fact to determine that one's senses are not sound is by reference to other pieces of sensory information, therefore demonstrating that sensory input is absolutely fundamental to human knowledge of any kind.

coherent picture of reality, and it is in this sense that all knowledge, including knowledge of religion, is according to Māturīdī based on the use of reason.

In sum, then, for Māturīdī empirical experience is the foundation of all knowledge. Reason is the faculty that people use to organize empirical perceptions into a coherent description of the real world, aided by rationally verified historical or traditional information. What is most important for Māturīdī is that empirical experience is foundational for all other forms of knowledge because its objective validity is unquestionable. In this sense, Māturīdī’s view of empiricism is similar to that of the modern philosopher of science, Karl Popper. Popper describes the basis of empiricism as the proposition that, “All we know about the world of facts must...be expressible in the form of statements about our experiences. [...] Science is merely an attempt to classify and describe this perceptual knowledge, these immediate experiences whose truth we cannot doubt.”¹⁵⁶ Popper’s statement perfectly describes Māturīdī’s own understanding of experience. It is the immediacy of empirical perception that so impresses Māturīdī, and it is on this basis that he argues for its objective validity. Māturīdī makes this clear when he challenges the deniers of the objectivity of empirical knowledge to a simple thought experiment: if one is being tortured, would one be able to deny the sensation of pain? After all, in the minds of the anti-empiricists perception is only illusory.¹⁵⁷

As we have seen, empirical experience of the world is the first step in human knowledge according to Māturīdī, upon which is built the solid edifice of reasoned

¹⁵⁶ Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1980), 94. Popper actually goes on to critique this “doctrine” of empiricism, but his presentation of its basic assumptions reveals the extent to which Māturīdī’s epistemology incorporates them.

¹⁵⁷ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 70.

reflection. The second of the two most fundamental types of knowledge, *samʿ*, is just as important to Māturīdī's epistemology. This term refers to knowledge that can only be obtained by receiving a report of it from some outside source, such as knowledge related to foreign countries or past historical events. While it is perfectly reasonable to believe a claim made about ancient Chinese history, for instance, and even to hold that it is true, this conclusion cannot be considered an act of purely individual reason, and thus is categorized differently. This type of knowledge, based as it is on the physical act of hearing (implied by the Arabic term *samʿ*, which literally means "hearing"), also has objective empirical validity; however, due to that fact that its referent is events in the past, events that cannot be experienced in an immediate sense, this type of knowledge is more historical than empirical. This is the basis of the second component of Māturīdī's realism: his historicism.

Epistemology II: Māturīdī Historicism

Māturīdī attempts to use rational principles to establish every aspect of Islamic belief, from belief in God to belief in the divinity and authority of the Qurʾān. He therefore does not argue for the primacy of the Qurʾān solely on the basis of its own claims to be true; rather, he attempts to demonstrate how the prophethood of Muhammad is rationally necessary, and thus so is the authority of the scripture that he brought. Māturīdī argues that prophethood is rationally necessary not on the basis of any inherent deficiency of human reason, but rather on its limitedness in scope. God designates each thing as good or bad, harmful or beneficial, and then imparts this

knowledge to the human intellect.¹⁵⁸ In this way, human reason is able to perceive right and wrong independently. However, the goodness or badness of things is not always apparent to reason, and it is for the sake of such ambiguous cases that prophethood is necessary. Not everything that humans need to know about the world is immediately accessible to empirical reason; thus, there is often occasion for reference to secondary sources of knowledge outside of the knowing self. Māturīdī describes secondary sources as tradition or reported knowledge (*samʿ*); prophethood is a kind of reported knowledge that informs humanity not only about distant times and places, but also about divine knowledge and knowledge of the unseen world.¹⁵⁹

This second component of Māturīdī's epistemology, his reliance on reported knowledge, fits well within the definition of historicism. This is because according to Māturīdī (as well as in the philosophy of historicism), historical knowledge relates information that fundamentally alters our perception of reality. As a result, our knowledge of past events has as much validity as the knowledge we obtain from the direct experience of events. This would be true both in the sense of our broad understanding of the world and in our understanding of the religion of Islam. This is how Māturīdī frames the importance of the Qurʾān and the Sunna: the knowledge that is produced by these texts (for instance, knowledge of the prophecy of Muḥammad, the history of belief in *tawḥīd*, or the history of the life of the Prophet), is just as much a part of the correct understanding of truth as direct empirical evidence is. In other words, historical knowledge supplements any attempt we make to understand reality. It is just

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 249.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 250; 253-254.

as indispensable as empirical knowledge, and is in fact based on empirical perception in the sense that it is “heard.”

Modern notions of historicism, particularly those outlined in the “classical” theories of historicity of the nineteenth century, also proceed from the basic affirmation of the objective validity of historical knowledge. As Carl Page writes:

[T]he historicist gesture [is] defined as the reflex insistence on the fundamental relevance of historical contextualization for either or both of (1) the intelligibility of human realities and (2) the possibility of human understanding. The notions of historical contextualization, intelligibility, and possibility in this definition are all open to specification in accord with the convictions emphasized by a particular version of the historicist gesture.¹⁶⁰

In Māturīdī’s case, the “historicist gesture” takes a form similar to that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century historian Benedetto Croce, in at least one respect. For Croce, the study of history was “de-ethicized,” in Hayden White’s term.¹⁶¹ This means that historical knowledge is supposed to be objective in the sense that it relates actual events in the past, and is not in and of itself concerned with a moral interpretation of these events. Rather, it is concerned with establishing their actual occurrence. History is supposed to be an objective description of events that have occurred outside the direct perception of the individual; this is why Māturīdī describes the content of historical knowledge as “reports” (*akhbār*). The objective foundation of historicism is the notion that knowledge of history can and should be a simple description of real events in the

¹⁶⁰ Carl Page, *Philosophical Historicism and the Betrayal of First Philosophy* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 12.

¹⁶¹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 401.

same way that empirical knowledge is a simple description of things.¹⁶² While the empirical observation describes events that are directly perceived by the knower, history describes events that are out of reach of the knower's immediate perception (but exist in the physical world) due to either distance or time.

To say that historical knowledge is equally as valid as sensory knowledge implies an assertion of the transformative power of history: this is also implied in Māturīdī's epistemology. It is the basic affirmation that historical knowledge carries the same level of epistemological certainty as propositions that are proven deductively, because historical knowledge is based on the reasoned verification of an empirical activity (the action of hearing a report). It is on this basis that Māturīdī's historicism has more in common with classical nineteenth century meditations on history than with the more recent critiques of historicism that assert that all concepts are the product of social circumstances and historical lineages.¹⁶³ For Māturīdī, as for Croce, history is important because of its status as real knowledge on par with other forms of objectivity, such as empirical science. It has the power to transform our understanding of the world as much as empiricism does, and this is why it is the second component of Māturīdī's theory of knowledge. In Māturīdī, historical knowledge does not displace philosophical or theological speculation (as it may be said to do in contemporary philosophical historicism). Rather, it is paired with and integrated into theological speculation. This

¹⁶² It is useful to point out here that the concept of history as an objective description of events is also employed in other Islamic religious disciplines, such as the science of *ḥadīth* criticism. For a succinct overview of this discipline see Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features* (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1996).

¹⁶³ Page, *Historicism*, 13.

combination is the basis for Māturīdī's theological realism because it allows him to approach reality from a variety of standpoints.

For Māturīdī a book of prophecy is something like a book of sacred history. A prophet is like a particularly knowledgeable historian who possesses knowledge beyond our empirical understanding of the world. Therefore, just as with historical reports, the claims of a prophet must be proven to be true according to rational criteria. Māturīdī argues that the Prophet Muḥammad can be rationally proven to be the final prophet based on the sound historical knowledge of his miracles and his unique moral virtues.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the book that he brought must be the final religious authority as well.

Māturīdī describes the Qur'ān in this way:

[God] compiled...his book according to the matters that befit the people who acknowledge that the book is true and is from God. There is no possibility of deviation in it: whoever adheres to it prospers and succeeds, and whoever turns away from it is miserable and fails. Even so, every interpreter supposes that he has hit on the decisive meaning (*al-muḥkam*) of [the Qur'ān], that he has adhered to it, and that with respect to what his opponent thinks about [the meaning of the Qur'ān], [the opponent] wavers or imagines its meaning according to what seems to accord with what he believes. Thus their disagreement [over the meaning of the Qur'ān] necessitates that they both distinguish the [verses that are] unambiguous (*al-muḥkam*) from [those that are] ambiguous (*al-mutashābih*), and the necessity of knowledge concerning the ambiguous, because the unambiguous [verses of the Qur'ān] do not contradict each other...It is therefore established that those who disagree do not do so on account of the Qur'ān itself, nor because it does not contain any explanation; rather, this indicates the obligation to refer to the Qur'ān and adhere to its authority on account of there being within it an explanation [of the disputed passages].¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 262; 286

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 303.

This passage introduces us to Māturīdī's theory of hermeneutics and his insistence on the importance of relying primarily on the Qur'ān in understanding the meaning of Islam. Adherence to the Qur'ān is the essence of human success in this world and the next, and the foundation of human engagement with metaphysical truths. Māturīdī's hermeneutics is based on the principle that the Qur'ān contains both unambiguous and ambiguous verses. The unambiguous verses establish universal and indisputable truths, such as the Oneness of God. Ambiguous verses, whose universal import is not immediately clear, are to be interpreted in light of unambiguous verses, whose universal import is undeniable. This establishes the point that the Qur'ān is internally consistent even though it contains verses that seem contradictory.

In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* Māturīdī avoids entirely the classic Islamic theological question of the creation of the Qur'ān.¹⁶⁶ At no point in the text does Māturīdī declare that the Qur'ān is either created or uncreated. He acknowledges that God possesses the attribute of eternal speech, but he does not explicitly address the issue of the Qur'ān's relationship with this attribute of speech. All Māturīdī is willing to say is that when God spoke to prophets such as Moses, the content of God's speech was uncreated but Moses and other prophets received this content through created means, such as letters and

¹⁶⁶ The question of the nature of the Qur'ān as the divine word of God became a major point of dispute in the eighth and ninth centuries when thinkers such as Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 148/745) began to claim that God could not be said to actually speak, as this would liken God to created beings. Traditionalist theologians, however, such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who became famous for his unwavering defense of the doctrine of the uncreated Qur'ān, argued that God must be considered a "speaker" because God is described as such in the sacred texts. God possesses the attribute of speech from eternity, thus making the words God has spoken in time, i.e., the Qur'an, also pre-existent. For this reason, the Qur'an must be described as uncreated (*ghayr makhḷūq*). For a thorough analysis of the origins and issues at stake in this debate, see Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Qur'an," in *Orientalia Hispanica, I* (Leiden, 1974) pp. 504-525.

sounds.¹⁶⁷ The entire discussion of this issue, which was central to the Ash‘arī theological system, takes up barely a few paragraphs in Māturīdī’s work. At the very least, Māturīdī’s approach to this issue confirms that he is much more concerned with issues of general epistemology and metaphysics than with the more closely textual questions raised by the Ash‘arīyya.

Māturīdī acknowledges that a plurality of views is possible on what it is that the Qur’ān is saying, and this leads to the problem of interpretation. As a solution, he divides the verses of the Qur’ān into two categories: verses that are definitive or unambiguous (*al-muḥkam*), and verses that are ambiguous (*al-mutashābih*). As Māturīdī claims above, the Qur’ān must be self-consistent in its interpretation; none of its verses can possibly contradict each other. Therefore, where apparent cases of contradiction arise, this problem can be resolved by referring to the verses of the Qur’ān that are absolutely clear and definitive in their meaning; these provide the criteria for the interpretation of verses that are ambiguous. Māturīdī provides a vivid example of this method of Quranic hermeneutics in his discussion of verses in the Qur’ān that speak of

¹⁶⁷ Māturīdī’s reticence on this issue reflects the tradition of the Ḥanafī theological school in Samarqand. In *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī provides the traditional theological position of the Samarqandi Ḥanafī theologians: “Their formulation on this [issue] was that the Qur’ān is God’s speech and his attribute, and that the speech of God Most High is not created and is likewise his attribute; [however] they do not say with certainty that the Qur’an is uncreated, lest it lead to the delusion of the listener that these expressions constructed from letters and sounds are uncreated, as the Ḥanbalīs claim” (373). Like Māturīdī, other Samarqandi Ḥanafī theologians seem to have had reservations about traditionalist Sunnī theology along the lines drawn by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and others. It is interesting to note that this hesitation to call the Qur’ān uncreated may stem from the actual position of Abū Ḥanīfa himself: as Wilferd Madelung points out, there is good reason to believe authors such as Ash‘arī when they claim that Abū Ḥanīfa rejected the idea that the Qur’ān was created. It is also important to point out that Nasafī takes the step that Māturīdī and apparently the entire theological tradition in Samarqand before him were unable to take: he is willing to declare that the Qur’ān is uncreated. This is just one example of Nasafī’s broader effort to bring Māturīdism into line with the prevailing Ash‘arī-Sunni orthodoxy of the day, a trend that will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three.

God's sitting on a throne or that speak of God in other anthropomorphic terms. Māturīdī claims that such verses, which due to their apparent anthropomorphism are to be seen as ambiguous, must be interpreted with reference to the unambiguous verse 32:11, "There is nothing like unto Him." Thus, there can be no sense in which God is literally or physically sitting on a throne, or engaging in any action that implies physicality or boundedness, for this would imply God's similarity to created beings.¹⁶⁸ References to God's throne must therefore refer to God's self-existence, i.e., God's subsisting without recourse to anything other than God Himself.¹⁶⁹ Māturīdī also suggests that these verses may refer to God's glory and status as the greatest being in the universe; they may also be seen as negating locality entirely, because if God is "above" everything, then God must also be above locality itself.¹⁷⁰ Māturīdī also applies the same interpretive technique to other verses that seem to ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics to God.¹⁷¹

This interpretation immediately points to a paradox in Māturīdī's understanding of theology: if human knowledge in general is based on sense perception and the experience of the empirical world, then on what basis can we have knowledge of God if God is understood to be beyond human experience? Māturīdī is well aware of this contradiction in his epistemological schema, and attempts to explain it in the following way: "The reality is that with respect to God Most High, there is no way to have knowledge of him except by means of the world's indicating his [existence], [and then] by ceasing the means by which knowledge of him was reached through the senses, or

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 138; 140.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 132-135.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 140.

by the witness of reported knowledge.”¹⁷² Māturīdī here points insightfully to a central paradox of monotheism in general: there is no rational way to deduce the existence of God other than by empirical observation of the physical world; however, once knowledge of God is established, God cannot be conceptualized in any kind of physical way and the empirical evidence that led one to the existence of God in the first place must be abandoned once the existence of God is proven. Māturīdī formulates this paradox in the following terms:

The truth of the definition of the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) is that its beginning is immanence [in the world] (*tashbīh*) and its outcome is [in] unity (*tawḥīd*), as necessity dictates. For what restrains intellects from the perception of what is more exalted than [human] conceptions is [precisely] that which is inferred from empirical perceptions, in the same way that the rewards and punishments of the afterlife are inferred by means of the pleasures and pains that exist in the world.¹⁷³

Māturīdī thus argues for a kind of negative theology in understanding God. God must initially be understood in terms of human experience, which necessitates reference to physicality and limitation. However, concepts derived from experience can only be utilized as a kind of epistemological shorthand that must be abandoned once one tries to understand God’s true essence. This can only be understood as devoid of any notion of physicality or limitation. However, the classic Kantian epistemological problem still remains: how can we assume that the concepts we hold of God refer to anything real, especially considering their utter inapplicability to what God actually is? How is it possible to assume that the constructs of human reason really refer to a reality outside of the self? This remains a problematic assumption of Māturīdī’s theological

¹⁷² Ibid., 197.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 106.

epistemology. However, his theory of metaphysics and the way in which he incorporates his epistemology into his metaphysical theory point to a possible resolution of this paradox, a resolution that is found in Māturīdī's theological realism.

Metaphysics I: Flux and Alternation

The passages that we have just considered clarify Māturīdī's epistemology, but only allude to his metaphysics. Yet these passages also allude to the two most characteristic features of Māturīdī's metaphysical theory: his notion of flux or change (*taqallub*) and the theory of natures (*ṭabā'i*). As is well known, classical *kalām* metaphysics is based on the Aristotelian concepts of essence (*jawhar*) and accident (*araḍ*).¹⁷⁴ An essence is the most fundamental unit of existence, and is completely indivisible. An attribute or accident is any characteristic that inheres in an essence. In his theological summary *Luma' al-Adilla*, the famous Ash'arī theologian Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 1085) provides a particularly succinct description of this theory. An essence has three main characteristics: it is bounded, it possesses volume, and it admits of accidents. Accidents are those things that cannot exist except by inhering in an essence: they are what "occur to" or "befall" an essence, such as color, smell, death, life, or any degree of physical extent or amount.¹⁷⁵

The combination of essences that produce physical bodies and processes is understandable insofar as it follows customary patterns (*'āda*), but it is epistemologically opaque from the human perspective, insofar as the atoms that make

¹⁷⁴ See Alnoor Dhahani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazilī Cosmology* (Brill: Leiden, 1994).

¹⁷⁵ Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Luma' al-Adilla fi Qawā'id 'Aqā'id Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*, ed. Fawqiyya Ḥusayn Maḥmud (Beirut: Dar al-'ālam al-kutub, 1987), 87.

up bodies and their movements are completely under the control of God. *Kalām* metaphysics also rests on the fundamental distinction between the pre-eternal (*qadīm*) and the contingent in time (*ḥādīth* or *muḥdath*). The pre-eternal is any existent whose existence has no beginning. The contingent is any existent whose existence has a beginning, i.e., something that was brought from non-existence into being in time.¹⁷⁶ This distinction is the basic ontological distinction between God and the world: God and God's attributes are the only things that may be said to be pre-eternal, while anything else in the universe must be contingent, being part of God's creation.

Māturīdī accepts all of these basic elements of *kalām* metaphysics but he does not make them central to his own system. He makes frequent reference to essences and accidents, but at the same time he introduces a third element into his metaphysics upon which he elaborates in greater detail: these are the natures (*ṭabā'i*).¹⁷⁷ In fact, Māturīdī mentions natures before ever mentioning essences or accidents: “Every sensible thing is composed of various and opposite natures (*ṭabā'i* ' *mukhtalifā wa mutaḍādda*), whose tendency is to reject each other and be repelled by each other.”¹⁷⁸ Bodies are composed of these mutually repellent natures (such as coldness versus hotness, dryness versus wetness, etc...).¹⁷⁹

Natures seem to play two roles in Māturīdī's theology: first, they provide proof of the existence of a single creator and orderer of the universe. Māturīdī argues that since things are composed of natural qualities that are mutually contradictory, there

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ On this topic see Richard Frank, “Notes and Remarks on the *ṭabā'i* in the Teaching of Al-Māturīdī,” *Melanges d'Islamologie* (1974), 137-149; and Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, 281-291.

¹⁷⁸ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 78.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.

must be some omnipotent orderer of the universe that prevents them from repelling each other and plunging the universe into chaos.¹⁸⁰ Second, the natures introduce an element of potential instability into the universe that is another characteristic of Māturīdī's understanding of existence:

Because we have found the entirety of what is perceptible in the world to be pre-determined, incapable of organizing itself, ignorant of the beginning of its state and of the extent of its partaking in all temporal or spatial states, within which it fluctuates (*yataqallabu*) and by means of which it is constituted, there being within it the opposite qualities whose nature it is to be mutually repellent, it is [therefore] understood that [the universe] does not exist by means of itself, and it is also understood that whoever ordered it and determined it has knowledge of it and power over it.¹⁸¹

Here the dual role of natures in Māturīdī's cosmology becomes clear: the opposition of these fundamental natures induces constant fluctuation (*taqallub*) in the universe, and the fact that this constant fluctuation of natures does not spin out of control or simply reduce itself to chaos proves the existence of a wise and all-powerful creator that keeps them together. Māturīdī describes this alteration in even more striking terms elsewhere in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*:

There is no single particle of being (*jawhar*) that refers in its essence to a single characteristic, such as harm and benefit, or evil and goodness, or fortune and misfortune. Rather, each thing characterized by evil may also be good in a respect (*wajh*) different from its original sense as evil, and this is the case for all attributes (*ṣifāt*). The states (*aḥwāl*) of things are such that they are not beneficial in every state (*ḥāl*) or harmful in every state.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 78, 89, 161.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 160-161.

¹⁸² Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 88. Pessagno also translates and discusses this passage in "The Uses of Evil in Māturīdīan Thought," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984), 59-82.

Here Māturīdī radically destabilizes the customary *kalām* metaphysics of essence and attribute. He removes any possibility of a fundamentally fixed nature belonging to anything in the world. This is because the natures of things are constantly in flux, shifting from one aspect to another, characterizing one thing at one moment and its opposite at the next, as all things in the universe ceaselessly pass from one state of existence into another.

Māturīdī terms this inherent instability found in the universe “change” or “flux” (*taqallub*). The term “flux” is preferred here in order to capture the full range of meaning implied by Māturīdī’s use of this term. By flux he means the alteration of things as they adopt opposing characteristics, the change in things from one state of existence to the next, or the shift in the essential nature of a thing as it experiences these constant modifications of itself. Māturīdī uses variations of the rather unusual term *taqallub* very deliberately throughout *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, in all cases denoting the constant change in state and form that any given thing experiences as it exists in the universe.¹⁸³ It is significant that he highlights this metaphysical reality at the very beginning of the passage with which we began the present analysis, which declares that God is “He who brought forth Creation by his power, and refashions things by his wisdom according to the pre-existence of his knowledge and will. The entirety of his creation fluctuates (*taqallaba*) through [God’s] talents and Goodness (*fī mawāhibihi wa iḥṣānihi*).”¹⁸⁴

Metaphysics II: The Epistemology of Flux

¹⁸³ See *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 133; 161; 178; 252; 254; 301.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 301.

Māturīdī's metaphysical system represents a significant modification of the traditional *kalām* cosmology based on the Aristotelian dichotomy between essence and accident. While accepting the basic outlines of this system, Māturīdī introduces the elements of instability and constant change into this conception of the universe; this element of radical instability is termed *taqallub*, or flux. This concept represents the most distinctive element of Māturīdī's metaphysics. The notion of flux also has important ramifications for Māturīdī's epistemology. As we have seen above, due to his fundamental concern to rationally harmonize a wide range of different philosophical systems, he evinces an urgent concern for an epistemology that can reliably mediate among disparate claims to truth. Yet his theory of flux would seem to work against the rational intellect's efforts to apprehend the essential characteristics of things: if things have no fundamental characteristics, at least not ones that cannot be altered, then how can it be that human reason can make any reliable claims about the nature of the universe? Māturīdī answers this question by introducing the notion of "perspective" into his epistemology.

As we have seen, the *kalām* theory of the natural world distinguishes between the created world and the Creator by defining the world as that which possesses all the attributes associated with physicality, such as dimension, location in space and time, extent, boundedness, and characterization by other physical properties and limitations. In the physical world, defining something is a way of limiting it, of inscribing it within the boundedness of time and space. Hence the philosophical and *kalām* use of the term *ḥadd* (limit) to mean "definition." God, however, is beyond all limitation and any association with physicality. Thus, God can only be characterized paradoxically—in

negative theological terms—by God’s utter inability to be characterized. God is all powerful, all knowing, and pre-eternal; however, as we have seen above Māturīdī insists that these attributes must be understood to be free of any association with the physical world despite the fact that our human minds must make use of comparisons derived from the physical world to describe the one thing that is utterly beyond it: God.

The physical characteristics of things that limit them and give them definition (such as size, shape, position, dimension, etc.) are the means by which the human intellect is able to apprehend things in the perceptible world. As Māturīdī states: “Everything has a definition (*ḥadd*) by means of which it is understood (*yudrak*), such as taste, color, flavor, odor, and other such specific definitions of things. God has appointed for each thing an aspect (*wajh*) by means of which it is perceived, and by means of which it is apprehended...”¹⁸⁵ These perceptible aspects of things are the intellectual handholds by which human reason can latch onto phenomena and organize its knowledge of them into a coherent picture of reality.

However, as demonstrated above, according to Māturīdī the actual characteristics of any given thing in the universe are constantly in flux; thus, knowledge (what Māturīdī would understand as the process of gathering data from the perceptible world so that the intellect can produce conclusions about it after reasoned reflection) is based fundamentally on *perspective*. Since everything in the universe that is not God is characterized by aspect or positionality, the knowing human subject can only perceive the world from a certain perspective, and this perspective determines which aspect of a phenomenon (be it physical or theoretical) one can perceive at a particular moment:

¹⁸⁵ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 146.

The human being is composed of conceptual limits (*ḥudūd*) and perspectives (*jihāt*), and each perspective from a person stands opposite a perspective from the thing perceived. The person does not perceive by means of that perspective anything other than the perspective that stands directly opposite him. If a deficiency interferes in the person's perspective by means of which they perceives its opposite, or [if] a thing conceals its opposite [and] hides it, then the extent of that [perception] departs from the perspective and its opposite. It is like perception (*idrāk*) without the perspective which exists for that type of perception. Thus, the [possible] states [of perception] are three: 1.) the negating of perspective (*taqlīb*) such that nothing is perceived by means of it at all, 2.) the establishment of [perspective] with the lifting of all impediments such that the essential nature of a thing is perceived by it, or 3.) a mixture [of the above two states]. Perception varies according to the variation of [these states].¹⁸⁶

This epistemological principle is the necessary correlate of Māturīdī's theory of a world in flux. Since Māturīdī argues that human reason is an objective instrument that is able to perceive the truth of things, human reason must also be understood as an intellectual instrument that is oriented directly toward what it attempts to understand. Unlike mystical understanding or personal inspiration, objective reason does not spring from some source outside of itself or within a specific subject, but is a tool that must be directly applicable to all phenomena in the universe that are available to the senses.

However, since the universe is constantly in flux, reason cannot fix itself on every aspect of a thing, since these aspects are constantly changing. In addition, things in the world often possesses *multiple* aspects, conflicting natures, or characterizations, which, although they are mutually contradictory, (such as wetness or dryness) can still inhere in one and the same object. Discursive reason (i.e., according to Aristotelian logic), based as it is on the logical ordering of predicates, cannot apprehend the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 224.

simultaneous inherence of two contradictory aspects in a single object, and thus is only able to perceive one aspect of a thing at a time. For Māturīdī, epistemology is fundamentally a process of perception whereby human reason directs itself toward a seemingly endless array of shifting aspects of a given phenomenon. Thus, reason is able to perceive different or contradictory aspects of the same thing only when it changes its own point of view.

The Epistemology of Perspective as Theological Method

This extremely unique epistemological theory is not merely a moment of idle speculation in Māturīdī's theology. Instead, it is the primary methodology that Māturīdī uses when interpreting the most difficult theological problems. In Islamic theology, chief among these problems is the issue of fate (*qadar*) and human actions, or the relationship between God's absolute omnipotence and foreknowledge of events, and the necessity to affirm human freedom as the guarantor of ethical responsibility. This issue was one of the first theological questions ever to be debated among Muslims, beginning in the late seventh and early eighth centuries with objections to the Umayyad dynasty's theological justification for their rule: God had decreed it and God's pre-determined decree of an outcome cannot be challenged. Critics of the Umayyad regime such as Ma'bad al-Juhānī (d. 704) and Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) responded that God does not pre-determine a person's actions, for this would vitiate human freedom and moral responsibility.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 1998), 82-104.

This response to predestinarian theology would become a standard feature of Mu‘tazilī doctrine beginning in the ninth century C.E. However, during the same period it began to meet with stiff resistance from the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, who pointed to verses of the Qur’ān and a number of reported sayings of the Prophet that implied that God does in fact pre-determine all of a person’s actions before she is born. These hadiths were eventually placed in canonical collections of Prophetic sayings such as the collections of Bukhārī and Muslim, giving them nearly unassailable authenticity among the traditionists. One hadith related by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal reads: “The first thing God created was the Pen; then he said to it, ‘Write.’ It said, ‘What shall I write?’ he said, ‘Write what will be and what is in being until the coming of the Hour.’”¹⁸⁸ Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s canonical collections feature entire sections devoted to Prophetic sayings about God’s pre-determination of events (*qadar*), which includes numerous highly influential statements such as: “God has entrusted an angel with the womb...and when God wills to determine its nature (or mode of existence) he says, ‘Lo, my Lord, is it male or female? Is it unfortunate or fortunate? What is the provision (*rizq*)? What is the term of life?’ And (the child) is written down thus in the womb of its mother.”¹⁸⁹

The doctrine of divine pre-determination of events became a cardinal principle of Islamic belief among theologians who accepted the authority of these Prophetic traditions. One of Māturīdī’s contemporaries, the Mālikī jurist Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996), clearly explains the traditionists’ position in a short and simple creed used throughout the classical period in the Islamic West: “Faith in pre-determination [is required], both its good and its evil and its sweet and its bitter, for

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

God has pre-determined all of this...He knew everything before its existence, which proceeds according to his pre-determination. His servant possess no saying or deed that He has not pre-determined, or about which He did not possess foreknowledge.”¹⁹⁰ The dogmatic theologians who followed the teachings of the traditionists, such as Ash‘arī, incorporated the notion of *qadar* into their systematic theology. So concerned was Ash‘arī to defend God’s position of absolute omnipotence that he famously declared that God can even will that infants be tortured in Hell; this is the kind of statement that the Mu‘tazila (and later the followers of Māturīdī) found reprehensible.¹⁹¹ Some version of belief in predestination became a standard feature of Islamic theological orthodoxy everywhere, but just how this term would be understood would prove to be an extremely divisive issue.

In *kalām*, the question of whether human actions really belong to human beings or whether they are pre-determined by God is usually discussed within the framework of the creation of human actions by God. In other words, since God is the creator of everything in the universe, God must also “create” human actions.¹⁹² Māturīdī agrees with Ash‘arī that God is in fact the ultimate creator of human actions; but unlike Ash‘arī, he insists that this does not mean that human beings do not freely choose their actions according to their own will. Māturīdī argues very forcefully that acts must be attributed to human beings themselves, or this would vitiate any kind of moral

¹⁹⁰ Al-Imām Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *Al-‘aqīda al-islāmiyya*, ed. Sulaymān ‘Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Maktab al-maṭbū‘āt al-islāmiyya, 2004), 33.

¹⁹¹ See for instance Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Al-Ibāna ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, ed. ‘Abbas Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: Dār al-nafā’is, 1994), 133; *Kitāb al-Luma’*, ed. Richard McCarthy in *The Theology of Al-Ash‘arī* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), para. 169.

¹⁹² Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-Luma’*, para. 90; Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 310.

responsibility.¹⁹³ Māturīdī also argues that everyone knows a priori (*min nafsihi*) that they freely choose their actions; to deny this would be self-contradictory in his view.¹⁹⁴ Like Ash‘arī, Māturīdī argues that the human being “acquires” (*yaktasibu*) the act that she then performs as a creation of God for her.¹⁹⁵ However, unlike Ash‘arī, Māturīdī further argues that human responsibility must be described in terms that imply direct control over one’s actions and in terms that describe the human being as the actual agent of the act, despite the fact that, as with any created thing, the act must ultimately be a creation of God. Māturīdī clearly states that the human being is the “chooser, agent, [and] acquirer” (*mukhtār, fā‘il, kāsib*) of any actions that she undertakes.¹⁹⁶ Māturīdī’s resolute affirmation of the human being’s free choice (*ikhtiyār*) in all actions is a part of his theology that all subsequent members of his school would insist upon, as we will see later.

Māturīdī also affirms that the power or ability (*istiṭā‘a, qudra, or quwwa*) through which a person commits an act is also a creation of God.¹⁹⁷ However, the power

¹⁹³ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 306.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 307. It is important to point out that Ash‘arī also argues for an a priori distinction between involuntary and voluntary actions; yet his theology seems to lean more strongly in the direction of affirming divine omnipotence at the expense of human autonomy (see *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, para. 92). Māturīdī argues that *both* divine omnipotence and human freedom are irrefutably real, and attempts to affirm one without infringing on the other.

¹⁹⁵ The doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*) is a common Sunnī theological concept that denotes how a human being can take possession of an act that is created for them by God. Ash‘arī’s definition is typical in this respect: “The meaning of *kasb* is that a thing [i.e., an action] proceeds from one who has acquired it by virtue of a created power” (*Kitāb al-Luma‘*, para. 92). For Ash‘arī, however, this means that the human being cannot be described as “choosing” the act, or as the real agent (*fā‘il*) of the act. In other words, the human being cannot be said to directly cause the act in any way: causality must be attributable in every respect to God alone. Māturīdī, however, explicitly attributes direct causation to the human being, who can accurately be called an “effector” (*āthir*) of things in the world (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 326).

¹⁹⁶ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 307.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 342.

to commit the act, plus the act itself, are only created by God *after* the human being has chosen to do the act.¹⁹⁸ This point establishes the priority of human free will in Māturīdī's theological system. Māturīdī also accepts the doctrine commonly attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa that the power that God creates enabling a person to commit an act also encompasses the power to do the opposite of the act, again affirming that at any given moment a person has the freedom to commit any act that she chooses.¹⁹⁹ Māturīdī also denies that God may require someone to do something that she is simply incapable of doing, another point of doctrine that would find wide acceptance among his followers.²⁰⁰ The reason that he rejects this notion hearkens back to the basis of his entire theological epistemology: it is simply repugnant to reason.

Finally, it is important to note that Māturīdī finds support for his doctrine of free will in the Qur'ān, which as we have seen above, is for him the ultimate point of reference in Islamic theology. On divine omnipotence, Māturīdī cites verses where God is called "Creator of all things," and "Determiner of all things" (6:102; 17). On the affirmation of human freedom, Māturīdī cites: "Whoever does righteousness, it is for his own soul; and whoever does wrong, it is against it. And your Lord is never unjust to His servants" (41:46). Māturīdī's theological positions on these issues thus stand on a firm Quranic basis, as the Qur'ān frequently exhorts human beings to exercise their free will to do good and avoid evil, yet at the same time it counsels them to always be aware of the existence of the all-powerful author of their existence.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 352; 357.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 349. Unsurprisingly, Ash'arī denies this doctrine (*Kitāb al-Lum'*, para. 126).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 352.

Māturīdī's resolute insistence on a combination of human freedom and divine omnipotence, however, clearly creates a logical paradox. How can human beings be free in a meaningful sense if they live in a universe where everything is controlled by God? Similarly, how can God be said to be truly omnipotent if human beings can take actions that do not have pre-determined outcomes, or that are not pre-determined themselves? It would seem logically that any attribution of power to God would detract from the power of the human being, and vice versa. This is clearly the case for Ash'arī. Māturīdī, however, denies this. In his view, the problem is not really one of power. Rather, the problem is one of *perspective*: "It is established that [human actions] in the sense of the first aspect are not [the human beings'], but in the sense of the second aspect they are."²⁰¹ Māturīdī does not attempt to solve this paradox outright, but rather shifts the way we think about it. He makes use of the epistemological theory of perspective to explain how this particular theological question, like so much else in reality, has multiple dimensions that human beings cannot perceive simultaneously. Human freedom and complete divine omnipotence must both be real: acknowledging both of them at the same time is not actually a logical contradiction, but instead is the acknowledgment of two facets of a single reality that human beings are unable to logically entertain together. Māturīdī refers to this theory as the theory of "aspects of the act (*jihāt al-fiʿl*)."²⁰²

As we have seen above, Māturīdī holds that physical phenomena admit of contradictory descriptions depending on the state or condition in which they are found

²⁰¹ Ibid., 310.

²⁰² Ibid., 323.

to exist at any given moment. His discussion of human actions shows that he views concepts in the same way:

[The human act] is from the perspective of creation a compulsion, but it is not created for the person in view of this aspect, and thus it is not designated as such. [Rather, it is] a free choice from the perspective of acquisition (*kasb*)... Do you not see that [from one perspective] unbelief (*kufi*) is a lie, but that it is true from the perspective of its proving the foolishness of the one who holds it? Likewise, [the human act] is a free choice with regard to acquisition, but with regard to [its] creation [by God] it is not; yet the perspective of [God's] creation does not vitiate free choice insofar as [creation] is affirmed.²⁰³

This is perhaps the clearest summation of what is most radical in Māturīdī's theology. Māturīdī views reality as something that is subject to perspective; how else could the most flagrant of lies, disbelief in God, be regarded as true? In Māturīdī's system this is possible because a shift in perspective can completely change the aspect of reality with which we are faced. At the same time, this is not just an epistemological truth but it is also a metaphysical truth.

Viewing different aspects of a single reality is not merely a semantic game that eliminates the notion of absolute truth. On the contrary, absolute as it may be, truth is not one-sided. For Māturīdī truth is *multi-dimensional*. A single reality can admit of mutually contradictory interpretations not only because human beings distort it to seem this way. Reality admits of contradictory interpretations because in one sense or another all interpretations are true: the only limitation is that a person must conceive of them one at a time, depending on the perspective in which they appear. It is not only that *kufi* may be interpreted as true in the human mind; *kufi* itself is true in at least some respects. In other words, Māturīdī speaks literally when he observes that nothing in the

²⁰³ Ibid, 321.

universe has a stable characterization or single meaning. With respect to human knowledge, the universe is kaleidoscopic: our view of it constantly shifts as our perspective shifts, yet each perspective involves the perception of something that is true, no matter how different it may be from what we perceive in another perspective.

With respect to metaphysics, Māturīdī's universe is constantly in flux, its fundamental characteristics changing at every moment. However, there is one important element of continuity that undergirds the ceaseless changes in the universe: God. All change in the universe occurs under the direction of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, who maintains the universe's endlessly diverse and changing components and who endows the human mind with the power to observe and understand the ceaseless fluctuations that surround us. As Māturīdī puts it, "The entirety of His creation fluctuates (*taqallaba*) through [God's] talents and Goodness."²⁰⁴ The existence of a single creator is the reason that all the changes that take place in the universe do not devolve into mere chaos, but instead proceed in an ordered and regular fashion. As outlined above in the discussion of natures, God is the reason that the multitudes of apparently conflicting forces in the universe do not cancel each other out and result in nothingness or chaos. Instead, God is the changeless point of unity that explains the continued existence of a universe that is filled with the possibility of fracture and catastrophic failure.

Māturīdī's universe is filled with change. He sees the material world as a collection of phenomena that constantly alternates, is constantly in motion, but ultimately is subject to the order and regulation (*tadbīr*) of God. Natures, aspects,

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 301.

perspectives, and even the fundamental characteristics of things are constantly in flux. However, Māturīdī's metaphysics also highlights ideal or unchanging elements which must stay the same for his theological system to work. It must be explained how the universe avoids chaos and retains unity. It must be explained how the truth of God's oneness (which prevents chaos in the universe) is passed on to human beings. Finally, it must be explained how human beings are able to receive this truth. Māturīdī's answers to these questions involve the concepts of God, religion (*dīn*), and reason (*'aql*). These three concepts are the elements of continuity that provide stability and coherence to Māturīdī's theology. We have already seen how Māturīdī takes great pains to separate God from the process of change that characterizes the physical world. God cannot be understood to exist in any way that implies contingency, dependence, subordination, physicality, or change. God is instead the agent that orders change and flux that constitute the fundamental nature of the universe. Without God's ultimate changelessness, the change inherent in the universe would have no meaning, and would simply result in chaos.

In order for human beings to intellectually conceive of God properly, they must have a system of understanding that properly describes both God's characteristics and the fundamental characteristics of the universe. There must be a way in which the knowledge of human beings regarding God and the universe may be rendered stable and continuous across time and space. The system of thought that preserves human awareness of the truth of the universe, i.e., the oneness of the Creator, is religion (*dīn*). Māturīdī describes religions (*adyān*) as composed of beliefs (*'itiqādāt*) which can in no way be described as predestined: they are voluntary acts specific to the heart, and thus

are so centered in the conscience of the individual that they cannot be described as acquisitions, as other acts are.²⁰⁵ Although the tenets of sacred law and religious practice (*al-Sharī‘a*) have admitted of change over time through the succession of prophets, true religion (*dīn*) has never changed because it reflects the fundamental truths of the universe.²⁰⁶

The term “*dīn*” refers to propositions about what is universally true about God and the world, and these propositions are believed in the heart: “Religious affairs (*al-diyānāt*) are matters of dogmatic belief (*al-‘itiqādāt*), not actions that are acquired (*af‘āl tuktasabu*), for dogmatic beliefs do not admit of [divine] compulsion or force... They are specifically acts of the heart (*af‘āl al-qulūb*).”²⁰⁷ For Māturīdī, the core of religious belief consists of intellectual propositions, which people freely assert or deny based on their own rational reflection. This view is implicit in the opening passages of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, where, as we have seen above, the question of determining the truth or

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 461; 467.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 476. This interesting distinction between religion and the Sharia first appears in a text attributed to Abu Hanifa, *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim* (ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari), which Joseph Schacht convincingly shows to have been written sometime in the middle of the ninth century and thus could not have been composed by Abu Hanifa himself (Joseph Schacht, “An Early Murji’ite Treatise: the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*” *Oriens* 17 (1964): 96-117). The work could, of course, contain authentic teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa. This text enjoyed extraordinary popularity throughout the history of Ḥanafī theology. It is mentioned in the *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm and is mentioned in the works studied by a prominent Ḥanafī Bukharan scholar of the 12th century (see ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Abī al-Wafā’ al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍīyya fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muhammad al-Ḥilw (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1980-1982), vol. 1, entry 11) The famous Bukharan Māturīdīan theologian Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 1184) also refers to this treatise by name (see *al-Bidāyah fī Usūl al-Dīn*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu, in *Matūridiyye Akaidi* (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2005), 87-88. Māturīdī himself seems to have been familiar with it or at least with some its major teachings, as his discussion of dogmatic belief draws on many of the same arguments made in the text. It is of course difficult to determine whether Māturīdī draws these arguments from this text in particular or from some other source of Abū Ḥanīfa’s theological doctrines.

²⁰⁷ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 467.

falsehood of religious beliefs initiates Māturīdī's reflections on epistemology.

Māturīdī's location of religious belief in the heart is also connected to his acceptance of the common Ḥanafī theological proposition that faith (*īmān*) is located in the heart, and cannot be determined merely by observing a person's outward actions.²⁰⁸

Finally, there must exist a means by which human beings can reliably discern the truth and distinguish it from falsehood and baseless assumptions: for Māturīdī this is reason (*‘aql*). As we have seen, Māturīdī's theological epistemology is devoted to defining an objective (and therefore reliable) way to access the truth of things. He concludes that reason must lie at the heart of human knowledge. These three elements of stability in Māturīdī's theological system provide a foundation for addressing and interpreting the otherwise bewildering instability of the universe. These elements, particularly Māturīdī's highly individualistic conception of religious belief and his rationalistic epistemology, have been found to be of most use to modern Turkish theologians seeking to utilize Māturīdī in their own theological projects. At the same time, as the tradition of Māturīdīsm developed in Central Asia and beyond, key elements of Māturīdī's theological system were modified by later commentators seeking to bring his theology closer in line with an emerging Ash‘arī-Sunni theological orthodoxy. The efforts of these theologians and the transmutation that Māturīdīsm experienced over the next eight to nine centuries will be the subject of the next chapter.

Māturīdī Realism: Situating Māturīdī in Classical and Contemporary Contexts

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 471-476. This view is also elaborated in detail in *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*, 26-27.

Māturīdī's theology is difficult to situate in relation to other systems of thought in medieval Islam because it stands out so markedly from its contemporaries. His theology cannot be placed comfortably in the same category as Ash'arī's (and later, all of *kālām*'s) theological combination of textualism and pure rationalism; yet at the same time, he rejects the Mu'tazila just as strongly. Māturīdī's epistemology and metaphysics in particular set him apart from other *kalām* theologians, and analogues for his system can be found in rather unexpected and non-Islamic places. His metaphysics of universal flux has deep similarities with notions of flux associated with pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C.E.) and Empedocles (ca. 400 B.C.E). Heraclitus is remembered in the Greek philosophical tradition as an advocate for the concept of an ever-changing cosmos. This concept is encapsulated in the quotes attributed to him about flowing rivers, such as the statements, "As they step into the same river, other and still other waters flow upon them" and "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, approaches and departs."²⁰⁹

Empedocles presented a similar notion of metaphysical flux based on the cosmos' ceaseless "coming into being and...dissolving into the primeval elements," which are earth, fire, air, and water.²¹⁰ As with Heraclitus, Empedocles also held that "the state of the world is in perpetual flux."²¹¹ Empedocles, however, introduces a notion of cyclical cosmic change. The four elements are themselves inactive, and are

²⁰⁹ David G. Stern, "Heraclitus' and Wittgenstein's River Images: Stepping Twice into the Same River," *The Monist* 74: 4 (1991), 581.

²¹⁰ Helle Lambridis, *Empedocles: A Philosophical Investigation* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1976), 43.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

moved through cycles of combination and dissolution by the forces of Love and Strife, which endlessly oppose each other in a cycle of creation and destruction. The elements are moved by these opposing forces, “at one time coming together by love into one cosmos, and at another time again all being borne apart separately by the hostility of strife.”²¹² Life is thus the product of the opposition and attraction of the four elements driven by the motive forces of Love and Strife, a process which calls to mind Māturīdī’s theory of the opposition of natures.

Heraclitus also speaks of a universal *logos*, which is interpreted by some scholars as referring to the ultimate principle in the universe that prevents this constant flux from dissolving into chaos.²¹³ In addition, Heraclitus seems to emphasize the importance of empirical evidence in approaching the *logos*, despite the inherent limitations of such evidence. As Patricia Kenning Curd puts it, “The truth about things is neither utterly concealed from nor entirely revealed to sense experience; rather, the perceptible world is a series of signs about the way things really are. Taking a sign for the whole truth is a mistake; but so is refusing to read a signal.”²¹⁴ This kind of approach to epistemology is indeed highly reminiscent of Māturīdī, and is featured in such statements attributed to Heraclitus as, “All that can be seen, heard, experienced-

²¹² Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles :A Text and Translation* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 231.

²¹³ The meaning of the word *logos* in Heraclitus is hotly debated, with some commentators holding that it refers to a metaphysical principle or force and others holding that it merely refers to Heraclitus’ own doctrinal statements (*logoi*). See Patricia Kenning Curd, “Knowledge and Unity in Heraclitus,” *The Monist* 74: 4 (1991): 532. If interpreted as the divine word, it could be seen to have some affinity to the Arabic term *kalām*, as in the word of God that brings all things into being.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 541.

these are what I prefer” and “The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but gives a sign.”²¹⁵

Māturīdī’s theology of flux also has some similarities with German Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), for instance, meditated intensely on the never-ending dissonances of the observed world, and how they all seemed to conform to a natural system of order: “The systems of forces can radically differ from one another and yet operate according to the same sort of laws, because in nature everything must finally be interconnected, and only one principle law can exist according to which even the most diverse powers are arranged.”²¹⁶ Herder places divine wisdom in the role of the controller of these ceaseless changes and oppositions: “Because everything in the world exists that can exist, opposites must also exist, and a law of supreme wisdom must everywhere form a system from this opposition, from the north and south poles.”²¹⁷ As in Māturīdī, for Herder God presides over a world of unending change that can only exist through God’s role as the eternal sustainer and orderer of the natural forces in the world: “Look at the entire universe from heaven to earth! What are the means, the ends? Is not everything a means to a million ends? Is not everything an end for a million means? The chain of almighty and omniscient goodness is braided and twisted in a thousand ways.”²¹⁸

Yet despite their deep similarities, both Heraclius and Herder are different from Māturīdī in some important respects. Herder, for instance, assumes constant progress in

²¹⁵ Patricia Curd, ed. And Richard D. McKirahan, Jr., *A Pre-Socratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 33-34.

²¹⁶ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language and History*, trans. and ed. Marcia Bunge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 135.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

the universe, a constant evolution throughout history in accordance with God's plan.²¹⁹ This notion of universal progress is absent in Māturīdī. At the same time, while Māturīdī's theistic metaphysics share some deep similarities with Herder, this is the point where the pre-Socratics and Māturīdī depart ways. Whatever the meaning of the term *logos* may be in Heraclitus, both his and Empedocles' conception of metaphysical flux does not explicitly mention a monotheistic conception of God. In addition, although Māturīdī does speak frequently about the tendency of opposite natures to repel each other (a movement Empedocles might call Strife), Māturīdī does not attribute their coming together to an impersonal force of attraction, but instead to the omniscience of God. These differences with Māturīdī place Heraclitus and Empedocles squarely within the philosophical movements that Māturīdī and other Sunnī theologians call the *Dahriyya*, non-theistic empiricists or atheists.²²⁰

As discussed above, Māturīdī is concerned to outline an epistemology that provides objective ways to describe the world as it is. This is the basis for both his empiricism and his historicism, each being a way to objectively describe events (the former pertaining to events directly perceived, the latter to events that have occurred within the realm of empirical perception but outside the field of perception of the individual in a given time and place). Otherwise put, what seems most crucial in

²¹⁹ Ibid., 47; 138.

²²⁰ This is particularly true of Empedocles, who espouses a philosophical naturalism based on the notion that the world is composed of the combination and dissolution of the four elements, which are immutable. Māturīdī places such views under the category of the *Dahriyya*, which he defines as any philosophical school that holds that prime matter is eternal and therefore has no intelligent creator. Māturīdī explicitly distances himself from these naturalist views on this point, despite the fact that he clearly utilizes similar conceptions of natures in his theology. For him, as we have seen, the fact that opposing natures such as heat and coolness can exist in a single thing proves that matter cannot self-organize, but must be manipulated by an omniscient intelligence. See *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 210-211.

Māturīdī's theology is his marriage of theism with an *inductive* use of human reason, which is the answer Māturīdī provides to the opening question of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*: how can we determine which conception of the universe is objectively true? And how can we approach this ultimate truth? Māturīdī uses a series of inductive proofs based on his empirical observation of the natural world to prove the existence of a single omnipotent God. Therefore, an epistemology that attempts to link inductive observation with rationally certain truth would be most in line with what Māturīdī proposes. Māturīdī is therefore best understood as a philosophical realist, and the key to his philosophical realism lies in his conception of human reason.

Māturīdī's theological epistemology is rooted in his understanding of human reason (*'aql*), which fundamentally presupposes that the human intellect provides the most direct access to phenomena in the world. This is why reason is able to objectively separate truth from error and illusion from reality. Yet Māturīdī's understanding of reason is not restricted to a strictly deductive methodology. Instead, his concept of reason is strongly inductive, or perhaps more accurately features a mix of deductive and inductive reasoning. For Māturīdī, human reason is not a mathematical formula that should be imposed on reality to give it order and meaning; rather, reason is the faculty that enables the human being to become open to reality and perceive it as it really is. This is why his theological method is more properly understood as inductive: it proceeds from data regarding particulars (such as empirical perceptions or knowledge of historical events) and advances toward an understanding of universal theses, such as the existence and unity of God.

Māturīdī's epistemology suffers from one serious logical flaw, however. He argues that by observing the ceaseless changes and variations in the universe, the mind is able to draw conclusions regarding the source of these variations, and the resulting conclusions are as valid as deductive conclusions because of the divine origin of reason. In his view, the gift of reason is the way in which God empowers human beings to make independent judgments that have objective validity and are therefore able to impact the world and our place in it. Māturīdī seems to assume that the divine origin of reason is able to give induction the same logical certainty as deduction. However, outside of his appeal to the divine origin of reason, Māturīdī never philosophically addresses what Karl Popper calls "the problem of induction." This refers to the difficulty that "an account of an experience...can in the first place be only a singular statement and not a universal one."²²¹ In other words, no amount of experience of a phenomenon can provide logically certain conclusions about the entirety of the phenomenon, because human senses can never amass enough data to enable the construction of a universally valid deductive proposition. As Popper puts it, "No matter how many instances of white swans we have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that all swans are white."²²² This is why inductive statements are graded on a scale of probability; Māturīdī makes no mention of probability, but instead assumes that induction can lead to the *logical* certainty of deduction.

This constitutes a major logical fallacy in Māturīdī's epistemology. Māturīdī's neglect of the problem of induction and his assumption that empirical observation can lead to logically necessary conclusions about the world excludes his epistemology from

²²¹ Popper, *Logic*, 28.

²²² *Ibid.*, 27.

being designated truly “modern.” For this reason, Māturīdī’s notion of empiricism is in fact more similar to that of the classical empiricists than to contemporary versions of empiricism; his empiricism is better described as “proto-modern.” Māturīdī claims that empirical knowledge discovers actual knowledge about things in the world. For him, empirical knowledge produces certainties about “the actual truths of things (*haqā’iq al-ashyā’*)” through the use of reason to organize and interpret the unquestionable data of immediate experience.²²³

Classical empiricists such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784) also held that empirical experience leads to certain, instead of probable, knowledge of the world.²²⁴ Locke argues that the entirety of knowledge is rooted in the direct experience of the outside world: “Our Observation employed either about external, sensible Objects; or about the internal Operations of Our Minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our Understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the Ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.”²²⁵ According to Locke, sensory impressions produce concepts, or “ideas” in the mind that are then ordered to create a coherent picture of reality. However, this theory of ideas does not imply that human knowledge of the world is indirect. Instead, like Māturīdī, Locke holds that our knowledge of the world concerns “actual real Existence” derived from empirical

²²³ Ibid., 480.

²²⁴ On Locke’s and Diderot’s claims about the certainty of knowledge based on sense perception, see Lex Newman, “Locke on Knowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s “Essay Concerning Human Understanding”* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 316; and David Funt, “Diderot and the Esthetics of the Enlightenment,” *Diderot Studies* 11 (1968): 38.

²²⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.I.2.

evidence.²²⁶ Diderot makes a similar claim when he writes that “one experiences, in the first instants of vision, only a multitude of confused sensations which untangle themselves only with time and by habitual reflection on what passes in us.”²²⁷ According to Diderot, the interpretation of this originally confused empirical information produces knowledge about the world that is as certain as a mathematical proof.²²⁸

For Māturīdī, as for the classical empiricists, knowledge is founded on the rational interpretation of empirical experience. This interpretation produces certain knowledge about the outside world. Later critiques of classical empiricism, such as that of David Hume (1711-1776), pointed out that it is a fallacy to assume that the observation of a limited number of events can be generalized into logically necessary rules about reality.²²⁹ Modern and contemporary empiricists have noted this critique, and have since argued that empirical arguments are based on probability, and therefore cannot produce deductive certainty. Because Māturīdī claims that empirical experience results in actual, instead of approximate, knowledge of the world, his notion of empiricism is therefore best described as “proto-modern.”

Despite Māturīdī’s problematic claim that inductive and empirical reasoning can reach deductive certainty, his understanding of reason as primarily inductive and empirical gives human reason a kind of elasticity that is able to respond to events in the world and be open to their possibility. This last point is precisely the “proto-modern” characteristic of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology that has become so crucial for

²²⁶ Ibid., IV.I.7; IV.IX.

²²⁷ Funt, “Diderot,” 41.

²²⁸ Ibid., 38.

²²⁹ See, for instance, Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.2.

modern Turkish theology. Modern and contemporary Turkish theologians often use the term “rationalism” (*akılcılık*) to describe Māturīdī’s epistemology. The term is most literally rendered “reason-ism” (*akıl-cılık*, the root term *akıl* being a direct borrowing of the Arabic term ‘*aql*). Instead of referring to a notion of pure reason or a strict use of deductive reasoning, which is implied in the English term “rationalism,” this characterization is meant to get at the faith that Māturīdī has in human reason’s ability to directly perceive and understand the complexities of the world, instead of the attempt to fit the world into artificial logical categories that are not the product of actual experience. Māturīdī’s epistemology in fact implies a critique of the recourse to a notion of pure reason or strict logical deduction, such as that found in Kant, Plato or even Ash‘arī. This term describes Māturīdī’s belief that human reason is able to interact with the world and draw innovative conclusions from it. His epistemology is based on the human being’s *reaction* to the world, instead of the attempt to rationally encapsulate it.

One Turkish theologian in particular, Hanifi Özcan of Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir (who will be discussed in more detail later) characterizes Māturīdī’s epistemology as a kind of “moderate realism,” due to the importance he places on empirical information and the function of reason in organizing this information into a coherent and accurate worldview.²³⁰ Based on the discussion presented above, this characterization seems accurate. It is worth exploring just how Māturīdī might be understood as a philosophical realist in order to better understand his appeal to modern Turkish thinkers. Māturīdī’s realism, which is a product of his epistemological deployment of empiricism and historicism, constitutes a kind of “proto-modern”

²³⁰ Özcan, *Bilgi*, 68.

epistemology that is seized upon by modern Turkish theologians and developed into a full-blown Islamic theological modernism.

Epistemologically, philosophical realism is based on the idea that there is a direct correspondence between objects of knowledge and our knowledge of them. Ralph Barton Perry calls this the “theory of immanence” in realism, meaning “that when a given thing, *a*, is known, *a* itself enters into a relation which constitutes it [in] the idea or content of a mind.”²³¹ Barton Perry describes this point in terms that are very reminiscent of Māturīdī: “Things do not transcend knowledge, but the thing mediated or ‘represented’ transcends the representation; while this whole process of transcendence lies within the field of things immediately presented.”²³² This statement reproduces Māturīdī’s paradox regarding the knowledge of God, where knowledge finds its “beginning [in] immanence (*tashbīh*) and its ending [in] unity (*tawhīd*), as necessity dictates.”²³³ According to realism, for knowledge that is not a priori, “the thing transcends the thought but it remains perceivable, or in some such manner accessible; and possesses the qualities and characters which such an immediate knowledge reveals.”²³⁴ Again, this statement seems to accord with Māturīdī’s approach to understanding reality: the whole extent of its truth and unity may remain outside our grasp, yet our perception of it is direct and genuine.

Realism separates itself from idealism by asserting that, in the words of Michael Williams, “things may be, and are, directly experienced without owing their being or

²³¹ Ralph Barton Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies* (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 308.

²³² *Ibid.*, 313.

²³³ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 106.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.

their nature to that circumstance.”²³⁵ This means that things in the world are not merely ideal constructs of the mind, sealed off from actual realities, as Kantian idealism, for instance, would hold.²³⁶ Rather, there are real things in the world, and these are in some degree directly available to us, depending on the circumstances. Realism similarly distinguishes itself from pure naturalism by utilizing logical deduction where empiricism fails.²³⁷ The realist understanding of the knower and the known, i.e., that they are both independent of each other and yet enter into a relationship in the act of knowing, implies that they may not in all cases coincide perfectly. This means that perspective and point of view are crucial components of realist epistemology.²³⁸ This is one of the elements of the inherent subjectivity of knowing, which “accounts for the possibility of error; but...does not in itself constitute error.”²³⁹ The apprehension of truth is therefore a matter of both right perception and correct apprehension: “Truth is neither coherence among things merely [as in naturalism], nor the complete internal coherence of thought [as in idealism]; but a harmony between thought and things.”²⁴⁰

These statements are in accord with Māturīdī’s assertion that empirical experience is the basis of all forms of knowing, even of those objects (such as God) that remain outside the field of empirical experience. The experience of our knowledge of God is empirical because all of our knowledge is empirical; this is how Māturīdī can claim that human knowledge of God must begin with empirical evidence and even

²³⁵ Ibid., 315.

²³⁶ Michael Williams, “Realism: What’s Left?” in *Truth and Realism*, ed. Patrick Greenough and Michael P. Lynch (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79-80.

²³⁷ Perry, *Philosophical Tendencies*, 272.

²³⁸ Ibid., 324.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 325.

description, but end with the logical affirmation of God's transcendence of these categories. In addition, the principle that there must exist "a harmony between thought and things" is also implied by the affirmation of historicism, the affirmation of the objective value of historical knowledge. Realism's assertion that human knowledge is based on an actual coincidence between intellectual processes and realities in the world is necessary if one is to speak of the existence (and objective awareness of) events in the real world.

Realism implies the possibility of objective history, the second key component of Māturīdī's epistemology. Barton Perry makes another important point that has major implications for Māturīdī's integration of realist epistemology with theology: "Truth is the achievement, and error the risk, incidental to the great adventure of knowledge. But eternal being, and the order of nature, are not implicated in its vicissitudes. So that if there be any virtue in these terms 'Eternal,' 'Order,' or 'Absolute,' they can be transposed without loss."²⁴¹ Māturīdī is able to combine a logical consideration of eternal truth (i.e., the Oneness of God) with a realist epistemology, because realism does not rule out the existence of the absolute: it merely conditions the terms in which we may understand it. These are the terms of objective human knowledge, which are rooted in empirical experience and developed in logical speculation. For this reason, Māturīdī rejects a number of much more popular medieval Islamic theological epistemologies, including the idealistic Platonism of the philosophers, the subjective mysticism of the Sufis, and the pure rationalism of the Mu'tazilīs (a method taken to its extreme in Ash'arī). Māturīdī similarly rejects blind traditionalism and irrational textualism on the

²⁴¹ Ibid., 328.

basis that they make no effort to engage with the evidence of experience and reason. As we will see over the next two chapters, his unique theological epistemology is precisely the area of his theology that so vexed his medieval disciples, and at the same time so enthralled his modern commentators.

CHAPTER THREE

ROOTS OF TURKISH THEOLOGICAL MODERNITY, II: PATHS NOT TAKEN IN
MĀTURĪDĪ THOUGHT

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Māturīdī succeeded in outlining a theological realism that prefigured certain modern epistemologies and in doing so cut against the grain of the available Islamic theological epistemologies of his time, Ash‘arism in particular. This chapter will detail how Māturīdī realism was abandoned by his theological successors who would go on to construct the Māturīdī school tradition. Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 1114) played a particularly crucial role in this process because he systematically dismantled some of the key components of Māturīdī’s realism in an attempt to bring him more closely in line with an emerging Sunnī-Ash‘arī epistemological and metaphysical orthodoxy. Nasafī’s works became the standard version of Māturīdism accepted by later generations, and for this reason later Māturīdism largely submitted to the textual rationalism of the Ash‘arīyya which came to be identified as Sunnī theological orthodoxy.

During the Ottoman period this Ash‘arī dominance prevailed, as demonstrated by an analysis of the institutional power of Ash‘arism in the Ottoman *medrese* system. Within an Ash‘arī theoretical framework, the Ottomans did however also tolerate the existence of multiple versions of Sunnī thought, including self-professed Māturīdīs. The Ottoman tradition, however, emphasized the ultimate harmony of Māturīdī’s and Ash‘arī’s schools within the broader framework of Ash‘arī epistemological and metaphysical orthodoxy that had become normative since the time of Nasafī. The

potential remained, however, for the assertion of a distinctly Māturīdī approach to theology, as demonstrated by a highly interesting theological controversy in the eighteenth century that saw the Māturīdī reassertion of the absolute primacy of human freedom. This controversy demonstrated the continuing viability of Māturīdī realism despite its near total neglect since the twelfth century. This flicker of the Māturīdī theological impulse in the eighteenth century foreshadows the full development and rediscovery of Māturīdī realism that took place in twentieth and twenty-first century Turkey.

Points of Departure: Comparing Ash‘arī and Māturīdī

The difference between the theology of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and Abū al-Manṣūr al-Māturīdī can be characterized by a difference in theological epistemology. As we have argued above, Māturīdī’s thought is based on a theological realism rooted in proto-modern notions of empiricism and historicism. This epistemological orientation reveals a universe constantly in motion and flux, passing before the rational and physical sight of the intelligent spectator who is called by God to observe it and interact with it on a rational level independent of blind authority. Māturīdī bases his theology on adherence to the eternal truths of the Qur’ān and the Sunna, but approaches them with a theology of realism that is not bound to either a strictly rationalistic or strictly naturalistic epistemology. For Māturīdī, truth is experienced as multi-faceted, and must be approached from a philosophical standpoint that acknowledges this fact.

Unlike Māturīdī, Ash‘arī’s theology arises from a confrontation with his own tradition and intellectual training. Ash‘arī’s break with his Mu‘tazilī mentors meant that

he revolted against their doctrine that God's actions must be limited by abstract notions of justice: God cannot do what is unjust, nor can God cause his servants to do what is evil.²⁴² Furthermore, the Mu'tazila famously denied the contention of Traditionalist theologians (i.e., theologians who focused heavily on the content of Prophetic sayings) that the Qur'ān can be identified with God's eternal attribute of speech, and thus must be characterized as uncreated and existing from eternity.²⁴³ Ash'arī interpreted the Mu'tazilī focus on the Qur'ān at the expense of the sayings of the Prophet (*ḥadīth*) as a disservice to the Prophet himself, and a direct repudiation of divine revelation. Ash'arī's "realization" of his error comes in the story famously related by Ibn 'Asākir (1106-1175 C.E.):

I heard one of our associates say: After the Shaikh Abū al-Ḥasan had gone deeply into Mu'tazilite *kalām* and mastered it, he used to propose questions to his masters. But when he got no satisfactory answers to his questions he became perplexed. And it is related of him that he said: "One night there occurred to my mind a dogmatic question which had been occupying me. So I rose and prayed two [prostrations], and, after asking God to guide me along the straight path, I fell asleep. While I slept I saw the Apostle of God, and I complained to him about the matter which was perplexing me. And the Apostle of God said: 'You must hold fast to my Sunna!' Then I awoke and I compared the theses of *kalām* with what I found in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. And I affirmed the latter and cast all else away."²⁴⁴

After experiencing this supposed conversion to the Sunna of the Prophet, Ash'arī attempted to do what no scholar had been able (or perhaps willing) to do before him:

²⁴² See Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atjama, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism and Rational Theology from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 1997); Watt, *Formative Period*, 231.

²⁴³ Madelung, "Origins," 508.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in McCarthy, 145.

attempt a synthesis of syllogistic, rationalistic *kalām* with the dogmatic outlook of the partisans of *ḥadīth* such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), who adhered to the written text of the Qurʾān or *ḥadīth* as literally as possible as a guarantee of orthodoxy. Ashʿarī makes this aim clear when he declares Ibn Ḥanbal to be the “virtuous Imam, the complete leader, through whom God has declared the truth, rejected error, clarified the way, suppressed the innovators and the heresy of the heretics, and made doubtful the doubters.”²⁴⁵ Ashʿarī’s attempt to think beyond the conceptual boundaries of his own milieu in Baghdad resulted predictably in controversy: when Ashʿarī excitedly presented a copy of his new work, the *Ibāna*, to one of the preeminent Ḥanbalī authorities of his time, he was scornfully rebuffed.²⁴⁶

Ashʿarī’s theological epistemology is usefully summed up in the phrase of a famous Ottoman Ashʿarī theologian and Sufī who we shall meet later in this chapter, ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī (1641-1731 C.E.). In the context of a discussion over the understanding of good and evil, Nābulūsī remarks that when determining the moral value of an action, Ashʿarī held that reason is “an instrument for the understanding of divinely revealed discourse.”²⁴⁷ Ashʿarī’s understanding of theology is highly discursive and assumes a notion of pure reason: Ashʿarī approaches the world as a text that can be read using the grammar of divine omnipotence. Whatever logically contradicts this

²⁴⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, ed. ‘Abbās Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: Dar al-Naqāʾis, 1994), 35.

²⁴⁶ Richard Frank, “Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ashʿarī,” *Le Museon* 102:1-2 (1991): 171.

²⁴⁷ ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī, *Taḥqīq al-Intiṣār fī Ittifāq al-Ashʿarī wa al-Māturīdī ‘alā Khalq al-Ikhtiyār*, ed. Edward Badeen, in Edward Badeen, *Sunnitische Theologie in osmanischer Zeit* (Würzburg: Orient-Institut Istanbul, 2008), 94. On Nābulūsī’s life and works, see Samer Akkach, *‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi: Islam and the Enlightenment* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2007).

grammar of divine power must be rationally invalid. Ash‘arī’s strict adherence to a syllogistic form of logical reasoning (i.e., that a single thing cannot admit of opposing predicates) is pithily contained in his saying that “the existence of two opposite meanings [or essences] in a single substrate is impossible.”²⁴⁸

This principle is actually a basic component of the accident/essence metaphysics used by Ash‘arī and many Sunnī theologians, yet it clearly seems to militate against the kind of fluctuations in meaning and essence that Māturīdī constantly discusses.

Ash‘arī’s universe is clearly more occasionalistic and in a sense more “two-dimensional” than Māturīdī’s. This is to be expected, given his tendency to approach religion and the world as texts to be read with the tool of reason, utilizing the grammar of divine power. Indeed, Ash‘arī claims as a general principle that human reason cannot operate except on the basis of some kind of traditional information (*sam‘*).²⁴⁹ This means that Ash‘arī’s textualism leaves no room for any notion of historicism because his system does not have a concept of independent reason that is able to get at the objective truths of history. His heavy emphasis on the fundamental arbitrariness of divine power has the effect of “ethicizing” history, i.e., imbuing it with a fundamental value that cannot be got at by human reason alone.²⁵⁰ In the phrase of the Ash‘arī authority ‘Adūd al-Dīn al-Ijī (ca. 1300-1355), “God’s actions have no purpose.”²⁵¹ This naturally rules out any notion of objective history as such, and thus any notion of historicism. The past, present, and future are merely spaces for the acting out of God’s

²⁴⁸ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Fūrak, *Maqālat al-Ash‘arī*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sayyāḥ (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2005), 112; see also 268.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵⁰ Note the absence of such an evaluation of history in *Croce* and classical historicism. See the discussion in Chapter Two.

²⁵¹ ‘Adūd al-Dīn al-Ijī, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, 1983), 430.

inscrutable will, and as such they have no content that can be approached by human investigation alone. In short, Ash‘arī’s strict theological rationalism and textualism certainly rules out Māturīdian theological realism.

It should be noted here that the sayings of Ash‘arī preserved by Ibn Fūrak (941-1015) do purport to show that Ash‘arī accepted the validity of empirical knowledge, and adopted the standard division of the sources of knowledge into empirical data, historical information, and reasoned reflection.²⁵² However, Ibn Fūrak also reports that there were discussions among Ash‘arī’s followers about the place of empirical knowledge in his theology, and how much of a role it played in his epistemology.²⁵³ The existence of this controversy demonstrates that Ash‘arī’s rationalistic textualism seemed somewhat extreme to his immediate followers, and that they may have attempted to modify it with the introduction a wider notion of epistemology. This early controversy over the precise meaning of Ash‘arī’s rather radical theological stance prefigures the modification of his doctrines that would be carried out by later members of the theological school that Ash‘arī founded, as we will soon see. It is in any case impossible to find any notion of the centrality of empirical knowledge in Ash‘arī’s actual extant works, and he nowhere makes the kinds of categorical statements about its absolute and a priori validity as Māturīdī frequently does. Notions of history and empiricism simply do not play a central role in Ash‘arī’s system as they do in Māturīdī’s.

In other words, Ash‘arī became convinced that the concept of divine omnipotence cannot in any way be abridged by our human notions of justice: consideration of God’s omnipotence must have priority. The same theological

²⁵² Ibid., 14.

²⁵³ Ibid., 16.

rationalism that led the Mu‘tazila to the conclusion that there can be no contradiction between justice and God’s actions led Ash‘arī in a different direction: God’s omnipotence is so foundational to God’s essence that no human concept of justice can contain it. What God does is just simply because God does it: there can be no outside criteria by which to judge God’s actions.²⁵⁴ As he states in *Kitāb al-Luma‘*,

The proof that [God] is free to do whatever He does is that He is the Supreme Monarch, subject to no one, with no superior over Him who can permit, or command, or chide, or forbid, or prescribe what He shall do and fix bounds for Him. This being so, nothing can be evil on the part of God. For a thing is evil on our part only because we transgress the limit and bound set for us and do what we have no right to do. But since the Creator is subject to no one, and bound by no command, nothing can be evil on His part.²⁵⁵

This orientation is at the root of Ash‘arī’s contention (mentioned in the previous chapter) that God is the sole actor in the universe, and that any actions humans commit can only be attributed to them metaphorically. When in doubt, Ash‘arī consistently errs on the side of God’s power and sees any attribution of power to a potential agent other than God as somehow a diminution of God’s omnipotence.

It is important to point out that when discussing human actions, Ash‘arī does acknowledge that there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary actions, a difference that all humans know a priori.²⁵⁶ Ibn Fūrak also reports that Ash‘arī was even willing to call human beings “choosers” (*mukhtār*, in the same way that Māturīdī does, as we have seen above) and to describe their actions as “choice” (*ikhtiyār*).²⁵⁷ It is

²⁵⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibāna ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, ed. ‘Abbās Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1994), 123.

²⁵⁵ Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, para. 170; translation by McCarthy.

²⁵⁶ Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, para. 92.

²⁵⁷ Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 124.

important to again point out, however, that this term occurs nowhere in Ash‘arī’s own extant works. Even in Ibn Fūrak, Ash‘arī’s use of the term seems limited to his refutation of an even more extreme description of divine omnipotence offered by the Najjārīyya. Ash‘arī does seem concerned to distance himself from any kind of fatalism or total denial of human free will.²⁵⁸ The defense of human freedom, however, clearly does not play a role in his theology: God’s freedom must always be prior, and he assumes that a diminution of one must involve a diminution of the other.

What is important to note is that Ash‘arī’s theological emphasis depends on the preservation of divine omnipotence and the logical consequences that result from this assertion, whatever their theological consequence for human beings. Whereas Māturīdī’s theological realism causes him to affirm two logically contradictory aspects of a single real phenomenon, Ash‘arī’s extreme rationalism, grounded in the affirmation of divine omnipotence, causes his system to lean much more clearly in favor of restrictions on human agency when pressed; this theological starting point will have repercussions as far ahead as the Ottoman period.

Early Theological Encounters and Points of Disagreement: Tenth-Twelfth Centuries C.E.

Ash‘arī’s theological tendencies gave rise to a number of distinctive metaphysical and epistemological principles which would become foundational to the formation of Ash‘arism as a theological tradition. Four of the most distinctive of these

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 101; 111; 124. Ibn Fūrak clearly interprets Ash‘arī’s doctrine as confirming free will; Frank makes a similar assertion in “The Structure of Created Causality According to al-Ash‘ari: An Analysis of Kitab al-Luma’ 82-64,” *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966), 13-75.

principles, and four that would meet with a complicated reception from Māturīdīs, are (1) the notion of metaphysical “custom” (‘āda), (2) the claim that human reason is incapable of identifying good or evil without the aid of revelation, (3) the claim that God is able to morally hold a person responsible for a duty which they are incapable of executing (*taklīf mā lā yutāq*), and (4) the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān.²⁵⁹ ‘Āda, or “custom,” in the context of *kālam* refers to the theory that occurrences in the real world do not occur independently of God’s direct will and intervention. This means, for instance, that when a flame catches a piece of paper on fire, this fire is not directly caused by the flame: instead, it is caused by God’s direct intervention. However, God usually creates certain actions to follow others (such as fire following from contact with a flame), and this is called metaphysical “custom.” Cause and effect are, therefore, metaphorical: what we experience as regular cause and effect is in every case an arbitrary action on God’s part, despite the fact that God usually creates these actions in certain sequences that we can recognize. The point of the notion of “custom” is that God does not have to create actions such that they appear causal; it is merely the case that God almost always does so.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Rudolph provides a useful historical summary of the first theological contacts between Māturīdī and Ash‘arī theologians in his article “Das Entstehen der Māturīdiya,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (1997): 394-404. His article shows how Māturīdī identity evolved in opposition to Ash‘arī challenges, a point that reinforces the antagonisms discussed here. While this chapter address the theological history of Māturīdī doctrines relative to Ash‘arism, important studies on the geographical spread of Māturīdism can be found in Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Spread of Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009): 59-92 and Wilferd Madelung, “The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks,” *Actos do IV Congresso de Estudos e Islamicos, Coimbra-Lisboa 1968* (1971): 109-168.

²⁶⁰ Actions of God that break with “metaphysical custom” include miracles, and they frequently described this way by Sufis as *kharq al-‘āda*.

This metaphysical doctrine became highly influential among Ash‘arī’s followers, and as we shall see later, became a foundational tenet of Sunnī theology more broadly. The famous systematizer of Ash‘arī’s theology, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (950-1013), argued that in the case of all knowledge that does not occur by report, God directly creates knowledge of a particular thing in the person at the moment when this thing perceived/phenomenon either breaks or accords with “the custom” of observed phenomena.²⁶¹ It is for this reason that Bāqillānī also argues that sense perception is only called knowledge in a metaphorical sense, for it cannot get at the true reality of the thing under consideration (*al-ḥaqīqa*).²⁶² Ibn Fūrak also makes the same claim: in the final analysis, God only creates knowledge in a person according to God’s arbitrary will— knowledge does not proceed from direct contact with things in the world, or from the inherent meanings of these things.²⁶³ Theologians clearly believed in the efficacy of human reason, which they affirm over and over again. However, Ash‘arī’s overriding concern with divine omnipotence caused them to affirm that God is the immediate cause of all that exists in the universe.

As noted above, however, Māturīdī repeatedly makes the point that empirical knowledge can in fact apprehend the reality of a thing, and that empirical knowledge is at the root of all human attempts to know the world: it is unequivocally foundational to human epistemology.²⁶⁴ In addition, the notion of the “custom” of observed phenomena

²⁶¹ Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb Tamhīd al-Awā’il wa Talkhīṣ al-Dalā’il*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥayḍar (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thqāfiyya, 1987), 31; See also Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (1028-1085), *Kitāb al-Irshād*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1950), 8.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 89.

²⁶⁴ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 304.

hardly gets any mention at all in Māturīdī's work; instead Māturīdī speaks of a natural world where humans constantly observe and reflect on the ceaseless motions and cycles of the constituent parts of God's creation, such as good and evil, light and dark, pain and pleasure, beauty and ugliness. Indeed, this is one of the most common proofs for the existence of God in Māturīdī's text: the ceaseless revolution of the "combination of opposing and various natures" and the infinite yet ordered combinations that these natures exhibit prove the existence of a wise creator.²⁶⁵

The question of metaphysical "custom" is more complex in Māturīdī's successors, although his school does not see it as restrictively as Bāqillānī does; rather, they discuss the notion as a way to refute the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *tawallud*, of the self-generation of the effect of an action, and do not adhere to it as a basic metaphysical principle. Though Bāqillānī makes *'āda* a centerpiece of his metaphysics, later Māturīdīs treat it as far more limited in scope. The Samarqandī Māturīdī theologian 'Alā al-Dīn al-Usmānī (d. 1157), for instance, explains that God only directs things in this way if they are not under our direct control, such as the random movement of water when a hand moves inside it. In other words, not all actions in the world are subject to the concept of metaphysical "custom," just those that humans cannot directly influence.²⁶⁶ Usmānī simply means that the effects of human actions are, like human actions themselves, created but not compelled by God. Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 1184) also asserts that "custom" is merely a way of saying that God creates the effects that humans intend from their actions, in the same way that God creates the actions that humans

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 78.

²⁶⁶ 'Alā al-Dīn al-Usmānī, *Lubāb al-Kalām*; ed. M. Sait Özervarlı, *Alaeddin el-Üsmendi ve lübab ü'l kelam adlı eseri* (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2005), 133.

themselves choose first.²⁶⁷ Māturīdī himself, however, does not employ the notion of “custom” in this way, but directly refers to human beings as “effecters” (*āthir*) of the things they intend to do.²⁶⁸

Because of Ash‘arī’s textualism, his theological tradition also held that reason plays a much more restricted role in the process of knowledge, despite its utility in interpreting divine revelation. According to Ash‘arī and his school, human reason (*‘aql*) is incapable of determining the moral status of an act without referring to revelation. Further, humans are not required to have used their own reason to discover the existence of God before the advent of revelation.²⁶⁹ In the words of the great Ash‘arī theologian Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (994-1066), “the entirety of moral judgments [*aḥkām al-taklīf*] are learned from reported evidences and judgments of revelation.”²⁷⁰

For the Māturīdī school, however, unaided human reason is able to determine the good and evil of actions without the help of revelation, though revelation in many cases may serve this purpose.²⁷¹ Usmandī summarizes the matter in this way:

The theologians from among the Muslims differ on whether human reason—considering the fact that it can be used to determine the contingency of the world, the existence of the creator, and the evidence of miracles— can also be used to determine the good or evil of an action and the necessity of doing such an action or preventing it. Our partisans have said, may God have mercy on them: [human reason] can be used to determine these things, such that even if

²⁶⁷ Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Bidāya fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*; ed. Bekir Topaloğlu, *Matūrīdiyye Akaidi* (Ankara: DİB Yayınları, 2005), 68.

²⁶⁸ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 327.

²⁶⁹ Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 30; See also Abū ‘Ubdha’s (d. 1758) succinct discussion of this disagreement in *al-Rawḍa al-Bahiyya fī mā bayn al-Ashā‘ira wa al-Māturīdiyya*, ed. ‘Alī Farīd Daḥrūj (Beirut: Dār Sabīl al-Rishād, 1996), 93-101.

²⁷⁰ Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 8.

²⁷¹ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 249.

God had deprived the world of a prophet then faith in God would still be required and disbelief prohibited, and such that thankfulness for His blessings would be required, and ungratefulness for them repugnant. This is the way transmitted from Abū Ḥanifa, may God have mercy on him.²⁷²

However, like other Māturīdī theologians, Usmandī points out that it is not human reason that necessitates the good or evil of an action; human reason is only one way by which a person can perceive the good or evil that God has determined for a specific action.²⁷³ In other words, human beings do not actually make an action good or evil, but they are able to tell whether it is good or evil based on their own reasoning and the data of revelation.

In line with their basic principle that God's will is entirely unconstrained, Ash'arīs claimed that God is theoretically able to do a number of things absolutely repugnant to human reason (despite the fact that they were often confident that God would actually never do these things). Ash'arī for instance famously held that it is possible that God might decide to punish children in the afterlife.²⁷⁴ Similarly, Ash'arī and his school held that God may command a person to do something that she is not actually capable of doing, and then hold her morally responsible for that command.²⁷⁵ Māturīdī and his followers, however, found this doctrine outrageous. The great systematizer of Māturīdīan doctrine, and the most influential member of the school after the founder himself, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (1046-1115), accused the Ash'arīs of outright heresy on this point: “Those who believe in compulsion (*jabr*) are those who believe that God can hold someone responsible for something that they are incapable of

²⁷² Usmandī, *Lubab*, 47.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁷⁴ Ash'arī, *Ibāna*, 133-134; *Kitāb al-Luma'*, para. 169.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 161; Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 226-228.

doing (*taklīf mā lā yutāq*).²⁷⁶ Mātūrīdī himself also strongly opposed this idea, claiming that it is simply repugnant to reason.²⁷⁷

Perhaps the most striking point of disagreement between the early Ash‘arī and Mātūrīdī schools is on the issue of the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. As mentioned above, the doctrine that the Qur’ān is uncreated (*ghayr makhluq*) became foundational to Sunnī theological orthodoxy, and developed into the most intense point of disagreement between the As‘arīs and Mu‘tazilīs. All Ash‘arīs (and eventually all Sunnīs) adopted the Traditionalist position of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and other members of the *ḥadīth* movement that the Qur’ān is uncreated, and has existed from eternity. The crucial theological move of this principle is the identification of God’s eternal attribute of speech (*ṣifat al-kalām*) with the Qur’ān, thus rendering the Qur’ān itself existent from eternity.²⁷⁸

Given how central this doctrine was to Sunnī orthodoxy in the heartlands of the Abbasid Caliphate, it is striking to note that Mātūrīdī did not hold this view. Furthermore, it is clear that it received rather mixed reactions from some of the earliest members of his theological school. Mātūrīdī declared that while God does possess the attribute of speech (*ṣifat al-kalām*) “the types [of this speech], which are from this perspective contingent and created, are the manuscript, the *sūras*, and the *ayās* and what is related to this; and from this perspective, God is not described by them”, i.e, they are

²⁷⁶ Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, ed. Hüseyin Atay and Şaban Ali Düsgün (Ankara: DİB Yayınları, 2004), 166. Ash‘arīs took great pains to disassociate themselves from the unpopular notion of *jabr* (“compulsion”), that human beings are totally pre-destined in their actions. See for instance Juwaynī, *Luma‘ al-Adilla*, ed. Fawqiyya Ḥusayn Muḥammad (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1987), 121.

²⁷⁷ Mātūrīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 352.

²⁷⁸ See Ash‘arī, *Ibāna*, 36, 61-89; Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 99-107; *Luma‘*, 102-107; among many others.

not attributes as speech is.²⁷⁹ Māturīdī also held that when God spoke to Moses, he “caused him to hear in Moses’ language, in letters which he created and a sound which he brought into being, but he caused him to hear what was not created (i.e., revelation).”²⁸⁰

It is also interesting to note in this context that Māturīdī’s rather ambiguous formulation of the nature of the Qur’an probably had some antecedents in Abū Ḥanīfa. Ash’arī himself mentions that Abū Ḥanīfa held the Qur’an to be created, on the grounds that since the Qur’an is not God, and everything other than God must be created, so too must be the Qur’an.²⁸¹ This view is mentioned in al-Ash’arī’s *Ibāna* on the authority of such important (but not necessarily disinterested) scholars as Sufyān al-Thawrī and Abū Yūsuf.²⁸² In addition, Nasafī makes it clear that this hesitation to call the Qur’an uncreated was in fact the orthodox position of the Samarqandī tradition of Ḥanafī theology, i.e., the very tradition which Māturīdī studied and taught throughout his life in Samarqand. Nasafī characterizes the traditional Samarqandī position as follows: “Their formulation on this issue was that the Qur’an is the speech of God and His attribute, and that the speech of God is uncreated and likewise His attribute. But they do not exactly say that the Qur’an is uncreated, lest it lead to the notion that these expressions constructed from letters and sounds are uncreated, as the Ḥanbalīs claim.”²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammad Aruçı (Beirut: Dar Sader Publishers, 2007): 116. Also see Wilferd Madelung, “al- Māturīdī , Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Samarqandī,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009).

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸¹ Madelung, “Origins,” 509.

²⁸² Ash’arī, *Ibānah*, 78-79.

²⁸³ Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 373. Nasafī’s statement also points to a common theme in early Māturīdī theology: their explicit opposition to the followers of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who Ash’arī saw as the highest expression of Sunnī Orthodoxy. See also on this point Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 1099), *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed.

What is most important is that nowhere in Māturīdī's doctrinal text *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* does it say that the Qur'ān is uncreated; in fact, Māturīdī's entire discussion of the nature of the Qur'ān takes up no more than a few pages. By contrast, in Ash'arī's main dogmatic work, *al-Ībāna*, this issue occupies almost a fifth of the total text, and is made a central concern of Ash'arī's arguments from the very beginning. This is explained by the fact that Ash'arī clearly had more at stake in this theological issue: his theological textualism required that the text of the Qur'ān be granted an epistemological status higher than that of any other source of knowledge. For Ash'arī and his followers (and soon after for most Sunnīs) the guarantee of the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān meant the guarantee of the essence of Islam. Māturīdī's theological epistemology, however, clearly does not require such an overtly textual focus, given its openness to the data of history and empirical experience.

Māturīdī's early followers shared his reservations. Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d.1099), in direct contradiction to the Ash'arī position, states that the Qur'ān cannot be identified with God's eternal attribute of speech; rather, it only refers to it.²⁸⁴ Bazdawī himself does not adopt the term "uncreated" to describe the Qur'ān, but he does declare that it is "not harmful" should it be adopted.²⁸⁵ Needless to say, this is clearly not a ringing endorsement of Ash'arī's position. Maḥmūd ibn al-Zayd al-Lāmishī (early twelfth century) never describes the Qur'ān as uncreated in his work *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li Qawā'id al-Tawḥīd*, despite his acknowledgment that the speech of God is one of the

Hans Peter Linss (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1963), 21. Bazdawī in fact characterizes the Ḥanbalīs as outright heretics because of their extreme textual literalism.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 61-66.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 66.

divine attributes.²⁸⁶ Abū Salama (ca. late tenth century), one of the earliest known representatives of the Māturīdī school, also does not describe the Qur’ān as uncreated.²⁸⁷ Even Māturīdīan theologians who did endorse Ash‘arī’s position did so while noting that it was an issue far from settled in their own school. Usmandī, for instance, describes the Qur’ān as uncreated, but notes that some masters of the Ḥanafī theological school claim that it cannot be described in this way.²⁸⁸

Synthesis in Favor of Ash‘arism: Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 1114)

Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, another member of the school of Samarqandī Māturīdī theologians in the early twelfth century, also engaged in the Māturīdīan debates about how to react to the doctrines of the newly powerful Ash‘arī school of theology. Unlike his colleagues and contemporaries, however, his answers to these questions were sympathetic to Ash‘arī and would become authoritative for the later development of Māturīdism.²⁸⁹ Nasafī’s influence would set the Māturīdī school on a historical course that veered away from the original metaphysical and epistemological principles of Māturīdī himself and brought Māturīdī doctrine more closely in line with Ash‘arism. As Wilferd Madelung points out, Nasafī’s overall attitude toward the Ash‘ariyya was much more measured than that of earlier Māturīdīs. He tends to minimize differences between

²⁸⁶ Maḥmūd ibn Zayd al-Lāmishī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li Qawā‘id al-Tawḥīd*, ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995), 71.

²⁸⁷ Abū Salama al-Samarqandī, *Jumal Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Ahmet Saim Kılavuz (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1989), 19.

²⁸⁸ Usmandī, *Lubab*, 9.

²⁸⁹ Wilferd Madelung, “Abu al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī and Ash‘arī Theology,” in *Studies in Honor of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Volume II: The Sultan’s Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. C. Hillenbrand (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 318.

the schools as much as possible.²⁹⁰ This foreshadows a trend in later Sunnī theology (influential to the present day) that argues that the differences between the schools are only semantic (*lafzī*).

Nasafī's treatment of Māturīdī is perhaps most interesting for what he does not say. In his monumental summation of Māturīdī theology, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, Nasafī nowhere uses the term *taqallub* (flux) or any of its derivations, despite the enormous importance the concept had for Māturīdī. Nasafī is not alone in this omission: to the best of my knowledge, the term is not used by any other Māturīdī theologian save Māturīdī himself. Nasafī only once mentions the doctrine of opposing natures, almost as an afterthought, and never develops this idea nor uses it in any other place in his work.²⁹¹ Again, this stands in stark contrast to the importance of this concept in Māturīdī's own works.

At the same time, Nasafī's own metaphysics seem to clearly favor the static rationalism of the Ash'arīyya at the expense of Māturīdī's conception of an ever-changing universe. By eliminating the concepts of opposing natures and flux from his theology, Nasafī removed two of the cornerstones of Māturīdī's dynamic metaphysics. Nasafī even goes further, making theological points that limit the expansiveness of Māturīdī's conception of reason and the possibility of change in the universe. At one point he declares, "The essential realities of things [*al-haqā'iq*] do not change by means of states; however, points of view, specific rulings, and whatever else has to do with relationships, may change."²⁹² Statements such as this reflect a significant modification

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 320.

²⁹¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, I:106.

²⁹² Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, I:39.

of Māturīdī's assertion that the essential natures of things change along with a change in their state, and that things do not have any essential nature at all save that which is determined by their specific location in a context of other relationships. While Nasafī retains Māturīdī's concepts of point of view and relationality, he does not allow these to destabilize the essential essence of things in the universe, a key theological move that removes yet another piece from Māturīdī's dynamic universe and brings him closer to the Ash'arī conception of a universe predetermined in every detail from the very moment of creation.

Nasafī moderates Māturīdī's epistemology in significant ways as well. Rather than simply declare human reason's ability to independently differentiate good from evil, as Māturīdī does, Nasafī introduces important qualifications to this idea that limits its scope and power significantly. Nasafī argues that human reason naturally inclines toward good things and naturally feels aversion to evil things, but can only apprehend good and evil without respect to the essences of individual things, i.e., as only abstract concepts. Human reason cannot apprehend the good or evil of a specific action or situation without recourse to divine pronouncement.²⁹³ Here, as elsewhere, Nasafī attempts to preserve the basic tenets of Māturīdī doctrine while at the same time modifying them in a way that is more in line with Ash'arism. Nasafī treats Māturīdī's theory of aspects in the same way. While he acknowledges that Māturīdī utilized a theory of aspects in explaining human actions (i.e., how they can be both freely committed by a person and created by God), Nasafī maintains that this use of aspect is

²⁹³ Ibid., II:16-17; 35.

merely an explanatory device.²⁹⁴ He does not explore the epistemological and metaphysical implications of such a theory, as Māturīdī so strikingly does (such as when he argues that even disbelief in God is true from at least one perspective).

Nasafī's Ash'arī-style devaluation of independent human reason has the overall effect of weakening Māturīdī's notion of historicism. Weakening the ability of reason to independently investigate past events without needing constant recourse to divine revelation removes the notion of objective history that is implicit in Māturīdī. In a sense, Nasafī "re-ethicizes" history. In addition, Nasafī's dismissal of Māturīdī's theory of perspective severely weakens the foundation of Māturīdīan realism, and demonstrates that even though Nasafī may hold to some of the same epistemological principles that Māturīdī does (such as the *a priori* validity of empirical knowledge and the existence of historical knowledge),²⁹⁵ he clearly does not interpret these principles as Māturīdī does. Instead of drawing out their implications for a philosophically realistic epistemology, he blunts their edges so as not to offend against the emerging Ash'arī epistemological and metaphysical orthodoxy.

The most dramatic modification Nasafī makes to Māturīdī's theology concerns the nature of the Qur'ān. Nasafī starts his discussion of the Qur'ān by affirming that the speech of God is an eternal attribute, just as Māturīdī and the Ash'arīs do.²⁹⁶ He also argues, again like Māturīdī, that the linguistic forms of this attribute (sounds, letters, specific languages of revelation such as Hebrew, Arabic, etc...) are created "indicators"

²⁹⁴ Ibid., II:260. It is interesting to note that while he does not use the notion of aspect to a great extent in his own theology, Nasafī takes Ash'arīs and Mu'tazilīs to task for rejecting the notion outright (II: 260-262). Bazdawī levels a similar critique, while again not exploring the matter in any detail in his own theology or developing its radical metaphysical implications as Māturīdī does (110, 233).

²⁹⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, I:20.

²⁹⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, I:372.

(*dalālāt*) of the eternal attribute of the speech of God.²⁹⁷ Interestingly, however, Nasafi also cites a proof that Ash‘arī heavily relies on to prove the eternity of God’s speech and hence the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. The proof is based on Qur’ān Sūrat al-Nahl 40, “Indeed Our saying to a thing, if We will it, is that we say to it “Be” and it is.” Were the word of God created (in this case, the speech of the word “Be”), then it would require that there exist a previous word to create this utterance, and so on ad infinitum.²⁹⁸ Since an infinite regress is impossible, this is definitive proof that the speech of God is uncreated (and hence so is the Qur’ān, which as mentioned above Ash‘arī identifies with the speech of God). In his *Ibāna*, Ash‘arī uses this proof to frame his entire discussion of the Qur’ān, indicating its paramount importance for him.²⁹⁹ The fact that Nasafi borrows this proof is very striking, especially since it is not found in Māturīdī. Furthermore, Nasafi openly acknowledges that he is borrowing the proof— he admits that Ḥanafī theologians had never used it before him.³⁰⁰ He does not, however, acknowledge its origin.

As mentioned above, Nasafi points out that Samarqandī Ḥanafī theologians (Māturīdī and his followers among them) traditionally had not been willing to state that the Qur’ān is uncreated. After acknowledging this, Nasafi then boldly proposes that the Qur’ān should indeed be described as uncreated, saying “by which I mean the attribute existing by means of [God’s] essence, which is [the attribute of] speech.”³⁰¹ Nasafi here

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 372.

²⁹⁸ While this verse does not have to be interpreted as implying an infinite regress, Ash‘arī argues that it does so.

²⁹⁹ Ash‘arī, *Ibāna*, 36, 62, 72.

³⁰⁰ Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, I: 345.

³⁰¹ Ibid., I: 393.

fully adopts the rationale and conclusion of Ash‘arism on this point, fully aware that he is deviating from the traditional positions of the Māturīdī school.

The importance of Nasafī’s theology in the history of Māturīdism was decisive. Nasafī’s *Tabṣirat* would become the foundational school text for Māturīdī thinkers from the thirteenth century onward. In this text, Nasafī undoes the key components of Māturīdī’s metaphysics of flux (components which apparently had not been fully accepted by other Māturīdīs before and during Nasafī’s time as well). Nasafī also weakens the independent-minded rationalism of Māturīdī’s epistemology. Finally, he takes the decisive step to move Māturīdism away from its traditional hesitation on the issue of the nature of the Qur’ān and toward a complete merger with Ash‘arism on this issue.

For future generations of Muslim theologians, this is perhaps the most crucial step that Nasafī took. The position that the Qur’ān is uncreated would become one of the signature doctrines of Sunnī orthodoxy, and had Māturīdism not been brought in line with it, the followers of Māturīdī may have risked the same charges of heresy that the Mu‘tazila received. As a consequence of Nasafī’s interpretation of Māturīdism, however, the most characteristic (and radical) theological positions of Māturīdī himself were softened if not outright eliminated in order to bring Māturīdī’s school in line with an emerging Sunnī theological consensus. Importantly for the future of Islamic theology, this new Sunnī consensus would be based on the occasionalistic and rationalistic metaphysics of Ash‘arī, rather than the theological realism of Māturīdī. From Nasafī on, any conception of empirical or historical knowledge in Māturīdī *kalām* would only ring hollow and remain subservient to an Ash‘arī notion of textualism and

strict rationalism, stripped as it was of the full philosophical realism that Māturīdī constructed on the basis of these two principles.

A similar development was in fact taking place within the Ash‘arī school during roughly the same period. As noted above, while Ash‘arī does distinguish between forced movements (such as involuntary trembling) and other types of movement (such as the ordinary movement of the limbs), he does not describe the latter type of action as “choice” (*ikhtiyār*). Rather, he describes it as the “acquisition” of the act from God (*kasb*). In other words, though Ash‘arī did not want to be seen as a fatalist or as utterly denying human free will, he remained very suspicious of any kind of terminology that imputes any notion of power to the human agent, including the term *ikhtiyār*. Needless to say, this hesitancy is admirable in its logical consistency but troubling in its theological implications.

This stance was, however, significantly modified by his followers in later centuries. As mentioned above, Ibn Fūrak took pains to argue that Ash‘arī was not a determinist, and records sayings of his that use the term *ikhtiyār* (though the term is nowhere used in any of the extant writings of Ash‘arī himself, despite the fact that Ash‘arī extensively discusses human actions in his *Kitāb al-Luma‘*). Juwaynī, one of the most influential members of Ash‘arī’s school both during his lifetime and beyond, was clearly comfortable with the term *ikhtiyār*, and introduces it to describe precisely the same kinds of acts that Ash‘arī would only describe as mere acquisitions: “The proof for the establishment of the human capacity to act [*qudra*] is that the human being, if his hand trembles, and then if he moves it intentionally, distinguishes between his state in the compelled movement and the state which he chose and acquired, for the distinction

between the two states of compulsion and choice (*ikhtiyār*) is known *a priori*.”³⁰² In other words, Juwaynī inserts the notion of choice in the very same discussion in which Ash‘arī omitted it. Like Nasafī, he surreptitiously, but significantly, moderates the position of the founder of his school.

Use of the term *ikhtiyār*, once so foreign to Ash‘arī’s way of thinking, eventually became a standard feature of later Ash‘arī theology, particularly in the period often described as the “moderns” (i.e., the formation of Ash‘arī theology after the twelfth century due to the introduction of new philosophical concepts after al-Ghazālī’s famous debates with Islamic philosophers).³⁰³ The most influential member of this new movement in Ash‘arism, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149-1209), unreservedly used the terms “choice” (*ikhtiyār*) and “intention” (*qasḍ*) to describe human actions.³⁰⁴ The late Ash‘arī authority ‘Adūd al-Dīn al-Ijī (ca. 1300-1355), who would become one of the standard points of reference in Ottoman theology, also describes human acts with the term “choice.”³⁰⁵ The fact that these two major authorities of the Ash‘arī school so comfortably utilize terminology that Ash‘arī himself hesitated in using indicates the extent to which Ash‘arī’s conception of human freedom had been modified in an apparent attempt to distance it from any accusations of determinism. This drift closer to the Māturīdī position on this issue mirrors the similar drift set in motion by Nasafī

³⁰² Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 215

³⁰³ On late Ash‘arism, see Oliver Leaman and Sajjad Rizvi, “The Developed Kalam Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77-98.

³⁰⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Arba‘in fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥijāzī al-Saqā (Cairo: Dār al-Jil, 2004), 224.

³⁰⁵ al-Ijī, 311.

toward Māturīdī agreement with Ash‘arism on questions of epistemology, metaphysics, and the nature of the Qur’ān.

Thus, by the beginnings of Ottoman theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Sunnī theology had agreed on the abandonment of Māturīdī’s metaphysics of flux and theological realism in favor of Ash‘arī’s conception of a occasionalistic ontology known through the use of a textual rationalism governed by the emphasis on God’s absolute omnipotence. Māturīdism also decided firmly in favor of the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. On the other hand, Ash‘arism moderated its position on human actions in order to more strongly emphasize the notion of free will. Ottoman theology would therefore feature an emphasis on substantial agreement between the two schools in a broad Sunnī theological consensus. As we shall see, however, the potential for theological controversy and the assertion of a distinctly Māturīdī theological identity remained during the Ottoman period despite the pervasive dominance of the philosophical Ash‘arism of Rāzī and Ijī.

Sunnī Theology in the Ottoman Period: Professionalization and Synthesis in the Medrese System

Sunnī theology experienced dramatic change during its course of development under the Ottoman Empire. Before analyzing Ottoman-era Sunnī theology itself, it is first necessary to discuss the unprecedented institutional developments under Ottoman rule that affected Islamic intellectual life in all its forms. As Cemal Kafadar argues, the early Ottoman state (founded by Osman I in the opening years of the fourteenth century) was composed of a diverse collection of religious and military interests, whose

main objective was the consolidation of dynastic and military power.³⁰⁶ The early Ottoman state was not as concerned about orthodox Sunnī Islam as many of the later Ottoman chroniclers assumed; rather, the presence of heterodox Sufism, Christian mercenaries in the direct employ of the Ottoman state, and even stories of the female warrior of the faith Efromiya, who did not cover and fought alongside male warriors, coexisted with discourses of orthodox, urban Islamic elites.³⁰⁷ From a very early point, however, the Ottoman state was willing to utilize orthodox Sunnī discourses in support of imperial legitimacy. Endowment documents dated to 1324 were written in accordance with orthodox Islamic law and describing Osman I and his successor Orhan I as champions of Islam demonstrate the utility that orthodox Islam could have for the Ottoman military state.³⁰⁸

The transition of the Ottoman state from a warring, tribal principality to a settled imperial government accompanied a shift in Islamic discourse in the territories of the empire. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Islamic educational institutions under Ottoman control were largely confined to rural Sufi lodges associated with the multitudes of popular charismatic saints that spread Islam throughout the Anatolian countryside (variously termed *şey*, *derviş*, or *baba*).³⁰⁹ These institutions had a loose relationship with state authorities, but had much deeper roots in Anatolian folk Islamic

³⁰⁶ Cemal Kafadr, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰⁹ Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “The Emergence of the Ottoman Medrese Tradition,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 25 (2008), 289-90.

traditions.³¹⁰ The needs of the Ottoman state, however, quickly favored the creation of a settled class of Sunnī Islamic authorities who would be a much more stable and reliable source of dynastic legitimacy.³¹¹ This new class of Islamic scholars would come from a uniquely Ottoman institution, the *medrese* (from the Arabic term, *madrasa*). These Islamic educational institutions had much in common with their institutional predecessors in the medieval Islamic world and drew on their scholarly traditions.³¹² Like the *madrasas*, the Ottoman *medreses* focused their studies on Islamic religious disciplines, leaving scientific traditions such as medicine and astronomy to be developed in separate schools created for that purpose.³¹³

Ottoman *medreses* differed in important ways from other educational institutions in the medieval Islamic world. Seljuk *madrasas*, such as the famous Nizāmiyya in eleventh century Baghdad, were characterized by a focus on law and *ḥadīth* studies.³¹⁴ Attempts to introduce Ash‘arism in the Nizāmiyya by Nizām al-Mulk, for instance, resulted in riots by the citizens of Baghdad who were at the time intensely hostile to *kalām* due to the influence of Ḥanbalī intellectuals among the urban underclass of the

³¹⁰ On Anatolian charismatic Sufism represented by such figures as Ahmet Yesevi and Yunus Emre, see Fuad Körpülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, trans. and ed. Gary Leiser and Robert Dankoff (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006). These figures are described as wonder-working champions of popular piety, and as such represented an inherent challenge to settled Islamic authorities such as the traditional religious scholars of the sacred law and theology, the ‘*ulāma*’.

³¹¹ İhsanoğlu, 291.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 289-290.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 289. On scientific *medreses* see also Miri Shefer Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500-1700* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010); and Tuncay Zorlu, “The Medical *Medrese* of Süleymaniye,” in *International Congress on Learning and Education in the Ottoman World, Istanbul April 12-15, 1999*: 63-87.

³¹⁴ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 9; “Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh Century Baghdad,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24:1 (February 1961), 10-17.

city.³¹⁵ The madrasa system was also, in Makdisi's words, "profoundly individualistic," meaning that academic authority rested solely in individual persons rather than in institutional prestige.³¹⁶ Jonathan Berkey makes a similar point about Mamluk-era (1250-1517) madrasas in Egypt. There as in Baghdad *madrasas* were primarily the locus for the traditional form of Islamic education that centered on the individual relationship between teacher and student and that located authority in the persons of scholars rather than in the physical institutions that housed them.³¹⁷ As Berkey notes, biographical dictionaries of the period mention teachers when discussing a scholar's academic history, rather than the location at which he or she studied.³¹⁸ Mamluk *madrasas* were also characterized by a lack of centralization: they were "less a formal system than a dynamic network, loose but comprehensive in its inclusion of various disparate social groups."³¹⁹

The Ottoman system of *medreses* was dramatically different. Ottoman *medreses* were classified according to a rigid system of promotion and prestige.³²⁰ *Medreses* were grouped according to the amount that their professors received as salaries from the central government, and a precise order of career advancement by appointment at increasingly more prestigious institutions was set out in Ottoman law. This career path

³¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

³¹⁶ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 1.

³¹⁷ Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17-18.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

³²⁰ Hüseyin Atay, *Osmanlılarda Yüksek Din Eğitimi* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1983), 82-83; See also Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix, 2002) and Richard Repp, "Some Observations on the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy," in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*, ed. Nikk R. Keddie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), 17-32.

began at the lowest levels of countryside *medreses* and could culminate in appointment at the highest academic levels, such as the professoriate at the Aya Sofya (Hagia Sofia) *medrese* in Istanbul or various high ranking *qāḍī* positions throughout the empire. There even existed an application process for positions once the requisite education level had been achieved.³²¹

Another stark difference between *madrasas* in Baghdad and Cairo and the Ottoman system is the place of theology in the curriculum. From the evidence that Makdisi and Berkey present, it seems clear that *kalām* theology was at the very least controversial in medieval Baghdad, and played apparently a minor institutional role in medieval Cairo.³²² The opposite was true for the Ottoman *medreses*, however. The study and teaching of theology was absolutely central to the Ottoman higher educational system at all levels of instruction. This is proven by extant curricula and book lists that were promulgated by the Ottoman state to direct the study and teaching done in *medreses* throughout the empire.

³²¹ Atay, 82.

³²² Michael Chamberlain critiques Makdisi's assertion that law formed the primary curriculum in medieval madrasas, arguing that there exist no surviving curriculum documents or booklists to substantiate this claim. His argument is, however, weakened by the fact that medieval curriculum lists do survive for North African *madrasas*. See Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87. İhsanoğlu makes a similar point, arguing that rational sciences (i.e., non-religious disciplines) were not institutionally marginalized in the medieval Islamic world as evidenced by the emergence of hospital schools and observatories in the thirteenth century, particularly in Central Asia (289). Makdisi's point does seem valid for at least Baghdad, however, as Ḥanbalī influence seems clearly to have created a general intellectual climate that during some periods was openly hostile to the rationalism inherent in most strains of Sunnī Islamic theology. Therefore, the point made by all three scholars seems to be valid, depending primarily on the time period and location in question. The point being made here, however, is that in the Ottoman *medreses* theology was considered equal in importance to any other field and occupied a place in the higher educational curriculum from beginning to end.

The oldest imperial law associated with the *medreses* is the *Kanun-i Talebe-i Ulūm*, which includes a curriculum outlining what works were to be taught at varying levels of *medreses*. Due to its age, this document is thought to be related to the Fatih Medrese complex in Istanbul, founded by Mehmet the Conqueror after his conquest of the city.³²³ The *kalām* works it lists include a commentary on the creed of Ijī and the commentary of Jurjānī on the *Tajrīd al-I‘tiqād* of Naṣr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274). Katip Çelebi also provides information on works that Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror ordered to be taught: these include Jurjānī’s commentary on Ijī’s *Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, and Sa‘d al-Dīn Taftāzānī’s (1322-1390) *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*. Similarly, no documents explicitly connected to the other major *medrese* complex in the Ottoman capital that was founded by Süleyman the Magnificent (Süleyman Kanuni, the “Law Giver,” in Turkish) seem to be extant.

However, a number of scholars from the classical Ottoman period personally detailed the books they studied during their education and even the *medreses* where these books were taught. Hüseyin Atay provides Taşköprülzade’s list from the middle of the sixteenth century as an example: according to Taşköprülzade, Jurjānī’s commentary on Ṭūsī’s *Tajrīd* was taught at the lower level *medreses*, while Jurjānī’s commentary on Ijī’s *Mawāqif* was reserved for instruction at the higher level *medreses*. What this evidence demonstrates is that the formalized teaching and study of theology took place at all levels of education in the Ottoman Empire and occupied the same level of importance as *fiqh* and other Islamic sacred subjects. Secondly, it points to the decidedly Ash‘arī inclination of formal instruction in theology in the *medreses*. As we

³²³ The evidence cited in this section is discussed in Atay, *Din*, 77-100.

will see later, however, this focus on Ash‘arism in the curriculum did not restrict academics and theologians from composing and studying Māturīdī works as well, nor did it stop some of them from openly exploring and declaring their preference for Māturīdism over Ash‘arism.

The biography of Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bāshā ibn ‘Ādil Pasha (better known as Mullā Ḥāfiẓ) in Taşköprülzade’s *Shaqā’iq al-Nu‘māniyya* provides a useful example of the unique features of the Ottoman *medrese* system that have been analyzed up to this point.³²⁴ Born in Persia sometime in the late fifteenth century, Mullā Ḥāfiẓ moved to Ottoman territory and began his studies under the scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Mu’ayyad, and subsequently presented his work to Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512). Impressed with his scholarship, Bayezid awarded him leadership of a *medrese* in Ankara. After teaching *fiqh* there, he then became a professor at a *medrese* in the town of Merzifon in northwestern Anatolia. After composing a supra commentary on Jurjānī’s commentary on al-Sakkākī’s (1160-1229) widely read work on rhetoric (*Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm*), he presented this work to his former teacher, Ibn al-Mu’ayyad, who approved of his work.

Mulla Ḥāfiẓ then traveled to Istanbul where he became a professor at the *medrese* of the minister Ali Pasha, during which time he composed a supra commentary on Jurjānī’s commentary on Ijī’s famous systematic theological work, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*. He was then appointed professor of a *medrese* in Iznik, where he wrote an apparently widely known treatise on prime matter. He then became a professor at one of the famous “Eight Medreses,” a complex at Fatih Mosque in Istanbul widely

³²⁴ Taşköprülzade, *Al-Shaqā’iq al-Nu‘māniyya fī ‘Ulamā’ al-Dawla al-‘Uthmāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabi, 1975), 267-268.

regarded as one of the most prestigious centers of learning in the empire. During this period he authored a commentary on Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd*. Finally, he became a professor at Aya Sofya *medrese*, the pinnacle of the Ottoman higher educational system. During his tenure at Aya Sofya, he authored a text called "The City of Knowledge" (*Madīnat al-ʿIlm*) where he synthesized sections of major works on *tafsīr*, *kalām*, and *fiqh*. After leaving this position, he was appointed a retirement stipend of seventy dirhams a day, and died around 1550.

Mulla Ḥāfīz's career perfectly summarizes the professionalization and synthesis of Islamic education that took place in the Ottoman period. His career arc takes him from the edges of the empire to the heart of imperial power, in a gradual ascent from lower prestige institutions to the Aya Sofya *medrese*, one of the greatest academic institutions in the empire. Moreover, this series of promotions was based on his own individual work as a scholar, which spanned numerous disciplines. Finally, his academic work exemplifies how theology played a crucial role at every stage of higher education in the *medreses*, and was clearly seen to be equal in importance to *fiqh* and other Islamic disciplines. Throughout his life, he participated in a highly structured and regularized system of education that was under the direct control of the Ottoman state and rewarded him at the end of his illustrious career with a rather generous retirement income.

Mulla Ḥāfīz's career recalls another major feature of the Ottoman *medreses*: their extremely close connection with state authority. The first *medrese* in Ottoman territory was founded in 1331 in Iznik. Between 1331 and 1451 (the beginning of the reign of Mehmet II, the conqueror of Constantinople) at least 84 separate *medreses* were

founded; by then, a new system of education had fully supplanted the independent Sufi lodges and small independent Qur'ān schools that had previously dominated the countryside.³²⁵ This new system of *medreses* was completely under state control, and provided education for state functionaries. As far back as Orhan I, Muslim jurisconsults (*faqīhs*) had played a role in sanctioning the use of state power;³²⁶ now, the Ottoman state had fully integrated the Islamic religious elite, the '*ulamā*', into the machinery of the Ottoman government. In the apt phrase of Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, the Ottoman Empire effected an "assimilation of the state with Islam" that was unprecedented in Islamic history.³²⁷ This assimilation was made possible by a sacralization of state authority that had never been achieved to such an extent under previous regimes in Islamic lands. The Ottoman state from the fifteenth century on, in opposition to the rising Shi'ī Safavid Persian empire to its east, promoted Sunnī orthodoxy within its borders, and the *medreses* became the intellectual backbone of state religious orthodoxy. While the utilization of notions of Sunnī orthodoxy in the legitimation of the state began with the Seljuqs, the incorporation of the '*ulamā*' and Sunnī religious institutions into the state bureaucracy seems to have been unique to the Ottomans.³²⁸

³²⁵ İhsanoğlu, "Emergence," 297.

³²⁶ Ibid., 293.

³²⁷ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Islam in the Ottoman Empire: A Sociological Framework for a New Interpretation," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9: 1-2 (2003), 188.

³²⁸ On the use of Sunnī Islam in the legitimation of the Seljuq state, particularly under the vizierate of Nizām al-Mulk (1018-1092), see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 90-100. Safi describes how Nizām al-Mulk sought through his patronage of the madrasa system to ease tensions within Sunnī factions (such as the intense animosity between the Shāfi'īs and the Ḥanafīs) in order to present a unified front of Sunnī orthodoxy against competing Ismā'īlī powers such as the Fāṭimids.

This Ottoman merger between religious and state power was not properly a theocracy, as Ocak usefully points out; religious institutions were explicitly subordinated to the state, not the other way around.³²⁹ The state's utilization of theological orthodoxy did, however, sometimes have horrifying consequences in the Ottoman period. Nabil al-Tikriti points to the state's overt utilization of *kalām* to define internal enemies by the identification of heresy. The Ottoman scholar Korkuad's (1468-1513) text, *Ḥāfiẓ al-Insān 'an Lafẓ al-Imān*, exemplifies this tactic. Korkuad sets out to define clear external markers of inward unbelief, thus enabling the state to identify heretics (who may also be loyal to the Persian state) and punish them. These external markers include modes of dress and incendiary statements about the irrelevance of religious texts, or even the absence of a person at public prayer.³³⁰

Crossing the customary Ottoman separation between Sultanic/customary law (*'urf* in Arabic, *örf* in Turkish; i.e., a form of secular law) and Islamic law, Korkuad also argued that it is permissible to derive rulings that affect secular policy from the Sharia, which would in the Ottoman legal system enable the state to punish apostasy.³³¹ This use of theology had a major social impact: by one account, some 40,000 Kızılbaş (a Turkic group with Shi'ī affiliations) were executed by the state after their names had been written down in official government records.³³² While Al-Tikriti points out that this number is certainly exaggerated, this incident indicates the sometimes horrifying

³²⁹ Ibid, 189.

³³⁰ Nabil al-Tikriti, "*Kalam* in the Service of State: Apostasy and the Defining of Ottoman Islamic Identity," in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, eds. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Boston, MA: Brill, 2005), 145.

³³¹ Ibid., 146.

³³² Ibid., 147.

extent to which Sunnī Islamic thought had been subordinated to the aims of the Ottoman state, and consequently to the violent consequences of intra-imperial rivalries.

The institutional structure of Sunnī Islam in the Ottoman Empire also benefitted the cause of philosophical Ash‘arism. In 1425, Murad II (r. 1421-1444; 1446-1451) established the office of the *Şeyhül İslam*, the highest position at the top of the Sunnī religious hierarchy in the empire.³³³ This position was originally established to issue fatwas supporting government decisions, but it also grew to have broad institutional authority; it always remained, however, subordinate to the Sultan himself.³³⁴ The first person appointed to this position was Molla Fenari (d. 1431), a renowned scholar from a village near İnegöl, a city in northeastern Anatolia not far from the former Ottoman capital of Bursa. Molla Fenari's own theological background would also prove to have major consequences for the development of Ottoman theology.

Molla Fenari was one of the first Ottoman-era scholars to produce large numbers of students and original works. His adherence to the tradition of philosophical Ash‘arism of Rāzī helped to establish this school's dominance in the theological curricula of Ottoman *medreses*.³³⁵ As Atay points out, the surviving Māturīdī *kalām* chains of transmission (*silsilāt*) in the Ottoman period in fact never end in Māturīdī. Many of them do, however, extend through Rāzī and end in Ash‘arī.³³⁶ The surviving

³³³ İhsanoğlu, “Emergence,” 297.

³³⁴ See Gazi Erdem, “Religious Services in Turkey: From the Office of Şeyülislām to the Diyanet.” *Muslim World* 98, no. 2-3 (April 2008): 199-215.

³³⁵ Ömer Aydın, *Türk Kelam Bilginleri* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2004), 51; and Ömer Aydın, “Kelam between Tradition and Change: The Emphasis on Understanding Classical Islamic Theology in Relation to Western Intellectual Effects,” in Sinasi Gunduz and Cafer S. Yaran, eds., *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 105.

³³⁶ Atay, *Din*, 118.

curriculum lists of Ottoman *medreses* and evidence gathered from biographical literature and personal memoirs from the classical era (approximately the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries) indicate that the large majority of the theology works taught and studied in the *medreses* were related to the late Ash‘arī tradition of Rāzī. Jurjānī’s commentary on Ijī’s *Mawāqif* was the most common work taught at the advanced levels of instruction in theology, which, as mentioned above, took place at all levels of *medrese* education.³³⁷ The lower courses in theology were most commonly based on Jurjānī’s *Tajrīd*. Taftāzānī’s *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* was also a major text of instruction at the advanced levels of theology according to this evidence. Taftāzānī’s text is perhaps best described as a synthesis of Māturīdī and Ash‘arī theology, and as such represents another important dimension of the development of Sunni theology in the Ottoman period: Sunni theological synthesis.³³⁸

As discussed above, based on the surviving curricula and other testimony, Rāzī’s version of late Ash‘arism seems to have formed the basis of Ottoman formal education in Sunni theology. This was largely due to the influence of such preeminent scholars as Molla Fenari and his teachers. However, the inclusion of Taftāzānī in the Ottoman curriculum (who wrote a famous and widely read commentary on the Māturīdī creed of Abū al-Barākāt al-Nasafī, d. 1310) points to the fact that many Ottoman theologians saw no fundamental conflict between the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools. This idea is most clearly on display in the extremely popular (and misleadingly named) *ikhtilāf* (disagreement) genre of texts that detail the points of divergence between the

³³⁷Atay, *Din*, 80; 85; 87; 88.

³³⁸ See Zafer Ishaq Ansari, “A Note on Taftazani’s Views on taklif, jabr, and qadr: A Note on the Development of Islamic Theological Doctrines,” *Arabica* 16:1 (February 1969), 65-78.

Māturīdiyya and the Ash‘ariyya. In fact, the goal of these texts was to examine supposed differences one by one and demonstrate that they were not actually substantive differences after all, or at the very least were not differences that justified accusations of heresy from either side. Indeed, this attitude seems to have prevailed particularly in the fifteenth century, when scholars were found in almost equal numbers writing commentaries on Māturīdī creeds as well as Ash‘arī ones. One specialist in theology, Hayali Ahmed Efendi (d. 1470) wrote very popular and influential commentaries on both Ijī and Taftāzānī.³³⁹

These comparative *ikhtilāf* treatises epitomize the Ottoman tendency toward synthesis as well as its acceptance of intellectual diversity. The earliest example in this genre seems to have been authored by the Mamlūk scholar, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370), *Nūnīyya al-Subkī*.³⁴⁰ Subkī’s work compares the theology of the Ash‘arīs and the theology of the Ḥanafīs (a term he prefers to Māturīdīs). He concludes that most of the points in which they differ are merely semantic, and that those points that are substantive disagreements (such as *taklīf mā lā yuṭāq* and the role of *‘aql*) are not so serious as to cause accusations of heresy. This two-part argument (that the disagreements between the two schools can be classified as either semantic or substantive, and that in any case none of them occasions accusations of heresy, or

³³⁹ Ibid., 56. Aydın’s extremely useful list of Ottoman-era theologians and theological works cites 25 separate commentaries or supra commentaries on Ijī’s *Mawāqif*, five on Taftāzānī’s *Maqāṣid*, six on Hızır Bey’s *Qāṣida*, 17 on Nasafī’s creed, and 12 on Ṭūsī’s *Tajrid*. This amounts to 37 commentaries by separate authors on Ash‘arī texts and 28 on Māturīdī ones. This indicates, again, a slight favoritism toward Ash‘arism, which was most likely due to its institutionalization early on. This data also, however, demonstrates that Māturīdism had a significant presence in theological debates and writings, despite its underrepresentation in the curriculum.

³⁴⁰ Ed. Edward Badeen, in *Sunnitische Theologie in Osmanischer Zeit* (Würzburg: Oriental-Institut Istanbul, 2008), 2-18.

takfir) became the standard form for all subsequent texts in this genre, which, like Subkī's, conclude that the differences between these two Sunnī traditions offer no basis for animosity among their adherents.³⁴¹ Some Ottoman authors, such as Kara Halil Pasha Çorlulu (d. 1775-1776) even made the case that all disagreements between the two schools were merely semantic (*lafzī*).³⁴²

Māturīdism in the Ottoman Empire: Maintaining a Distinct Identity in the Era of Synthesis

As explained above, the Ottoman *medrese* curriculum strongly favored Ash'arism and coexisted with a strong tradition of theological synthesis. However, alongside these developments, some Ottoman theologians maintained a preferential attitude toward Māturīdism. A near-contemporary of Molla Fenari, Hızır ibn Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (known as Hızır Bey; d. 1458) authored the first explicitly Māturīdī theological work in the Ottoman period, *al-Qasīda al-Nūnīyya*, a work which found many interested readers and commentators in the following centuries.³⁴³ Other authors

³⁴¹ The most widely known example of this genre is Ḥasan ibn Abī 'Udhba's *Rawḍat al-Bahīyya fīmā bayna al-Ashā'ira wa al-Māturīdiyya* (ed. Badeen 2008 and 'Alī Farīd Daḥrūj, 1996). Other examples include: *Risālat al-Ikhtilāf bayna al-Ashā'ira wa al-Māturīdiyya fī ithnatay 'ashara masa'la* by Ibn Kamal Pasha (d. 1534), one of the most prolific theologians of the Ottoman period (ed. Badeen 2008); *Risāla fī al-farq bayna madhhab al-Ashā'ira wa al-Māturīdiyya* by Yaḥyā Efendi ibn 'Alī al-Nawā'ī (1533-1598) (ed. Badeen, 2008); *al-Masālik fī bayān al-madhāhib li al-Ḥumamā' wa al-Mutakallimūn wa al-Ash'ariyya wa al-Māturīdiyya* by 'Abdullāh ibn Osmān ibn Mūsā Mestcizāde (d. 1737) (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi İstanbul, Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa 402); *Sharḥ al-Khilāfiyyāt bayna al-Ash'arī wa al-Māturīdī* by Muḥammad ibn Velī ibn Resūl al-Kırşehirī (d. 1752) (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi İstanbul, Şehit Ali Paşa 1650); and *Risāla Tata'allaqa bayna Kalām al-Māturīdī wa al-Ash'arī* by Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Ḥasan al-Jawharī (d. 1768-1769) (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, 2004).

³⁴² Kara Halil Pasha Çorlulu, appendix to *al-Masā'il al-Mukhtalifa bayna al-Ash'ariyya wa al-Māturīdiyya*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi İstanbul, Hafid Efendi 150/20.

³⁴³ Aydın, *Kelam*, 53.

throughout the Ottoman period evinced an open preference for Māturīdism, though in this era of synthesis they were far more reluctant to accuse Ash‘arism of heresy than their intellectual ancestors had been.

The Bosnian scholar Kāfi Ḥasan Efendi al-Aqḥisārī (1544-1616) authored a treatise that he said was inspired by his happenstance discovery of a manuscript of Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in Mecca, *Rawḍāt al-Jannāt fī Uṣūl al-I‘tiqādāt*.³⁴⁴

Aqḥisārī’s treatise is essentially a summary of the Sunnī articles of faith with a distinct Ḥanafī bent to issues such as the definition of belief. Aḥmad ibn Ḥasan Bayāḍī Zadeh (d. 1687), the son of a Bosnian immigrant to Istanbul who had the good fortune to count the *Şeyḫül İslam* of Süleyman the Magnificent, Abū Sa‘īd Efendi (d. 1662) as one of his teachers and who also enjoyed an illustrious career that culminated in his accession to a professorship at the Aya Sofya *medrese*, authored two famous compilations of (and commentaries on) the theological sayings of Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-Uṣūl al-Munīfa li-l Imām Abī Ḥanīfa* and *Ishārāt al-Marām min ‘Ibārāt al-Imām*.³⁴⁵ It is interesting to compare Bayāḍī Zadeh’s professional success with the biography of Mullā Ḥāfiẓ mentioned above. Both of these scholars during roughly the same time period were promoted to the highest academic post in the empire, a professorship at Aya Sofya, yet each of them displayed distinctly differing theological tastes. This is yet further evidence for the overarching climate of Sunnī intellectual synthesis that was so characteristic of the Ottoman period.

³⁴⁴ Ed. Badeen, 2008, pp. 31-61.

³⁴⁵ See İlyas Çelebi, *İmam-ı Azam Ebu Hanife’nin İtikadi Görüşleri* (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2000).

The most dramatic assertion of a distinctly Māturīdī theological identity, however, came in the form of a heated theological controversy that emerged in the eighteenth century over the understanding of the Māturīdī term for human free will, *ikhtiyār* (choice). The controversy seems to have had its roots in one section of a famous work by the influential fifteenth century Ottoman theologian, Ibn al-Humām (1388- 1456). In his *al-Musāyara fī al-‘Aqā’id al-Munjīya fī al-Ākhira*, Ibn al-Humām elaborates on a peculiar feature of the Māturīdī doctrine of free will, the notion of individual intent (*qasḍ*). This point has its roots in Māturīdī himself, who argued that human freedom has no meaning if human beings do not choose or intend their actions before God actually decides to create them: thus, human intention is prior to the divine creation of an event. Humans internally choose or intend a course of action, and God then empowers them with the ability to carry this action out and creates the action for them. Nasafī also mentions this doctrine in his discussion of human free will.³⁴⁶ Māturīdī and Nasafī, however, simply posit the necessary existence of this human intention, which is totally unburdened by any divine intervention without explaining its ontological status. Is it, too, an act created by God? Or is it something that must somehow stand outside God’s power and foreknowledge? These questions are left unanswered in Māturīdī, logically enough, as his realist epistemology is very able to handle theological paradox. The Ash‘arī metaphysics and epistemology that by the Ottoman period had become standard to all schools of Sunnī theology, however, seemed to demand a fuller explanation of just what independent human intention means.

³⁴⁶ See Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 357; 378-380; Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, II:167.

Ibn al-Humām elaborates on this question and terms this moment of unburdened human freedom “the definitive resolve” (*al-‘azam al-muṣammam*).³⁴⁷ In an attempt to clarify the origin of this “definitive resolve” that is a part of each free act, Ibn al-Humām argues that human intention is, like the act itself, created by God; this creation, however, does not compromise the freedom of the human being in making decisions in her innermost heart.³⁴⁸ Throughout the eighteenth century a group of openly Māturīdī theologians boldly reinterpreted Ibn al-Humām’s formulation through a discussion of the human will (termed either *al-ikhtiyār al-juz’ī* or *al-irāda al-juz’iyya*, (“partial choice” or “partial will”). The most popular of these treatises was authored by Muḥammad ibn Muṣṭafā Ḥamīd al-Kefevī Akkirmānī (d. 1760), a famous scholar who enjoyed wide professional success as a *qāḍī* in Izmir and Egypt, eventually acquiring the post of *qāḍī* of Mecca one year before his death. His treatise *Af’āl al-‘Ibād wa al-Irādāt al-Juz’iyya* is described in detail by Şamil Öçal.³⁴⁹

The next most popular treatises on this subject (based on the number of extant manuscripts in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul,) were authored by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Gümülcinevī (ca. mid. 18th century; *Risāla fī Baḥṭh al-Irādāt al-Juz’iyya*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Esad Effendi 01180) and the famous scholar Davūd al-Karsī (d. 1756; *Risāla fī Bayān Mas’alat al-Ikhtiyārāt al-Juz’iyya wa al-Idrākāt al-*

³⁴⁷ Ibn al-Humām’s discussion of this point (along with the rest of his text) can be found usefully paired with the later commentary on his work, the *Kitāb al-Musāmira* of Kamāl ibn Abī Sharīf (ed. Bulāq, 1317 A.H.), 110-114. His text has also been published in a separate edition by an instructor at Al-Azhar, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Maḥmūdiyya al-Tijāriyya, 1929). The discussion of the definite resolve is found on pp. 55-56.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 112-113.

³⁴⁹ “Omanlı Kelamcılarını Eş’ari miydi?: Muhammed Akkirmani’nin İnsan Hürriyet Anlayışı,” *Dini Araştırmalar* 2:5 (September-December, 1999), 225-234.

Qalbiyya, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Serez 1422) whose work was approved by Akkirmanî himself upon the former's arrival in Istanbul to complete his studies.³⁵⁰ Edward Badeen also includes an edited version of a treatise in this genre authored by a certain Isbirî Qādi Zadeh (d. 1717), *Mumayyizat Madhhab al-Māturīdiyya 'an al-Madhāhib al-Ghayrīyya*.

The first striking feature of these treatises is that they position themselves as Māturīdī alone, and offer a trenchant critique of the Ash'arī understanding of human freedom. All of these treatises involve an implicit critique of Ash'arism and sometimes even accuse the Ash'arīs of outright determinism, a charge that would have seemed rather odd in the Ottoman intellectual environment.³⁵¹ The copyist of Karsī's treatise, for example, makes the rather striking declaration that he thanks God for making him and his colleagues Māturīdī. These strong assertions of Māturīdī theological identity are significant in themselves, especially since all four of the authors under consideration here also make use of the standard Ash'arī textbooks in the Ottoman *medreses* (such as Jurjānī) in outlining the truth of the distinctively Māturīdī position on the issue of human freedom.

These authors detail the discussion of Ibn al-Humām on this issue, describing the moment of choice or intention as crucial to the execution of the act. However, they go a step further in safeguarding this moment of human freedom as totally free from all outside influence: they assert that not only does this occur in the innermost heart of the human being (hence the use of the phrase *idrākāt qalbiyya*), but as such it cannot

³⁵⁰ See *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, "Davud-i Karsî."

³⁵¹ Gümülçinevi, 2b; Karsī, 10b-10a; Isbirî, 62 (Isbirî's title also makes it clear that his treatise constitutes an implicit critique of the Ash'arīs).

properly be described as either created or uncreated.³⁵² This is because these intentions exist only in the innermost heart of a human being, and therefore have no existence “outside” in the real world (*fī al-khārij*, a metaphysical category borrowed from Ijī and other late Ash‘arīs). Therefore, as they have no exterior existence, they cannot be described by the terms created or uncreated: rather, intention is best described as a state of the human being (*ḥāl*). Isbirī provides a succinct summary of this interpretation of the Māturīdī notion of intention: “The human being’s expenditure of his power toward a specific end (i.e., his action) is the intention in the sense that it proceeds [from the person]. It is also a purely relational matter [*i’tibārī*, meaning it is related totally to the human being and no other outside cause], which is not present in the outside world, and does not pertain to creation [*al-khalq*].”³⁵³

Akkirmānī’s breakdown of the human act is also helpful in understanding this rather subtle theological point. According to Akkirmānī, each act has five parts: (1) the conception of the act, which is attributable to God; (2) the desire for the act, which is attributable to God; (3) the movement of the limbs; (4) God’s creation of the action after a person chooses it; and (5) the choice itself, which is not a created thing, but is rather described as a state of the human being.³⁵⁴ In other words, this theological argument is willing to attribute most parts of the human act ultimately to God, but retains one domain that seems to solely belong to the human being: the firm intention to commit the act, or the moment of choice to commit the act. In an effort to safeguard legitimacy of human free will, this theological argument locates the moment of choice

³⁵² Gümülcevi, *Risāla fī Baḥth al-Īrādāt al-Juz’iyya*, 5b-5a; Isbirī, *Mumayyizāt Madhhab al-Māturīdiyya*, 75; Öçal, “Osmanlı,” 231-232; Karsī, *Risāla fī Bayān Mas’alat al-Ikhtiyārāt al-Juz’iyya*, 15b-15a.

³⁵³ Isbirī, *Mumayyizāt Madhhab al-Māturīdiyya*, 75.

³⁵⁴ Öçal, “Osmanlı,” 232.

in the innermost self of the human being, thus removing it from all outside forces, even the creative activity of God.³⁵⁵

The basic principle of Sunnī-Ash‘arī metaphysics is that the entirety of the world is explicitly the creation of God, down to its most basic constituent parts. To remove part of this universe from the description of “creation” (*khalq*) seems very bold indeed, and demonstrates how far the Māturīdī school of thought wanted to go in defending the sanctity of human freedom. The fact that this freedom is located on a personal level is also worthy of note.

Interestingly, this argument inspired a passionate reply from one of the most influential Ash‘arī theologians of the eighteenth century, ‘Abd al-Ghānī al-Nābulūsī (d. 1737), who authored a scathing treatise in protest of this doctrine, *Taḥqīq al-Intiṣār fī Ittifāq al-Ash‘arī wa al-Māturīdī ‘alā Khalq al-Ikhtiyār*.³⁵⁶ Nābulūsī argues that intention should be seen as an accident, and thus is described as created; it cannot be described as a state.³⁵⁷ This means that *ikhtiyār* also has existence in the outside world.³⁵⁸ Nābulūsī defends Ash‘arism from claims that it is deterministic, and argues that the doctrine that *ikhtiyār* is created is actually the position of both Māturīdī and Ash‘arī, since Nābulūsī clearly assumes that both of these figures must have held to the same Sunnī theological orthodoxy. Nābulūsī also points out, probably accurately, that Ibn al-Humām held his position (implying a critique of how the eighteenth century Māturīdīs interpreted his legacy).³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ This argument splits the difference with Ash‘arism because the *desire* for the act comes from God.

³⁵⁶ Ed. Badeen, 2008, pp. 81-132.

³⁵⁷ Nābulūsī, *Taḥqīq al-Intiṣār*, 82.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

The tone of Nābulūsī's treatise is very defiant. He clearly feels that this new Māturīdī interpretation of free will threatens God's omnipotence, and in his defense of the creation of human choice and intention, Nābulūsī argues rather startlingly that compulsion (*jabr* or *iḍṭirār*) is actually a part of orthodox Sunnī doctrine. He states that all orthodox Sunnīs hold what he calls "restricted compulsion" (*jabr muqayyad*), which expresses his view that all human beings are ultimately under the command of God's will, whatever freedom they think may exist in human actions. Characteristically of the Ash'arī-Māturīdī divide more generally as discussed above, Nābulūsī if pressed chooses to emphasize God's omnipotence. In his formulation, "The person is a chooser in his actions, but he is compelled in his choosing."³⁶⁰ Interestingly, this phrase is also quoted by Gümülcinevī as proof of the error of Ash'arism on this point, indicating that this may have been a kind of stock Ash'arī theological formulation, which was used to counter eighteenth century Māturīdīs on this point.³⁶¹ Nābulūsī embraces this accusation of compulsion, declaring: "The person cannot escape from divine subjugation (*al-qahr al-ilāhī*), [nor from] compulsion in all of his states of being, his actions, his act of choice, his act of intention, and his expenditure of effort."³⁶²

Set in the middle of the theologically syncretistic environment of the Ottoman period, this debate illuminates two important points. First, it is notable that this debate exposes the crucial doctrinal foundation of Ash'arism, God's absolute omnipotence, and the drastic difference in the way Māturīdism deals with this issue. In a small way, and constrained in an Ash'arī theological environment that assumes a basic scriptural

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

³⁶¹ Gümülcinevī, *Risāla fī Baḥṭh al-Īrādāt al-Juz'īyya*, 4b.

³⁶² Nābulūsī, *Taḥqīq al-Intiṣār*, 108.

rationalism, the eighteenth century Māturīdians managed to reinvigorate a basic motivation of Māturīdī's own theology: the desire to prioritize empirical theological truth over theological rationalism. Like Māturīdī, these Ottoman-era theologians took as their starting point truths that were self-evident to both reason and the senses (in this case, human freedom) and then formulated a theological language to express these realities.

Second, this controversy demonstrates the potential for Māturīdī self-assertion even after the epistemological and metaphysical victory of Ash'arism described above. These Ottoman theologians were able to construct a novel solution to a theological problem based on their interpretation of Māturīdī's theological legacy. The use of Māturīdī in modern Turkey will turn out to be very similar: despite attempts at synthesis in the Ottoman period, Māturīdī's theological insights remain distinctive from Ash'arism and hold the potential for a radically new system of Sunnī theology that is divorced from the inflexible rationalism of Ash'arī. This chapter has argued that the essence of Māturīdī's metaphysics and epistemology was lost under the pervasive influence of Ash'arism following the death of Māturīdī. This process was facilitated by the efforts of Māturīdī's most famous commentator, Nasafī, and the Sunnī theological synthesis favored by the Ottoman state in their patronage of the *medrese* system. However, the potential for a distinctly Māturīdīan vision remained. It is the Māturīdī potential for theological realism that, as we will now see, modern Turkish theologians exploit in their own work.

CHAPTER FOUR

REASON AND THE REDISCOVERY OF MĀTURĪDĪ IN CONTEMPORARY
TURKEY: ARTICULATING A NATIONAL TURKISH TRADITION OF ISLAMIC
THEOLOGY

The Emergence of Liberal Islamic Discourse in the Late Ottoman Empire

The transition to modern Islamic theology in Turkey from classical Islamic intellectual traditions was part of a much larger social and political shift experienced in the territories of the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, Ottoman elites first put into action their century-old debates over the apparent decline in the political and economic preeminence of their empire: this was the era of constant reform, a series of dramatic political and social engineering carried out by the Ottoman state with the intention of modernizing Ottoman society to such an extent that it was able to economically and militarily compete with developing West European powers.³⁶³ These reforms began with attempts to reverse the decline of Ottoman military power by remodeling Ottoman armies along European lines. Gradually, and most especially during the Tanzimat period in the middle of the nineteenth century, these top-down reform programs attempted to dramatically alter the social fabric of Ottoman life by establishing equal legal treatment for religious minorities (in stark contrast with the traditional *dhimmi* system of medieval Muslim

³⁶³ For summaries of the reformist period, see: Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 15-30; Findley, 23-132; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire: 1700-1922* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54-74; and Erich Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 9-92.

polities) and economically integrate the Ottoman empire with the growing international market.

These reform programs set in motion a period of social transformation that culminated in the disintegration of imperial loyalties into a rapid succession of national independence movements, each claiming a mandate to establish a modern republic to defend the interests of an eternally-existing national community. Modern Turkey emerged as a result of this process, as Turkish nationalists defended the Anatolian peninsula and the environs of Istanbul as the historical center of a Turkish national community, winning control of this territory in a struggle against Allied powers' attempt to divide it among themselves at the end of the First World War. In the transition from empire to nation state, nearly all aspects of social life were reconfigured and reimagined in light of the understanding that the Turkish speaking inhabitants of Anatolia constituted an historical community distinct from centuries of Ottoman imperial civilization. In other words, the concept of nation and its attendant political system, republican democracy, led late Ottoman intellectuals to reexamine conceptions of religion, gender, social hierarchy, and economic theory, and under the influence of West European philosophical currents even the nature of the world and humanity itself.³⁶⁴ The history of modern Islamic theology in Turkey begins with these

³⁶⁴ On social change in the early Republican period, see Zafer Toprak, "The Family, Feminism, and the State during the Young Turk Period, 1908-1918," in *Première Rencontre Internationale sur l' Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne*, Institut National de Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Maison des Sciences de l' Homme. *Varia Turcica*, XIII. Istanbul & Paris: Edition Isis (1991); Jenny B. White "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal* 15:3 (Fall 2003): 145-159; and William Hale, *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey* (Croom Helm: 1981).

reimaginings, most particularly the redefinition of religion, religiosity, and national community.

In 1865, a cadre of Ottoman intellectuals established a secret society called *İttifak-ı Hamiyet*, or “Patriotic Alliance.” These intellectuals, later known as the Young Ottomans, advocated the establishment of a constitutional state and the establishment of a liberal political regime. Their comprehensive intellectual program included a theory of religion that would come to exercise enormous influence in modern Turkish history. In their famous *Letter from Paris* (their place of exile), they wrote: “Religion...rules over the spirit, and promises otherworldly benefits to us. But that which determines and delimits the laws of the nation is not religion. If religion does not remain in the position of eternal truths, in other words, if it descends into interference with worldly affairs, it becomes a destroyer of all as well as of its own self.”³⁶⁵

These words express a momentous shift in Ottoman Islamic thought: in the late nineteenth century, religion came to be thought of as something fundamentally divorced from politics and social policy, something that only referred to the “eternal.”³⁶⁶ Political concepts that in the Ottoman period found their legitimacy in religious discourse, such as sovereignty or rights, were now becoming wedded to West European philosophical notions of popular sovereignty and natural rights. The influential intellectual Namık Kemal (1840-1888), for instance, argued that what was moral “was determined according to the degree to which human beings conformed to the abstract good,” which

³⁶⁵ Berkes, *Development*, 208-209.

³⁶⁶ On the “privatization” of the notion of religion in Tanzimat-era Ottoman elites, see also Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 118.

was created by God.³⁶⁷ Sovereignty, however, rested in the people though their natural rights came from God. In this way a liberal Islamic discourse emerged that attempted to synthesize classical Islamic theological ideas with the liberal constitutionalist political discourses of the late nineteenth century. Namık Kemal's understanding of *Sharī'a* also reflected his acknowledgement that religious truth could be decoupled from social reform; thus, he held that the concrete laws of the *Sharī'a* (the *aḥkām*) could be changed over time.³⁶⁸

Liberal Islamic discourse emerged in the unique intellectual climate of the late Ottoman Empire that flowered in the period following the great wave of comprehensive Ottoman reform known as the Tanzimat and ended with the establishment of the Turkish republic (roughly 1839-1923). During this period, three dominant strains of thought emerged in answer to the question of how to pull the Ottoman Empire back from the brink of financial and political ruin and restore it to its former position of preeminence in global affairs. These were Westernism, Islamism, and Turkism.³⁶⁹ These three ideologies were not exactly well-defined, but instead were broad intellectual tendencies that could be present to a greater or lesser degree in a single thinker or set of discourses. Westernists argued for wholesale adoption of Western philosophical commitments (such as philosophical materialism, positivism, and secularism) and concepts of governance, such as the establishment of a secular republic and the complete removal of Islam from political power. Islamists, on the other hand, argued

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 211.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ For comparative discussions of these three currents of thought, see: Berkes, 337-408; and Ömer Mahir Alper, "The Conceptions of Islamic Philosophy in Turkey," in *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition*, eds. Sinasi Gunduz and Cafer S. Yaran (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 123-144.

that Islam must remain the ideological basis of the state, but that autocracy should be replaced with some form of constitutionalism.

A third current of thought emerged that utilized the concept of Turkish nationality to mediate between the competing demands of Islamism and Westernism. Turkism saw the concept of a shared Turkish identity to be the most suitable means for preserving both a sense of cultural distinctiveness while enabling the adoption of West European social models and technologies conducive to modernization. Turkism argued that Islam was part of the Turkish national story, and thus could not simply be discarded as a relic of an Oriental past. At the same time, certain West European forms of governance and social policy (most notably democracy and gender equality) represented the true ideals of the Turkish national culture, long lost under the influence of Ottoman imperialism. The negotiation of these disparate theoretical elements achieved lasting cohesion in the formulations of Ziya Gökalp (1878-1924),³⁷⁰ perhaps the most influential intellectual voice of modern Turkish thought. His reflections on Turkish identity and Islam's role in Turkish history would become highly influential in the development of a modern Turkish Islamic theological tradition.

³⁷⁰ On Gökalp's social and religious thought, see: Seyfettin Erşahin, "The Ottoman Foundation of the Turkish Republic's Diyanet: Ziya Gökalp's Diyanet İşleri Nazaratı," *Muslim World* 98 (April-July 2008): 182-198; Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 374-388; M. Sait Özervarlı, "Transferring Traditional Islamic Disciplines into Modern Social Sciences in Late Ottoman Thought: The Attempts of Ziya Gökalp and Mehmed Serafeddin," *Muslim World* 97 (April 2007): 317-330; Recep Sentürk, "Intellectual Dependency: Late Ottoman Intellectuals between Fiqh and Social Science," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series 47:3/4 (2007): 283-318.

Late Ottoman Foundations of Islamic Theological Modernism in Turkey: Ziya Gökalp, Sociology, and the Concept of Diyanet

Ziya Gökalp was born Mehmed Ziya in Diyarbekir province in 1878; he later adopted the surname “Gökalp,” or “sky hero,” an homage to old Turkish folklore. As a leading intellectual of his day, he participated actively in the Young Turk movement that resulted in the overthrow of the absolute Ottoman monarchy in 1908. Gökalp’s thought had wide impact beyond this period, however. His analysis of Turkish nationhood synthesized the intellectual tendencies of Westernism, Turkism, and Islam into a coherent intellectual Turkish nationalism that became foundational for Turkish intellectual and cultural history.

Besides politics and military reform, the Ottoman reform movements of the nineteenth century also extended their efforts to the translation and dissemination of European philosophy and social thought. The influence of French thought in particular extended deeply throughout nearly all areas of Ottoman elite society. A British traveler to Istanbul in 1847-1848, Charles MacFarlane, was once told to his surprise by a student at the Galatasaray Medical School that he and the rest of the students at the school were followers of Voltaire.³⁷¹ This French influence carried over to the nationalist period just before and after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, i.e., the period of Ziya Gökalp’s most influential intellectual activities. Like other intellectuals of his time, Gökalp was particularly influenced by French sociology in general and by the works of Emile Durkheim in particular.³⁷² Sociology became for Gökalp the key to a correct

³⁷¹ Özervarlı, “Transferring,” 317.

³⁷² Ibid., 326; Senturk, “Intellectual Dependency,” 303-304.

understanding of history, religion, and politics: sociology was for him the most effective intellectual tool in approaching the question of Turkish identity.

Gökalp famously rejected any racial definition of nationhood, arguing that race simply cannot be correlated with any particular social formation.³⁷³ Likewise, he regarded the notion of ethnic purity as a complete myth: the historical reality of intermarriage and the intermingling of peoples made it impossible in his view.³⁷⁴ Instead, Gökalp argued for a national identity based on a shared culture inculcated by societal norms and social education. The “nation” is the society into which a person is born and through which a person is shaped according to its ideals. The bond of unity between people of the same nation is their shared experience of a single social context: “Sociology asserts that this tie is a sharing of education and culture, that is, of sentiments.”³⁷⁵ Gökalp saw the individual’s experience of society as absolute: everything that makes an individual person who they are is provided to them in a social setting, through the social inculcation of values.

In describing the essence of national culture, Gökalp made a crucial conceptual distinction that would become instrumental in the definition of “Turkishness” in later periods of modern Turkish history. Gökalp distinguished between “culture” and “civilization,” arguing that culture refers to the values and sentiments inculcated by a given society into an individual.³⁷⁶ These values are innate to the individual: they are organic and authentic, and cannot be changed by individual initiative. They are what

³⁷³ Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, trans. Robert Devereux (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 12; Karpat, “Politicization,” 376-377.

³⁷⁴ Gökalp, *Principles*, 13.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷⁶ Gökalp, *Principles*, 22-24.

people refer to when talking about the “national.” These are the cultural characteristics imparted to any individual who is raised in the Turkish national society, whether their race is of Turkic descent or not. Again, what it means to be Turkish is not imparted by racial or ethnic characteristics, but the experience of being raised in Turkish society. The term “civilization,” however, refers to those aspects of human culture that are created by human initiative, and thus can be harmoniously shared by peoples of different nations. These include science, aesthetics, technology, or any other form of culture that is a product of human creativity and is not the result of being born into a certain social environment. Gökalp draws the distinction this way: “Civilization is the sum total of concepts and techniques created consciously and transmitted from one nation to another by imitation. Culture, however, consists of sentiments which cannot be created artificially and cannot be borrowed from other nations through imitation.”³⁷⁷

For all the apparent artifice of this distinction, this conceptual move authorized a highly important feature of modern Turkish intellectual life: the assumption that the adoption of West European social and cultural institutions does not conflict with Turkish national distinctiveness. This conceptual distinction allowed Gökalp to declare that the Turkish nation should discard Ottoman civilization for “Western” civilization, and become Western in civilization while remaining Turkish in culture. Becoming Turkish in culture was to be accomplished by Ottoman elites spending time among Turkish peasants to learn the folkways of Turkish national culture. At the same time, these same elites were to impart Western civilization to the Turkish masses.³⁷⁸ In fact, Gökalp saw no contradiction between authentic Turkish national values and Western

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 37.

liberal civilization. In his view, “the ancient Turks were both democratic and feminist.”³⁷⁹ Gökalp’s theory may help explain why mainstream Turkish intellectual culture has usually had little objection to certain social institutions and conceptions that were originally imported from Western Europe, such as participatory democracy and the equality of the sexes. Claims that Western European-style democracy represented something alien to the Turkish context only emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with the claims of many prominent conservative Islamists that Western modernity is in fundamental contradiction with Islam. What is important to note is that these groups emerged in opposition to a modernist Turkish-Islamic intellectual paradigm that saw no contradiction between the basic features of social modernity and Islamic tradition.

Gökalp viewed religion in a similarly sociological and pragmatic fashion. Durkheim famously describes religion as the reflection of the social group: religion is produced by society and is a concrete manifestation of a given society’s norms, institutions, and values. In Durkheim’s words, “The collective ideal that religion expresses, then, is not due to some innate power of the individual, but rather to the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize. It is by assimilating the ideals elaborated by society that he has become capable of conceiving of the ideal.”³⁸⁰ Gökalp viewed religion (and all other aspects of a human being’s internal life) in precisely the same way. This conception of society produced Gökalp’s attempt to reform *fiqh* by the creation of what he called “social *uṣūl-al-fiqh*” (*ijtimā’ī uṣūl-i*

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 111.

³⁸⁰ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. and abr. Carol Cosman and Mark S. Cladis (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 318.

fiqh).³⁸¹ This theory sought to incorporate the insights of modern social science into the study of the sources of Islamic legal rulings, thus allowing for the flexibility and adaptation of classical Islamic jurisprudence to modern social needs. Gökalp argued that religious principles based on divine revelation are not subject to change; however, religious rulings rooted in social conditions are liable to change along with those social conditions.³⁸²

Gökalp also inherited the Young Ottomans' view of religion as a personal and private experience. This meant a separation between religion from worldly affairs such as politics and the state: in his words, "The state and the *medrese* are two separate worlds" (*Devlet ile medrese iki ayrı alemdir*).³⁸³ Like most Islamic intellectuals of the period, Gökalp separated the legislative power of the state from religion, arguing that religion only referred to matters of private belief and worship (*itikat* and *ibadet*).³⁸⁴ Like the Young Ottomans, he argued that this separation was necessary to protect the inner transcendent essence of religion from worldly corruption. Gökalp also argued that this distinction was a basic principle of Islam itself, referring to the Qur'ānic verse: "O you who have believed, obey God, obey the Messenger, and those who have authority

³⁸¹ Özervarlı, "Transferring," 321-324; Senturk, "Intellectual Dependence," 304-310.

³⁸² Özervarlı, "Transferring," 323; Senturk, "Intellectual Dependence," 308.

³⁸³ Quoted in Erşahin, 188.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 188. On the privatizing of Islam to matters of belief and worship see also: Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Değişen Dünyada İslam'ın Batı'ya Dönük Yüzü: Günümüz Türkiye Müslümanlığına Genel Bir Bakış," [The Face of Islam Turning toward the West in a Changing World: A General View of the Islam of Contemporary Turkey] in *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam: Yaklaşım, Yöntem, ve Yorum Denemeleri* [The Turks, Turkey, and Islam: Attempts at Approach, Method, and Interpretation] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 129-140; and Gokhan Cetinsaya, "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on 'Turkish Islamic Synthesis' in Modern Turkish Political Thought," *Muslim World* 89:3-4 (July – October 1999): 354.

among you.”³⁸⁵ In his view, this verse implicitly recognizes a distinction between religious authority and secular authority by separating the authority of God and the Prophet from the power of “those who have authority among you.” Perhaps most crucially for the understanding of religion in the Turkish Republic, Gökcalp adopted the term *diyanet* to refer to personal religious practice, arguing that this is the true definition of what constitutes religion, rather than adherence to any particular model of politics or government.³⁸⁶ These matters, as the Qur’ān demonstrates, are left to the discretion of individuals and societies. In this way Gökcalp argued that the establishment of such modern notions as equality between the sexes and democratic government is in no way in conflict with Islamic values, but instead serves as the expression of their truths in a modern social context.

The Birth of Modern Turkish Theology: Religion, Society, and the History of the Turkish Faculty of Divinity

Gökcalp’s elaboration of religion as an issue of private concern exemplifies the broad intellectual climate in which modern Turkish Islamic theology came into being. As outlined above, the intellectual ferment of the late Ottoman Empire encouraged discussions of Islamic theology along lines very different from the previous *madrasa* traditions. These new parameters took into account the notion of a Turkish national community, the establishment of liberal participatory forms of governance, the privatization of religion, and the acceptance and even encouragement of radical social change such as the fostering of the equality of the sexes.

³⁸⁵ Sūrat al-Nisā’ 59.

³⁸⁶ See Berkes, *Development*, 416; Erşahin, “Diyānet.”

These socially and politically liberal currents of thought were not alone, of course, in this intellectual environment. However, due to their official patronage by the Ottoman state and their continuing support by Turkish national governments (namely, the period of Young Turk rule from 1908-1918 and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic after World War I in 1923) these liberal ideas gained preeminence in Turkish intellectual culture in this period, the formative period of modern Turkish theology. This meant that these ideas would become foundational to modern Islamic theology in the Republic of Turkey, and certain key academic institutional formations allowed them to consolidate and perpetuate their authority in Turkish Islamic intellectual life. Chief among these institutions was the large network of divinity faculties (*ilahiyat fakülteleri*) that today form part of the Turkish state and private university system. These faculties are the outcome of a process of the reorganization of Islamic intellectual life in the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, a process that laid the foundations for contemporary Turkish Islamic theology.

The first modern university in the Ottoman Empire, the *Darülfünun*, opened its doors in 1864 as part of a *medrese* reform movement occurring during the Tanzimat period. This institution also produced the first Faculty of Divinity in the Ottoman Empire. Situated next to the imperial mosque, Aya Sofya, in the heart of Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, the *Darülfünun* was meant to lead the empire in a series of modernizing educational reforms in imitation of the modern university system taking shape in Western Europe. It operated until 1933, when it was reorganized as Istanbul University, still one of the most prestigious universities in Turkey today.

Throughout its history the *Darülfünun* experienced a series of reorganizations and reforms, and only included a faculty of theology during certain periods of its existence.³⁸⁷ In 1912, the first section of the *Darülfünun* devoted to the traditional Islamic religious disciplines was established, but was closed soon thereafter in 1919.³⁸⁸ This section was called variously *Ulūm-u Aliye-i Diniyye* (The Higher Religious Sciences) or *Ulūm-i Şer'iyye* (The *Sharī'a* Sciences).³⁸⁹ The curriculum of this *Sharī'a* sciences section featured courses on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* studies, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *kalām*, ethics, Sufism, Prophetic biography, Arabic literature and philosophy, the history of philosophy, the history of Islam, and the history of religions.³⁹⁰ In other words, it featured a heavy focus on the study of traditional Islamic religious disciplines organized according to the institutional demands of a modern university and combined with a small offering of modern Western disciplines such as the history of philosophy and the history of religions. The program reflects the Islamic modernist outlook of the members of its faculty, who advocated the enrichment of the traditional Islamic intellectual worldview with the insights of the modern West European social and humanities disciplines.

³⁸⁷ On the history of the theology faculties in the *Darülfünun* see: Hidayet Aydar, "Darülfünun'un İlahiyat Fakültesi ve Türk Kültür Hayatına Katkıları," [The Darülfünun Faculty of Divinity and its Contributions to Turkish Cultural Life] *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13 (2006): 23-43; Münir Koştaş, "Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi," [The Ankara University Faculty of Divinity] *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 31:1 (1990): 1-27; and Mehmet Pacaci and Yasin Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," in Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 122-144.

³⁸⁸ Koştaş, "Ankara," 2; Pacaci and Aktay, "Religious Education," 123.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Koştaş, "Ankara," 2-3.

The theology section of the *Darülfünun* was reopened in 1924 and then closed again permanently in 1933 with the rest of the institution. This second incarnation of the faculty featured at least one key difference from its predecessor: it no longer offered courses in *fiqh*, except in the context of historical study; it also heavily focused on modern social science research methodologies.³⁹¹ The faculty was officially titled the Faculty of Theology (*İlahiyat Fakültesi*), the first time this term had ever been used to denote an educational institution: this also signaled a shift away from Islamic legal studies toward a consideration of Islam largely in theological and philosophical terms.³⁹² The faculty journal (*Darülfünun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası*) also published articles on research and reform in Islamic disciplines, and published in particular numerous articles by the sociologist Durkheim, translated into Turkish.³⁹³

However, during this brief period the *Darülfünun* theology faculty was home to the most important figures in Islamic theological reform in the late Ottoman and early nationalist period. During this time such important theological reformists as İsmail Hakkı İzmirli (1868-1946), Mehmed Şerefettin Yaltkaya (1879-1947), and Yusuf Ziya Yörükân (1887-1954) taught in the faculty.³⁹⁴ This generation of theologians was particularly important for the development of Islamic thought in the Turkish Republic,

³⁹¹ Koştaş, “Ankara,” 6.

³⁹² Aydar, “Darülfünun,” 26. This was most likely the first school of theology in the Sunnī Muslim world. It was also, as will be discussed later, the direct ancestor of the first modern school of theology in the Sunnī world organized along the lines of the modern West European faculty of divinity, the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁹⁴ Koştaş, “Ankara,” 7. On *kalām* reformists in late Ottoman/early Republican Turkey such as İzmirli and others, see Ömer Aydın, “Kalam,”; M. Sait Özervarlı, “Attempts to Revitalize Kalām in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” *Muslim World* 89:1 (January 1999): 90-105; *Kelamda Yenilik Arayışları 19. Yüzyıl Sonu 20. Yüzyıl Başı* [Pursuits of *Kalām* Renewal at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Centuries] (İSAM: İstanbul, 2008).

and so deserves some detailed discussion here. These theologians shared a desire for Islamic reform in the Ottoman Empire that distinguished them from conservative Islamic intellectuals and ‘*ulāma*’ of the time.³⁹⁵

İzmirli articulated his reform project in terms of a “new Islamic theology” (*Yeni İlm-i Kelam*). This project was motivated by his study of traditional *kalām* and its shortcomings in the modern philosophical context:

I contemplated writing a new Islamic theology. I studied the venerable texts of Ash‘arism, traditionalism and textualism in addition to works that discussed the various religions and sects. At that point I became interested in the new philosophy [*yeni felsefe*, i.e., Western philosophy]. After studying first philosophy, the new philosophy, and after the new logic [i.e., Cartesianism] was first translated into our language, I began to write the new Islamic theology for the sole purpose of serving my religious brethren.³⁹⁶

İzmirli conceived of Islamic theology as a philosophical project, and argued that it needed to change its dialogue partners. In the past, *kalām* scholars were versed in the philosophical thought of figures such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Greek Pre-Socratics because these constituted the intellectual vernacular of the period.³⁹⁷ However, modern Islamic theology must be reconstructed along the lines of a reconstructed *kalām*: it must be reconceived to take into account the Western philosophical currents of the modern age which “dominate the four corners of the earth.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ M. Sait Özervarlı, “Alternative Approaches to Modernization in the Late Ottoman Period: İzmirli İsmail Hakkı’s Religious Thought Against Materialist Scientism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (February 2007): 82-83.

³⁹⁶ Sabri Hizmetli, “İzmirli İsmail Hakkı’nın İlmi Şahsiyeti,” [İzmirli İsmail Hakkı’s Intellectual Profile] in *İzmirli İsmail Hakkı Sempozyumu: 24-25 Kasım 1995* [Symposium on İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, November 24-25 1995], ed. Mehmet Şeker and Adnan Bülent Baloğlu (Ankara: TDY Yayınları, 1996), 20-21.

³⁹⁷ Aydın, “Kalam,” 114-115; Hizmetli, “İzmirli İsmail Hakkı,” 19; Özervarlı, “Alternative,” 87.

³⁹⁸ Hizmetli, “İzmirli İsmail Hakkı,” 19.

Instead of integrating the defense of Muslim dogma with the philosophical insights and precepts of the ancients, İzmirli argued that the new Islamic theology must be both integrate and be prepared to critique the bases of modern Western philosophy, including Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Malebranche, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Comte, Mill, and Bergson.³⁹⁹ Not only do these philosophers for him represent significant advances in human thought, but perhaps most importantly, İzmirli observed that they were becoming the standard reference for the new generation of Turkish Muslims and must be both appreciatively and critically engaged by the new Islamic theology in order to secure the foundations of Islamic belief for succeeding generations of young Muslims in Turkey and around the Muslim world.⁴⁰⁰ İzmirli stressed that his new Islamic theology “would not contradict empirical knowledge, the laws of science, or scientific reasoning; it will [instead] refute doubts with both the verses of the Qur’ān and the laws of modern science.”⁴⁰¹ He also emphasized the importance of reason in Islam, arguing that though revelation may include precepts that are inaccessible to reason, it does not include precepts that are fundamentally irrational.⁴⁰² On the contrary, Islam by nature encourages the free use of reason and the rejection of *taqlid*.⁴⁰³

Without embarking on such a comprehensive theological undertaking, Yalçınkaya made very similar arguments. He was also a vocal champion of religious reform against the Ottoman Muslim conservatives, and believed in the fundamentally “reasonable”

³⁹⁹ Aydın, “Kalam,” 115;

⁴⁰⁰ M. Sait Özervarlı, “İzmirli İsmail Hakkı’nın Kelam Problemleriyle İlgili Görüşleri,” [İzmirli İsmail Hakkı’s Views on the Problems of Kalam] in *İzmirli İsmail Hakkı Sempozyumu: 24-25 Kasım 1995*, ed. Mehmet Şeker and Adnan Bülent Baloğlu (Ankara: TDY Yayınları, 1996), 109.

⁴⁰¹ Hizmetli, “İzmirli İsmail Hakkı,” 21.

⁴⁰² Özervarlı, “Görüşleri,” 123.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

nature of Islam. As he wrote in 1918, “In this religion there is complete harmony between reason and revelation, or put another way, between science and religion.”⁴⁰⁴ Yaltkaya goes so far as to define (true) religion (*din*) in general in these terms: “In our view, religion is the divine path that impels one to success in both the worldly and the religious in the context of people of sound reason and their own will and free choices (*ihhtiyar*).”⁴⁰⁵ His heavy emphasis on the Māturīdī notion of free will is also notable in this passage.⁴⁰⁶ Like İzmirli, Yaltkaya is also concerned to remain within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy and emphasizes that the existential root of Islam is revelation, and that God, whose existence can be demonstrated by reason alone, is also a part of a very personal relationship with the believer who locates the belief in God in her innermost heart and approaches the divine from a stance of awe and reverence.⁴⁰⁷

Unlike İzmirli, Yaltkaya did not locate the roots of a new and modern Islamic theology in philosophy. Instead, he turned to Ziya Gökalp’s sociology as the foundation for reform in Islamic thought.⁴⁰⁸ Yaltkaya was a strong supporter of Gökalp’s proposal for reform in Islamic law based on social contingency and even argued that “the social is the birthplace of the spirit of the sacred.”⁴⁰⁹ Like Gökalp, Yaltkaya was clearly a follower of Durkheimian sociology and viewed religion in general and Islam in particular in these terms. This is in fact the point at which him and İzmirli part ways:

⁴⁰⁴ Mehmed Şerefettin Yaltkaya, *Dini Makalelerim* [My Religious Articles] (Ankara: T.C. Diyanet İşleri Reisliği, 1944), 56.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰⁶ As discussed in Chapter Three, the Māturīdī concept of choice may have been familiar to İzmirli through Māturīdī school texts, or through his familiarity with late Ash‘arism, which took over this notion from Māturīdism.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 57; 11-13.

⁴⁰⁸ Özzervarlı, “Transferring,” 324.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 325. I have slightly modified Özzervarlı’s translation of this phrase.

though they served on the same reformist theological faculty, they participated in different reformist theological circles. İzmirli belonged to the group of modernist Ottoman Islamic reformers that published in the well-known modernist journal *Sırat-i Müstakim* (The Straight Path; 1908-1925) that also included translated articles by Muhammad ‘Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.⁴¹⁰ He was famously opposed to Gökalp’s sociological framework for reform in Islamic law, and published extensive refutations of his position and in favor of Islamic legal reform based on classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* methodologies such as *ijmā’*, *qiyās*, and *istiḥsān* (albeit in a modernist context).⁴¹¹

İzmirli’s works also betray little trace of nationalism, and he famously declared that he owed no allegiance to any particular classical Islamic theological school, Ash‘arī or otherwise.⁴¹² He therefore had no interest in defining a specifically Turkish heritage of Islam or of focusing on one Sunnī theological school over another. Yaltkaya, by contrast, published in the modernist Islamic journal *İslam Mecmuası* (Journal of Islam; 1914-1918) which had clear Turkish nationalist tendencies and strongly supported the works of Gökalp.⁴¹³ It comes as no surprise, then, that Yaltkaya authored the first article that located Māturīdī as part of a distinctly Turkish national religious tradition: his being

⁴¹⁰ Özervarlı, “Alternative,” 82.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 92. See for instance his pieces “Sosyal Bir İslam Fıkıh Usulüne İhtiyaç Var mı?” [Is a Social Basis of Islamic Law Necessary?], ed. Ali Duman, *Himmet Yurdu* 2, no. 3 (January-June 2009): 399-412; and “İcma, Kıyas ve İstihsanın Esasları” [The Foundations of *ijmā’*, *qiyās*, and *istiḥsān*], ed. Ali Duman, *Hikmet Yurdu* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 149-160.

⁴¹² Özervarlı, “Alternative,” 84.

⁴¹³ Ibid. *İslam Mecmuası* was actually funded by the nationalist ruling party of the time, the Committee of Union and Progress. See on this point Umut Azak, “Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam: The Ban on the Call to Prayer in Arabic (1932-1950),” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Mediterranee* 124 (November 2008): 161-179.

influenced by Gökalp's Turkish nationalism would lead to the project of "rediscovering" the uniquely "Turkish" heritage of religious thought. Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, who will be discussed at length later, was also part of Yaltekaya's circle. Their approach within the broader Ottoman Islamic reform movement had the most impact on the growth of Neo-Māturīdism in Turkey, and it is in their works that the roots of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism in the late Ottoman and early republican period can be discerned. The influence of İzmirli's works, though also part of the same liberal reform movement, can best be seen in later Turkish theologians' attempts to shore up Sunnī Islamic belief against materialism and radical social secularization such as the works of Said Nursi.⁴¹⁴

The *Darülfünun* theological faculty also produced a report on the question of the reform and modernization in religion in 1928, a document that would have wide influence among government circles in the early years of the Turkish Republic, and which serves as a kind of manifesto for Islamic theological modernism at the opening years of the Turkish Republic. This document was prepared by a committee headed by the esteemed scholar of Turkish religious history, M. Fuad Köprülü, and included İzmirli, Yaltekaya, and Yörükan, although Yaltekaya later claimed that he did not in the end endorse the document.⁴¹⁵ Yörükan also claimed in 1947 that this report had been published without the knowledge of most of the members of the faculty.⁴¹⁶ It is likely that Yörükan and others opposed some of its more radical suggestions such as the wearing of shoes during worship. However, Yörükan, İzmirli, and other members of

⁴¹⁴ On Said Nursi, see below pp. 33.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴¹⁶ Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, *Dini İnkılap ve İslahat Hakkında, İslam-Türk Mecmuası* 2, no. 73 (1947): 10.

this reformist circle did publicly support and help implement the basic precepts of the document (such as the translations of religious texts into Turkish, the call for national religious reform, and the establishment of the divinity faculty).⁴¹⁷ An analysis of this document therefore provides an illuminating summary of the nationalist-inspired Islamic reform movement of the Kemalist period that laid the foundations for Neo-Māturīdism.

The report is remarkable for its succinct inclusion of the most basic (and radical) precepts of Turkish Islamic theological modernism. These include the sociological analysis of religion, the identification of (and the need to foster) a national Turkish religious tradition, the religious commitment to democracy, and the claim that religious practices are subject to constant change in accordance with changing social conditions. All of these elements would emerge in the following decades as central to the theology of Yusuf Ziya Yörükkan and the Turkish Māturīdian project that would build on his legacy. Numerous elements of the suggestions in the report were actually carried out by the Turkish government after it was released, and the report also was published on the front pages of the daily Istanbul newspaper *Vakit* in 1928.

The report begins by stating its explicit intent to reform the religion of Islam in the larger cause of the “Turkish Revolution,” referring to the radical social and political reforms being carried out by the Turkish nationalists at the time.⁴¹⁸ In the view of the document’s authors, the essence of the religion of Islam is separate from particular social manifestations of religious truth, and thus formal religion must be open to change as society changes throughout history. Religion was a necessary part of the nationalist project in their view; however, arcane and irrelevant forms of religious life had to be

⁴¹⁷ Azak, “Vernacular”; Berkes, 487.

⁴¹⁸ Aydar includes the full text of the report in his article, pp. 37-39.

discarded to enable the true essence of Islam to be actualized in modern social circumstances. As we will discuss at length in Chapter 5, these arcane elements of Islam were understood to include certain types of Sufi devotion, Wahhabism, and any form of socially conservative Islam in general. The second article of the report clearly outlines the sociological bases of this conception of religion:

Religion is a social institution [*Din içtimai bir müessesedir*]. Like other social institutions, it must pursue a path of evolution in order to endure the exigencies of life. This evolution will not in fact occur outside of the fundamental essence of our religion. This being the case, however, whether it be the intellectual, economic, or aesthetic matters of our religion, it is a mistake to think that it can remain dependent upon all old forms and customs and be deprived of the power of evolution. For this reason, in Turkish democracy, religion must demonstrate its vitality and the development that it requires.⁴¹⁹

It should be pointed out that this passage (and the document in general) makes an implicit distinction between religion and politics, clearly separating the terms “religion” and “Turkish democracy” and marking them as clearly compatible yet distinct entities. This conceptual separation, first emphasized by the Young Ottomans in the middle of the nineteenth century, became a common assumption of Islamic modernists in Turkey by the republican period.

The above passage is of course most striking for its emphasis on the social nature of religion. Reminiscent of Gökalp and Durkheim, the document clearly understands religion in almost exclusively social terms, and analyzes it as a product of social forces. Thus, religion is suitable for periodic change as the original social conditions that produce it change. However, the part of religion that must “evolve” through the process of modernization is not the part that makes religion what it

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 37-38.

essentially is; the inner truth of religion is rigidly distinguished from social and political contingencies. Thus, the document makes another key point that will become a foundational element of Turkish Islamic modernism: the distinction between the “divine” and “human” elements of religion: “What is important is a philosophical vision that reveals the human (*beşeri*) and the absolute (*mutlak*) nature of the Qur’ān and of Islam.”⁴²⁰ This means that religion possesses both changeable and unchangeable aspects, the former being related to varying social conditions and the latter relating to divine truth.

The document also goes on to call for a number of religious reforms that would enable the true nature of Islam to best be revealed in the context of the nascent Turkish Republic. These suggestions include an emphasis on orderly worship, the proper training of preachers, praying in the mosque while wearing shoes, and the use of musical instruments in communal prayer.⁴²¹ The document also calls for the use of Turkish as the language of worship; this provision was famously carried out by Atatürk’s nationalist government, which meant, for instance, that until Atatürk’s party (the Republican People’s Party, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) was voted out of power in 1950 all calls to prayer were made in Turkish instead of Arabic. This recommendation had first been made by Ziya Gökalp in his book *The Principles of Turkism*, published in 1923.⁴²² The document ends by calling on the divinity faculty to serve as the locus for these reform efforts: “In order to actualize all of these reforms, the preparation of a

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ It should be noted here that these reforms are modeled on Protestant Christianity.

⁴²² Gökalp, *Principles*, 119.

practical program that will be brought into existence by a scientific center becomes necessary. This scientific center is the faculty of divinity.”⁴²³

This document makes three important points about the nature of religion that form the core of Turkish Islamic modernist theology. The first point is that religion is understood primarily as a social institution. At the same time, religion possesses both a human and a divine nature, the former properly referring to those aspects of religion that are produced by human social conditions and therefore must be periodically reformed as social conditions vary over time. The divine aspect of religion, i.e., its contents that reflect eternal truths (such as the oneness of God) are not affected by social change and thus remain constant. Finally, since this second aspect of religion constitutes its true and everlasting essence, religion cannot be allowed to interfere in political life, for to do so would risk corruption of our understanding of in the religion’s eternal truths.

Along with these theological points, the reformist theologians also took the first steps in defining a uniquely Turkish heritage of Sunni Islamic theology. While other government programs and prominent intellectuals elaborated the Turkish national heritage in music, art, architecture, language, and a whole range of other cultural institutions, Turkish theologians began to argue for the existence of a distinctly Turkish-Islamic theological heritage, distinct in content, style, and methodology from other Islamic nations, such as Arabic or Persian Islamic thought.⁴²⁴ Again, Ziya Gökalp made

⁴²³ Aydar, “Darülfünun,” 39.

⁴²⁴ On other efforts to “nationalize” culture in the early Turkish Republic, see: Sibel Bozdoğan, “Architecture, Modernism and Nation-Building in Kemalist Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 10 (1994): 37-55; Arzu Öztürkmen, “The Role of the People's Houses in the Making of National

statements to this effect in *The Principles of Turkism*, declaring, “Our religious catechism teaches us that our school of theology is that of al-Māturīdī and our school of jurisprudence that of Abu Ḥanīfa.”⁴²⁵ The “religious catechism” to which he refers could be any number of Ottoman-era works that emphasized the importance of Māturīdī and Ḥanafī *fiqh*. However, it seems that the first Turkish Islamic theologian to claim that Māturīdī was an actual member of the Turkish nation (i.e., that Māturīdī was a Turk) was Mehmed Şerefettin Yaltkaya, professor of the history of Islamic theology at the faculty of theology at the *Darülfünun*. Yaltkaya published an article in the faculty review in 1932 bearing the title, “Turkish Theologians.”⁴²⁶

Yaltkaya’s article is a list of medieval scholars of *kalām* presumed to have been “Turkish,” though the article does not spell out just what this means. It seems likely, however, that Yaltkaya understood this term in much the same way that Gökāl̄p did, i.e., as not primarily racial but cultural in content. After all, Yaltkaya was known to have been a close friend of Gökāl̄p’s.⁴²⁷ However the term may have been meant, this article represents the first text in modern Turkish (written as it was only a few years after the completion of the Turkish language reform) that speaks of Māturīdī as being a Turk. Yaltkaya’s article does not actually include much information about Māturīdī, however, and only refers to his success at debating with the Mu‘tazila and the

Culture in Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 11 (1994): 159-81; and Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴²⁵ Gökāl̄p, *Principles*, 126.

⁴²⁶ M. Şerefettin Yaltkaya, “Türk Kelamcıları,” [Turkish Theologians] *Darülfünun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 23 (1932), 1-19. The Ottoman script was replaced with the modern Turkish alphabet in 1928.

⁴²⁷ Ali Duman, “Şerafeddin Yaltkaya ve Mu‘tezile Husn-Kubh Meselesi Makalesi,” [Şerafeddin Yaltkaya and His Article on the Mu‘tazilī Question of Good and Evil] *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 2 (2002): 54.

importance of his work to Sunni theology.⁴²⁸ However, the article is significant in that its argument and basic assumptions seem to have quickly become normative in Turkish religious historiography; contemporary histories of Turkish Islamic thought in Turkish still reproduce Yaltkaya's main schema and list of personalities. In general, Yaltkaya includes figures who are mentioned in earlier biographical texts as having a connection to Turkish peoples or who were born or active in Transoxania and the Māturīdī school, as well as major theologians of the Ottoman period.

This is a rather mixed group of individuals, which includes Ibn al-Ikhshīd (d. 937-938), a Mu'tazilī theologian whose father was Turkish according to Ibn Ḥazm; Māturīdī, a resident of Samarqand whose ethnic lineage is nowhere discussed in existing sources, and a host of Ottoman-era theologians born in various parts of that vast empire. Yaltkaya's list of "Turkish" theologians served as a model for later writers. Ömer Aydın's extremely useful and detailed work *Türk Kelam Bilginleri* (Turkish Theologians; 2004), is essentially an expanded version of Yaltkaya's list using similar criteria, though Aydın makes it clear at the outset of his work that for him the term "Turk" does not refer to the race of these figures, but to their having been raised in and contributed to "Turkish-Islamic culture."⁴²⁹ Yaltkaya's article, therefore, represents a significant first step in the elaboration of the notion of a specifically Turkish Islamic theology that includes Māturīdī. Later thinkers, as will be discussed below, would focus on Māturīdī as the key figure in this distinctly Turkish tradition of Islamic thought.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁴²⁹ Aydın, "Türk," 11.

Yusuf Ziya Yörükan and the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity: the Founding of Modern Academic Theology in Turkey and the Outlines of a “Turkish” Islamic Theology

Yaltkaya was eventually appointed to the headship of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in 1942, and served in that capacity until his death in 1947.⁴³⁰ His colleague at the *Darülfünun* Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, however, continued to serve in an academic capacity even after the closing of the theology faculty at the *Darülfünun* in 1933. After this, the only academic venue to teach higher Islamic studies was provided at Istanbul University by the Institute of Islamic Sciences, attached to the Faculty of Letters.⁴³¹ Yaltkaya and Yörükan taught at this institute as well, but Yörükan would be the only professor of Islamic theology to go on to teach in the first divinity faculty founded during the Turkish Republic, the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity.⁴³² This meant that Yörükan occupied an extremely important role in the development of modern Islamic theology in Turkey. He was a product of the Ottoman *medrese* system, taught in the first reformed institutes of religious education at the end of the Ottoman Empire (during which time he also participated in outlining the widely influential Islamic reformist agenda discussed above), and then went on to become one of the first professors at the first faculty of theology founded in the Republic of Turkey. He also wrote the first article in the first issue of the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity’s faculty journal, a short catechism of Islam comprised of Quranic verses translated into

⁴³⁰ The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) is the government ministry that oversees also Sunni Islamic religious activity in the Turkish Republic. It will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴³¹ Koştaş, “Ankara,” 7.

⁴³² At least one other professor from the *Darülfünun* accompanied him there, Hilmi Ömer Budda, who taught courses in comparative religion and religious history. See Koştaş, 7-11.

Turkish. Yörükân's career spans the entire length of the development of modern Islamic theology in Turkey, and he was active at every step of this process.

Yörükân conducted his work as a specialist in Islamic theology at the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University by solidifying the modernist and reformist trend of thought that he had done so much to promote in the Ottoman period. The Ankara University Faculty of Divinity was founded in 1949 and was intended to fulfill precisely the role outlined for theology faculties discussed above in the reformist document issued in 1928. The records of the parliamentary debate leading to the establishment of the faculty indicate that this was the key mission of the institution: to further the modernist reform of Islam in the Turkish Republic. The prominent intellectual İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (1886-1978) contrasted the new divinity faculty with the traditional *medrese*, arguing that faculties of divinity embody scientific, "objective" (*objektif*) studies, replacing the *medrese*'s irrational and "subjective" (*sübjektif*) methodologies.⁴³³ Baltacıoğlu also emphasized the key role the new faculty would play in fostering the social sciences. The Minister of Education at the time declared that the new faculty "would be worthy of the Atatürk Revolution and will not work in the spirit of the *madrâsas*, but will work against reactionary trends."⁴³⁴

The first year of instruction at the faculty (1949-1950) included the following courses: Arabic, Persian, English, German, French, Sociology, logic and philosophy of the sciences, history of Islam, history of Islamic schools of thought (taught by

⁴³³ Koştaş, "Ankara," 8.

⁴³⁴ Quoted in Mustafa Köylü, "Religious Education in Modern Turkey," in *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition*, eds. Sinasi Gunduz and Cafer S. Yaran (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 54.

Yörükân), history of Islamic art, and comparative history of religions.⁴³⁵ The uniqueness of this institution in an Islamic historical context was noted by a number of observers at the time. Howard Reed, a scholar who visited Turkey in this period, claimed in 1954 that “So far as is known, the new Faculty of Divinity at Ankara is the only modern institution of its type in the Muslim world.”⁴³⁶ Indeed, this institution was probably the first faculty of theology organized in the Sunnī Muslim world along the lines of the Western European divinity school. This point is highly significant for the development of Islamic thought in modern Turkey. It helps explain the prestige and impact that Islamic theology has in modern Turkish intellectual discourse. The development of this institutionalized venue of Islamic theological discussion has also contributed to the impressive variety of Islamic theological currents in modern Turkey. This sophisticated institutional setting encourages the kinds of systematic and highly complex theological projects that have flourished among the Neo-Māturīdīs and other currents of Islamic theological thought in modern Turkey.

The curriculum of the faculty in its first year of operation is very informative in this respect. Unlike the curriculum of the first *Darülfünun* theological faculty (1912-1919, the faculty of *Sharī‘a* sciences) discussed above, the Ankara faculty’s first year of course offerings did not include a single subject related to the *Sharī‘a*. These courses included: Arabic, Persian, “foreign languages” (English, German, and French), sociology, philosophy of logic and philosophy of science, history of Islam and Islamic schools of religious thought, history of Islamic art, and comparative religious history.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Koştaş, “Ankara,” 11.

⁴³⁶ Howard Reed, “Revival of Islam in Secular Turkey,” *Middle East Journal* 8:3 (1954): 274.

⁴³⁷ Koştaş, “Ankara,” 11.

In 1953 and 1954, courses were added in classic Turkish religious texts, psychology and sociology of religion, Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, fine arts, pedagogy, history of Sufism, foundations of Islamic belief, Islamic philosophy, history of the Turkish Revolution, and Islamic law (*İslam hukuku*).⁴³⁸

The courses offered at the Ankara faculty followed in the footsteps of the second *Darülfünun* faculty (1924-1933) by focusing on *Sharī'a* as an object of primarily historical study. This is unsurprising, considering that the *Sharī'a* was by that point declared illegal in Republican Turkey. Though a course in Islamic law was added in 1953 and 1954, the subject remained subordinated to the historical study of Islamic thought and Islamic history. Overall, the Ankara theology faculty courses exhibit a strong focus on intellectual history and the study of the historical legacy of Islamic thought and culture. This focus helped foster the kind of intensive study of the classics of Islamic intellectual history that is at the foundation of most systematic Islamic theological projects in Turkey today, including the project of the Neo-Māturīdīs. The Ankara faculty also takes up elements of Turkish nationalism with its inclusion of courses in Turkish religious classics and Turkish Republican history.

In the early years of the faculty both male and female students were enrolled; female enrollment in the divinity faculties has remained relatively high (though disproportionate in relation to male enrollment) until the present day.⁴³⁹ The faculty also came into being during a period of great intellectual openness to international

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Of the 80 students who completed the first semester of the faculty, 22 were women (28 percent). Of the 40 students who graduated in the first class of 1953, nine were women (22 percent). These percentages have increased slightly over time: in the 1997-1998 academic year, 31 percent of the total enrolled were women. 30 percent of the graduates that year were women. See Pacaci and Aktay, "Higher Religious Education."

influences: the famous German scholar of Islam and Sufism, Annemarie Schimmel, taught in the faculty from 1954-1959. In addition, throughout the 1940s the Turkish government commissioned the translation and popularization of classics of world (largely West European) literature and philosophy. In 1952, a similar project was launched for the translation of classics from the Islamic world originally written in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and other historical languages of the Muslim world.⁴⁴⁰ The Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University would prove to be the most influential Islamic educational institution in the first few decades of the history of the Republic. In 1990, of only nine faculties of theology that existed in Turkey (today there are five times that number) six were headed by graduates of the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University.⁴⁴¹ The faculty also served as a model for later institutions, and inaugurated the critical and sociological study of Islam in Turkish intellectual life. However, despite its important historical influence, it remains best known (and sometimes critiqued) for its reformist leanings.⁴⁴²

The establishment of the Turkish divinity faculties formed part of a much wider reform project under the guidance of the first President of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This project deserves some discussion here as it formed the final push in a wave of reforms in Ottoman and early nationalist Turkish society since the Tanzimat period of the mid nineteenth century. In addition, this project has formed the ideological bedrock (and ever-present backdrop) to nearly all aspects of Turkish

⁴⁴⁰ Reed, "Revival," 270.

⁴⁴¹ Koştaş, "Ankara," 8.

⁴⁴² Necdet Subaşı, "İlahiyat(çı)lar Üzerine," [On Theologies/Theologians] originally published in *Öteki Türkiye'de Din ve Modernleşme* [Religion and Modernization in the Other Turkey] (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2002); also available: www.necdetsubasi.com/index/php/makale/67-ilahiyatcilar-uzerine.

intellectual and cultural life since its implementation in the earliest years of the Turkish Republic. Indeed, Atatürk's project laid the foundations for nearly all institutional manifestations of modern Turkish society, producing a very unique mode of institutionalized Islamic intellectual life in Turkey. Necdet Subaşı perceptively describes the role of the divinity faculty in this project: "From now on, by means of theology (*ilahiyat*), society's religious terminology would be reshaped, religious sentiments would be channeled in a suitable fashion; in a sense, the wholeness of state and nation would be brought together around a functionalist discourse of religion."⁴⁴³

However, in order to encourage these faculties to fulfill this role, the state asserted a high degree of control over their activities, mirroring how the old Ottoman government had dealt with the *medrese* system years before. In an effort to depoliticize the activities of religious scholars, a law was passed in the Turkish parliament on the very same day that the faculty was opened which declared: "any individual creating or participating in any association whose aims involve organizing the judicial, social, economic, or political order on religious bases is liable to from two to seven years in prison. The use of religion for political or personal objectives, as well as the use of religious sentiment with a view to weakening the principal of secularism is an offense for which prison terms of from one to five years may be imposed."⁴⁴⁴ This provision of the Turkish penal code (Article 163) was abolished in 1992; however, higher education remains under state supervision.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Quoted in Köylü, "Modern Turkey," 54.

⁴⁴⁵ Meltem Müftüler-Baç, *Europe in Change: Turkey's Relationship with a Changing Europe* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 88.

The Kemalist reforms of the late 1920s and 1930s formed the backdrop for this new form of higher Islamic religious education in Turkey. In the early years of the new Turkish Republic, Atatürk and his government undertook a series of drastic social reforms that aimed, in his words, to “form Turkish society into a modern society in every aspect.”⁴⁴⁶ The Ottoman Sultanate was abolished (1924), the Caliphate was abolished (1924), fezes and turbans were declared illegal (1925), all Sufi shrines and lodges were outlawed, (1925) and legal reforms designed to solidify the equality of women and men under Turkish law were continued throughout the decade, including granting women full suffrage and rights in political participation (in 1935, 18 female representatives were elected to the Turkish Parliament). All education was brought under the control of the state in 1924, and *medreses* were abolished entirely. In 1928, the Latin alphabet was introduced as the basis for the new Turkish alphabet, replacing the Ottoman use of Arabic script, as part of a massive program of linguistic reform. In addition, in 1926 Islamic law was completely abolished and replaced by a civil code based on West European models, and in 1937 the principle of laicism was included in the Turkish constitution.

These social transformations reached every aspect of Turkish society, and were meant to replace loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty, the Sunni Caliphate, or the world wide Muslim community (the *Umma*) with loyalty to the Turkish Republic, the Turkish nation, and the principles of strict secularism along the lines of the French model of

⁴⁴⁶ Quoted in Enver Ziya Karal, “The Principles of Kemalism,” in *Ataturk: Founder of a Modern State*, eds. Egun Ozbudun and Ali Kazancigil (London, UK: Archon Press, 1982), 15.

laicism.⁴⁴⁷ As Ahmet Yaşar Ocak astutely points out, this effort essentially meant an important modification of Ziya Gökalp's attempt to synthesize Westernism, Islamism, and Turkism by recommending a program of "Tukification, Islamization, and Modernization" (*Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, ve Muasırlaşmak*). The Kemalists simply dropped "Islamization," the middle term of this formula.⁴⁴⁸

İsmail Kara also asserts that the Kemalist reform program (along with the modernization efforts that took place during the late Ottoman Empire) utilized religion only in order to further the goals of the state, and that religious reform during this period was not motivated by sincere engagement with Islamic tradition but rather by loyalty to the state.⁴⁴⁹ I argue, however, that the religious thinkers who participated in this process (such as Yörükan, Yalçınkaya, and many others) did engage sincerely with Islamic intellectual traditions when creating their visions of Islamic theology. In other words, their support for radical reform programs carried out by the state did not render their theological projects in any way "inauthentic." Kara's contention was very likely true for many members of the Kemalist elite during this period, but it seems an oversimplification to characterize the efforts of Yörükan and other scholars of religion as motivated only by loyalty to the Kemalist government. At least in the case of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 28. See also Ahmad, "Making," 77-79; and Feroz Ahmad, "The Political Economy of Kemalism," in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, eds. Ergun Özbudun and Ali Kazancıgil (London, UK: Archon Press, 1982), 152; and Ergun Özbudun, "The Nature of the Kemalist Political Regime," in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, eds. Ali Kazancıgil and Ergun Özbudun (London, UK: Archon, 1982), 79-192.

⁴⁴⁸ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye'sinde Devlet ve İslam," [The State and Islam in Turkey in the Republican Period] in *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam: Yaklaşım, Yöntem, ve Yorum Denemeleri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 113.

⁴⁴⁹ Kara, *Cumhuriyet*, 27-28.

Yörükan , as will now be discussed, his theological project was rooted firmly (and primarily) in his own understanding of Islamic theological history.

Yusuf Ziya Yörükan exercised a great degree of influence over the development of modern theology in Turkey and, most importantly for the present study, helped consolidate the notion of Māturīdī's importance for the understanding of a uniquely Turkish tradition of Islamic theology. As described above, Yörükan was a product of the Ottoman medrese system and taught at the most important institutions of higher Islamic religious education during the early years of the Turkish Republic. The fact that he was recognized as an expert in the history of Islamic thought during his own lifetime is demonstrated by the fact that Atatürk himself tasked him with writing a history of Turkish Islamic religious sects after the emergence of Islam.⁴⁵⁰ Yörükan also authored the first article published in the first issue of the journal of the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University, which was an Islamic catechism based on citations from Quranic verses translated into Turkish.⁴⁵¹ In addition, Yörükan authored one of the earliest monograph studies published by the faculty, a translation and discussion of two creedal texts attributed to Māturīdī.⁴⁵² A brief examination of his thought helps to reveal the roots of contemporary Turkish engagement with Māturīdī theology, as well as explain

⁴⁵⁰ Turhan Yörükan, "Açıklama ve Teşekkür," [Explanation and Thanks] Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, *İslam Akaid Sisteminde Gelişmeler: İmam-ı Azam Ebu Hanife ve İmam Ebu Mansur-ı Maturīdī*, ed. Turhan Yörükan [Developments in the the Islamic Belief System: Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Maturīdī] (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2006), 11.

⁴⁵¹ See Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, "İslam İlm-i Hali," [Islamic Catechism] *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1:1 (1952): 5-20.

⁴⁵² See Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, ed. and trs., *İslam Akaidine dair Eski Metinler. I. Ebu Mansur-i Maturīdī'nin İki Eseri: Tevhid kitabı ve Akaid risalesi* [Ancient Texts on Islamic Belief, I: Two Works of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Maturīdī: The Book of Unity and Treatise on Belief] (İstanbul, 1953).

the significant influence this engagement has had throughout the last few decades of Islamic thought in Turkey.

Yörükan's theology represents a synthesis between the ideology of Islamic reform that was common to the other members of the modernist circle that taught at the *Darülfünun* and the intense Turkish nationalism that flourished in the 1930s and 1940s. His combination of the historiographical framework of "Turkish" religious history and the principles of modernist Islamic reform produced the normative intellectual framework for the study of Islam and the construction of Islamic theological projects in the new system of Divinity Faculties. Yörükan's thought therefore contributed to the standardized interpretation of Islamic history that would be taught in the universities and by extension in the Presidency of Religious Affairs, who had (and continues to have) direct authority over all Islamic curricula at mosques and other Islamic religious educational institutions in Turkey. Yörükan can be called therefore one of the "founding fathers" of mainstream Turkish theology, and in particular of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism.

Yörükan argues for an interpretation of Islam that was based primarily on the Qur'ān, the foundation for all of Muslim civilization.⁴⁵³ In his view Islam is a religion that preserves social cohesion and protects their fundamental rights as free members of a society. He writes, "Islam aims to establish good and orderly morals among people, to cleanse society of superstition, to bring individuals to a state of maturity, to preserve society in development and well-being, and to unite people around *tawhīd*, the belief in the one God."⁴⁵⁴ He lists the basic commands of Islamic ethics as "working to live, obtaining knowledge, adorning oneself with good morals, avoiding the forbidden, and

⁴⁵³ Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, *Müslümanlık* [Islam] (1957) (Ankara: Doğu Matbaacılık, 1993), 11; 42.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

defending the homeland.”⁴⁵⁵ Yörükan defines all of these as religiously obligatory (*farz*). His focus on the social role of Islam and his inclusion of national defense as an Islamic religious duty clearly demonstrate the influence of Turkish sociological thought and Turkish nationalism on his thinking. He is very much a follower of Gökalp, and his interpretation of Gökalp’s nationalist sociology of religion became foundational for both the Turkish divinity faculty system in general and the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs in particular.

Yörükan strongly emphasizes that Islam, according to the Qur’ān, gives enormous importance to human reason (*akıl*), writing that “in Islam, human reason is counted as the proof of proofs.”⁴⁵⁶ Reason is all that is needed to prove the existence of God, determine the authenticity of Prophetic sayings, and is at the heart of Islamic legal methodology.⁴⁵⁷ In his view, “Islam is addressed to reason.”⁴⁵⁸ Yörükan argues that human beings are obliged to use their God-given reason to interpret religion in accordance with the needs of their particular situation.⁴⁵⁹ This is how he interprets the traditional Islamic legal concept of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), which means acts of individual reason “which are performed after contemplation with one’s own reason and in a manner that accords with the spirit of Islam.”⁴⁶⁰

This argument for the need for constant reform in Islamic law through the free exercise of human reason is based on a number of closely related points that Yörükan

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 57-59. See also his article “Diyanet Nedir?” [What is Religious Practice?], *Kutlu Bilgi* 7 (1945): 193-197.

⁴⁶⁰ Yörükan, “Müslümanlık,” 37.

makes about Islamic religious practice and legal methodology. In his view, all religious rulings are based on the twin principles of “wisdom and the general good” (*hikmet ve maslahat*).⁴⁶¹ As the Qur’ān suggests, religion is not meant to be an excessive burden to human beings but is meant to promote their general well-being:

The principles that religion is facilitating [*kolaylatıcı*-i.e., that it is meant to facilitate good outcomes and not exist as a mere burden], that it is a wide and lenient road, demonstrate the importance that is given in religion to the general good, custom, and the needs of the time. These general needs (*maslahatlar*) ensure that rules are changed according to the needs of the time and the conditions of the environment.⁴⁶²

In other words, Yörükan argues that when the original social conditions that necessitated a given ruling about religious practice are no longer in force, the rule itself can and must be changed in order to preserve religion’s main function as the ultimate guarantor of human happiness and success. New religious rulings must, of course, be consistent with the basic teachings of Islam, but must at the same time be calculated to best express these teachings in a manner that is consistent with the prevailing social circumstances. As an example, Yörükan gives the traditional judgment that women could not be allowed to be alone with non-relatives, i.e., the practice of gender segregation in Muslim societies. This ruling is no longer valid, he argues, because modern society has removed the danger of impropriety that this rule originally sought to address.⁴⁶³ Yörükan also calls the changeable element of religion *diyanet*, or religious practice, “the state between God and the individual person.”⁴⁶⁴ Since this state is based

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 147.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁶⁴ Yörükan, “Diyanet,” 194.

on the conditions each individual finds herself in, it is subject to change with those prevailing conditions.

In addition, Yörükan argues that Islam is completely supportive of science and the modern scientific endeavor.⁴⁶⁵ Science is something fundamental to being human, and as such cannot be in conflict with Islam which is the religion best suited to the fostering of true humanity: “To be a human being is to possess knowledge (*bilgi*). To live in a social context is to possess religion. Knowledge removes human kind from barbarity, and religion ensures the possibility of community.”⁴⁶⁶ He contrasts this attitude with Christianity, which he describes as having experienced a constant conflict between science and its religious sensibilities.⁴⁶⁷ Yörükan explains that religion and science, when properly understood, actually share the same goal: “The source of both is society, and the goal of both is life and happiness. Like body and soul, they are simply two aspects of the same thing.”⁴⁶⁸

Finally, Yörükan strongly supports the establishment of the secular state. Yörükan argues that “it is necessary to clearly distinguish between religious and worldly affairs” as Islamic tradition has done consistently.⁴⁶⁹ In his view, secularism (*laiklik*) “is not irreligion (*dinsizlik*),” but is instead “rendering the rights of God to God, the rights of the human being to the human being, and the rights of the government to the government.”⁴⁷⁰ The division of the religious and the political is therefore not a privileging of the secular over the sacred: it is actually the correct

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 151. See also his article “İlim ve Din” [Science and Religion], *Kutlu Bilgi* 5 (1944): 129-132.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Yörükan, “Müslümanlık,” 156.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

ordering of the relationship between religion, society, and the individual such that religion is in a position to pursue its true goal, the dispelling of ignorance and superstition and the fostering of human happiness in this world and the next (*saadet*).⁴⁷¹ Yörükan also cites in defense of secularism the *ḥadīth*, “You are the most knowledgeable in your worldly affairs,” as evidence that the Prophet did not intend to establish a specific form of political system that had to be valid for all times and places, instead leaving this up to the needs of each individual social situation.⁴⁷²

Yörükan’s interpretation of Islamic theological history demonstrates how the move to rediscover Ḥanafī and Māturīdī sources could be motivated by an engagement with Turkish nationalism and at the same time produce theological interpretations deeply rooted in classical Islamic traditions. As was common for his time, Yörükan relied heavily on Durkheim’s and other sociological methodologies in the study of religion.⁴⁷³ Like other members of his theological circle Yörükan argued that classical forms of Islamic theology (i.e., *kalām*) needed to be rethought in order to take into account advances in modern science and philosophy.⁴⁷⁴ Yörükan also saw no use for formal *madhhabs* in modern Islamic societies.⁴⁷⁵ Yörükan cited Māturīdī, Ḥanafī tradition, and Muhammad ‘Abduh as inspirations for his theological project, and argued that Māturīdī perfected the line of thinking begun by Abū Ḥanīfa.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷¹ Yörükan, “Diyanet,” 197.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 154. This *ḥadīth* can be found in Şaḥīḥ Muslim 30: 5830-5832. The relevant phrase reads in Arabic: “Antum a‘lamu bī amri dunyākum.” The *ḥadīth* is also found in Nawawī’s collection, number 6.

⁴⁷³ Muat Memiş, “Yusuf Zıya Yörükan ve Kelam,” [Yusuf Zıya Yörükan and Kalam] in, Yusuf Zıya Yörükan, *İslam Akaid Sisteminde Gelişmeler: İmam-ı Azam Ebu Hanife ve İmam Ebu Mansur-ı Māturīdī*, ed. Turhan Yörükan (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2006), 20.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

Despite his broad sense of reformism, Yörükan demonstrated a clear preference for Māturīdī theology over Ash‘arī thought. He argued that Māturīdī’s system left more room for reason and was more faithful overall to the earliest Islamic theological traditions (the traditions of the *salaf*, or the first generations of Muslims).⁴⁷⁷ Interestingly, Yörükan argued that Abū Ḥanīfa, the founder of Māturīdī’s theological tradition, was in fact a theologian first and a jurist second.⁴⁷⁸ He wrote: “Before plunging into the science of *fiqh*, [Abū Ḥanīfa] presented his own theological views and *kalām* disputations; he became distinguished in theological debate.”⁴⁷⁹ Yörükan also argued that the Sunnī creed attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, *Fiqh Akbar*, was actually the first book in Islam to deal with religious knowledge proper (*din bilgisi*).⁴⁸⁰ This interpretation of Abū Ḥanīfa as a primarily theological figure is actually based on the Ottoman schools’ interpretation of the legacy of Abū Ḥanīfa. Yörükan based this view on quotes taken from an Ottoman-era commentary on the theological literature attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, the Bosnian Bayāḍī Zadeh’s (d. 1687) *Ishārāt al-Marām min ‘Ibārāt al-Imām*.⁴⁸¹ This text emphasizes Abū Ḥanīfa’s proficiency in theology, stating, for example, that he was “the first among those who set down in writing the foundations of Islamic belief, and mastered them by means of the certainties of irrefutable proofs.”⁴⁸² The same author

⁴⁷⁷ Memiş, 21; Yörükan, “Akaid,” 173.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁸⁰ Yörükan, “Müslumanlık,” 11.

⁴⁸¹ Ed. Aḥmad al-Farīd al-Miziyādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007).

⁴⁸² Ibid., 9.

also compiled a handbook on Islamic dogma comprised entirely of sayings of Abū Ḥanīfa entitled *Al-Uṣūl al-Munīfa li al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa*.⁴⁸³

Yörükān's interpretation of the history of *kalām* had the effect of authorizing the use of Abū Ḥanīfa as primarily a theological source, and therefore enabled modern Turkish intellectuals to create interpretations of Islam based on Abū Ḥanīfa's theology without necessarily having to refer to Abū Ḥanīfa's views on Islamic law. This prioritizing of Abū Ḥanīfa's theological writings would find great utility in later generations of Turkish Māturīdī thought, as will be discussed later. Importantly, Yörükān also identified a particular aspect of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition that would be emphasized by many more Turkish theologians over the next few decades: theological rationalism. Yörükān severely criticizes any form of anti-rationalism in Islamic thought, such as Wahhabism, which he accuses of extremism and bigotry.⁴⁸⁴ By contrast, he argues that Abū Ḥanīfa combined two tendencies of Islamic thought: textualism (*Nasçılık*) and rationalism (*Akılcılık*).⁴⁸⁵ Yörükān also argued that Māturīdī gave more importance to the use of reason than did either of his major theological contemporaries, al-Ṭaḥawī (d. 935) and al-Ash'arī. To prove this, he cited the fact that Māturīdī argued that knowledge of the existence of God is necessitated by reason and not revelation and that Māturīdī did not hold the doctrine that a person may be held responsible for actions which they are incapable of initiating, as Ash'arī believed.⁴⁸⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, this tendency toward theological rationalism was

⁴⁸³ Ed. İlyas Çelebi, *İmam-ı Azam Ebu Hanife'nin İtikadi Görüşleri* [Theological Doctrines of Abū Ḥanīfa] (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2000).

⁴⁸⁴ Yörükān, "Akaid," 103.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 172. This comparison is, incidentally, taken from the unpublished text of the history that Atatürk tasked Yörükān to write.

recognized as a distinct characteristic of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition in the Ottoman period, and has deep roots in the development of the classical tradition of *kalām*.

Also crucial to the later development of Turkish Māturīdism, Yörükan identified Ḥanafī-Māturīdism with a specific tradition of Turkish Sunnism.⁴⁸⁷ In Yörükan's view Abū Ḥanīfa was "the Imam of all Sunnism in theology."⁴⁸⁸ He outlines a vision of specifically Turkish Sunnism that was based on a reformist, rationalist interpretation of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theology. This combination of these (rather disparate) conceptual elements, based on the deep traditions of reformist thought of the late Ottoman Empire and fed by a nationalist impulse to re-interpret the Islamic legacy of the Turkish peoples, resulted in a tradition of Sunni Islamic theology that remains strong in Turkey today. This tradition is what is here referred to as Turkish "Neo-Māturīdism."⁴⁸⁹

Turkish Islamic Thought, 1950s-2000s and the Emergence of Neo-Māturīdī Theological Modernism

Turkish Islamic thought in the last fifty to sixty years has reflected the complex interactions between pious Muslim discourses in Turkey and the secular legal framework of the Turkish Republic. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, Turkish Muslims' support for democracy as a whole has remained steady. What

⁴⁸⁷ Memiş, "Yusuf Ziya," 21.

⁴⁸⁸ Yörükan, "Akaid," 64.

⁴⁸⁹ The term "Neo-Māturīdī" is used here in the same sense as terms such as "Neo-Thomism," i.e., theological schools that define the theological method of a traditional school of religious thought in order to apply this method to contemporary social and religious issues. As with the Catholic Neo-Thomist use of Thomas Aquinas, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs do not haphazardly use Māturīdī's words to support various political platforms, but instead define a coherent and complex interpretation of Māturīdī's theological ethos which they then use to approach specific questions of Turkish and Islamic modernity.

has been more contentious is the nature of democracy and the role Islam should play in politics and political discourse. Since the 1950s, the study of Islamic culture and the open profession of a devout lifestyle have become far more socially acceptable, and Islamic culture has gradually been absorbed into standard narratives of Turkish national history. The reformist theology featured in the divinity faculties has continued to form the academic theological mainstream, and reflects many of the broader assumptions among Turkish Muslims about the computability of Islam and democracy and Islam and modernity. Side by side with this reformist current of Islamic thought there has existed more conservative groups who have consistently felt marginalized by the political and religious establishment (despite the high degree of public confidence in the Turkish Presidency of Religious affairs in particular).

However, between the 1960s and the 1980s, as civil society broke down and Turkey descended into a state of political anarchy and near civil war in the late 1970s, discussions of the establishment of an Islamic state and the rejection of Western modernity became prominent among the country's most prominent Islamic thinkers. However, with the discrediting of the notion of an Islamic state in the mid-1990s and the meteoric rise in the number of operating divinity faculties (with a concurrent rise in enrollment) space has again been opened for the development of theological projects that discuss the relationship between Islam and modernity. The space is occupied by such influential currents of thought as Turkish Neo-Māturīdism. This section will briefly discuss the history of Islamic thought in Turkey in this period, and demonstrate how Neo-Māturīdism fits into these developments.

In 1950, the first multi-party democratic elections in Turkish history were held. Erich Zurcher describes this event as the “climax of the whole period of transition” that had occurred between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of a democratic republic.⁴⁹⁰ The repressive policies of the Kemalist one-party state that had existed for over two decades were decisively rejected by the voting public: with eighty percent participation, 53.4 percent of the votes went to the opposition Democrat Party (*Demokrat Partisi*) while 39.8 percent of votes went to the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), resulting in a large Democrat Party majority in the Turkish parliament.⁴⁹¹

One of the political platforms that helped carry the Democrat Party to victory was a promise to relax the Kemalist repression of popular religion and to encourage the expression of Islamic culture in the Republic. The activities of the Ankara University Faculty of Divinity in the early 1950s were enabled partly by this relaxation of aggressive Kemalist secularism. This period also saw a great increase in the influence and public profile of Islamic devotional movements such as the movement founded by Said Nursi (1877-1960), a charismatic intellectual who argued forcefully against the materialistic and naturalist philosophical currents of the late Ottoman Empire. Nursi’s theology attempted to reinforce the strength of Islamic belief in an increasingly secular era without challenging the political bases of secular democracy.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 217.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² On Nursi’s life and thought see: Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (London, UK: I.B. Taurus, 2009); Şükran Vahide, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal and its Impact on Aspects of Contemporary Turkish Society,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi’ (London, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 55-74; *Islam in*

Nursi was not a member of the Istanbul Islamic intellectual elite, and spent most of his life spreading his message through informal study circles or advocating for educational reform in the provincial areas of the dwindling Ottoman Empire. His theological approach does, however, have some important similarities with Turkish Muslim modernists such as İsmail Hakkı İzmirli who devoted their intellectual efforts to battling the “materialist” tendencies of modern philosophy and science. Like İzmirli, Nursi did not reject all elements of modern society, and was famous for his support for science education in Islamic curricula. In his view, when properly understood, the modern sciences can be seen as the most powerful proofs for the truths of religion, as they reflect the Creator of the world that is the focus of scientific inquiry. When asked about why their teachers never mention the Creator in their science classes, Nursi replied to one student “that each science they study continuously speaks of God, the Creator, and makes Him known in its own tongue. I told them to listen to the sciences, not to their teachers...”⁴⁹³ Rather than critique science itself, Nursi critiqued those who idolized it as a substitute for religion, calling them “nature-worshippers” (*tabiatperest*) or “worshippers of natural causality” (*esbabperest*).⁴⁹⁴

Nursi also shared with İzmirli’s circle a suspicion of nationalism: “Modern civilization says that the point of support in social life is force or power, the aim of life is to realize self-interest, conflict is the principle of relationship in life, the bond between communities is racism and negative nationalism, and its fruits are the

Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005).

⁴⁹³ Said Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005), 170.

⁴⁹⁴ Said Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul: 2002), 628.

gratification of carnal desires and the multiplication of human needs.”⁴⁹⁵ This combined with the socially conservative elements of his movement earned him the ire of the Kemalist establishment in the 1920s and drove his movement underground until the early 1950s. His stance against materialism could easily blend into a kind of anti-modernism, as when he wrote on “the Qur’ān’s miraculousness and indisputable superiority of modern civilization.”⁴⁹⁶

Nursi clearly saw a stronger division between modernity and Islam than the Istanbul-based modernists (such as İzmirli, Yaltkaya, and Yörükan) and was at best ambivalent about modern social developments. His study circles in eastern Anatolia, for instance, were gender segregated and only included “four or five” institutions for women out of about 200 total in operation.⁴⁹⁷ Nursi’s theology, therefore, combined elements of İzmirli’s Islamic modernist critique of scientific materialism with a more conservative (and at times even anti-modern) sensibility that made his project popular among conservative devotional movements that would later be known as the *cemaats*. This combination accounts for Nursi’s continuing popularity among Muslims in Turkey today: his theology emphasizes support for modern scientific developments while legitimizing the experiences of suppression millions of devout, socially conservative Muslim believers felt in the first few decades of the Kemalist Republic.⁴⁹⁸ Nursi’s

⁴⁹⁵ Nursi, “Words,” 426.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Vahide, “Renewal,” 70.

⁴⁹⁸ In this sense, Nursi was similar to other Islamic revivalists in the same time period such as Mawlana Mawdudi, though Nursi shied away from wielding any kind of political power or discussing any notion of the Islamic state. Importantly, he demonstrated loyalty to the republican democratic order so long as it did not violate the rights of believers or prevent the expression of religious sentiments in politics, a stance that would become typical of most Islamic conservative thinkers in Turkey throughout the twentieth century.

conservative elements, however, clash with the ethos of the Neo-Māturīdīs who, as will be discussed in detail later, heavily emphasize religious reform and social progress.

Rather than seek the overthrow of the democratic state (which he openly endorsed), Nursi instead focused his efforts on the revival of Islamic education and religious life in the secular Turkish Republic. In the 1950s, Nursi was finally given legal permission to bring his previously underground study circles into the open by founding an extensive network of *dershanes*, or study centers throughout Turkey.⁴⁹⁹ Not unlike other Turkish Muslim thinkers who were active in the late Ottoman Empire, Nursi located the essence of Islam in Islamic belief and spiritual practice, rather than identifying it with a specific political formation. Throughout the 1950s, Nursi continued to focus on the revival of Islamic belief by cooperating with other prominent world religious leaders (such as the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople and the Pope) in combatting the shared threat of communist atheism.⁵⁰⁰ In sum, Nursi's theology occupies a middle ground between religious modernism and religious conservatism; the same is true of the most famous of his intellectual disciples, Fethullah Gülen (1941-), whose widely influential movement carries on Nursi's attempt to shore up the presence of Islam in the Turkish public sphere and advance a socially conservative agenda within the framework of secular democracy.⁵⁰¹

This same period also saw the formation of devotional associations that sought the revival of conservative religious practices, including the practice of Sufism. The prominent Nakşibendi sheikh, Mehmet Zahid Kotku, led this widely influential (though

⁴⁹⁹ Vahide, "Renewal," 68.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁵⁰¹ On Fethullah Gülen's conservative brand of Islamic civic engagement and democratic reform, see the references in note 31 of the Introduction to this dissertation.

often underground) Sufi movement in Turkey throughout the 1950s and until his death in 1980.⁵⁰² Kotku also exercised a great amount of influence in Turkish politics in the 1970s and 1980s, especially by his contact with Necmettin Erbakan, the most influential Turkish Islamic politician of the 1970s to the mid-1990s and prime minister from 1996-1997.⁵⁰³ Kotku's spiritual circle exemplifies the mid-century phenomenon of the rise of *cemaats*, or "associations" founded to promote the practice of socially conservative forms of Islamic spiritual practice.⁵⁰⁴ These associations would become the target of intense criticism by Turkish theological modernists, including many Turkish scholars of Māturīdī (as will be discussed in the final chapter).

Beginning in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s, Turkey witnessed the rise of a distinct group of Islamic intellectuals, who openly challenged the basic tenets of Kemalist secular democracy and argued for the re-establishment of the state in accordance with an Islamist ideology. This group of intellectuals (represented most prominently by Ali Bulaç, a prominent intellectual and columnist for the widely read conservative-leaning newspaper *Zaman* which also has connections to Gülen circles) opposed the very notion of modernism, arguing that modernism represented the Western imperialist imposition of an inauthentic cultural identity on Muslim peoples.⁵⁰⁵ A

⁵⁰² Şerif Mardin, "The Nakşibendi Order in Turkish History," in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics, and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 133-134.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁰⁴ Ahmet Yıldız, "Transformation of Turkish-Islamic Thought since the 1950s," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu Rabi' (London, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 43; and Ocak, *Değişen*, 136. Important studies of these devotional groups include: Catherine Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses* and Brian Silverstein, *Islam and Modernity*.

⁵⁰⁵ Karasipahi, *Islamist*, 7-12; Meeker, "Muslim Intellectuals," 189-191; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Değişen," 129-130; "Günümüz Türkiye'sinde İslami Düşüncenin Bir Tahlil Denemesi ve Tarihi Perspektifi," [An Attempt at an Analysis and Historical Perspective on Islamic Thought in Contemporary Turkey] in

statement of Ali Bulaç in his work *Religion and Modernism* sums up the attitude of this group of intellectuals toward the West and modernity (and implicitly toward Islamic modernism): “Religion and modernism are fundamentally two [different] phenomena whose harmonization is impossible. This opposition, which rests on two separate views of the world and of the cosmos, shows itself in every issue which is encountered in the conception of the human being, of life, and in the ordering of worldly and social relations.”⁵⁰⁶

This extreme anti-modernism, itself somewhat foreign to the basic modernist themes of mainstream Islamic theology in Turkey, has since declined precipitously in influence due to the continual rejection of extreme Islamism by the Turkish voting public. The decline of the anti-modernist interlude of the 1960s to the 1980s has opened up space in Turkish Islamic intellectual discourse that is being rapidly filled by theological projects much more sympathetic to, or openly in support of, the key modernist tenets that have formed the basis of Turkish Islamic academia and the Turkish clerical establishment since the 1930s. The end of the call for a Turkish Islamic state has been replaced by discussions of the nature of Turkish Islam itself.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the re-emergence of discussions of the place of Islam in the history of the Turkish nation, and the possibilities for its “re-reconciliation” with the secular republic. Partly as an attempt to coopt the power of Islamist discourses, the leaders of the 1980 military coup adopted the right-wing nationalist ideology of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” (*Türk-İslam Sentezi*), which emphasized the importance of

Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam: Yaklaşım, Yöntem, ve Yorum Denemeleri (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 101-102.

⁵⁰⁶ Ali Bulaç, *Din ve Modernizm* [Religion and Modernism] (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1995), 304.

Islam and Turkic-Islamic dynasties in Turkish national history, as their official vision of the ideology of the Turkish state.⁵⁰⁷ This inclusion of Islam in the Turkish national story was a continuation of the ideas of the earlier reformists mentioned above. However, by this time these ideas had been adopted by conservative nationalists rather than liberal reformers.⁵⁰⁸ Advocacy for the establishment of an Islamic state has weakened considerably since the late 1980s and the “postmodern coup” of 1997, which unseated the government of the Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.⁵⁰⁹ As Ahmet Yıldız points out, Islamic thought in Turkey since the late 1990s has focused on the attempt to “formulate Islam more in moral and social terms rather than giving primacy to the political, and refrained from open confrontation with the still militant secular state.”⁵¹⁰ In other words, Islamic intellectuals in Turkey today are again concerned with the questions that occupied the first nationalist Turkish Islamic intellectuals. Given the widely accepted premise of a democratic state, what is the place of Islam in Turkish culture and history? And if democracy is to be a key principle of Turkish politics, what is the relationship between Islam and secularism?

It is in this particular intellectual climate that academic theology has begun to thrive in Turkey. As noted above, in the early nineties there existed less than ten faculties of theology in Turkey: there are now well over five dozen, with new ones

⁵⁰⁷ Cetinsaya, “Synthesis,” 374; Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine* [From the Turkish History Thesis to the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 79-89; Umit Kurt, “The Doctrine of ‘Turkish-Islamic Synthesis’ as Official Ideology of the September 12 [Regime] and the ‘Intellectuals’ Hearth’- Aydınlar Ocağı as the Ideological Apparatus of the State,” *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 3:2 (2010): 113.

⁵⁰⁸ Cetinsaya, “Synthesis,” 351.

⁵⁰⁹ On the decline of the notion the Islamic state in Turkey, see Ocak, “Günümüz,” 103; Yıldız, “Transformation,” 41.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

being opened on a nearly annual basis since the mid-2000s. Approximately 6,500 students are now enrolled in a divinity faculty, an incredible increase in numbers considering that fact that only about 500 students were enrolled in the 2006-2007 academic year.⁵¹¹ Among the many available areas of study and types of theological projects, the study of Māturīdī has come to be associated with the continuation of the modernist theological tradition first consolidated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In other words, reading Māturīdī has become for many Turkish Islamic theologians the most effective way to answer the questions posed above about Islam in contemporary Turkish society. For these thinkers, like other members of the tradition of Turkish Islamic modernism, democracy and secularism are assumed to be basic tenets of modernization; the task for the present time becomes how to demonstrate that religious modernization is part of religious orthodoxy and how the adoption of socially modern institutions can be grounded in classical Islamic traditions.⁵¹²

Mehmet Zeki İşcan (currently a professor in the Faculty of Divinity of Atatürk University in Erzurum) has commented on this recent movement in Turkish Islamic thought, and has isolated a number of key issues that these thinkers focus on when discussing Māturīdī.⁵¹³ Two of these issues are particularly prominent in their

⁵¹¹ Muhammet Hanefi Suluoğlu, “İlahiyat Fakültelerindeki Güzel Gelişmeler,” [Positive Developments in the Divinity Faculties] *E-İlahiyat Dergisi* 1 (2011): 14.

⁵¹² This school of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism follows the tradition of Islamic modernism perpetuated by the divinity faculty at Ankara University and other reformist circles. See Recep Şentürk, “Islamic Reformist Discourses and Intellectuals in Turkey: Permanent Religion with Dynamic Law,” in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 227-246.

⁵¹³ See Mehmet Zeki İşcan, “Bir Türk Bilgini İmam Māturīdī’nin İslam Düşüncesine Katkıları,” [The Contributions of a Turkish Scholar, Maturidi, to Islamic Thought] in *Uluslararası Türk Dünyasının İslamiyete Katkıları Sempozyumu, 31 Mayıs-1 Haziran 2007* (Isparta: Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi

discussions, and will serve to encapsulate the distinctiveness of the theological approach of this strain of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism: these are the emphasis on Māturīdī's theological rationalism and the distinction drawn between religion (*dīn*) and religious practice, or religious law in an Islamic context (*Sharī'a*; in Turkish, *şeriat*). Before discussing these issues, it is necessary to briefly discuss a rather interesting assertion that is merely assumed by all of these thinkers: the assertion that Māturīdī was, in some sense, "Turkish."⁵¹⁴ As noted above, this is often meant in a vaguely "cultural" sense, i.e., without implying that Māturīdī was in some way ethnically related to current citizens of the Republic of Turkey. However, some contemporary thinkers do seem to make this assertion. Sönmez Kutlu, for instance, argues that Māturīdī was very likely of Turkish lineage and Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçı propose that Māturīdī's native language may have been Turkish based on the odd nature of his Arabic syntax.⁵¹⁵

This presumed connection with the Turkish nation seems to have been the basis for the revival of strong academic interest in Māturīdī in Turkey in the 1970s following the publication of Fethullah Kholeif's groundbreaking edition of the only surviving copy of Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Articles from this period assert the need for

İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2007), 462-466; "İslam Düşüncesinin Entelektüel Temellerinin Yeniden Yorumlanmasında Māturīdī'nin Katkısı," [Maturidi's Contribution to the Reinterpretation of the Intellectual Foundations of Islamic Thought] *EKEV Akademik Dergisi* 12:34 (Winter 2009): 1-22.

⁵¹⁴ Nearly all works devoted to the study of Māturīdī in Turkish matter-of-factly describe him as Turkish in some sense. See for instance, Mehmed Aydın, "Türk Kelamcılarında İmam Maturidi," [Maturīdī among the Turkish Theologians] *İslam Medeniyeti* (August 1973): 28; Ahmet Vehibi Ecer, *Büyük Türk Alimi Maturidi* [The Great Turkish Scholar Maturīdī] (İstanbul: Yesevi Yayıncılık, 2007), 31-34; Musa Kocar, "Maturidi'de Akılcılık ve Uygulama Alanları," [Rationalism and its Areas of Application in Maturīdī] *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 17:2 (2006): 28; and many others.

⁵¹⁵ Kutlu, "Bilinmeyen," 6; Topaloğlu and Aruçı translation, 11.

Turkish intellectuals to rediscover Māturīdī as part of the Turkish-Islamic heritage.⁵¹⁶ Māturīdī is now widely assumed to be the Turkish religious thinker par excellence, who (along with Abū Ḥanīfa and others) helped to found a uniquely Turkish tradition of Islamic thought. Ahmet Vehbi Ecer (a retired professor in the faculty of divinity at Erciyes University in Kayseri) points to this commonly held notion in the introduction to one of his many works on Māturīdī: “[...] Whenever I’ve said: ‘I’ve learned that we are Ḥanafī in law, but who is our imam in belief?’ ‘Imam Māturīdī’ is immediately given in answer to my question.”⁵¹⁷ Theologians such as Hanifi Özcan (currently a professor in the Faculty of Divinity of Dokuz Eylül University in İzmir) have argued extensively for the existence of this uniquely “Turkish” heritage of Islamic theology, and have placed Māturīdī at the center of this heritage.⁵¹⁸

Hanifi Özcan’s article *Türk Din Anlayışı: Maturidilik* (The Turkish Understanding of Religion: Māturīdism) is one of the clearest expressions of this key assertion in Turkish Neo-Māturīdism. Özcan argues that Māturīdism experienced its historical development inside Turkish culture, and therefore exhibits certain key traits of the uniquely Turkish approach to religious thought.⁵¹⁹ It is important to note here that the notion of “Turkish culture” implied in the argument that Māturīdism is a reflection

⁵¹⁶ Ahmet Vehbi Ecer, “Ebu Mansur el-Matüridi,” [Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī] *İslam Medeniyeti* (March 1973): 10; M. Aydın, 28.

⁵¹⁷ Ecer, “Büyük,” 7.

⁵¹⁸ See especially Hanifi Özcan, “Türk Din Anlayışı: Maturidilik,” [The Turkish Understanding of Religion: Māturīdism] in *İmam Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik: Tarihi Arka Planı, Hayatı, Eserleri, Fikirleri ve Māturīdilik Mezhebi* [Māturīdī and Māturīdism: Historical Background, Life, Works, Ideas, and the Māturīdī School] ed. Sönmez Kutlu (Ankara: Kitabiyat, 2003), 285-293; “Türk Düşünce Hayatında Maturidilik,” [Māturīdism in Turkish Intellectual Life] *Türkiye Günlüğü* 101 (2010): 143. On this point see also Ahmet Vehbi Ecer, “Matüridi’nin Türk Kültüründeki Yeri,” [Māturīdī’s Place in Turkish Culture] *Hikmet Yurdu* 2, no. 4 (August-December, 2009): 95.

⁵¹⁹ Özcan, “Türk Din Anlayışı,” 285.

of the Turkish understanding of religion utilizes Ziya Gökalp's understanding of national culture as an all-encompassing feature of social life that conditions all intellectual and cultural activity within that nation.

Ecer summarizes this view of culture that was taken over by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs. Ecer calls culture “a totality” (*bir bütün*) of values and practices that defines that unique character of one social group relative to others.⁵²⁰ Māturīdism and Ḥanafism are for the Neo-Māturīdīs the key religious components of Turkish culture, and therefore express what is unique in Turkish religious thought. Özcan locates the beginnings of Turkish religious thought in Abū Ḥanīfa specifically. According to Özcan, Abū Ḥanīfa was notable for his use of individual reason (*ra'y*) in his approach to solving Islamic legal problems because he realized the need for reasonable flexibility when communicating Islam to a non-Arab convert audience.⁵²¹ Özcan further argues that Abū Ḥanīfa's flexible attitude when dealing with non-Arab converts to Islam (such as his famous decision that praying in Persian is allowed) demonstrates a kind of pragmatic rationalism that helped to preserve Turkish cultural and national integrity throughout the Islamization process.⁵²²

Abū Ḥanīfa, then, bequeathed to Turkish religious thought the means to keep its cultural integrity and pragmatically respond to religious dilemmas, a kind of theological pragmatism that Özcan sums up in this way: “Just as Māturīdī prefers a moderate realism in place of a rigid realism or rigid idealism, Māturīdī prefers a syncretistic and synthetic empiricism and rationalism in place of a strict empiricism or strict

⁵²⁰ Ecer, “Yer,” 92.

⁵²¹ Özcan, “Türk Din Anlayışı,” 286.

⁵²² Ibid.

rationalism.”⁵²³ Özcan also characterizes Māturīdī’s theology as realist balance between theory and practice.⁵²⁴ In other words, Turkish Neo-Māturīdism from the very beginning identifies what is most unique about Māturīdī and what separates him from Ash‘arī: a theological realism based most fundamentally on a notion of empiricism. The entire Neo-Māturīdī project is built on this description of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology. Interestingly, these theologians usually use the Turkish term “rationalism” (*akılcılık*) to signify Māturīdī theological realism. The reasons for the use of this term will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, as this choice of terminology is imbued with deep political significance that merits its own discussion.

Describing Māturīdī’s unique system of thought, therefore, becomes for this school of thought a description of the uniquely “Turkish” approach to understanding Islam. The two key theological components to this approach are rationalism and a distinction between the eternal and the contingent components of religion. Māturīdī’s theological rationalism is probably the most commonly discussed aspect of his thought in this group. According to this interpretation, the use of human reason (*akıl*) in Māturīdī takes on a particular importance.⁵²⁵ In this understanding of Māturīdī, “reason”

⁵²³ Ibid., 289.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ See on this point Hülya Alper, “Matüridi’nin Akıl ve Vahiy Algısı,” [Māturīdī’s Understanding of Reason and Revelation] in Şaban Ali Düzgün, ed., *Matüridi’nin Düşünce Dünyası* [Māturīdī’s Thought World] (Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2011), 177-181; Ramazan Altıntaş, “Matüridi Kelam Sisteminde Akıl Nakıl İlişkisi,” [The Relationship between Reason and Revelation in Māturīdī’s Theological System] *Marifē* 5:3 (Winter 2005): 234; Muhiddin Bağçeci, “Māturīdī’nin Kelam Metodu,” [Māturīdī’s Theological Method] in *Ebu Mansur Semerkandi Māturīdī (862-944) Sempozyumu*, Mart 1986 [Abū Manşūr Samarqandī Māturīdī (862-944) Symposium, March 1986] (Kayseri: Ahmet Hulusi Köken, 1990), 25; Ali Bardakoğlu, “Hüsün ve Kubh Konusunda Aklın Rölü ve İmam Māturīdī,” [Māturīdī and the Role of Reason in the Question of Good and Evil] in *Ebu Mansur Semerkandi Māturīdī (862-944)*

denotes a “functional” (*işlevsel*) or broadly realist faculty that is the most important tool in the human understanding of religion, allowing human beings to approach religion flexibly and with the ability to re-interpret it in accordance with changing social circumstances.⁵²⁶ Hülya Alper (professor in the Divinity Faculty of Marmara University in Istanbul) succinctly expresses this interpretation of the primacy of reason in Māturīdī’s system in her use of the phrase, “the primacy of reason and the necessity of revelation.”⁵²⁷

Alper provides a succinct interpretation of Māturīdī’s understanding of human reason that also rings true for other theologians in this group:

According to [Māturīdī], reason is like sensory knowledge, which does not encounter variation and cannot be rendered ineffectual on account of any particular ambiguity; sensory knowledge forms the basis of the recognition of all hidden and closed-off matters of inquiry. Likewise, the locus of reason, and the particularity that it evinces, is its being the ground of the knowledge of the nature of things.⁵²⁸

In other words, reason based on sensory knowledge, though it is clearly flawed and limited (as it is after all a human instrument) is the basis of all that human beings know about the world.

It is worth noting here that this argument is problematic. This fundamental weakness is found throughout Neo-Māturīdī thought and is clearly a heritage of the aggressive interpretation of modernism that lay at the heart of the Kemalist project. As

Sempozyumu, Mart 1986 (Kayseri: Ahmet Hulusi Köken, 1990), 42; Ecer, “Büyük,” 28; Kocar, 30; Sönmez Kutlu, “Akılcılığı,” 7.

⁵²⁶ Kutlu, “Akılcılığı,” 24; Altıntaş, 235; See also in Özcan, “Bilgi Problemi,” 68, where he describes Māturīdī’s epistemology as a kind of “moderate realism.”

⁵²⁷ Alper, “Māturīdī,” 177.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, the notion of “rationalism” (*akılcılık*) is used throughout these works to describe Māturīdī’s theological approach. The term reason (*akıl*) is meant to denote the flexible and pragmatic exercise of independent human thought to creatively react to changing social circumstances, enabling changes or reforms in religious practice when necessary. However, the consistent valorization of human reason in this context produces a utopian and even fundamentalist interpretation of reason and of modernity itself. The solution may be the wider adoption of Özcan’s more precise description of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology as a kind of moderate realism (*ılımlı bir realizm*). In the sense of theological epistemology, this term better describes what is at stake in the Neo-Māturīdī term *akılcılık*. The political content of this term will form the subject of the next chapter of this dissertation.

According to Alper, reason is also the primary instrument in the establishment of religious truth, even if some aspects of these truths remain beyond the limits of human reason in their absolute sense. She describes the relationship between reason and revelation (*vahiy*) in Māturīdī this way:

In this context, in Māturīdī’s system of thought it may be said that instead of a linear relationship between reason and revelation, there exists a circular relationship that moves from reason to revelation, and then again from revelation back to reason. In reason’s first establishing [the truth of] revelation, and in revelation’s rendering the use of reason a basic requirement of religion [*vacip*], its own authority is legitimized. From the other side, reason, in being turned toward a useful state while also being saved from being inactive in turning to the understanding of revelation, thus also reconstructs itself by communicating with revelation. Reason, which at first certifies the truth of religion as a whole, when it enters into the domain of the religious, is able to speak authoritatively on the understanding and evaluation of religious laws. Revelation gives new existence to reason, as it were, through the meeting of reason and religion after the

existence of revelation is established with reason.⁵²⁹

Alper's detailed analysis of the relationship between reason and revelation in Māturīdī helps to define the meaning and limits of the concept of Māturīdī rationalism.⁵³⁰ According to Alper, reason is prior in the process of human religious understanding, for reason establishes the truth of religion and revelation in the first place. However, despite this epistemological priority, there exists a balance between reason and revelation, as each acts positively on the other.⁵³¹ Reason establishes the truth of revelation, but once it does so it is enhanced and transformed when the revealed text commands the believer to use her reason to approach religious truth. Alper, like the other theologians discussed here, attempts to preserve the primary function of reason in approaching religious truth without turning human reason into the actual producer of religious truth. This is a delicate theological move that requires faith, as it were, that the free yet disciplined use of human reason does not at the same time compromise the absolute truth of the divine message.

This also means that there cannot be any contradiction between reason and revelation, another point frequently made by these theologians.⁵³² What is important to note in this case is that reason is understood as something "functional" or "useful," i.e., as a tool that can transform our understanding of religion in all its aspects. Reason is the

⁵²⁹ Alper, "Algısı," 179.

⁵³⁰ Her important book, *İmam Matürîdî'de Akıl-Vahîy İlişkisi* [The Relationship between Reason and Revelation in Māturīdī] (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2010) is by far the most thorough treatment of this subject in any language.

⁵³¹ The point of a balance between reason and revelation in Māturīdī is also frequently cited in this context: see for instance Altıntaş, 244 and Bardakoğlu, 46.

⁵³² See for instance: Bağçeci, "Kelam Metodu," 31; Altıntaş, "Kelam," 242.

tool that verifies the truth or falsehood of any intellectual proposition.⁵³³ This evaluation of reason releases the interpretation of religion into a broadly “humanist” space, turning religion into a subject that is always creatively engaged by human thought. It refuses to view religion as a monolith, but rather manages to enable a critical response to religious tradition that is authorized not by the negation of absolute religious truth, but instead by its affirmation in a space that it is known primarily by human reason alone. By marking out essential religious truth as something that is known and apprehended by the use of reason, this frees a space for the interrogation of any religious proposition that cannot be established to exist within these boundaries. This interpretation does, of course, rest on a monolithic and uninterrogated notion of universal reason; however, it achieves a sound theological framework for discussing how human beings may legitimately critique religious tradition without betraying religion as a whole.

Alper expands on this point by offering a succinct yet powerful way of expressing the role of tradition in religious understanding. In Alper's view, the basic conflict between truth and error or good and evil throughout history can be reduced to the conflict between two traditions: ancestral tradition (*Atalar geleneği*) and the tradition of *tawhīd* (*Tevhid geleneği*), or belief in the unity of God (i.e., ultimate Truth). She points out that this dichotomy is evident in the Qur’ān, which famously exhorts believers to follow the truth of God, not the religious tradition of their polytheistic ancestors.⁵³⁴ Alper argues that the crucial question to ask with respect to tradition is not *whether* something is traditional (and therefore judged as negative or positive on that

⁵³³ Alper, “Māturīdī,” 178.

⁵³⁴ Hülya Alper, “Atalar Geleneğine Karşı Tevhid Geleneği,” [The Tradition of *Tawhīd* against Ancestral Tradition] *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* (Dec. 2010), 9-11.

account), but *which* tradition it emanates from: the tradition of convention or the tradition of God. The tradition of God has to do with reasoned evaluation, and Alper reproduces Māturīdī's famous distinction between arguments from authority (*taqlīd* in Arabic, *taklit* in Turkish) and arguments from reason. By being connected to the realm of the eternal, the use of reason in a real-world critique turns reason into a liberatory device in the interpretation of Islam:

To accept tradition that has constantly existed in an Islamic cultural environment (and not tradition outside of Islam) simply because 'it is pure tradition,' is actually contrary to the spirit of this religion. To say this is certainly not to discount existing Muslim traditions, because religions will of course exist within a tradition. What is suggested here, however, is that while reaching the awareness that this tradition is true, it be followed consciously and conscientiously by means of reason (*akıl*), not imitation (*taklit*). Perhaps such an approach can bring salvation to an individual: 'Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we should not [now be] among the Companions of the Blazing Fire!' [Qur'ān, Sūrat al-Mulk: 10; Ali translation].⁵³⁵

Here Alper uses a discussion of tradition to describe reason's utility in a real-world critique: reason is the instrument that helps one discern the eternal from the contingent, the true from the false, the divine from the human.

Alper and another modern Turkish theologian, Ramazan Altıntaş (a professor in the Faculty of Divinity of Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya), point out that reason properly addresses the basic truths of religion (such as the need for worship in general), but revelation outlines the specifics of these truths that cannot be known by reason alone, such as how worship is to be conducted.⁵³⁶ This alludes to the key function of reason in this group's interpretation of Māturīdī's doctrine of reason: for

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 172; Altıntaş, "Kelam," 243.

them, Māturīdī holds that reason is able to apprehend the most essential truth of religion, i.e., the truth of the oneness of God. In other words, the basic truths of religion are, in Özcan's phrase, "able to be known by pure reason alone" without the aid of revelation.⁵³⁷ This clearly represents an expansion of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī principle that the existence and oneness of God can (and therefore must) be known independently through the use of reason, even in the absence of revelation. This isolation of the essential and therefore unchanging truths of religion in the realm of reason means that there must exist another realm of religion that is established by irrational means, and is therefore liable to change over time: this realm is *Sharī'a*, or religious practice.

This element of the contemporary Turkish-Māturīdī argument is perhaps the most striking element in this stream of thought. It will be noticed that, as discussed above, it has a precedent in the Islamic reformism of Ziya Gökalp and other representatives of the Young Ottoman tradition of Islamic thought. In analyzing this highly interesting theological point, it is first necessary to note two traditions that seem to converge here: Durkheimian sociology of religion and certain key theological doctrines of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theology. The notion that religion is closely related to social institutions and therefore must change along with them, is, as we have seen, a crucial component of Turkish theological modernism from the late Ottoman/early Republican period that comes into being under the influence of a sociological understanding of religion.

Another point that these Turkish Islamic modernists develop with particular sophistication is the connection of this understanding of religion with the Ḥanafī-

⁵³⁷ Hanifi Özcan, *Çoğulculuk*, 47. See also Alper, "Māturīdī," 172; and Kutlu, "Akılcılığı," 20-21.

Māturīdī theological tradition. They ground their argument for religious reform in a sophisticated yet elegantly simple interpretation of traditional Islamic religious texts, in particular the texts of what they see as the core of the Turkish legacy of Islamic thought. The ninth-century text *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*,⁵³⁸ attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, includes a discussion of the difference between *dīn* (religion) and *Sharī‘a* (law) and argues that:

The messengers of God, peace and blessings upon them all, did not adhere to different religions (*adyān*). Each messenger from among them did not command his people to abandon the religion (*dīn*) that came before him because their religion is one. [However,] each messenger called [his people] to his own law (*Sharī‘a*) and negated the law of the messenger that came before him, because the laws [of each messenger] are many and different.⁵³⁹

The voice of Abū Ḥanīfa deploys this distinction to support the principle that works are separate from faith, and that a believer in the religion of Islam remains a believer even if one does not adequately practice the requirements of Islamic spiritual life. This distinction implies that the essential characteristics of religion are separate from religious practices. Māturīdī also utilizes this distinction in his works, where he for instance argues that “matters of religion (*diyānāt*) are dogmas (*‘itiqādāt*), not acquired actions.”⁵⁴⁰ Māturīdī also emphasizes that religion (*dīn*) is properly located in the heart (*qalb*) and cannot be subject to any outside coercion or influence.⁵⁴¹

Some contemporary Turkish theologians, especially Mehmet Zeki İşcan, Sönmez Kutlu (a professor in the divinity faculty at Ankara University), and Hanifi Özcan build

⁵³⁸ On this text see note 81, Chapter Two of the present work.

⁵³⁹ Abū Ḥanīfa, *Kitāb*, 14.

⁵⁴⁰ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 467.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 471-477.

on these distinctions and take them one step further: if religion is primarily internal and is known by human reason, then exterior religious actions must be in some way contingent on external realities, for they do not have the same epistemological status that internal religious truth does. This is similar to the point made by Māturidī and the texts attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, but this contemporary line of thinking takes this distinction one step further. If religion is that which is known by reason and therefore not subject to change, then the Shari‘a is context-dependent and therefore subject to change. This means that the Shari‘a, the Islamic sacred law, is subject to change based on the demands of new social conditions and the application of human reason.⁵⁴² When the original social conditions that occasion a religious ruling change, this makes the rule itself liable to change. In Özcan’s words:

Sharī‘as have two sides, the human (*beşeri*) and the divine (*ilahi*). The human side possesses an “aggregational” and historic character; it is brought into being by the contributions of scholars and its applications in various time periods. For this reason it is possible for it to be changed in every time period, which means that it is open to change according to newly arisen conditions. With respect to the structure of revelation (*vahiy*) and Prophetic tradition (*sünnet*), which constitute the divine side of religious laws, these cannot change. However, their unchanging structures are not an obstacle to change in their understanding and interpretation, connected as they are to the human aspect [of *Sharī‘a*], which changes according actual conditions. This is because understanding and interpreting revelation and Prophetic tradition are the task of reason, provided that it does not fall contrary to their essence. In this case, the entirety of *Sharī‘a*, with respect to its interpretation, is open to change in every time period, and is never an obstacle to change in practice.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² Kutlu, “Akılcılığı,” 23-24; Özcan, “Māturidī,” 33; 71-72.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 33-34.

Özcan here combines the rationalism discussed above with a sociological consideration of the possibility of religious change, all filtered through an interpretation of Māturīdī theology. Just like Alper, he is most concerned with the preservation of the concept of absolute religious truth alongside the concept of free use of human reason in understanding religious truth. The distinction between religion and *Sharī‘a* is meant to isolate the concept of eternal truth both from the vicissitudes of history and the whims of individual interpreters. And yet, at the same time, how we understand this eternal truth must be an individually localized, yet eternally applicable, instrument of human reason.

Kutlu and Özcan also map this distinction between religion and *Sharī‘a* onto a distinction between the individual and society. Religion is related to the individual (*bireysel*) while *Sharī‘a* is related to the social (*toplumsal*), or as Kutlu puts it, “the dimension of religion that concerns social relationships.”⁵⁴⁴ Religion represents the most interior spiritual experience of a human being, a true gift from God, which produces different expressions according to different social circumstances.⁵⁴⁵ Its essence, the truth of the oneness of God (*tevhid*), is shielded from historical change; yet the ways in which the essence manifests itself in history is subject to change. As Özcan puts it, “it is an indispensable feature of religion that a person constantly changes his or her attitude towards it, and this is a fact of history.”⁵⁴⁶ Change and stability, the social and the individual, religious practice and religious truth, are all held to coexist in a way that

⁵⁴⁴ Kutlu, “Akılcılığı,” 22.

⁵⁴⁵ Hanifi Özcan, “Modern,” 135-137.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

does not infringe on the self-contained validity of either. This is fundamentally an act of theological realism, highly reminiscent of Māturīdī's own realistic epistemology.

This chapter has discussed the ways in which Islamic theology has been utilized in the Turkish national project. This discussion has attempted to point out some important instances where secular-nationalism and Islamic tradition have interacted in modern Turkish history. The development of modern Turkish theology reveals that, for at least one very influential group of Turkish Islamic thinkers, secularism and Islamic theology did not experience a mutually antagonistic development in modern Turkey, as is often assumed. Instead, for a group of scholars steeped in the classical Islamic educational tradition, secular-nationalism represented a possible form for the authentic expression of Islamic truth. Building on the late Ottoman Turkish nationalist intellectual legacy of Ziya Gökalp and others, and motivated by the reform document issued in 1928, a circle of Turkish theological modernists at the *Darülfünun* continued their project with the establishment of the first faculty of theology at the University of Ankara in 1949. Scholars such as Yusuf Ziya Yörükan and Şerefettin Yaltkaya began to envision a uniquely Turkish tradition of Islamic thought, and Māturīdī came to be considered the premier representative of this rationalist and liberal tradition of Islamic theology. The activity of scholars of the faculty of divinity at Ankara University kept this tradition of Turkish Islamic reformism alive throughout the intense shifts in Islamic theological discourses throughout the middle of the twentieth century.

With the decline of interest in reactionary political Islamism, and the meteoric rise in influence of the ever-expanding system of divinity faculties at Turkish universities, a new generation of Turkish theologians in the late 1990s and 2000s picked

up where Yörükan and Yaltkaya left off, developing an elaborate and sophisticated interpretation of Māturīdī's theology that attempts to replant the roots of Turkish social modernity in Islamic theological soil. This transfer of bases of authority, following as it does in the wake of urgent contemporary questions about Islam's role in the history of the Turkish nation, epitomizes a new era of intellectual conversation in contemporary Turkey, in which Islam's cultural and social value to Turkish society are being openly discussed. These discussions, of which the school of Māturīdī Turkish Islamic modernism is an active part, reveal the ways in which Islamic tradition and Islamic modernity are predicated upon each other. To return to Gadamer, it demonstrates that the viability of the modern depends on a compelling interpretation of the traditional. Māturīdī's role in contemporary Turkish theology shows that the future of modernity in Turkey is being negotiated through different recourses to the past, and that what it means to be modern depends on what it means to be a part of tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL AND THE USES OF MĀTURĪDĪ
“RATIONALISM” (*AKILCILIK*) IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH THEOLOGY

As discussed in the previous chapter, the contemporary interest in Māturīdī in Turkish theology is rooted in a much larger and older tradition of Turkish Islamic reformist thought that can be traced to the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Its primary theological modes and concepts are rooted in this tradition of reformist Islamic theology, which was given official approval by the Kemalist secular state and consolidated in the network of divinity faculties that replaced the Ottoman *medrese* system. Contemporary Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs utilize the concept of Māturīdī’s theological “rationalism” to demonstrate how a reformist and liberal vision of Islam has been a part of Turkish cultural history in the form of its greatest religious thinker, Māturīdī. In other words, they combine the principles of Turkish Islamic modernism with their interpretation of Māturīdī, and attempt to more fully explore the linkages between the two. This chapter has two parts. It will first discuss the ideological significance of the key concept of “rationalism” in Neo-Māturīdism through a reading of Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political. It will then detail the two main political arguments made by Neo-Māturīdism in Turkey today.

The term “rationalism” (*akılcılık*), as alluded to above, is difficult to parse in purely semantic terms. It does not refer to its customary definition in English, i.e., a philosophical orientation that implies that human knowledge is based on logical

relationships between concepts that need not have any necessary or exact correspondence with things in the world. In fact, for the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs “rationalism” means very nearly the opposite: in this case, it is meant to express a theological and philosophical orientation that is open to the changes experienced in the world, and a willingness to interpret one’s religion with these changes in mind. This means that for these theologians the term “reason” (*akıl*) has been imbued with certain implications that exceed its mere use as a philosophical concept. One of the sources of these implications is of course Māturīdī himself and the proto-modern elements of his theological realism. In the most basic sense, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs focus on the term “reason” because it plays such a large role in Māturīdī’s own thought, and they perceptively identify the epistemological implications of Māturīdī’s theological realism. This represents the link between modern Turkish theology and Māturīdī’s theological realism.

At the same time, the concept of “reason” has been imbued with certain ideological implications specific to the Turkish context. It not only stands for a philosophical orientation, but a socially liberal and theologically reformist political orientation that assumes its own set of natural oppositions. The term “political” will be used in this chapter in the sense that Carl Schmitt outlines, i.e., to express the way in which ideological and social formations act against a perceived other or enemy. Understanding which thinkers and organizations the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs see as their opponents will go a long way toward understanding how they define their theology (the modern deployment of Māturīdī “rationalism”). At the same time, this chapter will explore the principal ways in which Māturīdī is put to political use in the more

conventional sense of the term, i.e., as a way to support certain forms of political and social organization in modern Turkey.

After analyzing the ideological antithesis of Neo-Māturīdī rationalism and discussing the significance of this term, this chapter will detail the two main political arguments made by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs. The first argument is part of a much broader trend in Turkish Islamic thought that defends the legitimacy of democracy in an Islamic context. The Neo-Māturīdī version of this argument uses Māturīdī to show how Islamic theology supports the establishment of secular democracy. Further, this argument involves a critique of traditional Kemalist secularism by suggesting that contemporary Turkish democracy should shift to a model of greater individual religious freedom that is not subject to state supervision, as in the Kemalist version of French secularism. This contention therefore implies a shift toward the Anglo-American version of secularism which prioritizes individual religious freedom over the state's right to supervise religious expression (the nature of this shift toward Anglo-American secularism will be discussed more fully in the conclusion).

In this argument, the Neo-Māturīdīs suggest that the central values of Kemalism, such as individual freedom and secular democracy, are actually better served by the adoption of Anglo-American conceptualizations of individual freedom of religious expression in the public sphere. This argument for the support of Turkish liberal democracy, while at the same time critiquing its Kemalist strictures on individual religious expression, is the most common political argument advanced in the writings of Neo-Māturīdī theologians, and is part of a much larger critique of the state supervision of individual religious expression in Turkey. While retaining the idea that Māturīdī is

part of Turkish national history, this argument does not turn on a strict loyalty to the traditional Kemalist state but instead focuses on the legitimacy of secular democracy in general and the role of Turkish Islamic thought in supporting secular democracy and individual democratic freedoms.

The second Neo-Māturīdī political argument that will be considered is much more nationalist. It contends that Māturīdī's theology actually demonstrates the need to defend the traditional Kemalist order, which is based on the authority of the paternalistic state to regulate individual expression of religious affairs. This argument does not simply argue that Māturīdī thought supports secular democracy, but goes even further to assert that his theology supports traditional Kemalist secularism and the need to defend and strengthen the Turkish state. This argument is also part of a larger tradition in Turkish theology, one that is loyal to the Turkish state in particular (rather than secular democracy in general) on religious grounds. This line of thinking was popularized after the incorporation of certain elements of Sunnī Islamic tradition into the Turkish nationalist narrative after 1980. This highly nationalist reading of Māturīdī, however, is much less common than the first argument for secular democracy in general, and is most clearly expounded by politicians, public intellectuals, and some members of the academic elite. Despite its minority status, it represents a clear outgrowth of the incorporation of Māturīdī into the narrative of cultural history described in the previous chapter and is therefore worthy of some consideration.

Māturīdī and the Political: Defining the Enemies of Neo-Māturīdī Akılcılık

As Carl Schmitt writes in *The Concept of the Political*, “the substance of the political is contained in the context of a concrete antagonism.”⁵⁴⁷ Like other aspects of human existence, such as aesthetics, ethics, or religion, the political has its own distinctive criteria.⁵⁴⁸ It expresses an existential reality that is fundamental to human life, a reality that cannot be simply reduced to other realms of human existence such as the economic, the ethical, the aesthetic, the religious, or the ethnic. In any situation of conflict, “The political entity is by its very nature the decisive entity, regardless of the sources from which it derives its last psychic motives.”⁵⁴⁹ The political is based on the most fundamental motivation of separation in human existence, the distinction “between friend and enemy.”⁵⁵⁰

The political therefore refers to the natural experience of conflict that is a basic element of human existence. Schmitt strongly implies that the friend-enemy distinction is an unavoidable component of human relationships, and therefore he is highly critical of what he views as liberalism’s attempt to efface this reality by striving for a social state that eliminates the possibility of armed conflict. Otherness in human relations, in a negative sense, is inevitable and may even be the key to group solidarity. In this sense “the political enemy” does not have to correspond to moral conflict or even economic competition. Its mere otherness is enough for a threat to be perceived, and for conflict to be possible. The political enemy is therefore “the other, the stranger; and it is

⁵⁴⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 30.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

sufficient for his nature that he is, in an especially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.”⁵⁵¹

Schmitt’s analysis of the political includes a number of dimensions that are particularly germane to a discussion of the modern Turkish cultural debate, most especially the notion of threat. In the situation of conflict (i.e., in a political situation Schmitt’s sense of the term), “Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence.”⁵⁵² Schmitt’s analysis of the political implies that even though the experience of the political is itself an irreducible phenomenon, what causes the political to emerge has to do with a perceived threat to one’s own existence. This accounts for the existential dimension of the political in the first place. In other words, the most urgent reason to define another person or group as a political other is if they are perceived as an existential threat. There is no stronger reason to initiate a situation of conflict (i.e., a political situation) between two parties. The notion of the political therefore helps us to identify what a given group of people perceives to be the greatest threat to its own existence. This analysis also helps to bring the qualities a given group sees as essential to itself into starker relief. From the perspective of intellectual history or even theology, the notion of the political highlights the fundamental conceptual dichotomies that underlie all ideological systems.

Carl Schmitt’s analysis of the political would be useful in the analysis of any ideological system, but it is first helpful to explore the ways in which it is suitable for the modern Turkish context in particular. Kemalism, the ideological backdrop of all

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

cultural debate in contemporary Turkey, operates with a very clear notion of the political in the sense that Schmitt describes. Kemalism depends on an extremely strict friend versus enemy distinction that has major implications for religious thought. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Kemalist program of social reform had as its initial target traditional Ottoman Islamic religious institutions. Its characterization of these institutions (such as dervish lodges, popular religion, *Shari'a*, and Sufism) would have an enormous impact on the possibilities and parameters of religious debate in Turkey for years to come. Some of these Kemalist political concepts (in Schmitt's sense) were adopted into the general vocabulary of the Neo-Maturidis and fused with a particular understanding of traditional Islamic theological conflicts to create the general picture of the political other of the Neo-Maturidis. For these reformist theologians, the other is a closed-minded, "irrational," and traditionalist approach to Islam that is more concerned with submission to authority than with the free exercise of individual reason to meet the demands of modernity. At the same time, for the Neo-Maturidis the use of reason is not simply an accommodation to modernity. On the contrary, the free use of individual reason is in their view commanded by God as part of correct Islamic practice.

A speech delivered by Atatürk in 1925 gives a particularly clear picture of the Kemalist ideological enemy:

The object of the revolution... is to give to the citizens of the Republic a social organization completely modern and progressive in every sense. It is imperative for us to discard every thought that does not fall in line with this true principle. All absurd superstitions must be rooted out of our minds and customs. Only thus can we cause the light of truth to shine upon all the people.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, "An Exhortation to Progress," *The Living Age* 327 (1925): 232.

Kemalism turns on a very strict positivist dichotomy between the modernist and the traditionalist and invests the state with the role of rescuing the people from ignorance and molding them into model citizens of the modern world. As August Comte (a major inspiration for Kemalism) wrote in 1907:

...it becomes every day more evident how hopeless is the task of reconstructing political institutions without the previous remodeling of opinion and of life. To form then a satisfactory synthesis of all human conceptions is the most urgent of our social wants: and it is needed equally for the sake of Order and of Progress. During the gradual accomplishment of this great philosophical work, a new moral power will arise spontaneously throughout the West, which, as its influence increases, will lay down a definite basis for the reorganization of society. It will offer a general system of education for the adoption of all civilized nations, and by this means will supply in every department of public and private life fixed principles of judgment and of conduct.⁵⁵⁴

These two passages perfectly sum up what is at stake in Kemalist ideology. Kemalism originally saw itself as the bearer of enlightened modernity to a population existing in the darkness of its anti-modern and traditionalistic world view. It is important to note here that the dichotomy at issue in Kemalism is not exactly tradition versus modernity, but rather traditionalism versus modernization. This is because Kemalism glorifies pre-Islamic Turkish tradition as the substance of Turkish national character, and seeks to establish social modernity in Turkey through the re-appropriation and revival of these national characteristics.

In order to reach a state of material and social modernity, all social institutions and social thought must be remade in light of the demands of this need: "It is

⁵⁵⁴ August Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J.H. Bridges (London, UK: Routledge, 1908), 2. For a thorough accounting of the ideological history of Kemalism, see M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Historical Roots of Kemalism," in *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*, eds. Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 32-60.

imperative for us to discard every thought that does not fall in line with this true principle. All absurd superstitions must be rooted out of our minds and customs.” These “superstitions” are the ideological lineaments of a (presumably) dead Ottoman society: they are what held Turkey back in the eyes of Kemalism. Contemporary rationalism and social rationalization still demand the rooting out of any elements that oppose the Kemalist order, because the opposition of these elements to Kemalism proves that they are opposed to the Comtean and Kemalist universal good of “Order and Progress.” In the view of Kemalism, such traditionalist elements represent an existential threat to its way of life, and thus constitute the epitome of the Kemalist political enemy.

The term used in Kemalist discourse used to refer to these political enemies is *irtica*, or “reactionism,” meaning a reaction by backward elements against Kemalist progress, in particular the representatives of conservative Islam.⁵⁵⁵ This term became a key component of the Kemalist ideological lexicon after the “Menemen Incident” in 1930, when a young teacher was beheaded by the leader of an Islamic insurrection against the Kemalist regime.⁵⁵⁶ Mustafa Fehmi Kubilay, who died at the age of 24, became a martyr for the Kemalist cause (then only seven years into its political administration) and the leaders of the republic in Ankara made elaborate arrangements to memorialize his sacrifice. Every year his sacrifice is commemorated in the small city of Menemen north of Izmir on Turkey’s Aegean coast, attracting thousands of

⁵⁵⁵ The most extensive discussion of this concept is Umut Azak’s excellent study *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion, and the Nation State* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

participants showing their support for the Kemalist state.⁵⁵⁷ The uprising at Menemen came to symbolize the notion that the Kemalist state faces an ever present danger from conservative, reactionary Islamic forces who would seek to arrest Turkey's progress toward modernity. These forces are the extreme political enemy of Kemalism, its clearest political other.

The notion of a conservative, irrational, and religiously authoritarian Islam epitomized in the concept of reactionsim would constitute the enemy of Islamic reformist thought in Turkey, and hence to a great extent in Turkish Neo-Māturīdism as well. The term *irtica*, loaded as it is with the concrete politics of the 1920s and 1930s, is never actually used by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, however. Instead, they refer to a host of theological enemies that taken together embody essentially the same ideological content as this term: as a concept that signifies both conservative and authoritarian interpretations of Islam. Their political other shares the same characteristics as the Kemalist notion of *irtica*. However, the question of whether or not their critique of conservative Islam necessitates loyalty to the Kemalist state depends on the theologian in question, a distinction we shall take up later in this chapter.

The Neo-Māturīdī notion of conservative authoritarian Islam is signified by a large variety of terms, all of which point in various ways to a similar ideology. These terms, which will be discussed in turn, include: *Selefiyye*, the Islamic practices of Iran and Saudi Arabia (especially Wahhabism; the two countries are often conflated in Turkish intellectual discourse because they each feature some kind of Islamic state), the Ash'ariyya, *Tarikatçılık* (conservative Sufism), and traditionalism broadly defined.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 22.

These terms all converge in the critique of *cemaats*, or religious associations usually associated with conservative Sufi groups. Very few of the contemporary Māturīdīs use all of these terms at once, but they all use at least one or more of them or employ similar notions to refer to a shared ideological and theological enemy: conservative Islam.

Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, foundational as he is to contemporary Turkish Neo-Māturīdism in general, sets the terms for the modern Turkish Neo-Māturīdī reinterpretation of Kemalist *irtica*. He wrote in 1957 that, Islam “pursues the goal of establishing good and ordered morals among people, cleansing society from superstitions, bringing individuals to a state of maturity, nourishing society in well-being and progress, and uniting people around belief in the oneness of Allah and belief in the one God.”⁵⁵⁸ As in his theology more generally, Yörükan stands as a kind of intermediary between Kemalism and Islamic reformist thought. He adopts the notion of national moral progress from Kemalist discourse.⁵⁵⁹ His use of the term “superstition” was also a standard concept in the Kemalist definition of *irtica*, but the notion of “superstition” does not play much of a role in contemporary Neo-Māturīdī thought.⁵⁶⁰

Yörükan does, however, provide the first outlines of the conservative Islamic enemy identified by contemporary Māturīdism in terms that are still used by these

⁵⁵⁸ Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, *Müslümanlık* [Islam] (Ankara: Doğu Matbaacılık, 1993), 19.

⁵⁵⁹ On his notion of national moral progressivism, see “Ahlakımızın Kökleri I,” [The Roots of Our Morals I] *Kutlu Bilgi* 1 (1944): 7.

⁵⁶⁰ The concern to eradicate superstition did, however, become a key issue for the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), the government ministry charged by the Turkish state with the task of regulating the practice of Sunni Islam and espousing an official interpretation of Islam amenable to Turkish secularism. On this institution, which has deep institutional and ideological connections with both the divinity faculties and the key figures of Turkish Islamic reformism, see İstar B. Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” *The Muslim World* 98 (April-July 2008): 216-227 and Kara, *Cumhuriyet*, 51-118.

theologians today. During his discussion of *içtihad*, where he argues that the classical Arabic term for independent legal judgments in Sharia (*ijtihād*) refers to the ability of any devout Muslim to make personal choices on how to best practice Islam to suit her current situation, he alludes by way of contrast to the *mutaassiplar*, a very strong term which can be rendered into English as “fanatics” or “bigots.”⁵⁶¹ This is how Yörükan refers to any Muslim who opposes the idea that specific provisions of the *Sharī‘a* or other elements of traditional Islamic religious thought can be amended or even abandoned if they no longer prove suitable for current social conditions. For Yörükan, as for the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, this is the essence of religious error in the Muslim context: the unwillingness to identify those elements of traditional Islamic religious practice that must be discarded or reformed in light of modern conditions. This is the underlying attitude that the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs are most vehemently opposed to, and it sums up the ideological antithesis of their own program.

Yörükan presents a summary of the concrete social phenomenon that he sees as the clearest embodiment of these conservative Islamic religious errors: *tarikatchılık*, a term that refers to the institutionalized Sufi religious orders that flourished during the Ottoman period, but is imbued with much deeper ideological significance (no doubt as a consequence of the Kemalist assault on the Sufi orders as the quintessential enemy of the enlightened and progressive Turkish state). While acknowledging that many features of traditional Sufism are highly honorable components of Islamic practice (such as the control of worldly appetites and the pursuit of piety), he attacks institutionalized Sufism

⁵⁶¹ Yörükan, *Müslümanlık*, 59. The Arabic equivalent, *muta‘āşib*, is not found in Māturīdī’s work.

as the vehicle for the fanatical and reactionary trends of Islamic thought that he so strongly opposes. He describes *tarikatchılık* this way:

Tarikatchılık is an issue that concerns both the present and future of our country. Whether in secret or in the open, it carries out its agenda in the garb of religion and under a screen of truth. Today we must learn the truth of our religion, abandon those things that are not a part of it, struggle against fanaticism, ignorance, and indolence, and proceed down a path that elevates the nation. This is the duty of every Muslim.⁵⁶²

According to Yörükan, conservative Sufi groups “drag the nation into discord, incite the people to fanaticism and ignorance, and pave the way to indolence.”⁵⁶³ His description of Sufism is of course decidedly one-sided and very politically charged. What is important for our discussion is what this term signifies in the larger Turkish cultural context. Yörükan uses this terminology to describe a larger religious attitude that he sees as the most serious threat to contemporary Islam: religious conservatism or anti-modernism.

Yörükan’s critique of Sufism is closely related to similar arguments made by Islamic modernists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the critique of Sufism found in Rashid Rida and Muhammad ‘Abduh’s *Tafsīr al-Manār*.⁵⁶⁴ Since Yörükan mentions ‘Abduh as one of the main sources for his own theology, it is very likely that his critique of Sufism is based on his reading of works such as *Tafsīr al-Manār*, though the critique of Sufism in this particular work most probably belongs

⁵⁶² Yörükan, *Müslümanlık*, 216.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵⁶⁴ Hourani, *Liberal*, 150.

more to Rida than ‘Abduh.⁵⁶⁵ Yörükan’s adoption of this argument was probably influenced by his opposition to the kinds of conservative Sufi opposition to the Kemalist state that came to be identified with the term *irtica*.

The critique of Sufi spirituality as a source of irrational superstition also features prominently in the works of later Islamic modernists, most notably Fazlur Rahman, who writes in *Islam* that “Sufism, as it developed in the whole of the Muslim world, is solely responsible for inculcating, spreading, and perpetuating the most fantastic and grotesque beliefs in the miracles of saints. The network of superstitions such beliefs have engendered has simply enchained the minds and spirits of the credulous masses, and even the learned and educated fall prey to them in large numbers.”⁵⁶⁶ Rahman counts the rooting out of this kind of irrational spirituality to be one of the most urgent goals of Islamic reformism. His continuing critique of Sufi spirituality also probably influenced subsequent generations of Turkish Muslim modernists, who counted him as one of their most important influences in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁶⁷ As a part of this wider Turkish reformist current, contemporary Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs are building on Rahman’s critique of Sufism as well as Yörükan’s notion of *tarikatçılık* when they discuss pious Sufi groups such as the *cemaats*, which will be discussed later in more detail.

Yörükan’s understanding of *tarikatçılık* embodies the theological other of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, who as a group espouse a critique of Islamic conservatism but differ in attitude toward traditional Kemalism. Yörükan’s definition of *tarikatçılık* contains the basic elements of the perceived enemy of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, who

⁵⁶⁵ Rida’s abhorrence of Sufi ritual is well known and may have played a role in his attraction to Wahhabism. See Hourani, 225.

⁵⁶⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 244-245.

⁵⁶⁷ Recep Şentürk, “Islamic Reformist Discourses,” 236.

see their role as promoters of Islam as a faith that recognizes the need for continual change in religious practice to better express eternal religious truths in ever-changing social circumstances. In their view, as in Yörükân's, Islam embodies a spirit of rational inquiry, theological realism, and the energetic pursuit of social reform. Conservative Islam is taken to be the very opposite of what Islam really stands for, and as a result, they define socially conservative and authoritarian Islamic practices and beliefs as their primary theological and ideological antithesis.

The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs use various terminologies to refer to socially conservative and ideologically authoritarian interpretations of Islam. Some, such as Ahmet Vehbi Ecer, utilize the same terminology as Yörükân, who refers to the ever present threat of “fanatical *tarikatchılık*” (*mutaasıp tarikatchılık*).⁵⁶⁸ Ecer describes this phenomenon in terms very reminiscent of Yörükân, but focuses to a much greater degree on the need for Māturīdism to counteract this conservative Islamic threat: “The way of salvation from this disunity, lethargy, and backwardness—from the perspective of religion—is the comprehension and bringing to life of Māturīdī's understanding of religion, which presents to us a rational, scientific, contemporary and ultra-modern conception and method.”⁵⁶⁹ This sentence provides a succinct overview of the important dichotomies that structure the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī project. Their project envisions a theologically reformist interpretation of Islam embodied in the theological rationalism/proto-modern realism of Māturīdī, who is seen as both one of the greatest exponents of orthodox Sunnī Islamic thought and the greatest exponent of the Turkish

⁵⁶⁸ Ecer, “Büyük,” 156.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

tradition of Islamic thought more specifically. Overall, their primary targets of critique are forms of Islamic conservatism that deny the possibility of religious reform.

These targets of critique are usually conceptualized as either traditional Islamic theological currents of thought or social movements that embody these currents of thought. Modern Islamic theological movements that are frequently singled out include Wahhabism, which comes under attack by both Ecer and Yörükan.⁵⁷⁰ Ecer and Muhiddin Bağçeci (a retired professor at the Divinity Faculty of Erciyes University in Kayseri) also point to the “Selefiyye” as emblematic of traditionalist and conservative thinking, a term that seems to encompass both modern Salafî Islamic revivalism and classical Islamic opponents of systematic theology such as the followers of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855).⁵⁷¹

By far the most interesting theological opponent that the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs identify is, however, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and Ash‘arism. This is interesting on a number of levels. First, it goes against the generally pan-Sunnī tendencies of earlier Turkish Islamic reformers such as Yörükan who, while taking a special interest in Māturīdī and valuing him particularly highly as a representative of Turkish intellectual history, rarely were willing to condemn Ash‘arī or other orthodox Sunnī authorities outright. This hesitancy is abandoned by many of the later Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs. Secondly, the delineation of a Māturīdī critique of Ash‘arism also runs against the

⁵⁷⁰ Ecer, “Büyük,” 27; Yörükan, “Akaid,” 103. Wahhabism and other highly conservative interpretations of Islamic practice often come under intense criticism by devout Muslims across the political spectrum in Turkey. As Jenny B. White notes when discussing her conversations with Islamist political activists in Turkey, “From the highest party leaders...to the street level activist...there was a general disaffection with Islamic law as it was applied in Iran and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the Taliban in Afghanistan, who were often characterized as having nothing whatsoever to do with Islam.” See White, 168.

⁵⁷¹ Ecer, “Ebu Mansur,” 12; Bağçeci, “Kelam Metodu,” 23.

notion of Ash‘arī-Māturīdī synthesis that had been so normative in the Sunnī world since the 13th century, as outlined in Chapter Three.

Many of the contemporary Turkish commentators on Māturīdī point out that Māturīdī’s system gives greater importance to reason than Ash‘arī did, but do not necessarily take this as necessitating a critique of Ash‘arism.⁵⁷² Others, however, such as Musa Kocar (a professor in the Divinity Faculty of Süleyman Demirel University in Isparta) argue that Ash‘arī’s disdain for reason was so profound that it approached the heresy of the fatalistic predestinarians, the Jabriyya.⁵⁷³ Kocar goes so far as to blame the influence of Ash‘arism for arresting scientific and intellectual progress in the Ottoman Empire, and for causing a long period of “imitation and intellectual lifelessness.”⁵⁷⁴ Ecer summarizes the negative influences of Ash‘arism on Islamic culture in even more striking terms: “The Ash‘arī school, which characteristically does not give pride of place to reason, inculcates a passive notion of compliance in the people, and ensures the continuance of traditionalism, has held back Islamic society from modernization and enlightenment.”⁵⁷⁵ These critiques of Ash‘arism are not of course mentioned by all of the later Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, but their inclusion in this theological literature is nonetheless striking in the extent to which it goes against centuries of Sunnī Islamic theological consensus. This critique of Ash‘arism is also taken up by the more vocally nationalist Māturīdī voices in Turkey, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The two most prolific representatives of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism, Sönmez Kutlu and Hanfi Özcan, however, center their critique of conservative Islam on a commonly-

⁵⁷² See for instance Bardakoğlu, “Hüsn ve Kubh,” 42.

⁵⁷³ Kocar, “Uygulama,” 51.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ecer, “Büyük,” 158.

used term in contemporary liberal Islamic discourse in Turkey: the *cemaat*, a term for a religious association usually associated with conservative Sufi groups. These religious associations began to proliferate in Turkey beginning with the relaxation of strictures on religious expression after the 1950s. They are closely associated with Sufism because they are often the means by which devout Turks can participate in Sufi devotional practices without attempting to join or create a Sufi order, which remain illegal. The formation of these conservative and traditional alternative centers for Islamic practice was a direct consequence of attempts to impose reformist Islam across Turkey by the Kemalist government. As Kara points out, after the closing of the dervish lodges and Sufi sacred sites such as tombs,

...the ideology of the Republic did not accept any Muslim religious society, school, order or general disposition; it attempted to appropriate and impose a uniform Islam or understanding of being a Muslim. As a result, the structures of associations, orders, schools, and general dispositions were seen as, and declared to be, illegitimate and destructive individual elements of distribution.⁵⁷⁶

This radical assault on popular religion drove many of its practitioners underground and laid the foundations for a conservative Sufi-oriented underground piety that is often (but by no means always) allied with Islamist challenges to the secular state. These disparate elements of conservative Sufi practice and Islamist opposition are conflated in secularist discourse in the term *cemaat*.

In a more strictly theological sense, Kutlu eloquently summarizes the essence of the conservative Islamic religious mentality that he associates with the *cemaats*: "Whatever its name, behind these religious-political or religious-social

⁵⁷⁶ Kara, *Cumhuriyet*, 311.

movements there is what we call a ‘closed frame of reference’ mentality.”⁵⁷⁷ What Kultu means by this is a religious epistemology that does not appeal to any category of knowledge universally accessible to all people, such as reason or empirical experience. Instead, these groups appeal to the singular authority of a charismatic leader or authority figure. In doing so, they stifle the ability of their members to think freely and to rationally interpret Islamic doctrine. This critique calls to mind, and was probably inspired by, Maturidi’s making a similar point about *ilhām* and other forms of mystical knowledge in the opening pages of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Like the rest of the Neo-Māturīdīs, Kutlu argues that Māturīdī’s theology indicates that there is no conflict between reason and the dictates of revelation and laments the fact that Māturīdī’s rationalism (*akılcılık*) has been neglected in Islamic theological tradition.⁵⁷⁸ Like other Neo-Māturīdīs, Kutlu aims to revitalize the freedom provided in Māturīdī thought for creative and reformist interpretations of Islam.

In contrast to “a closed frame of reference mentality” (*örtülü referans çerçevesi bir zihniyet*), Kutlu argues instead for Māturīdī’s approach, which he terms the “rationalist-civilized mentality” (*akılcı-hadari zihniyet*). This is perhaps the clearest single-term definition of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī interpretation of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology. The pairing of “rationalist” with the term “civilized” is highly significant: it demonstrates that the term these theologians use to talk about Māturīdī “rationalism” —*akılcılık*—does not merely, or even primarily, refer to philosophical epistemology. The term instead refers to a certain view of society, a certain social ideology that is implicitly contrasted with conservative religious attitudes.

⁵⁷⁷ Kutlu, “Maturidi Akılcılığı,” 8.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

These are inherently harmful to social life and are, in a word, “uncivilized.” Kutlu’s term reveals the most unique subject of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī’s reading of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology: Turkish Māturīdīs see epistemology as having social significance, as sanctioning precisely the kind of social change and social critique implied by religious reform. They also see it as an affirmation of the continual need for religious reform in the face of constant social change. An openness to these two propositions is what is meant by these Turkish theologians’ use of the term “Māturīdī Rationalism.”

Hanfi Özcan makes a similarly important argument for this understanding of Māturīdī in his aptly titled article, “The Understanding of Religion for the Individual and Society in the Modern World.” He describes Māturīdī’s use of reason as the ability to determine the “functionalist” (*işlevsel*) elements of religion in order to allow for religious change over time.⁵⁷⁹ This understanding of religion, in contrast to what he (like Kutlu) calls “the religion of the *cemaats*,” is “a religion indexed to knowledge” that opposes traditionalist approaches to religion that do not take into account the advances and changes brought by modernity.⁵⁸⁰ In other words, this means a broadly humanist approach to religion and Islam: “Religion exists for the person, not the person for the religion.”⁵⁸¹ For Özcan, change in religious practices (isolated from the sphere of eternal religious truth) brought about by changing individual and social circumstances is an undeniable fact, and it is precisely this quality of religion that the mentality of the

⁵⁷⁹ Özcan, “Modern,” 134.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

cemaats misunderstands: “The constant changing of a person’s stance vis-à-vis religion is one of religion’s unchanging particularities, and this is an historical fact.”⁵⁸²

Özcan summarizes this “rational approach” (*rasyonel yaklaşım*) to religion in the following way: “This [approach]...will be made possible by human reason’s taking it up again from the very beginning with total freedom and in such a way as to penetrate every point of religion without exception. However, this at no time must mean an interference with the nature of religion, i.e., its essence and fundamental characteristics.”⁵⁸³ Here Özcan connects the use of the term “reason” with the potentially radical consequences it implies in the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī line of thinking. This again refers to the freedom of human intellectual efforts to alter the practice and structure of religion in order to better express its timeless essence of truth in changing social circumstances. This distinction between the essential truths of religion (i.e., the Oneness of God, or *tevhit*) and how these truths are actually practiced and made manifest in the real world underlies the religion-*Shari’a* distinction discussed in the previous chapter, and it is precisely the kind of realistic theological distinction that the contemporary Māturīdīs accuse their opponents of ignoring in favor of blind obedience to authority and tradition.

Neo-Māturīdī Political Arguments I: Māturīdī and Liberal Secular Democracy

This section will focus on the first of two major political arguments made by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, the argument for secular democracy based on Māturīdī’s theology. This argument stems from the early republican period and reflects the widely

⁵⁸² Ibid., 139.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 134.

held belief that there is no reason why Muslim countries would (or should) not be able to implement a successful democratic system. In fact, what is most remarkable about mainstream Islamic support for democracy in contemporary Turkey (at least in a theoretical sense) is how unremarkable it has become.⁵⁸⁴ For this reason it is first necessary to explain the sense in which Islam and democracy are seen to be naturally compatible in contemporary Turkish Islamic theological discourse, and then to analyze how various Māturīdī discussions interact with this wider discourse.

Islamic support for democracy is by no means a recent phenomenon in Turkey, despite the challenges it may have received over the past few decades by radical Islamist groups operating on the ideological fringes of Turkish Islamic thought.⁵⁸⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, one of the most influential religious leaders of modern

⁵⁸⁴ On this point, see Metin Heper, “Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation?” *Middle East Journal* 51:1 (1997): 33. Since the 1980s in particular, conservative Islamic movements that were previously regarded as radical and anti-democratic have in the face of the pressure of the electorate moderated their political rhetoric to assure the public that they harbor no anti-democratic intentions, and even intend to endorse and promote democracy. These movements include the followers of Fethullah Gülen and centre-right political parties with a more radical Islamist past, such as the current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP). See Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 111-112; Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236; 248.

⁵⁸⁵ For a useful summary of the ideological agenda of recent Islamic radicalism in Turkey, see White, 117-118. As many other commentators have also noted, once radical Islamist elements are elected into Turkish political positions, such as the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) in the late 1990s, their agendas are quickly moderated under the pressure of the electorate (White, 134). This is also one of the reasons for the success of the current ruling party, the AKP, which has managed to shed its radical Islamist roots in favor of a broad center-right, socially conservative, democratic, and economically liberal platform (see Yavuz, “Secularism,” 79-117). This phenomenon corresponds well with Mansoor Moaddel’s argument that Islamic ideologies that confront a discursively monolithic opponent (such as a dictatorship) will radicalize, while those that confront a discursively plural system (such as democracy, as in the case of Turkey) will moderate in order to be able to successfully operate in electoral politics. This seems to be precisely what has taken place in Turkey. See Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 16-17.

Turkey, Said Nursi, openly supported the establishment of democracy in Turkey and never demanded opposition to it. His most prominent ideological successor, Fethullah Gülen, likewise voices unproblematic support for the Turkish democratic system, although like many other conservative thinkers he critiques the way that democracy is often implemented in Turkey: “To view Islam as the opposite of democracy or democracy as the opposite of Islam is incorrect. [...] Islam is not democracy, democracy is not Islam. Democracy is a system that the entire world is heading towards, but it is still being retouched; in order to find itself it is still coming out of its shell.”⁵⁸⁶ Or as he puts it elsewhere: “Democracy is an administration of the people. It constitutes a depth of life, its human dimension. Both democracy and the Republic constitute the ground appropriate to Islam, Islamic thought, and the experience of Islam.”⁵⁸⁷

Prominent contemporary academic theologians tend to share the same view. Ali Bardakoğlu (President of Religious Affairs in Turkey from 2003-2010 and former professor at the divinity faculties at Erciyes University in Kayseri and Marmara University in Istanbul) writes:

In the Qur’ân and Sunna... the job of determining the forms of social administration and their style and detail of administration is left up to human initiative. This is because these are issues that exist as tools related to general contexts and ideals that may change in every society and period; historical experiences have demonstrated this. However, Islam, as a religion which implies universality, carries a claim of validity for every style of social organization, from the most primitive to the most developed.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Quoted on his official webpage. See “Demokrasi hakkındaki görüşleri.” [Views on Democracy] <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/1919/124/>.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ali Bardakoğlu, “Teorik Açıdan İslam ve Demokrasi: Yasama,” [Islam and Democracy from a Theoretical Perspective: Legislation] in *İslam ve Demokrasi* [Islam and Democracy] (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2005), 362.

According to Bardakoğlu, Islam expresses certain immutable principles that, despite their inherent universality, imply a great degree of flexibility in their concrete implementation throughout history.⁵⁸⁹ Bardakoğlu also make use of an argument commonly utilized in modern Islamic theology in Turkey: the Qur’ān and Sunna contain universal ethics for the implementation of political systems, but nowhere make mention of any system in particular.

The same argument is put forward by the politically active Islamic liberal thinker, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, former dean of the Faculty of Divinity at Istanbul University, in his widely read reformist manifesto *Reconstruction: Returning to the Qur’ān*.⁵⁹⁰ In his words, “The Qur’ān does not put forward any kind of state...The Qur’ān wants the principles sent by God, the universal principles addressed to all people, to be put into practice...The Qur’ān is not concerned with the container.”⁵⁹¹ The former dean of the Faculty of Divinity of Marmara University, Zekeriya Beyaz, also writes: “When examining the basic sources of Islam, we see that no particular political system is proposed in a clear and obvious fashion.”⁵⁹² It is also striking to note in this context that Atatürk himself at least once made the same argument, saying in January of 1923 in Izmit: “In the bases of religion there is no specific declaration that government

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ See his *Yeniden Yapılanmak: Kuran’a Dönüş* (İstanbul: Yeni Boyut Yayınları, 1997).

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁹² See “Siyaset ve Din Sosyolojisi Açısından Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin Temel İlkeleri ile İslam’ın Temel Prensipleri Arasında Uyum ve Uzlaşma,” [Agreement and Harmony between the Basic Principles of the Turkish Republic and the Basic Principles of Islam from a Political and Sociology of Religion Perspective] *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3 (2001): 47.

should take this or that form. Only the bases on which government should rest are made obvious, clear, and certain.”⁵⁹³

Another prominent theologian and scholar, Süleyman Uludağ (currently a professor at the Faculty of Divinity of Uludağ University in Bursa), also argues that no concrete political system or state system is recommended by the Qur’ān or Sunna.⁵⁹⁴ In his view this was in fact the reason why divisions over the political organization of the Muslim community emerged so quickly among the followers of the Prophet after his death; there was no model recommended for them to follow. Uludağ argues that it is neither correct to say that Islam rejects democracy, nor to claim that Islam necessarily implies it. This is because “Democracy falls under the category of neither the commanded nor the forbidden in Islam (*mübah*). This means that Islam does not imply democracy but it also does not reject it. [Democracy] is necessarily defended from the perspective of its benefits and general outcomes.”⁵⁹⁵ In other words, while there is nothing inherently Islamic about any political system, democracy must be upheld because it is the system that at present is best able to secure justice and the protection of human rights.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ The full text of this speech can be found in Arı İnan, *Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’ün 1923 Eskişehir-İzmit Konuşmaları* (Ankara, 1996), 103.

⁵⁹⁴ Süleyman Uludağ, “Teorik Açıdan İslam ve Demokrasi: Yargı,” [Islam and Democracy from a Theoretical Perspective: Legal Judgment] in *İslam ve Demokrasi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2005), 399.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. Beyaz makes similar use of this Islamic legal term, arguing that it provides for a wide sphere of personal freedom in Islamic moral theory. He writes: “According to Islam, there is in everything an original sense of moral neutrality (*ibaha*), meaning freedom and goodness. Things are only evil, harmful, and to be avoided if they are found to contain definitive evidence (*delil*) of their evilness...everything in principle is permissible (*helal*), only those things which contain definitive evidence that they are impermissible (*haram*) are actually impermissible.” See “Temel İlkeleri,” 43.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 400. For other useful summaries of the kinds of pro-democracy arguments made in modern Turkish Islamic thought, see Nuran Koyuncu, “İslami Yönetimde Demokrasi var mıdır?” [Is there

Contemporary Māturīdī theologians in Turkey make their own contributions to this broader discussion by attempting to draw out political principles from the writings of Māturīdī. While their individual works are highly diverse in their specific approaches to the question of Māturīdī’s relevance to modern politics, many utilize his work to help open a space for the justification of modern liberal political regimes by Islamic theological tradition. They attempt to reveal how Māturīdī’s theology lays an Islamic theological groundwork for the adoption of political regimes in the Muslim world that have their historical origins outside of the traditions of Islam, such as secularism (broadly conceived) and representative democracy.

These projects participate in a much larger cultural phenomenon in Turkey, the reinterpretation of Kemalist secularism and liberal democracy to take into account Turkey’s Islamic heritage. This reinterpretation of the Kemalist political system forms part of the post-1980 flowering of intellectual conversations surrounding Islamic history and culture in Turkey, conversations that also include a liberal democratic critique of the traditional Kemalist state’s intervention into religious affairs.⁵⁹⁷ In a sense, the strong belief in democracy and freedom of thought originally advanced by Kemalism has laid the foundations for its own critique, and has led to the accusation in Turkey that Kemalist authoritarianism has betrayed its own commitment to democracy. Since the 1980s, “the secularist and positivist elite has lost its monopoly of the intellectual

Democracy in Islamic Administration?] *Türk-İslam Medeniyeti Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 4 (2007): 245-256.

⁵⁹⁷ On the liberal critique of Kemalism, see Halil M. Karaveli, “An Unfulfilled Promise of Enlightenment: Kemalism and its Liberal Critics,” *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2010): 85-102.

debate.”⁵⁹⁸ The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs have been one force in this much larger questioning of the Kemalist paradigm. Along with the re-discovery of the proto-modern elements that make up Māturīdī realism outlined in Chapter Four, these projects form one of the clearest examples of the central thesis of this dissertation, which is that modern discursive structures and social formations are always understood with reference to pre-existing traditions. These projects demonstrate that the modern can only be conceived through a particular interpretation of tradition; it is in fact the re-interpretation of the traditional that produces the modern.

The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs begin their discussion by noting at the outset that Māturīdī’s political thought is, like all other aspects of his system, conditioned by his “rationalism,” i.e., his sense of philosophical realism that allows for continual change in humanity’s understanding religion and its relationship to society. As detailed in Chapter Four, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs follow the general Turkish Islamic reformist elaboration of religion as a primarily interior act of belief that is separate in its essence from political and social changes. They also affirm that religion as experienced in the world possesses an institutional and practical structure that can and must change according to the needs of the times. Politics and political systems are therefore identified with the changeable structure of religion, and are thus most appropriately placed in the provenance of the judgment of human reason, rather than being subject to the dictates of divine revelation. If the essence of religion must be understood rationally,

⁵⁹⁸ Zurcher, *Turkey*, 289. On the questioning of strict Kemalism since the 1980s, see also Reşat Kasaba, “Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 18 and Murat Somer, “Deocratization, Clashing Narratives, and ‘Twin Tolerations’: Between Islamic Conservative and Pro-Secular Actors,” in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism, and the Kurdish Issue*, eds. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London, UK: Routledge, 2010), 36.

then this is all the more true for these aspects of religion that do not possess any eternal mandates, such as which form of political system the Muslim community must utilize.

According to Şaban Ali Düzgün (a professor at the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University),

If the administration of the state were an institution that necessitated its being directly related to religion, then it is inconceivable that the divine will would leave this problem unsolved. Proceeding from this principle, [i.e., that God nowhere in revelation demands the use of a specific political system and has therefore left the issue unresolved], the scholars of Islam developed the notion that the administration of the state is rational (*aklî*) and not religious (*dinî*). This is because, according to them, the actualization of organizations by means of an administrative apparatus (such as conflict resolution, the guaranteeing of internal and external security, the application of laws, and the prosecution of worldly affairs) is something that can be established rationally (*aklen*).⁵⁹⁹

Düzgün implies the same point made by many of the other theologians mentioned above, that Islam does not imply or demand the existence of a particular political system. Because this is the case, according to Düzgün, this means that human beings are authorized to use their own independent reasoning, as Māturīdī suggests, to devise political systems to suit their present needs. Sönmez Kutlu makes a similar argument. According to Māturīdī, the choice of a particular political is not an inherently “religious” (*dinî*) matter, but is instead better understood as a “political and sociological preference” that must accord with the needs of a particular time and place.⁶⁰⁰ Arif Yıldırım, also a professor at the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University, makes the

⁵⁹⁹ Düzgün, “Siyaset,” 351.

⁶⁰⁰ Kutlu, “Diyamet-Siyaset,” 61. See also Kutlu, “Bilinmeyen,” 12.

point that the issue of the form of the state “rests more on reason” than on revelation, or the sphere of the properly religious.⁶⁰¹

As alluded to above, the distinction between religion and state, or religion and politics, is a logical conclusion based on the broader principles of Māturīdī “Rationalism” as outlined in the previous chapter. It builds on the notion that religion has an eternal essence that is known and nurtured in the innermost parts of the human being, but which is actualized in the real world through different and changeable social and institutional structures and practices. Kutlu argues that this distinction between religion and politics (*diyanet-siyaset ayrımı*) is implied by broader principles in the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theological tradition, such as the distinction between religion and *Sharī‘a* and the distinction between faith and works.⁶⁰²

This is a particularly important point, as it demonstrates that the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs do not only detect a strain of philosophical realism in Māturīdī’s writings, but also see this orientation as characteristic of Samarqandī Ḥanafī theology more broadly. Kutlu argues that “Māturīdī, in making the distinction between faith (*iman*) and works (*amel*), defines ‘faith’ as the affirmation of the heart,⁶⁰³ which is to be actualized by the person’s own free will and about which no person can be questioned.⁶⁰⁴ No one can

⁶⁰¹ Arif Yıldırım, “Ebu Mansur Matürīdī’nin Din-Devlet İlişkisine Bakışı ve Bazı Değerlendirmeler,” [A Look at the Relationship between State and Religion in Māturīdī and Some Considerations] *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 10:27 (Spring 2006): 156.

⁶⁰² Kutlu, “Diyanet-Siyaset,” 62. On the common Ḥanafī distinction between faith (*īmān*) and works (*‘āmāl*) see Watt, 128-134.

⁶⁰³ In classical Ḥanafī theology this is termed “taṣdīq bi-l-qalb.” See for instance *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*, ed. Kawtharī, 16; and *Kitāb Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfā*, ed. Kawtharī, 75.

⁶⁰⁴ The notion that a person’s profession of religious faith is something that cannot be doubted by any other person, because it is an action that is taken inside a person’s heart and is therefore inaccessible to any outside observer, is a basic principle of the Ḥanafī understanding of religious belief (*īmān*) as is most

interfere in this realm.”⁶⁰⁵ This distinction, like the distinction between religion and *Shari‘a* in Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theology, ultimately is utilized by the modern Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs as support for the privatization of religion and the definition of religion as primarily an act of rational assent to certain immutable truths about the world.

The argument for the distinction between religion and politics is a corollary doctrine to the distinction between religion and *Shari‘a* discussed in the previous chapter, i.e., the distinction between religious belief and religious practice. Both establish religion as an internal act shielded from external contingencies, and both are based in distinctions made in Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theological texts. In this way, a much earlier theological controversy about how to determine membership in the Muslim community (in other words, whether a person should be considered a Muslim on the basis of her actions or her sincere profession of the faith),⁶⁰⁶ which came to be a standard feature of Māturīdī theology through Māturīdī’s association with Ḥanafism, is used by modern Turkish theologians to support two closely related principles: the separation of religious belief from religious practice and the separation of religion from politics. By elaborating on the principle that religious assent is an internal act, these Turkish theologians are therefore able to associate certain religious practices and political systems with the changeability of society, and by doing so sanction constant change and reform in both realms.

clearly elaborated in the text *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*, discussed in Chapter Two. It was originally a central tenet of Murji‘ism, which later became a part of Sunnism in general and the Samarqandī Ḥanafī school of theology in particular. The concept of the interiority of faith therefore receives special mention in Māturīdī’s works, and thus is focused on by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs as a specifically Māturīdī concept despite its acceptance by Sunnism more broadly.

⁶⁰⁵ Kutlu, “Diyanet-Siyaset,” 63.

⁶⁰⁶ On the origins of this early Islamic theological controversy, see Watt, 119-128.

Aside from the general appeal to Māturīdī’s “rationalism,” these theologians also cite a specific quote of Māturīdī’s that they believe strongly points to Māturīdī’s contention that political administration is indeed unconnected to religion in a dogmatic sense, and must instead be decided through the free judgment of the people according to the specific needs of their circumstances. This quote is found in the second volume of Nasafī’s *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, and refers to Māturīdī’s views on the Imamate, or the leadership of the Muslim community.⁶⁰⁷ This is a standard concluding discussion found in nearly all major *kalām* works that is curiously absent in Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The quote reads as follows: “Our sheikh Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī said: ‘It is necessary with respect to religion that one look to the one who is most fearful of God, the most pious, and the most discerning in affairs and most knowledgeable of matters, and that he be invested with leadership of the Muslim community (*al-imāma*).’”⁶⁰⁸ In Nasafī’s citation Māturīdī goes on to explain that this is based on the Quranic verse: “The most noble of you in the eyes of God is the most pious among you.”⁶⁰⁹ Māturīdī thus seems to argue that the leadership of the Muslim community should be based solely on individual qualifications to lead, focusing in particular on personal piety or fear of God (*taqwā*) and knowledge of administrative affairs. This contention naturally poses a problem for Nasafī, who has difficulty reconciling this belief with the traditional Sunnī doctrine that the leader of the Muslim community must come from the tribe of the Prophet, the Quraysh.

⁶⁰⁷ This term refers to leadership in a Sunnī, not Shi‘ī, context. The term reflects usage earlier than Māturīdī’s time, but was retained as a technical term throughout *kalām* literature even after it began to refer to non-Sunnī institutions.

⁶⁰⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, II:437.

⁶⁰⁹ Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt 13.

Düzgün, Kutlu, and others see this statement as proof that Māturīdī saw the requirement that the leader of the Muslim community be from the Quraysh as a requirement based on the needs of the society in which it was elaborated, and therefore is not a requirement for future generations. In their view, this is why Māturīdī makes it clear that the qualities that are necessary for political leadership are instead general qualifications, which do not imply a particular political system.⁶¹⁰ They argue that Māturīdī's rejection of the notion that the Imamate be based on the lineage of the Quraysh (a political doctrine that was rooted in the tribal politics and culture of the time), and his argument that the choice of the Imam should instead be based on purely rational qualities of competence and good character, implies that Islam does not prescribe any particular political system. Islam as a religion, as noted previously, only requires that whatever system is put in place be operated with justice, equity, and respect for individual freedoms.⁶¹¹ Therefore, since democracy is the system that best satisfies these requirements in our current social setting of modernity, it is the system that should be adopted and defended by Muslims as being most in harmony with the principles of Islam.

Finally, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī interpretation of Māturīdī's doctrines often implies a critique of the traditional Kemalist understanding of secular democracy. Kutlu in particular fleshes out this point in detail:

Because it has no priestly class and church which monopolized political and legal sovereignty, Islam is theoretically in its essence secular (*laik*) and has no need for [further] secularization. [...] The application [of secularism] in the West

⁶¹⁰ Kutlu, "Diyanet-Siyaset," 61; Kutlu, "Bilinmeyen," 12; Düzgün, 351.

⁶¹¹ Düzgün, "Siyaset," 364.

can be discussed in terms of ‘the secularization of religion.’ Secularization in the Islamic world, however, can be discussed in terms of the secularization of the state, as is the case in Turkey.⁶¹²

Kutlu argues that because the distinction between religion and politics is inherent in Islam (as Māturīdī supposedly demonstrates), Islam is actually “in its essence secular,” meaning that the task of secularization in the Islamic world does not in fact mean the reinterpretation of Islam itself, but rather the reinterpretation of the traditional relationship between Islam and the state. In a rather cursory manner, Kutlu contrasts this with Christianity which did recognize a separation between the spiritual and the material realms and the worldly and the religious realms (which are not recognized by Islam according to him). However, in his view, Christianity does not inherently recognize a distinction between religion and political power, due to the existence of a priesthood.⁶¹³ This fusion between religion and political power necessitated secularization in Christianity; however, since this two realms are kept separate in Islam, it does not need to be forcibly secularized as Christianity was.

Whatever the merits of Kutlu’s comparison, it does imply a number of interesting points. First, Kutlu’s discussion implies that he views secularization as a separation between religion and state, not as a total removal of religion from the public square, as traditional Kemalism would have it. Instead, he argues that adoption of the Western model of secularization (i.e., the Kemalist model) would infringe on the essence of Islam and have the adverse effect of devaluing religion:

⁶¹² Kutlu, “Diyanet-Siyaset,” 69.

⁶¹³ Kutlu does not distinguish between the different types of pastoral leadership in various Christian denominations. He is referring to the sacramental and leadership role that Christian priests, pastors, etc... hold, a role different from leaders in Sunnī Islam due to its association with spiritual hierarchy (at least in high church contexts).

The point that must be kept in mind is this: Secularism (*laiklik*) was born in the West as a response to the political domination of the priestly class. In the event that the Western type of secularism is taken up exactly and applied in Islamic culture, it will give birth to a priestly class. From the perspective of Muslims, this situation will be the reason for the experience of even greater problems with the issue of the relationship between religion and politics. In redefining the relationship between religion and the state in the Islamic world, there is most certainly benefit to be derived from paying attention to the unique structure of Islam and the religious structure which is a product of its history.⁶¹⁴

Kutlu goes on to argue that this is one of the reasons why modern Turkey has had more success than other Muslim nations in the separation of religion from the state: its first parliamentarians and ideologues (such as Ziya Gökalp) were, as Hanafi Ottoman Muslims, influenced by the Māturīdī tradition of political thought.⁶¹⁵ Kutlu therefore argues that it is important for Muslims to implement a version of secularization that is true to their own religious ideals, meaning a version of secularization that targets traditional understandings of the state in Muslim society, rather than a form that seeks to challenge Islam itself in the way that Kemalism does.

In Kutlu's view, the principle of the separation of religion from the state is already inherent in Islam. What is needed is to apply this understanding of Islam to the theory of the state most commonly utilized in Muslim societies, which wrongly assumes that state and religion must be identified with each other. Kutlu's argument, therefore, subtly critiques Kemalist secularization in the guise of a critique of "Western" secularization, a process that results in the removal of religion from public consciousness and results in the devaluation of religion in society. Kutlu uses the name

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. Note that Kutlu is limiting his understanding of Islam here to Sunnism.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. Kutlu argues that even though late Ottoman reformers may not have been doing this consciously, their advocacy of the secularization of the state represented a "Māturīdī" line of thinking.

of Māturīdī to make this critique, implying that the application of a Māturīdī (and therefore truly Islamic) form of secularism would result in a system that protects individual freedoms while at the same time allowing for the free exercise and expression of religion in public life.

Yıldırım makes a similar point when he writes about the points at which the goals of the secular state and the goals of religion intersect with each other:

“Secularism, although it is the addressing of the needs of the country in a positivistic and rational fashion, does not remain indifferent to religion at every point. This is due to the fact that true religion cannot conflict with true reason, which does not exceed its own sphere and which knows its limits with respect to revelation...”⁶¹⁶ Yıldırım goes on to assert that the state naturally needs some metaphysical basis greater than itself to establish its legitimacy, and that if religion does not fill this role in supporting the goals of the democratic state, it will be supplanted by the outright sacralization of the state itself. His critique of the sacralization of the state is directed at traditional Kemalism, which directs intense adoration to the Turkish state as the paternal protector of its people; thus, his concern to establish a transcendent anchor for democratic authority that does not result in the almost religious sense of Kemalist statism. While religion and the state must remain separate, religion must not be supplanted by the worship of the state. Again, this seems to constitute a veiled critique of the Kemalist assault on religion’s right to exist in the public sphere and the related Kemalist notion that religion cannot play any constructive role in the ideological maintenance of the secular state.

⁶¹⁶ A. Yıldırım, “Ebu Mansur,” 160.

Yıldırım envisions a system, based again on Māturīdī principles, where the goals of religion and the secular state are recognized as mutually compatible and are allowed to work in harmony with each other. Yıldırım argues that secularism must be applied in a way that takes into account local religious conditions and attempts to work in harmony with the religious customs of the people.⁶¹⁷ Again, it is difficult not to detect in these statements an implicit critique of Kemalist secularization. Religious traditions and the secular state must be willing to work together without infringing on each other's sovereign ideological territory:

In today's secular and democratic societies, the protection and defense of the nation and the country's interests is the duty of the ruling political regime and the opposition. The admonitions of religion may intersect with the rational (*rasyonele*) results that are reached through this process. In this situation, say if a concession is made on account of secularism when it intersects with religion (which means that it is not even in harmony with the democratic conduct toward religion that is envisioned by secularism), this is also a kind of infringement of secularism...⁶¹⁸

Here again it is abundantly clear that Yıldırım, like Kutlu, is suggesting a critique of Kemalist secularism's tendency to exert control over religious expression and conduct. Indeed Yıldırım, like a number of other devout Muslim critics of the Kemalist administration of democracy, suggests that this aggressive form of secularism actually acts against its own sacred principles when it violates the sovereignty of individual freedom in religious conduct by attempting to limit religion's influence on public life. Secular democracy, in the minds of many Turkish Islamic intellectuals (including most of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs), was established to guarantee individual freedom. The

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

aggressive persecution of religion carried out by the Kemalist state thus fails to uphold its own lofty principles, which as discussed above, are widely embraced by the Turkish public.

The overarching significance of the *diyanet-siyaset* distinction elaborated by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs is two-fold. First, it is a corollary of the doctrine of the distinction between religion and *Sharī‘a* and as such forms an Islamic theological template for liberal political reform in the same way that the religion and *Sharī‘a* distinction serves as an Islamic theological template for liberal religious reform. Second, both of these key doctrines are seen by these theologians to reflect Māturīdī’s overriding sense of “rationalism,” which as we have described, is best understood in an English philosophical idiom as referring to Māturīdī’s proto-modern realism. Both of these doctrines exemplify the most important characteristic of Māturīdī’s theology in the minds of these theologians: his principle that Islam sanctions religious reform in accordance with changing social needs and circumstances. In their view, this principle is based on Māturīdī’s governing notion of “rationalism” (or theological realism) that signifies an openness to the change inherent in the world and a flexibility of thought in the face of this change. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, this is the sense in which term “reason” (*akıl*) is deployed in modern Turkish Islamic theology: it is a constant flexibility in thought that is opposed to dogmatism, traditionalism, and blind social conservatism.

In addition, the discussion of the distinction between religion and politics by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī theologians is often accompanied by a subtle critique of how Kemalist secularism goes about separating these two realms. These theologians often

assert that it does so at the expense of religion and actually violates the democratic principles advocated by Kemalism in the first place. However, not all Turkish thinkers who evince an interest in Māturīdī's political relevance share these reservations about Kemalism. Indeed, for some Turkish Islamic intellectuals, traditional Kemalism is in fact the perfect concrete manifestation of Māturīdī's theology. For these much more radically nationalist thinkers, a proper understanding of Māturīdī does not imply a reformulation of Kemalism, but instead demands its unwavering defense. It is to these highly interesting, and much more politically charged, arguments that we now turn.

Neo-Māturīdī Political Arguments II: Māturīdī and Secularist Turkish Nationalism

A parallel tradition of Islamic support for the Turkish political system has existed alongside the more customary current of Turkish Islamic support for secular democracy and liberal political reform. As noted above, support for democracy in Turkey does not necessitate automatic support for the form that democracy currently takes in Turkey, or for the way it is currently practiced by Turkish political elites. There does exist, however, a much more vocally nationalist current of Islamic thought that argues that the specific mode of democracy in Turkey, that of laic secularism, is in fact itself compatible with (and even necessitated by) the principles of Islam. This current of thought takes the Islamic argument for liberal democracy one step further, therefore, by claiming that the specific Kemalist secularist democracy of the Turkish Republic is in fact the system of government most in harmony with Islam. This rather striking strain of thinking in modern Turkish Islam gained strength after the promotion of the ideology of Turkish-Islamic synthesis by the leaders of the 1980 military coup. While this radically

secularist strain remains a distinct minority from most Islamic theology in Turkey (which is usually content with the argument for liberal democracy more generally, and usually critiques the oppressive and paternalistic tendencies of Kemalist secularism), it has not surprisingly featured the use of Māturīdī, given the fact that most scholars of Turkey consider Māturīdī to be a key figure of Turkish national history. This is the basis for the radically nationalist strain of Neo-Māturīdism, the second political ideology put forth by this movement.

A discussion of the ideas of this nationalist Turkish Islamic theology are therefore helpful in understanding how the second type of Neo-Māturīdī political argument is an outgrowth of this broader movement. The writings of Zekeriya Beyaz very well represent this more explicitly nationalist form of Turkish theology, where the ideological bases of the Turkish Republic are taken to be the ideal example of the harmony between Islam and democracy. In his aptly named article, “Harmony and Reconciliation between the Basic Tenets of Islam and the Basic Principles of the Turkish Republic from the Perspective of the Sociology of Politics and Religion,” Beyaz articulates the thesis that it is necessary to demonstrate the basic harmony between the values of Islam and the values of the Kemalist state because “certain radical groups” have in recent years argued that Islam is inherently opposed to the principles of the secular republic.⁶¹⁹ Thus Beyaz sets himself to the task of showing how the Kemalist state not only does not contradict Islam, but in fact represents an expression of Islamic principles.

⁶¹⁹ Beyaz, “Din Sosyolojisi,” 31.

Beyaz argues that the secular republican form of government is in harmony with Islam by deducing political principles from a number of Quranic verses. Surat al-Nisā' 59 exhorts Muslims to "obey the Messenger and those who have authority among you"; according to Beyaz, this verse proves that Muslims should live under a state structure because this structure is best suited to giving commands and prohibitions on earthly matters.⁶²⁰ In Beyaz's view, this means that "from the perspective of Islam, the Turkish State (*Türk Devleti*) is an honored, sacred, and legitimate state to which obedience is required."⁶²¹ Beyaz also argues that the religion of Islam and the Turkish state in fact share the same goals for humankind. These goals include guaranteeing personal freedom, security, and material and spiritual fulfillment.⁶²² Beyaz even goes so far as to imply a comparison between the Turkish state and the description of Muḥammad in the Qur'ān as "a mercy to the worlds."⁶²³ In Beyaz's words:

So what is mercy? Mercy is the incalculable blessings and kindnesses that comprise the material and spiritual happiness of human beings. In short, the goal to which Islam is directed is to bring mercy and material and spiritual happiness to the worlds, to the entirety of humankind. In this sense, every beneficial thing that is directed toward the same goal, which takes as its goal the securing of human happiness, is good from the perspective of Islam. It is therefore seen that the goal to which the fundamental principles of the Republic of Turkey are directed is found to be parallel, or even identical, to the fundamental aims of Islam.⁶²⁴

Ahmet Akbulut, professor of theology at Ankara University, makes similar arguments with respect to the state-dominated, Kemalist laic secularism practiced by the Turkish

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶²² Ibid., 44-45.

⁶²³ Sūrat al-Anbiyā' 107.

⁶²⁴ Beyaz, "Din Sosyolojisi," 46.

government (*laiklik*). In his view, *laiklik* shares the same goal as the morality of the Qur'ān, which is to protect human freedom: “*Laiklik* is not just the freedom of belief and worship, nor is it simply the separation of religious from state affairs. It has another basic goal, and that is to protect the individual from the assaults of religions and ideologies.”⁶²⁵ Akbulut argues that in order to safeguard the existence of *laiklik*, the system which allows for the free exercise of religion, justification for *laiklik* must be found within religion itself.⁶²⁶

Akbulut, like Beyaz and other contributors to this Kemalist line of thinking, argues that social issues should have no religious referent at all, and that religion should be strictly separated from almost any aspect of public life: “Religion’s being taken as a reference with regard to social issues must be prevented. If the politician takes religion as a reference, religion will be shaped according to the interpretation of the politician.”⁶²⁷ Akbulut frames this fundamental principle of Kemalist laicism in rather striking terms: “The Qur’ān did not come to solve our problems. It states that we must solve our problems with science and reason (*ilim ve akıl*), i.e., we must take science and reason as our reference. In our view, reason is not just for reaching an understanding of Islam; after becoming Muslim, it is needed to direct our lives according to the principles of sound reason.”⁶²⁸ Like other Kemalists, Akbulut frames his ideological quest as an

⁶²⁵ Ahmet Akbulut, “Din, Laiklik ve Demokrasi Üçgeni,” [The Religion, Secularism, and Democracy Triangle] *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi Özel Sayı Cumhuriyetin 75. Yıldönümüne Armağan* (1999): 266.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

effort to rid Turkey of *irtica*, the highly-charged catch-all term for anyone who opposes the Turkish state on religious grounds.⁶²⁹

While Akbulut and Beyaz's theological/Turkish laic synthesis seems strained, it is one line of thinking that has attracted Turkish thinkers who identify with Māturīdī. The explicitly Māturīdī strain in this current of thought has been represented by vocal nationalist politicians and public intellectuals, most notably the former parliamentarian and civil servant Gündüz Aktan (1941-2008). Aktan, a graduate of the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University and a career diplomat who also served as a representative of the right-wing nationalist National Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*), outlined the most cogent elaboration of the political dimensions of Turkish Neo-Māturīdism in a series of articles published in the left-leaning newspaper *Radikal* (*The Radical*) in October of 2004. Aktan's ideology seamlessly blends the notion of Māturīdī rationalism with the Kemalist and secularist principles of the Turkish Republic by arguing that the social transformations wrought under Atatürk and the Turkish Revolution that led to the establishment of modern Turkey are, in fact, manifestations of the application and revival of a specific theological interpretation of Islam. Aktan argued that the secular ideology of the Turkish Republic was the logical result of the revivification of the Māturīdī theological school in Turkey.

Aktan begins his article entitled "Our Founding Ideology and Islam" with the observation that while religiously based critiques of the secular republic continue in contemporary Turkey, "to defend the Republic with religious points of reference

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 275.

remains taboo.”⁶³⁰ Aktan, like many of the more moderate theologians discussed earlier in the chapter, argues that Islam does not, in fact, specify a specific form of government or state, but instead merely provides general principles for a how a just and free society ought to be governed.⁶³¹ Aktan then begins to outline his religious defense of the secular Turkish Republic by explaining that the harsh secularist reforms of the 1920s and 1930s in fact aimed to produce a new kind of citizen:

The Republic had as its goal the formation of a new kind of person. It aimed to create the free individual (*özgür birey*).⁶³² It rescued the mind and the heart from superstitions, false beliefs, and heretical innovations (*bidatlar*). It took back its destiny from the sheikhs, the murshids, the dervishes, the fortune-tellers, the sorcerers, the jinn-conjurers, and the *üfürükçüs*.⁶³³ In place of the perception that science is a threat to faith it arrived at the realization that science is a window that has been opened onto the inner workings of the ways of God. It invited life to the person who, instead of crawling among tombs and hiding in the corners of dervish lodges, shatters these gates and steps outside.⁶³⁴

This passage is thick with the implied dichotomies and ideological fractures of traditional Kemalism and its quixotic quest to rid the Turkish nation of *irtica*. Aktan identifies the Republican project with an attempt to eliminate irrational and backwards thinking in order to advance the cause of modernization. At the same time, Aktan represents the secularist cause as a realization of religious truth, the correct

⁶³⁰ Gündüz Aktan, “Kuruluş ideolojimiz ve İslam (1)”, [Our Founding Ideology and Islam 1] *Radikal* October 9, 2004.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² On the notion of a new, free mode of being human created by the Turkish Republic, see also Ramazan Yıldırım (professor of theology at Istanbul University Faculty of Divinity), “Maturidi Teoloji ve Cumhuriyetin Özgür Bireyi,” [Maturidi Theology and the Free Individual of the Republic] *Haber 1*, July 19, 2007.

⁶³³ A kind of folk healer who was believed to heal others by breathing on them.

⁶³⁴ Gündüz Aktan, “Kuruluş ideolojimiz ve İslam (2),” [Our Founding Ideology and Islam 2] *Radikal* October 12, 2004.

interpretation of which brings about the liberation of individuals from centuries of superstitious irrationalism and places them into a proper relationship with God. Aktan implies that the Islamic critique of the secular nature of the Turkish Republic is actually a manifestation of ignorance and superstition, and as such is in fact contrary to the true nature of Islam.

The question of the founding of the Republic was not, in Aktan's mind, fundamentally political but theological. The Turkish Revolution was based on a radical reinterpretation of the notions of "God" and "religion."⁶³⁵ He goes on to state the nature of this theological reorientation explicitly: it involved a turn away from centuries of Ḥanbalī-Ash'arī thought and a turn toward Māturīdism.⁶³⁶ For Aktan, Ḥanbalī-Ash'arī theology is fundamentally opposed to the notion of human freedom: it preaches a dictatorial notion of the state and encourages irrationalism and traditionalist thinking. It is the very antithesis of Māturīdism's emphasis on rational thought and the celebration of human freedom. According to Aktan, Māturīdism "considers *taklit* (imitation or arguments from authority) to be idolatry, and considers independent reason the greatest religious criterion."⁶³⁷ Aktan frames the choice between these two traditions in very stark terms: "The last 1000 years of Sunni thought belonged to Ash'arī. The results have been obvious. The 1000 years ahead of us must belong to Māturīdī. It is a matter of life and death."⁶³⁸

In a political sense, Aktan makes it clear that this return to Māturīdism is the only way to protect democracy and human rights in a Muslim context. He theorizes that

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

theology has a concrete social impact, and that theological propositions actually underlie the ideologies of social institutions and practices: “We must from now on realize that theology gives birth to sociology. The answer that society gives to theological questions over time shapes that society’s culture.”⁶³⁹ This statement represents an interesting inversion (or perhaps simply an intensification) of the sociological nature of religion emphasized so strongly by the earliest generation of Islamic theologians in modern Turkey. For this reason Aktan places the blame for the failure of democratization in so much of the Muslim world squarely on the shoulders of Ash‘arism: “It is not Islam that has not made peace with democracy, but rather the society that has been created by Ḥanbalī-Ash‘arī theology, which has plagued Islam for a thousand years.”⁶⁴⁰

Another writer at *Radikal* came to Aktan’s defense in the two years after his series of articles came under heavy attack by the renowned Islamic theologian Hayreddin Karaman, writing in the pages of the Islamist newspaper *Yeni Şafak* (*New Dawn*).⁶⁴¹ Aktan’s son, Uygur Aktan, claimed in his own articles that the challenge of oppositional Islamic conservatism to the secular state (in republican terminology, *irtica*) also has deep theological roots. In his view these roots begin with the early separatist movements of the Khawārij, “crystallize” in the medieval Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), and are brought to modern expression in the Egyptian radical Islamist Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).⁶⁴² For Uygur Aktan, the conflict between *irtica* and

⁶³⁹ Gündüz Aktan, “Kuruluş ideolojimiz ve İslam (3),” [Founding Ideology and Islam 3] *Radikal* October 14, 2004.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ See Uygur Aktan, “İdeoloji, teoloji, ve devlet,” [Ideology, Theology, and the State] *Radikal* November 12, 2004 and “İslamiyet ve yeniden inşa,” [Islam and Reconstruction] *Radikal* January 13, 2005.

⁶⁴² Uygur Aktan, “Türk devrimi, laiklik, ve İslam,” [The Turkish Revolution, Secularism, and Islam] *Radikal* October 13 2006.

Kemalism is but the latest stage in the conflict between “orthodox” Islamic rationalism and “heterodox” Islamic conservatism. Like his father, Uygur Aktan also describes the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic as tantamount to the application of Māturīdī theology to modern political life:

Atatürk was the greatest iconoclast of our history; he was the breaker of idols. However, secularism (*laiklik*) cannot be defended by idolizing Atatürk himself. We must defend secularism in the way that Atatürk did: by discovering that in the religious sphere the original iconoclast was the religion of Islam itself. It is not Islam that is contrary to the Republic, democracy, secularism, and modernity; rather, it is the reactionism (*irtica*) that is molded by the Khārijī, Ḥanbalī, Salafī, and Ash‘arī doctrines that have plagued Islam for a thousand years. However, the dynamic rationalist school of thought inherent in Islamic thought that is formulated along the main axis of Ḥanafī-Māturīdism is not an obstacle to modernization; it is instead its theological dimension and it simply awaits its discovery.⁶⁴³

Like Beyaz, Aktan’s use of Islamic imagery in the defense of the nationalist narrative of the Turkish Republic is quite arresting. If Beyaz intimates that the advent of the Republic is similar to the advent of Islam, as a “mercy” to mankind, then Aktan intimates that Atatürk was like the Prophet Muḥammad. These characterizations, while very striking, are unusual in mainstream Turkish theological literature, Māturīdī or otherwise. However, they constitute one important and influential dimension of the ongoing negotiation between Islamic and nationalist narratives in Turkish cultural debates.

Hayreddin Karaman’s critique of Aktan’s religious nationalism is important, however, in a number of respects. It represents a more conservative iteration of the general theme of Islamic reformist thought in modern Turkey. Since the 1970s he has

⁶⁴³ U. Aktan, “Türk devrimi.”

advocated for the use of *ijtihād* in *fiqh*, and opposes many components of medieval *Sharī'a*, including the penalty of death for apostates. At the same he argues for the primacy of the patriarchal family structure, and is well known for his limited tolerance for a secular state, an institution whose utility he seems to accept but whose philosophical bases he frequently criticizes. As Recep Şentürk astutely points out, Karaman's brand of what one might call "conservative modernism" is highly reminiscent of the works of Fethullah Gülen, who also seems reluctant to challenge the institutions of secular democracy but is more concerned to promote a general religious conservatism within the confines of Turkish democracy.⁶⁴⁴

Karaman frames his opposition to Aktan's pieces by depicting secularism as a system that Muslims have consented to live under, and a system that they must learn to adapt to as devout believers, but outright rejects the notion that Islam and the Turkish brand of state-enforced secularism (laicism, or *laiklik*) can in any way be sourced in Islam. As he puts it, "In my view, it is a mistake to syncretize Islam with the secular (*laik*) state, to defend one with the other. What is more correct it to consider how the members of each system will live this earthly life together or separate from each other (as nations, blocs, or groups) in tranquility, peace, and justice..."⁶⁴⁵ This statement stands in stark contrast to both the moderate and the nationalist forms of Neo-Māturīdī political arguments, both of whom see a religious basis for secular democracy in Māturīdī's theology. Karaman also argues that though individual liberties must be

⁶⁴⁴ Şentürk, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 233-237; Ahmet Saim Kılavuz, "Hayreddin Karaman," in *Çağdaş İslam Düşünürleri*, ed. Çağfer Karadaş [Contemporary Islamic Thinkers] (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2007), 301-346.

⁶⁴⁵ Hayreddin Karaman, "Laikliğin Kur'an'la savunulması," [The Defense of Secularism with the Qur'ān] *Yeni Şafak* October 22, 2004.

protected by the establishment of a democratic state, he critiques the concept of “liberty” as fundamentally Western in origin and for its implication that God’s sovereignty over human beings is not absolute.⁶⁴⁶ Karaman also argues that the concepts of human rights and even democracy itself are Western and imperialist in origin, and maintains that a fully functional democracy can be erected on the basis of an Islamic state.⁶⁴⁷ These ideas clearly stand in contrast with the Neo-Māturīdī argument for secular democracy and the concomitant Neo-Māturīdī fear of religious government epitomized by their criticism of the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Karaman’s brand of Islamic reformism, due to its hesitancy to synthesize Islam and modernity outright, is therefore more in line with İsmail Hakkı İzmirli and Said Nursi’s thought, as outlined in the previous chapter. Karaman’s critique therefore reveals an important fracture within Islamic modernism in contemporary Turkey, a fracture between those groups that see Islam and some elements of social modernity as compatible but within a conservative social framework. These include Nursi and Gülen, who argue in favor of democracy, for instance, but shy away from liberal modernist reformism. They, like Karaman more recently, are the ancestors of late Ottoman thinkers such as İzmirli who advocated for a rethinking of Islamic thought in order to meet the demands of modernity but who resisted the outright identification of Islam with social modernity or progressive liberal social reform.

This “conservative modernist” group also tends to distance itself from Turkish nationalism, instead speaking in the name of a broader pan-Sunnism. The Neo-

⁶⁴⁶ Michelangelo Guida, “The New Islamists’ Understanding of Democracy in Turkey: The Examples of Ali Bulaç and Hayreddin Karaman,” *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 2010): 363.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 364-365.

Māturīdīs, however, are ancestors of Yaltkaya and Yörükan's circle, who utilized Ziya Gökalp's religious sociology to create a national Turkish heritage of liberal Islamic thought based on Māturīdī, who they see as the Turkish religious thinker par excellence. In their view, Islam's ability to adapt to changing social norms in the modern period is part of its inherently flexible and rational nature. For them, modernity is not a challenge to be met as it is for the "conservative modernists." On the contrary, modernity is a call for liberal reform within Islamic religious practice, based on the eternal rational truths of Islam itself.

This chapter has used Carl Schmitt's concept of the political to help define what is meant by the notion of "Māturīdī Rationalism" (*akılcılık*), the term used by the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs to summarize their interpretation of Māturīdī's theology and hence of Islam in general. Schmitt's concept of the political, by focusing on the perceived enemy of Neo-Māturīdism, has helped to define how they view their place in the contemporary Turkish theological landscape. Schmitt's notion of the political as the conflict between two ideologies who see each other as a threat to their own way of life perfectly describes how Yörükan deploys the term *tarikatchılık*, how Kutlu or Özcan use the term *cemaat*, or how Aktan understands the Ash'ariyya. In all these cases, and for the others discussed in this chapter, Schmitt's concept of the political describes the need for the Neo-Māturīdīs to clearly define their theological opponents: these opponents represents a threat to the liberal order that they seek to defend, and as such are all labeled in some way to denote theological conservatism.

An analysis of the perceived ideological opponents of Neo-Māturīdism in Turkey has enabled us to discern the content of the term "rationalism" in their usage: it

refers to a reformist theological orientation that differentiates between eternal religious truth (the Oneness of God) and how that truth is experienced, institutionalized, and expressed in societies across history. Overall, their “rationalist” approach means the ability to distinguish the experienced from the eternal, and to recognize when the former must be changed, adapted, or even abandoned for the sake of the continuing viability of the Islamic religion. Conservative Islamic groups that oppose the notion of reform within Islamic tradition, or who lean more heavily in favor of submission to a charismatic authority at the expense of the free exercise of individual interpretations of Islam, are the theological opponents of this movement, and the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs’ characterization of them as such draws heavily on political terminology inherited from Kemalism.

The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs derive this notion of rationalism from their reading of the central role that “reason” (*‘aql*) plays in Māturīdī’s works, and their interpretation of Māturīdī’s theological epistemology draws on the elements of the proto-modern philosophical realism that it features. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Māturīdī sees the world as a constant source of change that is best approached using the individual exercise of reason and the data of experience to chart the course of human societies across history. Contemporary Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs use these elements of Māturīdī’s theology to ground elements of Turkish Islamic reformist thought, producing a synthesis of the proto-modern elements of Māturīdī realism and Turkish Islamic reformism that they express in the term Māturīdī “rationalism” (*akılcılık*).

Schmitt’s notion of the political, by helping to illuminate the Neo-Māturīdīs’ place in Turkish political discourse, has brought into sharper relief two major political

ideologies put forward by Neo-Māturīdī thought. As political liberals who define themselves in opposition to conservative Islam, these thinkers include detailed theological arguments for the legitimacy of secular democracy and a liberal political order. The Neo-Māturīdī political arguments are of two types. First, the more mainstream Neo-Māturīdīs use Māturīdī as a way to support the establishment of democracy in Muslim countries and are part of a much broader Islamic theological argument in Turkey to this effect. While they see Māturīdī as a specifically “Turkish” Islamic thinker, they view his interpretation of Islam as having normative relevance to all of Sunnism.⁶⁴⁸ Some of the theologians who take the approach of using Māturīdī to argue for the legitimacy of democracy also use his theology as a way to critique the heavy-handed secularist policies of the Kemalist regime, and argue for an even broader vision of democratization than traditionalism Kemalism envisions.

The second political use of Māturīdī is more radical, and follows a parallel but distinct Turkish Islamic theological argument for the legitimacy of not only secular democracy in general, but also Kemalist laicism in particular. This line of thinking argues that Kemalism is in fact a concrete manifestation of Māturīdī’s theology, and is therefore (ironically) the most truly “Islamic” form of political organization currently available to Muslim nations. While both political arguments use Māturīdī’s theology to combine ideologies of Turkish nationalism with ideologies of Islamic theological reformism, the former more moderate argument leans more strongly on Turkish Islamic theological reformism for support, while the latter more radical political argument leans

⁶⁴⁸ It is difficult to assess what influence Turkish Neo-Māturīdism has outside of Turkey. However, since only a few of these theologians’ articles have been translated into English, and none of their works have been translated from Turkish into any other language, it seems likely that this line of thought is currently confined to Turkey.

more heavily in the direction of Turkish nationalism. The conclusion to this dissertation will explore the Neo-Māturīdī political argument for liberal democracy in more detail and explore its significance for Islamic thought in Turkey more broadly.

CONCLUSION

AN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY OF LIBERALISM

Summary of Main Arguments

This dissertation has argued that the emergence of the tradition of liberal Islamic theology in Republican Turkey that grounds its arguments in the interpretation of Māturīdī's theological texts reveals an important dynamic in intellectual history usually overlooked in the study of Islam. The Turkish Neo-Māturīdī rediscovery of Māturīdī's theology to support an argument for liberal reform in Islam shows that the traditional and the modern are not necessarily antithetical. Academic studies of Islam in Turkey have adopted a commonly assumed dichotomy between the traditional and the modern (and, by extension, the religious and the secular) inherited from the Enlightenment. This dichotomy assumes that premodern intellectual traditions (such as Islamic theology) must be inherently incompatible with modernity and modern political notions (such as the notion of the secular).

As a result, most studies of Islam in Turkey have focused on groups that adopt this dichotomy as well, such as Islamists who reject modernity in favor of Islam, or secularists who reject Islam in favor of modernity. This dissertation has sought to reveal an important current of thought that has since the beginning of the Turkish Republic seen Islam and modernity as anything but antithetical. For these Turkish liberal theologians, modernity can in fact be seen to be predicated upon certain premodern Islamic traditions of thought. The Turkish liberal theologians who most clearly exemplify this tradition are what I have called the Neo-Māturīdīs, a group of liberal

theologians in Turkey who have linked Māturīdī with Turkish national and cultural history in an attempt to outline a national Turkish interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with modernity and liberal democracy.

I have argued that Gadamer's hermeneutics demonstrates that the tradition-modern dichotomy assumed by theories of modernization and the ideologies of the Enlightenment is untenable because it ignores the role that tradition actually plays in generating new ideas and intellectual traditions. Gadamer's "rehabilitation" of the concept of "prejudice" against Enlightenment claims of absolute objectivity reveal that preexisting discursive traditions play an essential role in the formation of new discursive traditions. Gadamer's hermeneutics shows that the modern and the traditional are actually more closely related than has been previously assumed. Gadamer shows that since understanding takes place in the context of a person's location in a particular context, it must always partake of preconceptions or "prejudices" in the formation of any new interpretation. In other words, one cannot interpret anything without certain preconceptions that precede the act of understanding. When we realize that these preconceptions are what we mean by the term "tradition," then it becomes clear that participation in tradition is the ground of all interpretation. Similarly, because our hermeneutical acts are constituted by the modification of our pre-conceptions to fit reality as it is experienced, participation in tradition may also produce change. As Gadamer puts it, "Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves."⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.

This dissertation has also attempted to identify the key features of Abū al-Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's theology that the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs have emphasized the most. In this process, I have laid out an examination of Māturīdī's theological epistemology that delves deeper into the significance of his focus on empiricism and his vision of a changing world. Through a close analysis of passages in Māturīdī's only surviving systematic theological work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* I attempted to more fully explain the significance of his use of terminologies such as reason ('*ʿaql*'), rational speculation (*naẓar*), empirical perception ('*iyān*'), aspect (*wajh/jiha*), natures (*ṭabā'i*), flux (*taqallub*), and religion (*dīn*).

I have argued that Māturīdī outlines a philosophically realistic epistemology that prioritizes empirical data in interpreting the world. Reason is the instrument people use to organize sensory data into a coherent picture of the world. Māturīdī also elaborates a metaphysics of constant change, or flux, wherein all things in the world experience ceaseless variation in their inherent natures based on shifts in context and state. Nothing in the world has a stable nature: the characteristics of a thing are determined relative to its context. When the senses are utilized to create knowledge about the world, they encounter the objects of the world in their respective contexts and can observe how these characteristics may shift through the endless process of flux that characterizes the world as a lived experience. Māturīdī elaborates a theory of perspective that claims that human beings can only apprehend a limited number of aspects or states of a thing at one time due to the limitations of our senses. Yet according to Māturīdī, the fact that the world does not devolve into chaos is the ultimate proof for the existence of a single all-powerful creator who is unchanging and eternal (unlike the created world). Māturīdī

describes the creedal profession of the existence of the one God (*tawḥīd*) as an inner profession of belief in the hearts of human beings, thereby delineating a sphere of eternal religious truth from the constant changes that characterize the created world.

These features of Māturīdī's theology, such as the metaphysics of natural flux, empiricist epistemology and the acceptance of reason's ability to discern good from evil in varying situations independent of the dictates of revelation, put him at odds with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's occasionalistic metaphysics and textual rationalism. However, the most influential systematizer of Māturīdī's theology, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, succeeded in bringing Māturīdī's theology closer in line with Ash'arism by downplaying or eliminating the elements of Māturīdī's thought that conflicted with Ash'arī orthodoxy. Nasafī's interpretation of Māturīdism would become standard for later generations of Māturīdī thinkers who built the later Māturīdī tradition on his texts. At the same time, the mature Ash'arī school epitomized by the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and 'Adūd al-Dīn al-Ijī incorporated significant Māturīdī influence into their own systems, bringing some key components of Ash'arism closer in line with Māturīdism. This is most clearly seen in the late Ash'arī adoption of the Māturīdī doctrine of choice (*ikhtiyār*) in human actions.

By the beginning of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century, the ground was prepared for a theological synthesis between Ash'arism and Māturīdism. This synthesis became Sunnī theological orthodoxy in the Ottoman period, as the Ottoman state emphasized its attachment to orthodox Sunnism in opposition to the rival Shi'ī Safavid state. Ottoman theologians argued that the differences between Māturīdism and Ash'arism were merely semantic and did not merit charges of heresy. At the same time,

the highly professionalized Ottoman system of religious education, the *medrese* system, favored late Ash‘arī theological texts in its curricula. However, in this intellectual climate there were important instances of the assertion of a distinctly Māturīdī theological identity. The most notable of these was an eighteenth century theological controversy over the definition of *ikhtiyār* (personal choice), in which a group of Ottoman theologians identified with what they described as a uniquely Māturīdī theological position on human freedom while at the same time critiquing Ash‘arism on this question. Their works demonstrated the continuing viability of Māturīdī theological realism even in an intellectual environment of theological synthesis.

The nationalist Turkish Republic emerged as a consequence of the radical social and political reforms set in motion at the end of the Ottoman Empire. During the late Ottoman period, a *medrese* reform movement helped to produce a circle of modernist Islamic theologians in Istanbul that supported reform in Islamic belief and practice by appealing to classical Islamic textual traditions. This circle became the crucible for the formation of a Turkish Islamic reformism that became the core ideology of the new Turkish system of higher religious education, the divinity faculty system. These theologians, and most particularly Turkish nationalists such as Yusuf Ziya Yörükkan, began to rediscover the significance of Māturīdī and described his theology as the key component of a national Turkish heritage of Islam. Yörükkan in particular in the late 1940s and early 1950s combined the notion of a Turkish Islamic tradition of theology with Islamic modernist reformism, and in doing so set the parameters for mainstream academic theology in Turkey.

The academic heritage of Islamic reformism in Turkey emerged as a major intellectual force in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the enormous growth experienced by the divinity faculty system in this period. Though the question of an Islamic state emerged in some circles from the late 1960s to the early 1980s as a challenge to the Turkish heritage of reformism, the failure of these radical Islamist movements to receive sufficient popular support caused the notion of an Islamic state to fall out of fashion by the mid-1990s. Since this period, discussion of Islamic thought in Turkey has centered on the relationship between Islam and Turkish national identity and has asked how Islamic thought can best advance the interests of the Turkish people as a moral or social force. The academic theology of the divinity faculties has reemerged as a major contributor to these debates.

One of the most significant liberal reformist voices in these conversations is a movement I have termed Turkish Neo-Māturīdism. This movement is a group of scholars that has followed in the footsteps of the earliest generations of nationalist Islamic reformists in Turkey in order to define a uniquely Turkish understanding of Islam. They argue that Māturīdī's theology is the most suitable theological system for outlining a vision of Islam for contemporary Turkey. They expand on the empiricist realism of Māturīdī's epistemology to create an argument for reform in Islam. The Neo-Māturīdī argument is based on a distinction between eternal religious truths (such as the doctrine of the unity of God) and contingent religious practices (such as religious law). Because Māturīdī recognized that change is inherent in the world, and that the only precepts that cannot be altered as a result of this change are immutable religious truths, these theologians argue that Māturīdī recognized the same distinction between

changeable and unchangeable elements of Islamic belief and practice elaborated by modern Islamic reformism. These theologians describe the distinction between the changeable and unchangeable elements of religion as a distinction between *dīn* and *Sharī‘a*, where *dīn* refers to immutable religious truths such as belief in the one God and *Sharī‘a* refers to the changeable religious practices that are meant to express this truth in ways best suited to the present cultural environment. This terminological distinction is taken over from Māturīdī himself.

Most importantly, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs outline an epistemology of religious reform based on Māturīdī’s extensive discussion of reason and perception. They argue that Māturīdī’s theological realism is the ideal method for recognizing the changeable and the unchangeable in Islam, thereby enabling ongoing religious reform in accordance with changing contexts. In their view Māturīdī’s openness to empirical experience and his realist approach to religious doctrine constitute a kind of flexible religious humanism that is best suited to dealing with the place of religion in a changing world. They term this attitude “Māturīdī Rationalism” (*Māturīdī Akılcılık*), a term that does not actually refer to an epistemology of pure reason, but instead refers to the deep confidence that Māturīdī places in the ability of independent human intellectual effort to understand and interpret the world. The Neo-Māturīdī argument sees reformist potential in Māturīdī’s realist epistemology and develops this potential into a sophisticated theological epistemology of Islamic reform.

Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political helps to understand the meaning of the crucial term *Māturīdī Akılcılık*. By separating out the perceived ideological opponents of the Neo-Māturīdī movement, one can see that by contrast Māturīdī “rationalism”

refers to a flexible and reformist religious epistemology that recognizes the possibility and necessity of reform in Islam without compromising its immutable truths. This term refers to the confidence that Māturīdī posits in independent human reflection and the elasticity that his inductive and empirical method provides when thinking about the place of religion in society. The Neo-Māturīdī theologians set their ideas against various conservative Islamic groups in Turkey that see a conflict between Islam and modernity or Islam and social change. In the eyes of the Neo-Māturīdīs, their most potent ideological opponents are conservative Muslim thinkers who diminish the individual's ability to interpret religion for herself or who deny the possibility of religious reform in accordance with modernity. This is because for the Neo-Māturīdīs, as for the first generation of Islamic reformists in Turkey, modernity and Islamic tradition are not opposed or discrete entities. Instead, as Gadamer might have predicted, modernity may be seen to be predicated on Islamic tradition. In this way the Neo-Māturīdīs go on to use Māturīdī's realist epistemology to make an argument for liberal democracy and for reform in favor of greater individual liberties within the existing Kemalist system.

The Changeable and the Unchangeable: The Turkish Theology of Liberal Democracy and Interpretive Authenticity

As alluded to above, the distinction between the changeable and the unchangeable is a crucial component of the Neo-Māturīdī argument and of Islamic reformism in general. Discussing this distinction in greater detail reveals how reformist theologians make an argument for liberal democracy. As Abdolkarim Soroush points out, "the changeable and unchangeable in Islamic thought and practice is a topic with

its own reformist lineage.”⁶⁵⁰ Islamic modernism is based on a distinction between religious beliefs and practices that reflect eternal truths and those that are products of human contingency and thus subject to reform or abrogation.

This is the argument of Islamic modernism, which implies a critical attitude toward received tradition and an openness to the social changes brought about by modernity. In the words of Muhammad ‘Abduh, “Islam reproves the slavish imitation of the ancestors that characterizes the leaders of the religions, with their instinct to hold timidly to tradition-sanctioned ways.”⁶⁵¹ In this perspective, tradition can only be considered valid insofar as it accords with divine truth, and has no absolute status as such. On this point liberal Islamic modernists share much with conservative Islamic modernists. However, the liberal Islamic modernist position insists on openness to the changes wrought by modernity on the grounds that the effectiveness of religious institutions is related to their ability to interact meaningfully with their social situation. These are the demands that inspire what Muhammad Iqbal called “the principle of movement in the structure of Islam.” As he explains, “The conservative thinkers of Islam focused all their efforts on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by a jealous exclusion of all innovations in the law of *Shari‘a*...But they did not see...that the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men.”⁶⁵²

As Iqbal goes on to demonstrate, for Islamic modernism the dignity of the individual and her ability to respond creatively to new social conditions is at the heart

⁶⁵⁰ Sorouosh, “Changeable,” 9.

⁶⁵¹ ‘Abduh, *Unity*, 127.

⁶⁵² Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 120.

of religious reform: “The only effective power, therefore, that counteracts the forces of decay in a people is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals. Such individuals alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision.”⁶⁵³ The distinction between the changeable and the unchangeable in Islam can also acquire a historicist dimension, whereby the non-essential components of Islamic tradition can be described as historically contingent. This formulation is especially prominent in the modernist theological works of Fazlur Rahman, who argues that it is necessary for Muslims “to distinguish between normative Islam and historical Islam.”⁶⁵⁴ As Rahman explains, “If the spark for the modernization of old Islamic learning and for the Islamization of the new is to arise, then the original thrust of Islam—of the Qur’ān and Muḥammad—must be clearly resurrected so that the conformities and deformities of historical Islam may be clearly judged by it.”⁶⁵⁵ For Rahman, the notion of history expresses the concept of human contingency upon which is built the notion of reform in Islamic modernism.

Building on Māturīdī and previous traditions of Islamic modernism, Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs argue that the unchangeable can only be expressed through the changeable. They draw out the political and social consequences of this argument and explain that essential religious truth can only be experienced by human beings in this world through participation in human institutions and practices. The changeable enables the visibility of the unchangeable (religious truth) in human experience. As Yusuf Ziya

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁵⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 141.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

Yörükan argues, “Religion (*din*) is a divine institution.”⁶⁵⁶ However, in practical terms, religion must be expressed in ways conducive to the society in which it finds itself: “In worldly affairs, religion starts from the principle of the public good (*maslahat*).”⁶⁵⁷

As discussed in previous chapters, Yörükan distinguishes between *din* and *diyanet*, where *din* refers to immutable religious truths and *diyanet* refers to aspects of religious practice that are liable to change because they are connected with an individual’s situatedness in a particular context. As Yörükan explains, “*diyanet* is the state of an individual person between herself and God; it means to believe in and conform to *din*.”⁶⁵⁸ Because one’s *diyanet* is contingent on one’s own circumstances, it is liable to change in accordance with these circumstances, and the individual believer should be free to make these determinations. As Hanifi Özcan puts it, “the execution of religion as such is dependent on the human being, meaning were there to be no human being there would be no use for religion. However, in order for this function to be carried out, it is necessary for religion be able to answer the needs of the human being, be they social or individual.”⁶⁵⁹

The free use of rational investigation and intellectual effort is what enables a person to distinguish between the changeable and the unchangeable in religion and determine the proper nature of their relationship. This theological realism is what allows for the development of an Islamic understanding of liberal democracy, deployed in contradistinction to the restrictive theological epistemology of Turkish Islamic conservatism. Hülya Alper aptly summarizes this use of reason with her phrase, “the

⁶⁵⁶ Yörükan, “Müslümanlık,” 19.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁶⁵⁸ Yörükan, “Diyanet,” 194.

⁶⁵⁹ Özcan, “Modern,” 136.

priority of reason and the necessity of revelation.”⁶⁶⁰ Like Yörükan, Alper emphasizes that there can be no contradiction between reason and the truths of revelation.⁶⁶¹ As she explains, “Reason, which at the beginning certifies the truth of religion as a whole, while entering into the sphere of the religious, is able to speak authoritatively on the understanding and evaluation of religious laws.”⁶⁶² In other words, reason (*akıl*) is what determines how changeable religious practices are to be interpreted in light of unchangeable religious truth.

This epistemology of religious reform is the basis of the Neo-Māturīdī argument for religious liberalism and liberal democracy. Nader Hashemi’s seminal work *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies*, is helpful in drawing out the political component of their argument, as it explores the necessary theological roots of liberal democracy. As Hashemi demonstrates, the notion of the secular is nowhere inherent in Christianity or in any other premodern religious tradition. Instead, in order to delineate a neutral public space where religious debate could be carried out without the implication of state violence, Christian communities in Western Europe had to develop a justification for secular democracy from within the Christian tradition itself. Hashemi’s analysis of John Locke is particularly illuminating in this respect. He shows how secular democracy could only be made possible in early modern Europe when it was given a theological underpinning due to the continuing social purchase that religious values had in early modern

⁶⁶⁰ Alper, “Akıl,” 179.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 179.

European society. The path to political liberalism in early modern Europe was through a rethinking of Christian theology.

Hashemi points to John Locke because of the crucial epistemological distinctions that Locke draws between the religious and the political, and even more crucially, the fact that he constructs these distinctions through theological arguments. Hashemi highlights this important distinction with a quotation from Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. As Locke states, "I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the Business of Civil Government from that of Religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other."⁶⁶³ Hashemi's main point is that arguments for secular democracy and religious toleration must be made on the basis of theological claims in societies where religious reasoning possesses paramount moral authority, such as the contemporary Islamic world. Thus, Hashemi argues for a Muslim theory of secularism because, as he puts it, "Liberal democracy requires a form of secularism to sustain itself, yet simultaneously the main political, cultural and intellectual resources at the disposal of Muslim democrats today are theological."⁶⁶⁴

The Turkish Neo-Māturīdī attempt to distinguish theological religious truth from contingent and context-specific religious practices is very similar to the epistemological foundations that undergird Locke's search for religious tolerance in the secular sphere. In *Essay Concerning Toleration* (written approximately 20 years before his more famous *Letter*), Locke argues for religious toleration on the basis that religious doctrines, such as "speculative opinions and Divine worship," are worthy of toleration

⁶⁶³ Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 109.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

by the state because it is the duty of the sovereign to preserve the public interest and not to interfere with domains “where we [i.e., both the magistrate and the subject] are both equally inquirers and both equally subjects.”⁶⁶⁵ Locke bases his defense of religious toleration on the epistemologically contingent nature of religious belief. This notion is more explicitly spelled out in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where Locke draws a clear distinction between the certain truths of Reason (such as the existence of the one God) and notions that possess a greater degree of ambiguity: “the Existence of one GOD is according to Reason; the Existence of more than one GOD, contrary to reason; the Resurrection of the Dead, above Reason.”⁶⁶⁶ Locke further explains that beliefs “above reason” may be taken “either as signifying above Probability, or above Certainty,” just like those beliefs that are protected by the religious toleration of the magistrate.⁶⁶⁷

This focus on individual reasoning in determining the sphere of religious practice is as a key feature of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī argument. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, this emphasis maps onto a liberal democratic critique of Kemalism. As Halil M. Karaveli puts it, “the liberal disavowal [of Kemalism] is a call for the reexamination of the Turkish secularist experience, and in particular how it relates to Western, emancipating traditions.”⁶⁶⁸ Karaveli points to Locke as well, arguing that whereas there was a Hobbeseian moment in Turkish political philosophy that separated

⁶⁶⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, in *An Essay Concerning Toleration and Other Writings on Law and Politics 1667-1683*, ed. J.R. Milton and Philip Milton, 267-316 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006): 273, 271.

⁶⁶⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 687.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Karaveli, “Liberal,” 87.

church from state, there was no Lockean moment that argued for the lack of state interference in religious affairs.⁶⁶⁹ This is an insightful comment because it points to the commonly cited distinction in state secularism between what Hashemi calls “the Anglo-American ‘religion-friendly’ (weak) version and the French Republican ‘religion-hostile’ (strong) version.”⁶⁷⁰

As explained in Chapters Four and Five, Kemalist secularization followed the French Republican model, which is why the term for secularism in Turkish—*laiklik*—borrows from the French. This model has come under increasing criticism from Turkish liberals (such as the Neo-Māturīdīs), for whom it represents state oppression of religious expression (such as wearing the headscarf). The notion of individual liberty implied in Turkish Neo-Māturīdī theology is much more in line with the Anglo-American model of secularism. The need to adapt religion to individual circumstances, for instance, is highly reminiscent of the liberal theology of John Stuart Mill, for whom fulfillment of the needs of the individual and society are the ultimate ends of any social program.⁶⁷¹ The liberal Turkish critique of Kemalist laicism is also reminiscent of Mill’s concept of individual liberty: “The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”⁶⁷² Interference by the state in religious affairs is ruled out in the Anglo-American model, for as Thomas Jefferson famously argued, “To suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁷⁰ Hashemi, “Liberal Democracy,” 104.

⁶⁷¹ See on this point John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979). 11.

⁶⁷² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. David Bromwich and George Kateb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 83.

profession or propagation of principles, on the supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty.”⁶⁷³

The emphasis on the primary importance of ever-changing social circumstances in Turkish Māturīdī reflections on religious reform also recalls John Dewey’s philosophical expansion of the idealized individualism of classical liberalism: “Time signifies change. The significance of individuality with respect to social policies alters with change of the conditions in which individuals live.”⁶⁷⁴ Contemporary Turkish Neo-Māturīdism may therefore be described as politically “liberal” in the sense that they argue for an Anglo-American notion of individual religious freedom as a critique of both Kemalist laicism and Islamist conservatism. The reason why Māturīdī is important for them in this context is because they detect in his theology the epistemological foundations that make this possible. They detect a “proto-modernism,” upon which can be built the kind of Islamic theology of liberal democracy that Hashemi calls for. Māturīdī is proto-modern in the sense that the fundamental components of his epistemology (namely empiricism and historicism) imply certain key assumptions of the

⁶⁷³ Thomas Jefferson, “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia (1779),” in Lloyd S. Kramer, ed., *Paine and Jefferson on Liberty* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994).

⁶⁷⁴ John Dewey, “The Future of Liberalism,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 292. Dewey’s argument is that classical liberalism’s notion of natural liberty can lead to the inability to perceive structural injustices that prevent a person from living out her full individuality, despite the urgent desire to do so. This liberal identification of structural injustices that must be removed before actual liberty can be achieved is becoming a part of the Turkish liberal Islamic movement as well. The Presidency of Religious Affairs, for instance, has instituted a policy of gender-based affirmative action (“positive discrimination,” *pozitif ayırmacılık*, in Turkish) in its hiring practices. In the constitutional reforms adopted by a public referendum in 2010, the ruling AKP was also persuaded by secular liberals to include new language that made “positive discrimination” legal under the Turkish constitution’s provisions for ensuring gender equality. Since that time the AKP has (albeit partly reluctantly) adopted the policy of “positive discrimination” as part of its own ideology.

modern epistemology of liberal democracy. The appeal to empiricism and reason that Māturīdī so passionately makes is compatible with the modern secular argument that since religious knowledge is the domain of personal reflection and observation, it cannot be regulated by the state. For both Māturīdī and modern liberals alike, religious knowledge is based on individual empirical knowledge and reasoned reflection. However, for modern liberals such as the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs, this argument has political implications: since religious knowledge is based on individual reflection it should not be governed by the state if individual liberties are to be preserved.

Of course, the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī theological argument for liberal democracy is based on the development of possibilities that Māturīdī himself did not explore. Although the Turkish theologians do not put words in his mouth, they do shift the emphasis of Māturīdī's reflections on the changeable and the unchangeable toward the political. The unchangeable gets the most emphasis by Māturīdī himself because he is concerned to prove the existence of a single omnipotent God in the context of inter-religious debates. In fact, the very first dogmatic proof that Māturīdī employs in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* argues for the fact of change in the natural world (*taqallub*). Because these changes do not devolve into chaos, they must be directed by an omnipotent deity (*mudabbir*). In a sense, this is the essence of the argument of his entire text, the point toward which his entire system is directed.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the arguments of the Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs are not directed at those who do not believe in an omnipotent creator. Rather, they are directed at conservative Muslims who either do not accept social modernity or do not believe that religion should be reformed to conform to modernity. For this reason, the

Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs shift the emphasis in Māturīdī's formula: they focus instead on the changeable. They use the existence of the unchangeable (dogmatic truth) to highlight the nature of the changeable (religious practice) in an effort to elaborate a theological defense of social and political change, which opens a space for liberal political reform. They draw out implications in Māturīdī's thought that were underdeveloped by Māturīdī himself due to the exigencies of his own social and political environment. In this way, they have rediscovered his relevance for modern Islamic theology.

While the Turkish Neo-Māturīdī defense of liberalism has been clearly articulated and has strong roots in the history of Turkish Islamic modernism, it remains to be seen whether or not Neo-Māturīdī religious liberalism constitutes a full-fledged theory of secularism. This would be a fruitful avenue for future research along the lines suggested by Hashemi's call for an Islamic theory of secularism. To what extent can their liberal theology be called a theology of secularism? Can this theology be elaborated upon to produce an Islamic theory of secularism based on premodern Islamic tradition? What might such a theory look like and what role could it play in contemporary Islamic thought? In addition, how might the Neo-Māturīdī theological paradigm address other questions at stake in liberal democratic societies, such as gender equality and the treatment of minorities? I hope to explore these questions in fuller detail in the future elaborations of this project.

The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs must be understood as they describe themselves: as *Māturīdīs*. Just like other members of any interpretive tradition they find new justifications in traditional texts in order to advance their interpretive agenda. Indeed, as

Gadamer show, this is the very essence of the act of interpretation: “The interpreter seeks no more than to understand... the text-i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text’s meaning and significance. In order to understand this he must not try disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand it at all.”⁶⁷⁵ The Turkish Neo-Māturīdīs show that an Islamic theology of liberal democracy is not a contradiction in terms or a hybrid creature composed of mutually opposed thought traditions. In sum, the Turkish theology of liberalism is, above all, Islamic.

⁶⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 321.

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