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FAZLUR RAHMAN'S ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
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Institute of Islamic Studies
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Montreal
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether traditional learn-to-swim progressions, leading to the front and back swim, were developmentally valid for children with physical disabilities.

Forty children between the ages of 5 and 12 years participated in this study. The children were described according to four descriptive characteristics: disability type, functional sport classification, mode of ambulation, and need of a floatation device. The children required recommendation from their regular aquatic instructor as being comfortable in the water to participate in the study. In addition, each child had to pass a water orientation-adjustment test.

The developmental validity of the progressions was assessed by testing the children on seven skills: rhythmic breathing, front float, front glide, front swim, back float, back glide, and back swim. A pass consisted of all criteria for success being met for a particular skill. The data were analyzed to determine the number of children who followed the typical progression and the number who followed an atypical progression.

The results indicated that the proposed learn-to-swim progressions for both the front swim and back swim were not developmentally valid for most children with physical disabilities who were neither extremely high nor low in functional sport ability.

These results are consistent with the views of ecological theory and suggest that not all children with physical disabilities will reach an end-goal using the same means. Aquatic instructors therefore, need to adapt their teaching methods to the individual strengths of their students.

RÉSUMÉ

Auteur	: Fatimah Husein
Titre du mémoire	: La philosophie islamique de Fazlur Rahman
Département	: Institut des Études Islamiques, Université McGill
Diplôme	: Maîtrise ès Arts

Cette étude examine l'approache de Fazlur Rahman de la philosophie islamique en analysant son attitude à l'égard des oeuvres des philosophes musulmans ainsi que les convictions de l'auteur concernant la valeur des préceptes du Qur'ān. Elle explore les relations existant entre sa philosophie et sa méthode d'interprétation du Qur'ān puisque, selon le raisonnement de Rahman, cette méthode demeure le seul moyen puovant satisfaire les besoins changeants de la société. De plus, l'étude explore la définition donnée par Rahman de la philosophie islamique, qui est fortement caractérisée par trois termes religieux, c'est-à-dire, l'*īmān*, l'*islām* et le *taqwā*.

Du plus, ce mémoire examine les motivations qui ont poussé Rahman, dans ses oeuvres, à emprunter certaines expressions utilisées par les philosophes musulmans, puisque, à première vue, cela semble contredire les positions prises par Rahman. Une attention particulière sera accordée à son livre *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* dans lequel Rahman élabore sur l'existence humaine et l'ultime destin selon son interprétation du Qur'ān. Ce mémoire parvient à la conclusion que la philosophie islamique de Rahman est une philosophie morale, qui est pratiquement orientée et basée sur sa compréhension du Qur'ān.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis owes much to the help and contributions of a great many people. First and foremost my mother, father and two brothers, who have always supported me and understood my commitment to my studies. Sincere thanks are due to Professor Todd Lawson for his invaluable advice. His intellectual and constructive criticism, patience and encouragement were instrumental in the completion of this thesis. It was he who "opened" my mind to thinking critically and to trying to understand the underlying reasons and meanings behind every single notion. I would also like to thank Prof. Üner Turgay for his warmth and kindness, which has contributed to a very positive environment in the Institute.

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Gratitude is also owed to my beloved friend Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah, who has given to me so generously of her very limited time. To my Indonesian friends in Montreal, who I cannot mention one by one, I would like to thank them for enriching me with "bitter-sweet" memories; and to Shama and Zeshan Farooqui, for their kind hospitality as I stayed with them for about one year. Last, but not least, my deepest thanks are reserved for a special "someone" in Indonesia, without whom this thesis would not have been possible.

SPELLING AND TRANSLITERATION

The Arabic names and terms in this thesis follow the system of transliteration employed by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal. Place names will be written according to the conventional English spellings.

English	Arabic
th	ث
ḥ	ح
kh	خ
d	د
dh	ذ
sh	ش
ṣ	ص
ḍ	ض
ṭ	ط
ẓ	ظ
ʿ	ع
gh	غ
ʾ	ء

Long vowels of آ, ي, و, are typed by using the bars above characters: ā, ī, and ū.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic philosophy by examining his studies and critique of Muslim philosophers' works and his certitude as to the value of the Qur'ānic message. The thesis is not concerned with Rahman's opinion on the value (if any) of the *sunnah* or tradition of the Prophet in providing answers for the needs of contemporary man. Rather, it concentrates on his opinion on the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world, as mostly expressed in the Qur'ān. The reason for choosing this approach lies in the importance that the Qur'ān occupies Rahman's scheme of thought. This thesis, therefore, examines the relationship between Rahman's philosophy and his task of interpreting the Qur'ānic message in the light of contemporary needs.

It should be noted, however, that Rahman himself does not term this specific thought as "Islamic philosophy." The reason why I have chosen to refer to Rahman's intellectual activity in this manner is because of his disagreement with the Muslim philosophers' preoccupation with metaphysical notions on the one hand, and his offer of what he regarded as a more ethics-based system of thought.

Fazlur Rahman, one of this century's greatest Muslim scholars, was a Muslim scholar who was born in 1919 in what is now Pakistan, into a Muslim family that was deeply religious. Despite the piety of his parents, however, his father convinced him that although Islam was a great religion, it had to face modernity both as "a challenge and as an opportunity."[1] For this reason, Rahman was attracted in his youth to both traditional and

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[1]Fazlur Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," in *The Courage of Conviction*, ed. P. L. Berman (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), 154.

modern knowledge. His early education in India took place at traditional institutions of Islamic studies. In 1942, he received his Master's degree in Arabic Literature at Punjab University. From there, he went on to Oxford University whence he graduated with a doctorate in Islamic Philosophy in 1949.[2]

It was Rahman's study of philosophy which first created a conflict between his traditional beliefs and his modern thinking. He confesses that for at least six years -- from the late forties to the mid-fifties -- he experienced an acute scepticism. His book *Prophecy in Islam*,[3] reflecting this scepticism, gives an account of traditional Muslim theologians and Muslim philosophers on the issue of prophecy. During that same period Rahman realized that he needed to learn Islamic philosophy in preparation for a complete study of Islam, and from that time onward he devoted a great deal of energy to Islamic philosophy. To quote Rahman:

> Convinced that the Muslim philosophers were headed in the wrong direction, I was "reborn" with a new impulse to understand Islam. But where was that Islam? Had I not studied it with my father? But then my father had transmitted to me a fourteen-century-old tradition, and my scepticism had been directed at certain

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[2]This description of Rahman's life does not pretend to be a complete biography, since many other works provide this. In fact, Rahman himself wrote his autobiography in "Fazlur Rahman,"154-9. For a detailed account of Rahman's life see D. L. Berry, "The Thought of Fazlur Rahman as an Islamic Response to Modernity" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 50-61; Alparslan Açikgenç, "The Thinker of Islamic Revival and Reform: Fazlur Rahman's Life and Thought (1919-1988)," *Journal of Islamic Research* 4, 2 (1990): 232-48; F. M. Denny, "The Legacy of Fazlur Rahman," in *The Muslims of America*, ed. Y. Y. Haddad (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 96-8; T. A. Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas: Studi atas Pemikiran Hukum Fazlur Rahman* (Islam and the Challenge of Modernity: A Study of Fazlur Rahman's Legal Thought) (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 79-104; Amhar Rasyid, "Some Qur'ānic Legal Texts in the Context of Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutical Theory" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1994), 5-7.

[3]Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958).

> important aspects of that tradition. I then realized that although Muslims claim their beliefs, law, and spirituality are "based upon the Quran," the scripture embodying the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632), the Quran was never taught by itself in any seat of traditional learning, but always with the aid of commentaries. A study of the Quran itself, together with the life of the Prophet, enabled me to gain fresh insight into its meaning and purpose, making it possible for me to reevaluate my tradition.[4]

Among those accomplishments for which Rahman is most renowned is his method of interpreting the Qur'ān. This method served as the basis of his understanding of Islamic legal theory.[5] It is acknowledged that Rahman's recommendations for achieving a proper understanding of Islamic principles are among his most significant contributions to the field of Islamic religious doctrine.[6] Furthermore, as Denny states, in Rahman's works one discerns an intellectual approach that presupposes those first principles which are rooted in faith.[7] However, Islamic philosophy, which first inspired Rahman to learn the Qur'ān in depth, has not received the attention it requires from scholars interested in his thought.

In fact, Rahman pays great attention to Islamic philosophy, and -- departing from the Muslim philosophers' conceptions of God, man, and nature -- attempts to provide a Qur'ānic perspective on these subjects, doing so in the hope of filling certain needs of contemporary man. In his writings,[8] Rahman alternates between support and criticism of

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[4]Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 155.

[5]See among others, Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," *The Muslim World* 81, 3-4 (1991): 212-30; Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas*; Rasyid, "Some Qur'ānic Legal Texts."

[6]Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," 213.

[7]F. M. Denny, "Fazlur Rahman: Muslim Intellectual," *The Muslim World* 79, 2 (1989): 91.

[8]For a complete bibliography of Rahman's works, consult T. A. Amal and I. Ali-Fauzi, "Bibliografi Karya-karya Intelektual Fazlur Rahman: Bagian I & II (Fazlur Rahman's Bibliography:

Muslim philosophers and makes a strong effort to elaborate his own position. This attention is not usually seen as part of his philosophical thought but, rather, of his legal thought; it can in fact be said to belong to the discourse of Islamic revival and reform.[9]

In analyzing Rahman's thought, especially his emphasis on *ijtihād* and his criticism of the world-negating conceptions of the Ṣūfīs, one is struck by its similarities with ideas advanced by some famous Muslim thinkers of the Indian subcontinent, such as Sirhindī (d. 1624) and Shāh Walī-Allāh of Delhi (d. 1762). These two thinkers spoke out in response to the political chaos faced by Indian Muslims at that time.[10]

Both Sirhindī and Walī-Allāh criticized the doctrine of *zuhd* ("the world-negation"). In Sirhindī's view, "the last point in creation which is this world is also the nearest to the starting point [(God), because the world is the purpose of the whole creative process]."[11]

Part I & II)," *Islamika* 1 (July-September 1993) and *Islamika* 2 (October-December 1993): 110-3, and 81-4, respectively; "Fazlur Rahman's Works," *Journal of Islamic Research* 4, 2 (1990): 248-52; Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988)," *Islamic Studies* 27, 4 (1988): 390-6.

[9]See among others, Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas*; Rasyid, "Some Qur'ānic Legal Texts."

[10]For a discussion on the political situation of India at the time of Sirhindī and Walī-Allāh, and the *mujaddid* ("renewer") tradition see, among others, Aziz Ahmad, ed., *Religion and Society in Pakistan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971); I. H. Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics* (Karachi: Ma'aref, 1972); P. Hardy, *Muslims of British India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1-60; B. D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3-45; Eqbal Ahmed, "Islam and Politics," in *Islam, Politics and the State: The Pakistan Experience*, ed. M. A. Khan (London: Zed Books, 1985), 13-30; E. Landau-Tasseron, "The 'Cyclical Reform': A Study of the *Mujaddid* Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79-117; S. Alvi, "The *Mujaddid* and *Tajdid* Tradition in the Indian Sub-continent: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 18 (1994): 1-15.

[11]S. Aḥmad Sirhindī, "Intikhāb-i Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī," ed., Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī* (Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1968), 47, line 8. The English quotation of this passage is taken from F. Rahman, "Introduction," *Selected Letters*, 53. For more discussion on Sirhindī's views and works that have been done on him, see chapter two of this thesis.

Walī-Allāh pointed in the same direction, postulating a world-affirming outlook.[12] He objected to the practices of popular religion in India, including worship at saints' tombs and the sacrifice of animals to deities.[13] Walī-Allāh's insistence on the importance of *ijtihād* is equally apparent. Hermansen argues that his position resembles that of the Shāfiʿī school, although Walī-Allāh was a Ḥanafī in practice. She further maintains that he "went from a position of rejecting *taqlīd* to an acceptance of generally following the four *madhhabs*, although being able to go outside them on specific cases."[14]

Indeed, Rahman admires both Sirhindī and Walī-Allāh. In one place, he describes Sirhindī's attempt to harmonize sharīʿah and *taṣawwuf* as revealing "some of the rarest insights into the nature of Islam," and asserts that "his religiously world-affirming attitude would astonish even the most modern thinker."[15] Elsewhere, Rahman notes that Walī-Allāh was a thinker "*sui generis* in the entire history of traditional Islam," and that "no one before him attempted an integration [Tatbiq] [sic] of the total Islamic Structure."[16]

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[12]Fazlur Rahman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 6, 2 (1967): 118.

[13]P. Hardy, *Muslims of British India*, 29.

[14]Shāh Walī Allāh, *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's* Ḥujjāt Allāh al-Bāligha, trans. M. K . Hermansen (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), xxxi-ii. See also Fazlur Rahman, "The Thinker of Crisis: Shah Waliy-Ullah," *Pakistan Quarterly* 6, 2 (1956): 45; Rahman, "Internal Religious Developments in the Present Century Islam," *Journal of World History* 2, 4 (1955): 863-4. For more discussion on Walī-Allāh, see, among others, A. Ahmad, "Political and Religious Ideas of Shāh Walī-Ullāh of Delhi," *The Muslim World* 52 (1962): 22-30; R. Peters, "*Idjtihād* and *Taqlīd* in 18th and 19th Century Islam," *Die Welt des Islams* 20, 3-4 (1980): 131-45; J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī 1703-1762* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986); M. A. Ghazi, "State and Politics in the Philosophy of Shah Waliy Allah," in *Islam: State and Society*, eds. K. Ferdinand and M. Mozaffari (London: Curzon Press, 1988), 89-102.

[15]Rahman, *Selected Letters*, 52.

[16]Rahman, "The Thinker of Crisis," 44.

The question arises as to whether these similarities between Rahman's thought and that of the two eminent Indian scholars on certain issues, on the one hand, and Rahman's admiration of these thinkers on the other, indicate their influence on Rahman's position. One possible answer may be found in the notion of "cumulative tradition" advanced by W. C. Smith. In Smith's view, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are constantly being recreated. In his discussion of Islam, Smith postulates that "For whatever reason, it is a fact irrefutable and profoundly significant that the Islamic tradition has become [and one can hardly emphasize that word too strongly] what it has observably become; that it has become so by gradual and complex historical process that can be studied." He further argues that "The Islamic tradition that modern Muslims inherit, and that observers see, has been the handiwork of Muslims."[17] In other words, it is safe to argue that Fazlur Rahman ranged himself alongside the Muslim scholars who preceded him. However, this does not necessarily mean that he was influenced directly by their interpretations of the various subjects discussed.

Although some work has been done on Fazlur Rahman, especially on his method of interpreting the Qur'ān, the focus of this thesis is his understanding of Islamic philosophy. While his Qur'ānic methodology will be an important part of our analysis, this methodology will concern us only insofar as it appeared to Rahman to provide an answer or answers to contemporary man, since Rahman believed that it is only by grasping the true meaning of the Qur'ān that the needs of contemporary man can be satisfied. Moreover, this

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[17]W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 164.

thesis examines the philosophical expressions which Rahman employs in some of his works in order to discover the reasons behind his chosen expressions. Therefore, the main contribution of this thesis will lie in its attempt to reveal Rahman's concept of Islamic philosophy, and -- as he himself insists -- to place his method of interpreting the Qur'ān within a pragmatic framework, as opposed to the metaphysical one of the Muslim philosophers.

Chapter one examines Rahman's definition of his philosophy. In order to reach a comprehensive understanding of this definition, this chapter will provide two background accounts: a brief one of the development of *falsafah* and *kalām* in Islam, and another of some definitions of Islamic philosophy proposed by eminent scholars in the field. Rahman's distinctive understanding of Islamic philosophy will be explored in the last section. In particular, one will find that Rahman's philosophy is characterized by its ethical orientation, based on three key terms in the Qur'ān: *īmān*, *islām*, and *taqwā*.

Rahman's interpretation of the history of Islamic philosophy is fully analyzed in chapter two. Before coming to his interpretation, however, a discussion on Rahman's opinion of the development of philosophy in Islam is needed. This assessment leads to another aspect of his thought whereby his religious, historical and political thought are all interwoven. Since Rahman devoted a great deal of space to the debate on essence and existence, with special reference to Ibn Sīnā, one needs to examine why it was so important for Rahman to deal with this subject. From these three aspects of the discussion, it is clear that Rahman's emphasis on the use of the historical approach influenced his interpretation of the philosophical tradition of Islam. At the same time, one finds that Rahman believed

that the debate over essence and existence is central to Islamic thought, which itself emphasizes the fundamental distinction between God and created objects.

In the third chapter, the discussion is centered on Fazlur Rahman's view of the value of philosophy in the contemporary world and is based on the arguments found in his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*,[18] using his other works only so far as they relate to the discussion. The book has been chosen as our principal source given the fact that Rahman's approach to Islamic philosophy is closely related to his methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān, in that both are designed to bring out ideas that can help to satisfy people's needs in this world. This chapter consists of a threefold discussion. The first section examines Rahman's Qur'ānic methodology. Rahman's frequent use of certain philosophical expressions in explaining the Qur'ān is discussed in section two of this chapter. The discussion culminates in the third section, in which Rahman's application of his methodology is examined. It is in this last section that his approach to making Islamic philosophy apply to contemporary issues will become clear.

We hope to show in this study that Fazlur Rahman has made a significant contribution to Islamic philosophical discourse. His argument that Islamic philosophy should not deal solely with metaphysical notions but should instead relate to moral and practical behaviour brings an alternative insight to the study of the subject. Moreover, his view that Islamic philosophy did not cease to exist with the death of Averroes (d. 1198), acknowledges the fact that Muslim thought not only had an impact on Western philosophy, but is also worthwhile studying for its own sake. It is true that the characteristics of

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[18]Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.

Rahman's philosophy do not absolve him from inappropriate conclusion in relation to the neglect of ethics by Muslim philosophers. Furthermore, his views regarding the contribution of the Muslim philosophers to the intellectual discourse in Islam sometimes seem ambivalent. However, his attempt to fit Islamic philosophical discourse within a pragmatic framework, in order to provide answers to the needs of contemporary man, places him -- to borrow Sonn's words -- at "the forefront of Muslim scholars." [19]

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[19]Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Existential Hermeneutic," unpublished paper delivered at the conference entitled "Islam and Modernity: The Fazlur Rahman Experience," Istanbul, February 1997.

CHAPTER I

FAZLUR RAHMAN'S DEFINITION OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

In his arguments concerning the definition of Islamic philosophy, Fazlur Rahman tries to use an Islamic methodology in order to find an explicatory definition of Islamic philosophy based on Qur'ānic teachings. In his studies of various philosophers, Rahman examines the writings of his historical predecessors as well as his contemporaries, analyzing their philosophical findings and contrasting their ideas with the Qur'ān. To Rahman, philosophy in Islam marked a critical chapter in the history of human thought. Nevertheless, he offers a critique of Muslim philosophers for not being Islamic-minded in their endeavours and for betraying their weak religious convictions. In Rahman's judgment, Muslim philosophers have failed to discern the differences between "higher religio-moral cognition and other forms of intellectual cognition."[20] He therefore strongly recommends that they devote more space in their discourse to ethical questions.

The present chapter focuses on the definition of Islamic philosophy given by Fazlur Rahman and is divided into three sections. The first section consists of a brief preliminary discussion of the development of *falsafah* and *kalām* in Islam. Some conceptions of Islamic philosophy outlined by important scholars in the field will be discussed in section two. These two sections serve as a basis for understanding Rahman's general definition of Islamic philosophy. Section three analyzes the specific characteristics of Rahman's Islamic philosophy. As the following pages show, Fazlur Rahman's definition of Islamic philosophy

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[20]Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), 124.

is distinguished by the emphasis it places on ethics and his own personal religious beliefs.

A. The Development of *Falsafah* and *Kalām* in Islam: A Brief Discussion

The word *falsafah* is derived from the Greek *philosophia*, and refers to the tradition as a whole.[21] The development of *falsafah* began with the movement to translate Greek philosophical texts into Arabic, both directly and from Syriac versions,[22] a process which extended from just before the time of al-Ma'mūn (reigned 813-833 A. D.) through to the tenth century.[23] It is often assumed that *falsafah* was simply a continuation of *philosophia*; nevertheless, Arabic-speaking Muslims were not part of the tradition in which *philosophia* had developed. This was because for the Falāsifah (Muslim philosophers), the new concepts that they took from the Greeks were foreign, and they had to adapt themselves to these

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[21]Marshall Hodgson argues that the word *falsafah* is originally identical with Western 'philosophy.' This, however, includes not only the study of metaphysics and logic, or even these sciences in addition to the positive sciences, but more importantly, implies the "philosophic approach to living, of which interest in such studies was an expression." (*The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974], 418). Jean Jolivet states that *falsafa* is Islamic philosophy in the technical sense of the word. It refers to the philosophical mode inherited from the Greeks which developed since the beginning of the ninth century A. D. in the Muslim world ("The Development of Philosophical Thought in Its Relationship with Islam up to Avicenna," In *Islam, Philosophy and Science* [Paris: The Unesco Press, 1980], 37-8).

[22]R. Arnaldez, "Falsafa," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. by Bernard Lewis, Ch. Pellat, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954-), 2:769 [subsequent references to this edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* will be designated by the abbreviation *EI*^{2}].

[23]Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 412. Al-Ma'mūn founded the *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* (House of Wisdom) in Baghdād, a scientific institution founded in imitation of the ancient academy of Djundaysābūr. In this institution, the main activity was to translate the Greek philosophical materials which had been brought from Rūm under the instruction of the caliph. Its directors were Sahl b. Hārūn and Salm, assisted by Sa'īd b. Hārūn. This institution, however, did not survive under the reign of al-Mutawakkil (reigned 847-61). A similar, and the most important academy founded in Fāṭimid times was the *Dār al-Ḥikmah*, established by al-Ḥākim in 1005 A. D. (D. Sourdel, "Bayt al-Ḥikma," *EI*^{2}, 1:1141).

ideas.[24]

> The Faylasūf, we have said, was dedicated to philosophic reason, to following its conclusion, without yielding to preconceptions, wherever it might lead. But 'reason' had for the Faylasūfs a more exacting implication than mere 'reasoning' as a general activity... Rationality involved bringing all experience and all values under a logically consistent total conception of reality... The Philosophic version of rationality required, to begin with, the acquisition of a good deal of specialized information. But the Faylasūf scholar was not interested just in gathering facts... In any case, a true 'philosopher' ought not to be interested in the particular for its own sake.[25]

The translation movement was not, however, the first impact of Greek ideas on the Muslims. Before that, in the first half of the eight century, the Muʿtazilites (the first speculative theologians in Islam) had broached Greek thought. Simon van den Bergh even argues that the word *mutakallimūn*, dialecticians, shares the name of the Stoics in later Greek philosophy. It has been argued that the Muʿtazilites took the theory of the "rationality of religion," and the "optimistic view of a rational God who has created the best of all possible worlds" from the Stoics.[26]

The word *mutakallimūn* originates from *kalām,* literally "speech or "word." The discussion of *kalām* in this context, however, refers to *ʿilm al-kalām*, one of the religious sciences in Islam; "the discipline which brings to the service of religious beliefs (*ʿaḳā'id*) discursive arguments; which thus provides a place for reflexion and meditation, and hence for reason, in the elucidation and defence of the content of the faith."[27] It is usually referred

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[24]Arnaldez, "Falsafa," *EI²,* 2:769-70.

[25]Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 1, 422.

[26]Simon van den Bergh, "Introduction," *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), ix.

[27] L. Gardet, "ʿIlm al-Kalām," *EI²,* 3:1142.

to as Islamic theology or Islamic scholasticism. The development of *kalām* began as early as the battle of Ṣiffīn (657 A. D.), when the Muslim community split into what would become three main politico-religious traditions (Khārijī, Shīʿī and Sunnī) over the problem of the validity of the *imāmah* (leadership) and over that of the "status of believer" which must be possessed by the *imām*.[28] Certain intellectual refinements, however, were only achieved when this movement was incorporated into the Muʿtazilah school.[29]

As noted by van Ess, the name Muʿtazilah refers to a religious movement which arose quite early in the history of Islam. During the ninth and tenth centuries, this group developed into a theological school.[30] It soon became one of the most important theological schools in Islam, and the Muʿtazilites are considered the earliest Mutakallimūn.[31] They adopted access to certain strands of Greek thought in their attempt at taking Islamic dogma to a higher intellectual level, one that is more adapted to the needs of contemporary

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[28]L. Gardet, "ʿIlm al-Kalām," *EI*², 3:1141-2.

[29]Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 44. The Muʿtazilah started as early as ʿAlī's time when "several notable Companions of the Prophet refused to pay ʿAlī the homage which he demanded or offered it reluctantly" (H. S. Nyberg, "al-Muʿtazila," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first ed., ed. by M. Th. Houtsma, et al. [Leiden; E. J. Brill, 1913-1938; reprint, 1987], 6:787) [subsequent references to this edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* will be designated by the abbreviation *EI*¹]. Nyberg also argues that originally the Muʿtazilah was politically oriented, having arisen under the same "constellation" as the Shīʿī and Khārijī ("al-Muʿtazila, 787). See also D. Gimaret, "Muʿtazila," *EI*² and W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973).

[30]Josef van Ess, "Muʿtazilah," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 10:220.

[31]Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. L. Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 105-6.

knowledge.[32] Watt argues that the persons who initiated the discussion of Islamic dogmas in terms of Greek philosophical conceptions included some of the most important Muʿtazilites.[33]

Taking as an example the concept of cosmology, it is interesting to compare the views of the Falāsifah with those of the Mutakallimūn, especially the proponents of Ashʿarī *kalām.* The Falāsifah held the view that the world is unchanging and eternal. In this sense, knowledge is "a matter of timeless concepts, essences, and natural laws, rather than of transient and changing details," and as a consequence, the world is seen as "timelessly proceeding from self-sufficient Reason, each event in it being but an exemplification of logical possibilities."[34] On the other hand, the Ashʿarīyah do not believe in any inherently unchanging essences or natural laws. Accordingly, the world is seen as a product of an act of will in time by God, "and within it, every particular event was in turn the immediate act of God."[35]

B. Some Definitions of Islamic Philosophy

Before embarking on a discussion of Rahman's contribution to the debate, this section outlines some of the prevailing interpretations of Islamic philosophy held by such

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[32]M. Horten, "Falsafa," *EI*[1] 3:48.

[33]W. M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 58-9.

[34]Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 1, 441.

[35]Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 1, 441.

eminent scholars in the field as Toshihiko Izutsu,[36] Henry Corbin,[37] Majid Fakhry[38] and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.[39]

Izutsu for his part, contradicts the Western belief that the demise of Islamic philosophy occurred with the death of Averroes in 1198. The danger in accepting this belief,

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[36]Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993) was a scholar in the fields of Islamic, Far Eastern, and comparative philosophy. He mastered over thirty languages, and was mainly concerned with Iranian mystics and philosophers. Among his philosophical and mystical works are: *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971); "Introduction," *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari,* trans. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu (New York: Caravan Books, 1977); *Sufism and Taoism: Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994).

[37]Henry Corbin (d. 1978) was one of the few Western scholars who paid great attention to the development of Islamic philosophy in Persia among the Shi'ites. In Tehran, he established and directed the 'Bibliotheque Iranienne,' which aimed at collecting and analyzing original Persian and Arabic texts. Among his works are: *Falsafah-i Īrānī va Falsafah-i Ṭaṭbīqī* (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran: Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, 1990); and *En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-2), 4 vols. For his work on the development of Islamic philosophy, which has been translated into English, see n. 31 above.

[38]Majid Fakhry is a prolific writer, both in Arabic and English, who concentrates on the relation between Greek and Islamic philosophical thought. He is now Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University, Washington. For his work on the history of Islamic philosophy see n. 29 above, and his recent anthology: *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1994).

[39]Seyyed Hossein Nasr (born 1933) is an Iranian thinker, and one of the scholars most active in introducing the traditional metaphysics of Islamic philosophy to the modern world. He is now Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, Washington D. C. Among his works on Islamic philosophy are: *Three Muslim Sages* (New York: Caravan, 1976); *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); and *Science and Civilization in Islam* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1992). For more information about his life and activities see Mehdi Amin Razavi, "Introduction," in *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), ix-xv; Jane I. Smith, "Nasr, Seyyed Hossein," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), :230-1; and Jane I. Smith, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Defender of the Sacred and Islamic Traditionalism," in *The Muslims of America*, 88-95. For more information about his works see *The Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr Through His Fortieth Birthday*, compiled by W. C. Chittick (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, Monograph 6, 1977), 7-12. For the latest edition of his publication see M. Aminrazavi, ed., *The Complete Bibliography of the Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: From 1958 Through April 1993* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science of Malaysia, 1994).

he argues, is that one may assume that Islamic philosophical thought ceased altogether at that time. Izutsu maintains that only the first phase of the history of Islamic philosophy, i.e. the living influence of Islamic philosophy upon the formative process of Western philosophy, had come to an end. Therefore, he concludes, with the death of Averroes Islamic philosophy lost its vitality for the West, but not for the East.[40]

Izutsu further questions the assumption, held by many Western scholars, that the Muslim world produced nothing more than commentators who lacked any originality, following the golden age of Islamic philosophy --that is, the period of three centuries extending from al-Fārābī (d. 950) to Averroes. Izutsu argues on the contrary that a kind of philosophy which was "typically and characteristically Islamic" developed only *after* the death of Averroes rather than *before.* This arose and matured in the period following the Mongol invasion, continuing well into the Ṣafawid period in Iran. This form of Islamic philosophy, known as *ḥikmat,* is a blend of rational thought and gnostic intuition.[41]

Corbin emphasizes in his works that Islamic philosophy is a body of thought which is essentially linked to the religious and spiritual fact of Islam. Consequently, Corbin states that the discourse on Islamic philosophy is incomplete without the inclusion of a broader spectrum of Muslim thinkers than the few great thinkers of Islam made familiar to medieval Western Europe through Latin translations.[42]

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[40]Izutsu, "Introduction," 2.

[41]Izutsu, "Introduction," 3. This word, *ḥikmah,* in Arabic, or *ḥikmat* in Persian means wisdom. For a further discussion of the concept of *ḥikmah,* see Nasr works: "The School of Iṣpahān," and "Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī Maqtūl," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif, vol. 2 (Weisbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1966), 904-32, and 372-98, respectively.

[42]Corbin, *History,* xiv.

Corbin's views warrant closer examination. In line with Izutsu, he attempted to account for the historical source of the assumption that the development of philosophical meditation in Islam came to an end with the death of Averroes. His research led him to the conclusion that such perceptions arose out of the West's inability, or unwillingness, to distinguish between philosophical meditation in Islam, on the one hand, and what is called 'philosophy' in the West on the other. He argues that the distinction between 'philosophy' and 'theology' in the West could not exist in Islam, since it presupposes a process of 'secularization' that is alien to Islam. Corbin goes even further in stating that it is impossible to speak of *ḥikmah* (*sophia*) in Islam without also speaking of mysticism.[43]

Corbin's findings have not escaped criticism. Majid Fakhry criticizes him for his heavy reliance on the Shi^{c}ite and Isma^{c}īlī element, which, in his estimation, obscures the organic nature of Islamic thought.[44] Fakhry himself approaches Islamic philosophy from a historical perspective. He states that Islamic philosophy is "the product of a complex intellectual process in which Syrians, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers, and others took an active part."[45] Although he includes a discussion on the Islamic intellectual tradition in Persia, as represented by Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Mulla Ṣadrā (d. 1641), he nevertheless

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[43]Corbin, *History,* xv-xvi. He translates the word *ḥikmat* as theosophy.

[44]Fakhry, *A History,* ix. For an extensive review of Fakhry's *History,* see P. Morewedge, "A Major Contribution to the History of Islamic Philosophy: A Review Article," *The Muslim World* 62 (1972): 148-57.

[45]Fakhry, however, suggests that "Arabic philosophy" is a convenient term of reference to this body of work on account of the great contribution made by Arabs to Islamic philosophy. To name but one contribution, it was the Arabs who first exhibited a great interest in ancient learning. Without this stimulus, the Muslim intellectual renaissance was not likely to have been realized (*A History,* xv). Fakhry's argument, however, is open to debate since it was al-Ma'mūn, a Persian, who first initiated the building of Bayt al-Ḥikmah as a stimulus to ancient learning. See n. 23 above.

fails to explain clearly their role as the bearers of the Islamic philosophical traditions to the East, as do Izutsu, Corbin, and Nasr.

Fakhry argues that Western scholars pay scant attention to the development of Islamic philosophical thought for two reasons. In the first instance, the subject matter itself is perceived to be "fundamentally medieval in spirit and outlook." In this sense, the discussion on Islamic philosophy gains currency only "in so far as it has a direct or indirect bearing on the development of European philosophy or Christian theology." In the second instance, he argues, there is the character of Western scholarship itself, which continues since the seventeenth century onwards has tended to minimize the role of Greek, Arabic and Latin thought.[46]

In line with both Izutsu and Corbin, Hossein Nasr provides an added distinction between two levels of philosophy, "profane" and "traditional." By the first term, Nasr refers to the philosophic function currently accepted in the West. Here, philosophy is "the attempt of man to reach ultimate knowledge of things through the use of his rational and sensuous faculties and cut off completely from both the effusion of grace and the light of the Divine Intellect."[47] By contrast, traditional philosophy refers to an activity which is based on certainty rather than doubt. Nasr postulates that at this level "man's mind is continuously

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[46]Fakhry, *A History,* viii.

[47]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Meaning and Role of 'Philosophy' in Islam," *Studia Islamica* 36 (1973): 58. For the distinction between metaphysics and profane philosophy see R. Guenon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, trans. M. Pallis (London, 1945), 108ff, and "Oriental Metaphysics," in Needleman, ed., *The Sword of Gnosis* (Baltimore, 1974), 40-56.

illuminated by the light of the Divine Intellect and protected from error."[48] Nasr concludes that if one considers philosophy on its first level, one finds that its manifestation in Islam is very limited. On the other hand, when one attempts to understand philosophy on its second level, one finds one of the richest intellectual strains in the world. This philosophic form is "always related to religious realities and has been most often wedded to illumination (*ishrāq*) and gnosis (*irfān*)."[49]

Nasr suggests that to gauge the place of philosophy in Islam, one must look at Islam in depth, including the dimension of *ḥaqīqah*. He understands *ḥaqīqah* as being one dimension of Islamic revelation, besides two others, i.e. the sharīᶜah and the *ṭarīqah,* that has been revealed to mankind.[50] He goes further stating:

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[48]Nasr, "The Meaning and Role," 59. Nasr calls this type of philosophy *scientia sacra* which means "sacred knowledge which lies at the heart of every revelation and is the centre of that circle which encompasses and defines tradition" (*Knowledge and the Sacred* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1989], 130). See also his other work: *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993). It is very clear that Nasr shares the opinion of Réne Guénon (d. 1928), A French metaphysician, traditionalist, and scholar of religion, Frithjof Schuon (b. 1907), and A. K. Coomaraswamy (d. 1947) on the importance of the doctrine of *philosophia perennis* and the sacred science. Among Guenon's writings translated into English are: *East and West,* trans. Martin Lings, 2nd ed. (New York: Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 1995); *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*; *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr. (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1995), and *Crisis of the Modern World,* trans. M. Pallis and R. Nicholson (London, 1945). Among Frithjof Schuon's works are: *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976); *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984). Among Coomaraswamy are: *A New Approach to the Vedas: An Essay in Translation and Exegesis* (London: Luzac and Co., 1933); *Sources of Wisdom* (Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1981).

[49]Nasr, "The Meaning and Role," 58-9. Nasr agrees with Corbin stating that the notion of *ḥikmah* cannot be identified with philosophy, or theology as currently understood in the Western concept. He, however, refuses to identify it with theosophy, as Corbin does, since it has, unfortunately, been identified with pseudo-spiritualist movements in the English-speaking world (Nasr, "The School of Iṣpahān," 907).

[50]Nasr, "The Meaning and Role," 57-8. See also his *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981), 155; and *Ideals and Realities in Islam* (London: Aquarian, 1994), 93-146, where he discusses these terms in detail.

> The very term *al-ḥaqīqah* is of the greatest significance for the understanding of the relation between Islamic philosophy and the sources of the Islamic revelation. *Al-ḥaqīqah* means both truth and reality. It is related to God Himself, one of whose names is al-*Ḥaqq* or the Truth, and is that whose discovery is the goal of all Islamic philosophy. At the same time *al-ḥaqīqah* constitutes the inner reality of the Qur'ān and can be reached through a hermeneutic penetration of the meaning of the Sacred Text. Throughout history, many an Islamic philosopher has identified *falsafah* or *ḥikmah,* the two main terms used with somewhat different meaning for Islamic philosophy, with the *Ḥaqīqah* lying at the heart of the Qur'ān.[51]

This survey of the definitions of Islamic philosophy given by the afore-mentioned scholars illustrates their understanding of the discipline as a process and product of thought which did not cease to exist after the death of Averroes. Three of these scholars, namely Izutsu, Corbin, and Nasr, place particular stress on the development of Islamic philosophy in Persia, where the term *ḥikmat* retains wide currency.[52]

The fact that the Peripatetic tradition (strongly characteristic of the Western tradition) finds a weak parallel in the Islamic tradition today lends credence to the arguments of those who would link the decline of Islamic philosophy to the death of Averroes. It should be noted, however, that what most Western scholars mean by the end of Islamic philosophy in the twelfth century is actually Islamic philosophy in its technical sense. As discussed earlier, Islamic philosophy in this sense is a philosophical mode of thought which is mainly based on the works of Plato and Aristotle, and the doctrines of

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[51]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy,"in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* eds. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 29.

[52]See, among others, Izutsu: "Introduction," 1-18, and *Creation and the Timeless Order*; Corbin: *History*, and *En Islam Iranien*; Nasr: *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition,* 145-87; "The Meaning and Role of 'Philosophy' in Islam", "Ibn Sīnā's 'Oriental Philosophy'," and "Introduction to the Mystical Tradition," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, 21-6, 247-51, 367-73, respectively.

neo-Platonist philosophers.[53] Therefore, if one concedes that the characteristics and content of Islamic philosophy have been greatly influenced by the conditions, issues, and cultures of the past, then one must understand that the passage of time necessitates a readjustment of subject-matter.[54] Evidence of this readjustment has been shown to exist in the works of, among others, Corbin, Nasr, and Izutsu. If one equates these readjustments with a philosophic evolution or reformation, then the existence of Islamic philosophy cannot be questioned.[55]

C. Fazlur Rahman and the Character of His Philosophy

One feature of the works of Muslim philosophers which particularly strikes Rahman is the blatant neglect of the ethical dimension in their philosophical treatises.[56] Here Rahman underscores the need for discussing ethics within the parameters of philosophical discourse. Nurcholish Madjid and Wan Daud have even alluded to Rahman's unfulfilled

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[53]Jolivet, "The Development," 41.

[54]Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' is of a similar opinion on this point and states that the issues of philosophical thinking in the modern Arab world belong to a historical and social formation that is different in nature and complexity than that of the days of al-Kindī or al-Fārābī ("Islamic Philosophical Expression in Modern Arab Society" *Der Islam* 72 [1995]: 50). For a detailed discussion on the historical and philosophical background to the ideas of contemporary Muslim revivalists in the Arab world, with special reference to Sayyid Quṭb, see Abu-Rabi' *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

[55]Actually, Fazlur Rahman himself held a view similar to the above-mentioned scholars to the effect that Islamic philosophy did not cease to exist with the death of Averroes. Rahman's view on this subject will be discussed in chapter two.

[56]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 125.

hope of producing a comprehensive work on Qur'ānic ethics.[57] He did, nonetheless, write some articles on the topic, wherein he defines ethics as a theory of moral right and wrong, for which the guidance (*hudā*) of the Qur'ān was intended.

Rahman was not convinced that Greek or Persian ethics was necessarily antagonistic to the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, he asserts the need for a specifically Muslim endeavour to define the Qur'ānic ethics, for two reasons: one, Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the word of God; and second, they believe that the Qur'ān contains, actually or potentially, answers to all the questions that might arise in our daily life.[58] To Rahman, therefore, a science of Islamic morals is possible only when the nature and function of man are put "in the centre of interest," for the Qur'ān was revealed to human beings for their sake alone.[59] It is on the basis of a moral imperative, he argues, that the future of human enlightenment must rest.[60]

Rahman regrets that the religious history of Islam does not yield a systematic moral philosophy. In his estimation, Muslim philosophers failed to produce a coherent ethical system, contenting themselves with pure metaphysics and leaving all practical concerns to

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[57]Nurcholish Madjid, "Fazlur Rahman dan Rekonstruksi Etika al-Qur'an (Fazlur Rahman and the Reconstruction of Qur'ānic Ethics)," *Islamika* 2 (October-December 1993): 25; Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "Personal Anecdotes on a Great Scholar Teacher and Friend," *Journal of Islamic Research* 4, 2 (October 1990): 254.

[58]Fazlur Rahman, "Law and Ethics in Islam," in *Ethics in Islam: Ninth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference,* ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1985), 13-4.

[59]Fazlur Rahman, "Functional Interdependence of Law and Theology," in *Theology and Law in Islam*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971), 97.

[60]Fazlur Rahman, "Avicenna and Orthodox Islam: An Interpretative Note on the Composition of His System," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Seventy-fifth Birthday*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 676.

the field of law.[61] While works on ethics (*ʿilm al-akhlāq*) have been compiled in Islam, they repeatedly neglect, based as they are upon Greek or Persian sources, the provisions of the sharīʿah in their considerations.[62] Modern Western scholars[63] account for this tendency by depicting Muslims as being wary of "producing a rival system of 'do's' and 'don'ts' to the *sharīʿah,*" and leaving questions of practical morality to the latter.[64]

By analyzing three basic terms used in the Qur'ān, Rahman attempts to identify the foundations of a Qur'ānic ethics and its characteristic ethos. These three terms, all derived from different roots, are *īmān, islām* and *taqwā,* and express related ideas. The first term, *Īmān* comes from the root *a-m-n* and means "to be at peace with oneself" or "to feel no tribulation within oneself." In the latter sense, it is equivalent to the term *muṭma'inn,* which means "one who is satisfied within oneself," and both are used equivalently in the Qur'ān 16:112. In its basic meaning, *Īmān,* to Rahman, connotes "peace" and "safety," but in its fourth form, it acquires the attribute of "belief" or "faith" in God, which insures one's peace and safety. *Īmān*, therefore, is "an act of the heart, a decisive giving of oneself up to God and His Message and gaining peace and security and fortification against tribulation."[65]

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[61]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 94.

[62]Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Studies and the Future of Islam," in *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and its Problems,* ed. Malcolm H. Kerr (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1980), 127.

[63]However, here Rahman does not specify whom he means.

[64]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 125.

[65]Fazlur Rahman, "Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur'ān," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983): 170-1. Izutsu understands the word *Īmān* as the very centre of the sphere of positive moral properties; see his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 184; see especially the chapter "The Believer," 184-93. He wrote several treatises

Here Rahman identifies two important attributes surrounding faith. In the first instance, faith is not simply equivalent to intellectual or rational knowledge, but is not devoid of such knowledge either. Thus, rational knowledge is but one of many components of faith. Moreover, he states, numerous passages in the Qur'ān establish this faith-knowledge equivalence, and affirm faith as an attribute which is strengthened by knowledge. Second, faith is not only a matter of "the heart or heart-and-mind," but must also result in action. Rahman holds the separation of the two to be in direct discord with the Qur'ān, leading to "a totally untenable and absurd situation."[66]

The second term, *islām,* is derived from the root *s-l-m* whose meaning is "to be safe," "whole," and "integral." The verbal noun of the fourth form with the definite article, *al-islām*, means "the surrender" or "the genuine surrender." This idea is integral to *Īmān*: "the 'surrender' to God's law, in its essential nature, is not possible without faith."[67] Interestingly, as noted by Rahman, *islām* in some verses of the Qur'ān is identified with "God's light" and "God's guidance," expressions which are equivalent to the word *Īmān*. The point Rahman wishes to make here is that *Īmān* and *islām* imply each other, for "an individual may have some sort of *Īmān* but it cannot be true and full *Īmān* unless it is

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concerning the semantic analysis of some key words in the Qur'ān, namely, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology --A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām*-- (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965), and *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964).

[66]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 171-2.

[67]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 172.

islamically expressed and worked out through a proper community."[68]

Taqwā, the last of the three terms, is, in Rahman's view, the most central ethical concept in the Qur'ān.[69] He says that when one explores the basic meaning of *taqwā*, one is struck by the fact that the word has the same sense as the two others, i.e. *īmān* and *islām.* The root *w-q-y* mean "to protect" or "to save from destruction," and in the eighth form of the verb it means "to protect oneself from possible danger or attack," thus, "to be careful." This word is usually translated as "God-fearingness" or "piety."[70] Rahman argues, however, that the standard use of *taqwā* in the Qur'ān is in the moral sense "to guard or protect against something" or "to protect oneself against the harmful or evil consequences of one's conduct," thus, "the fear of God" in this sense means "the fear of the consequences of one's actions." In other words, taqwā "can be effectively conveyed by the term 'conscience,' if the object of conscience transcends it."[71] Rahman believes that *taqwā* is the "inner torch whereby man can discern between right and wrong."[72] He concludes that while *īmān* concerns itself with the inner life, and *islām* concerns itself with outward action, *taqwā* concerns itself equally with faith and surrender. In his words:

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[68]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 172-6. One of Rahman's weaknesses is that he does not give a working definition of what he means by "Islamic." This makes his view difficult to analyze.

[69]Rahman's emphasis on the importance of the term *taqwā*, especially as the balance of moral action, can be analyzed in many of his writings. To mention some of them: *Major Themes*, 9, 12, 28-31, 37, 45-6, 110; "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge," *Islamic Studies* 19, 4 (1980): 236-9; *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 155.

[70]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 176.

[71]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 29.

[72]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 9.

> The most important function of *taqwā* is to allow man to correctly examine himself and to see the right from the wrong... It must be noted, however, that this self-examination as it is implied in the notion of *taqwā* can never mean self-righteousness... If this self-examination had a built-in success, humanism would work perfectly well and therefore would be no need for transcendence. But we know how subjective the consciences of people can be. *Taqwā* implies this very transcendence since it implies that while the choice is ours and the effect is ours, the final and truly objective judgment upon our performance is not ours but "lies with God."[73]

One can now discern how these three religio-ethical terms compose the essential character of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic philosophy. The term *īmān* demonstrates that Islamic philosophy cannot be merely intellectual, as it implicitly condemns over-reliance on rationally-derived doctrines. The second term, *islām,* demonstrates that Islamic philosophy cannot conceive of a doctrine without its being tied to a real act, because as the Qur'ān stipulates, "personal inner faith is by no means sufficient for God's purposes."[74] In this approach lies the key to Rahman's critique of Muslim philosophers, whom he accuses of being far too removed from the actual lives of their co-religionists, and too "enamoured of their metaphysical heights to condescend to climb down to ethics."[75] This view is echoed by Alparslan, his student, who regards Rahman not merely as a "theoretician" but as an activist thinker as well.[76] The third term, *taqwā,* also finds a place within Rahman's

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[73]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 178-9.

[74]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 175.

[75]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 125.

[76]Alparslan Açikgenç, "The Thinker of Islamic Revival and Reform," 237. Being his student, Alparslan shares the opinion of Rahman on the importance of ethics in philosophical discourse: "The philosophical issues included in the metaphysical realm are not only the problem of God, immortality and revelation, but also such abstract problems as what is knowledge, being, freedom, and truth. Ethical problems are also a part of the metaphysical realm" ("A Concept of Philosophy in the Qur'anic Context," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 11, 2 [1994]: 165). See

criticism of Muslim philosophers. According to him, the only way in which one may attain *taqwā* "is to recognize both his powers and the limits God has put upon him as his natural condition."[77] This is to say that Muslim philosophers, being too heavily steeped in rational concepts, are liable to forget the limitations of their intellectual capacities.

Rahman's contention that Muslim philosophers neglected the field of ethics is, however, open to debate. There were in fact a number of Muslim philosophers, such as al-Kindī (d. 866),[78] al-Ghazālī (d. 1111),[79] Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030),[80] Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274),[81] and al-Dawwānī (d. 1501)[82] who wrote comprehensive treatises on Islamic ethics. Moreover, as Nasr maintains, many of these philosophers did develop an ethical system

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also his other work, "Toward an Islamic Concept of Philosophy: A Response to the Modernists," in *Islām and the Challenge of Modernity: Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, ed. Sharifah Shifa Al-Attas (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 535-89.

[77]Rahman, "Some Key Ethical," 181. See also his *Major Themes,* 29-30, and "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary," 236-7.

[78]Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī wrote a work on ethics entitled *Risālah fī al-Akhlāq.* It is reported that this treatise exists together with other works of al-Kindī in a private library at Aleppo. See Richard Walzer, "Some Aspects of Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq,*" in *Greek Into Arabic* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1962), 221.

[79]Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿat al-Maymanīyah, 1894). The "Ethics" part has been translated by Nabih Amin Faris as *The Book of Knowledge* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966).

[80]Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammmad Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq,* ed. C. K. Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1966). This work has been translated into English as *The Refinement of Character*, by C. K. Zurayk (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1968).

[81]Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* (Lahor: Panjab Yunivarsiti, 1952); English translation: *The Nasirean Ethics*, by G. M. Wickens (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).

[82]Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Asʿad al-Dawwānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* (Lakhnaw: Maṭbaʿi Munshi Naval Kishor, 1916); English translation: *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, by W. F. Thomson (London: The Oriental Translation Fund., 1839).

based, not only on 'rational ethics,' but on the specific teachings of the Qur'ān. Nasr further asserts that metaphysical discourse in Islamic philosophy was never entirely divorced from ethics or from the practical aspects of religion.[83]

In analyzing Rahman's critique of Muslim philosophers one may, therefore, wonder why he does insist that an Islamic moral philosophy was never worked out. Rahman has established his own criteria of moral philosophy as "a rational system of 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad'." On this point, Rahman argues that such a system can be found neither among the orthodox "who declared 'good' and 'bad' to be *sharʿī* and not *ʿaqlī*," nor among the Muʿtazilah, nor even among "pure" philosophers.[84] Taking al-Ghazālī's system for an example, Rahman reasons that in his scheme "both *kalām* and law are to be related to spiritual life and thus personalized... This highly personal religion does not see the need for a *public* reform of law through a public, i.e., rational, system of moral principles derived from the Koran."[85] Thus, Rahman conjectures that it is "the absence of the emergence of a self-conscious and independent ethics" which is principally responsible for the problems which have plagued Islamic civilization through time.[86]

It is clear from the above explanation that Rahman's criticism is directed at orthodox *kalām*, the Muʿtazilah and the Muslim philosophers, who have not produced a

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[83]Nasr, *Islamic Life*, 155.

[84]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 94. It must be noted, however, that Rahman does not state that the sharīʿah is not important. His criticism is aimed at the heavy emphasis on the sharīʿah and the neglect of "the nature of man and his function." See p. 97 of the same article.

[85]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 93-4.

[86]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 93-4.

"Qur'ānic-derived rational system of moral principles." He reproves them for their failure to develop "a theory of knowledge that would do justice to religious facts and moral cognition."[87] This might be true for the orthodox *kalām*, since some of its supporters hold the opinion that revelation and traditions are the only sources of knowledge about right and wrong. The case of the Mu'tazilah, however, is different. They initiated a type of discourse which had certain philosophical overtones. In their view, "the justice of human and of divine acts is a real characteristic of the acts; and it is knowable in principle and often known in fact by natural human reason, without the aid of revelation."[88] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), for example, argues that right and wrong can be understood by reason, "although not on the whole by inflexible rules."[89] In other words, his rationalism provides "a place for revelation as an indispensable supplement to reason."[90] Thus, it is very clear that although this group gives a large space to reason, the Qur'ān is basic to its ethical precepts.

It is true that the Muslim philosophers' works on ethics were based on Greek or Persian sources, as Rahman argues. An indication of this may be found in the third and fifth chapters of Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* which Richard Walzer argues were taken from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[91] Furthermore, Ibn Miskawayh did not discuss the

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[87]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 125. Indeed, Rahman believes that the *Akhlāq-i-Nāṣirī* and *Akhlāq-i-Jalālī* are essentially secular works (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 52).

[88]G. F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 10.

[89]Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism*, 8.

[90]G. F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18.

[91]Richard Walzer, "Akhlāḳ," *EI²*, 1:327. See Walzer's specific comments on Miskawayh's sources in "Some Aspects," 220-35. Hourani holds the similar opinion and states that Miskawayh's

concepts of right and wrong, or good and evil, which justifies the view that this is not "the place to look for ethical philosophy."[92] Seen in this light, Rahman's critical remarks on the Muslim philosophers' failure to produce a Qur'ānic-derived, rational system of moral principles seems to gain legitimacy. It should be noted, however, that Muslim philosophers did indeed try to integrate Greek ethical teachings into their own religious tradition. Some authors, such as Ibn Miskawayh, emphasized the compatibility of Greek moral philosophy with the basic principles of Islamic tradition.[93] More importantly, the need to assimilate the notions of Greek ethics to the Qur'ānic teachings may not have been felt at the time. Another thinker, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) goes even further in proposing an ethical concept which tried to reconcile "Islamic philosophy, in its Avicennian form, with theology and the religious tradition in general."[94] It should also be borne in mind that this type of

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work, together with Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's and Dawwānī's, "follow a settled tradition of Hellenic philosophy in Arabic, dealing with the perfection and ends of the soul, virtues as means and vices as extremes" (*Reason and Tradition,* 21). See also, among others, Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 6, and Fakhry, "The Platonism of Miskawayh and Its Implications for His Ethics," *Studia Islamica* 42 (1975): 50-2; G. E. von Grunebaum, "Concept and Function of Reason in Islamic Ethics," *Oriens* 15 (1962): 6; Zurayk, "Preface," *The Refinement,* xi.

[92]Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, 21.

[93]To illustrate his views on "anger," Miskawayh discusses verses from the Qur'ān, "al-Kahf" 32, 42, 45 where, according to him, God gives the most correct and the truest parables of boastfulness (*Tahdhīb*, 196). Another example of Miskawayh's reference to the Qur'ān in discussing his ethics is his insistence that a human being should not perform evil deeds to achieve his soul's perfection, which in turn leads to the real pleasure described by God in 32:17 : "No soul knoweth what delight of the eyes is hidden in reserve for them" (*Tahdhīb*, 13). See also Walzer, "Akhlāḳ," 328.

[94]Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 8. Rāzī's attempt to harmonize philosophy and theology makes him an original and controversial thinker. He was brave enough to contradict the doctrines of the Ashʿarites, to which school which he belonged. Unfortunately, little research has been done on his thought. See among others: Paul Kraus, "The 'Controversies' of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Islamic Culture* 12 (1938): 131-53; Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Philosophical Theology in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,*" *Hamdard Islamicus* 17, 3 (1994): 55-84; and Fathalla Kholeif, *A*

discussion, where the concept of the perfection of the soul, based on the Platonic duality of soul and body, represented one of the core areas of interest to the intellectuals of Rāzī's time. For these reasons, Rahman's critical remarks that "a moral philosophy was never worked out in the religious history of Islam,"[95] and that "certain treatises of certain minor philosophers on morals do not add up to much,"[96] may be an exaggeration.

D. Conclusion

Attempts at defining the meaning and role of philosophy in Islam have been numerous. Several of these attempts have yielded conclusions similar to Rahman's. Muḥammad Iqbāl, for instance, who acknowledged the role of Greek philosophy in shaping Muslim thought, regrets this same philosophy for having obscured the Qur'ānic vision.[97] Nasr has followed his own approach to the study of Islamic philosophy by conducting a re-examination of its inner, spiritual core in the hope of deriving its essential truths.

Fazlur Rahman's understanding of Islamic philosophy, however, remains unique. It is, of course, true that Iqbāl -- to mention only one Muslim scholar who has closely studied Islamic philosophy -- proposed valuable suggestions applicable to the understanding of Islamic philosophy. He did not, however, emulate Rahman's comprehensive attempt to trace the historical development of the philosophical tradition in Islam. Moreover, Rahman,

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Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1966).

[95]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 94.

[96]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 125.

[97]Moḥammad Iqbāl, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), 3.

preoccupied as he was by both Greek and Islamic philosophy, was better able to analyze the gap between the two systems of thought.

Rahman was a Muslim thinker who dealt with philosophy on his own terms. He clearly expressed his religious belief in his analysis of the philosophical tradition of Islam. Rahman's philosophy, after all, includes his faith commitment; hence there is no clear separation between his philosophical views and his religious beliefs. Here lies the kernel of his perception of the character of Islamic philosophy. Thus, one can conclude that Rahman's definition of Islamic philosophy is characterized by an approach which is not merely rational, but more importantly, is grounded in the practical. In short, Rahman's philosophy is a moral and practical philosophy abstracted from his understanding of the Qur'ān.

Rahman's approach to philosophy, however, does not absolve him of his inappropriate conclusion regarding the neglect of ethics by Muslim philosophers. Indeed, Rahman's assertion that the Falāsifah neglect the sharī^{c}ah in their ethical discourse shows his "bias" since he, to some extent, expected them to base their ethical concepts on Islam, which was not the main issue of the intellectual environment of their day.

It is not invalid to ask why we consider Rahman's thought to be "philosophy" and not "theology." The reason is, as may be deduced from Rahman himself, that the term theology (*kalām*) in the history of Islam may be understood to comprise "... theoretical foundations of the religion like God's existence, His attributes, the world as creation of God, and Prophethood."[98] Thus, *kalām* deals more with theoretical concepts than with

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[98]Rahman, "Functional Interdependence," 91.

practical deeds. Moreover, Rahman discusses a broader range of issues than is encompassed by classical *kalām.* In fact, Rahman's Islamic philosophical approach is characterized by a comprehensive vision of life.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORY OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Rahman's understanding of Greek thought led him to the conclusion that Muslim philosophers were headed in the wrong direction because they were greatly influenced by Hellenistic thought. Consequently, Rahman devoted great attention to Islamic philosophy, producing a number of important works in the field. Yet he is still regarded as a scholar who was more concerned with the issue of revival and reform in Islam rather than with philosophy. As Charles Adams has pointed out, this may be attributed to the fact that Rahman was not a constructive philosopher, in the sense that he did not offer his readers a coherent philosophical system of his own. Adams further points out that Rahman was less an originator and propagator of philosophical ideas than a historian of philosophy."[99] On the other hand, it may be argued that the issue of Islamic reform, which was of great interest to Rahman, has, to date, generated more interest amongst Muslims than his philosophical thought.[100] Perhaps the reason for this is that Rahman's philosophical views

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[99]Charles Adams, "Fazl al-Rahman as a Philosopher," *Journal of Islamic Research* 2, 4 (1990): 226.

[100]Rahman's ideas on revival and reform in Islam can be found in some of his essays. He holds the opinion that the idea of revival and reform in Islam, in its strict sense, cannot be attached to the formative period of Islam. Both revival and reform occurred after the establishment of an orthodoxy. He, however, argues that the early period is very important, because the major developments of Islam can be traced back to the period after the death of the Prophet ("Revival and Reform in Islam," *The Cambridge History of Islam,* vol. 2 B, eds. P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, et al. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 632). Rahman further holds that it is moral rather than theological factors which must underlie the revival and reform in Islam ("Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism," in *Change and the Muslim World,* eds. P. H. Stoddard, D. C. Cuthell, et al. [Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981], 24). Accordingly, Rahman's approach to Islamic reform should be distinguished from other approaches which attempt to put Islam back into politics,

are usually considered separately from his other ideas rather than as a general framework for his "Islamic thought."

This chapter focuses on Rahman's interpretation of the history of Islamic philosophy in three sections. Section one examines his own understanding of the development of Islamic philosophy. Section two analyzes his religious beliefs and measures their influence on his interpretation of the philosophical tradition in Islam. Additionally, it juxtaposes his historical and his philosophical thought. Special attention is also given to those aspects of Rahman's methodology which distinguish him from other scholars. The final section focuses on Rahman's preoccupation with the philosophical debate surrounding essence and existence.

A. Fazlur Rahman's Understanding of the Development of Islamic Philosophy

The birth of philosophical thought in Islam occurred, according to Rahman, in the wake of the theological developments (*kalām*) of the eighth century. Although reason

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civil law, or education. His approach lies in the critical assessment of the intellectual legacy of Islam to understand its history, to differentiate its essential principle from its particular formulation, and to determine the best way to apply it in the contemporary context; see Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," 226-7. In another work, Rahman divides the reform movements in the Islamic world into four, namely: pre-modernist revivalism, classical modernism, neo-revivalism, and neo-modernism. He himself speaks for the last group; see his "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities," in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, eds. A. T. Welch and P. Cachia (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 315-25. For an analysis of his thought on revival and reform, see Alparslan Açikgenç, "The Thinker of Islamic Revival and Reform," 232-48. As one example of the influence of Rahman's neo-modernist ideas, many of his works were translated into Indonesian in the early 1980s, and some prominent Indonesian scholars like Nurcholish Majid and Ahmad Syafii Maarif, who were Rahman's students at the University of Chicago, began to incorporate Rahman's ideas in their writings. Rahman himself was invited to come to Indonesia and gave a lecture at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Yogyakarta, Indonesia, entitled "Islam and the Challenge of Modernity," August 1985. After his death in 1988, The Institute of Philosophy and Religion (LSAF), Jakarta, presented a seminar on "Fazlur Rahman's Ideas," December 3, 1988.

played a pivotal role in *kalām*, Rahman believed that it should be differentiated from philosophy, since the two had different emphases. Taking the Muʿtazilites as an example, Rahman argues that they were theological rather than philosophical in orientation. The Muʿtazilites tried to solve the moral problems of the Muslim community through theological, rather than philosophical debate.[101] This, however, does not mean that Rahman supported their views, since he believed that the Muʿtazilites "had gone too far beyond the limits which traditional Islam could recognize as valid," and "showed themselves as rigid and intolerant advocates of Hellenic rationalism."[102]

On the other hand, Rahman regarded Islamic philosophy as "a combination of Aristotle and Neoplatonism."[103] According to him, while Muslim philosophers introduced revolutionary concepts regarding contingent and necessary being and prophethood into the philosophical discourse, they also admitted "the general cosmological scheme" enshrined in Greek thought. Muslim philosophers, such as al-Kindī, endeavoured to harmonize the schism dividing philosophy from religion, a process which reached its peak with Ibn Sīnā's (d. 1037) efforts to integrate "the traditional demands of the orthodox religion with the

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[101]Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 4:219. Rahman further argues that "the Muʿtazilah carried their rationalism so far as to claim parity for reason with revelation in the discovery of religious truth" (*Islam*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1979], 90). One can debate the argument that the Muʿtazilah's approach was more theological rather than philosophical through their concept of ethics. Although they accorded high status to natural reason as a source of ethical knowledge, they could not avoid showing how the right and the good can be understood by man with unaided reason, and if possible, "to define what these were in their reality, independent of the divine will." Thus, they discussed the question of moral issues in the context of theology, rather than philosophy (Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism,* 3).

[102]Rahman, *Islam,* 89-90.

[103]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 220.

purely Greek rationalism."[104] Avicenna's thought did not escape al-Ghazālī's harsh criticism in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (*Incoherence of the Philosophers*),[105] a rebuttal, which, to a certain extent, put an end to the falsafah tradition. Under such conditions, philosophy in Islam took the form of theosophic intuitionism "where it found a ready and secure home."[106] In Rahman's view, "we do not get pure philosophy in Islam but a mystical philosophy."[107] Nevertheless, he differentiates between philosophy and Ṣūfism in the following:

> While the purely intellectual philosophical tradition survived in the form of commentaries or handbooks with the different rhythms either as an instrument of theology or its critic, philosophy after al-Ghazālī developed in a new and important direction which may be called a purely religious philosophy or philosophical religion. This development, although profoundly influenced in its course by Ṣūfism and its modes of thought, is, nevertheless, to be distinguished from the latter. ... For, the phenomenon we have termed philosophical religion, although it often identifies its doctrines with those of the Ṣūfis, especially of speculative Ṣūfism, is characterized by rational argumentation and a purely intellectual and logical thought-process while Ṣūfism relies exclusively on gnostic experience or intuition and uses poetic imagination rather than purely rational processes.[108]

Rahman divides Ṣūfism into two branches, one the early ascetic piety which arose in the second century of Hijra as a reaction to the external development of the law, and the other a variety which arose during the 3rd and 4th centuries and which favored the doctrine of Gnosis (*ma'rifah*), "an inner experiential knowledge which it progressively came to

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[104]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 222.

[105]Edited by Sulayman Dunyā (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1947). The English translation is by Ṣabīḥ Aḥmad Kamālī (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958).

[106]Rahman, *Islam*, 144.

[107]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 223.

[108]Rahman, *Islam*, 123.

oppose to the intellectual knowledge (*ʿilm*) of theology..."[109] Rahman's disdain for this second form of Ṣūfism is apparent in his writings. The Ṣūfīs, in his view, "claimed an incorrigible way of *knowing* which was supposedly immune from error and, further, whose content was utterly disparate in character with intellectual knowledge." He further asserts that the 'ecstatic statements' of Ṣūfism are "not open to the scrutiny of ordinary avenues of knowledge."[110]

Rahman criticizes the Ṣūfī doctrine of *al-ḥaqīqah* ('inner truth'), because, in his

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[109]Rahman, *Islam*, 141. He argues that the speed of development of Islamic law, which deals mainly with the external behaviour of the human being, led the Ṣūfī movement to grow. For a further discussion on the development of Ṣūfism through the centuries, see his "Revival and Reform," 633-5, and Fazlur Rahman, "Islam," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7:313-16. Schimmel shares the opinion of Rahman that early ascetic piety arose as an anti-governmental attitude as early as the time of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728). She further argues that in the ninth century different types of mystical tendencies and teachings emerged. The roots of these movements, however, can be traced back to an earlier period. See her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 30, 41. For a detailed account of the historical approach to Ṣūfism, see Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York: New York University Press, 1989). Regarding the notion of *maʿrifah*, Schimmel cites the example of a Muslim mystic Dhū'n-Nūn (d. 859), who was alleged to have a "philosophical-gnostic" but not a philosophical approach to defining this notion. In his words: "the gnostic becomes more humble every hour, for every hour is drawing him nearer to God. The gnostics see without knowledge, without sight, without information received, and without observation, without description, without veiling and without veil" (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 43). Contrary to Rahman, however, Schimmel does not argue that this type of mystical teaching is opposed to intellectual knowledge.

[110]Rahman, *Islam*, 141-2. At first glance, one finds that Rahman has a different understanding of the character of the later development of Ṣūfism from that of Nasr. Nasr holds the view that, from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries, both the Ṣūfīs and the Muslim philosophers were concerned with the attainment of ultimate knowledge (S. H. Nasr, "Introduction to the Mystical Tradition," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, 367). See also Nasr, "Mysticism and Traditional Philosophy in Persia, Pre-Islamic and Islamic," in *The Islamic Intellectual*, 3-9. Upon closer examination, however, one finds that Rahman has a similar idea to that of Nasr, explaining that from the sixth/twelfth century onward, Ṣūfism became a mass movement, which, in some of its manifestations, not only worshipped at saints' tombs, but also "looked like being simply a spiritualized version of Ismāʿīlī esotericism, or a philosophical dissipation of the orthodox position through intellectual or pseudo-intellectual argument" (Rahman, "Revival and Reform," 634).

estimation, "many Ṣūfīs came to hold that the seeker who arrives at this mystic truth goes beyond the Sharī'a - the religious law, of which he is no longer in need and which is meant only for the masses and neophytes."[111] The doctrine of monism (unity of being or *waḥdat al-wujūd*)[112] held by Ṣūfīs represents a threat to the concept of the shârî ah because, in Rahman's words, it "obliterates all distinctions in the real world which must serve as the touchstone for the validity of any proposition."[113] Moreover, the "pantheistic" content of "theosophic intuitionism," the new form of philosophy adopted after al-Ghazālī's attack, brings to bear the extreme distinction between "Reason" and "*Kashf*":[114] "Now, whenever

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[111]Rahman, *Islam,* 143. Here, the difference between Rahman's understanding of the concept of *ḥaqīqah* and that of Nasr is apparent. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Nasr argues that the discussion of Islamic philosophy cannot be separated from the notion of *ḥaqīqah.* Indeed, to understand the relation between Islamic philosophy and the sources of the Islamic revelation, one must comprehend the central part played by the term (see nos. 50 and 51 of chapter one). For Rahman, however, this concept is understood in a completely different way. He sees it as a way understood by many Ṣūfīs to escape from the sharī'ah. On this point, Schimmel shares a similar opinion to that of Rahman, stating that the wandering dervishes or *faqīrs* played a considerable role in discrediting Ṣūfism by performing miracles and placing themselves beyond the law (*bī shar'*) (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions,* 19).

[112]Rahman understands the word "monism" in this context as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). In discussing Sirhindī, he also uses the term monism to illustrate the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (see n. 116 below). Aziz Ahmad, on the other hand, argues that the Shaykh himself attached two different meanings to this word, namely: ontological (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and phenomenological (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*), and that Sirhindī attacked ontological monism (Aziz Ahmad, "Religious and Political Ideas of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī," *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 36 [1961]: 268).

[113]Rahman, *Islam,* 147. Izutsu disagrees with the criticism directed towards *waḥdat al-wujūd.* He believes that the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is "something which, if structurally analyzed and elaborated in a proper way, will provide a theoretical framework in terms of which we shall be able to clarify one of the most fundamental modes of thinking which characterize Oriental philosophy in general" (Izutsu, "An Analysis of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*: Toward a Metaphilosophy of Oriental Philosophies," in his *Creation and the Timeless Order,* 67).

[114]A dictionary definition of "*kashf*" is "to pull away," "remove," "take off" (Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary* [Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1976], 828). Here Rahman does not give the definition of the term; however, from the context of the discussion, it might be concluded that he considers it to be a means of knowing, or a supra-rational system which cannot be altered or destroyed, as opposed to imperfect knowledge.

the organic relationship between perceptive and formulative reason is thus cut in a society, it can never hope to keep alive any intellectual tradition of a high calibre."[115]

Discussing Sirhindī's attack on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Rahman argues that the Shaykh disagreed with the tenet both metaphysically and on the basis of his mystical experience; "the former is directed against Ibn al-ᶜArabī, the second against all Ṣūfīs who declare the unitive experience to be the highest and truest fact of mystic life."[116] Rahman supports Sirhindī's efforts to harmonize *taṣawwuf* and the sharīᶜah while maintaining the latter's supremacy.[117] He further credits Sirhindī with having made the first serious and systematic attempt to address the subject in Islamic history.[118]

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[115]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 115-6.

[116]Fazlur Rahman, "Introduction," 32. See also Rahman, "Dream, Imagination and ᶜĀlam al-Mithāl," *Islamic Studies* 4, 2 (1964): 177-8. It is interesting to analyze Sirhindī's opinion of Ṣūfism. In his early life, he joined the Chishtī order, and believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd.* After the death of his father, while on the way to ḥajj, he met the Naqshbandī saint Khwājah ᶜAbdul Bāqī (d. 1603), and joined his order. This order is stricter toward the sharīᶜah in their *sulūk* (traversing the Ṣūfī way). Later, he criticized the doctrine of monism, which was very popular in India at that time, as not being the *tawḥīd* of the Prophets. Consequently, he proposed the doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd,* which would be compatible with the religion of the Prophet. This doctrine of Unity of Being in vision, teaches that, in fact, the Unity of Being is only a matter of subjective perception (*shuhūd*). See Muhammad A. H. Ansari, *Sufism and Sharīᶜah: A Study of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's Effort to Reform Sufism* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 11-7, and 101-17. For Sirhindī's concept of *tawḥīd* consult Burhān Aḥmad Fārūqī, *The Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid* (Pakistan: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989). For a detailed account of Sirhindī's works and his mystical development see J. G. J. ter Haar, *Follower and Heir of the Prophet: Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) as Mystic* (Leiden: Het Oosters Instituut, 1992). Another useful work on Sirhindī is by Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971).

[117]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 117.

[118]Rahman, "Introduction," 43. To Rahman's mind, Sirhindī's world-affirming attitude and his understanding of the Prophet's task "to bring order into this temporal world of empirical objects," is one of his greatest contributions to the discourse (Rahman, "Introduction," 52-3).

Moving on to the topic of *zuhd*[119] in Ṣūfism, Rahman concurs with Sirhindī's critique of its practice. In his view, its practice does not lead the Ṣūfīs nearer to God but rather in the opposite direction.[120] It is possible that some Ṣūfis who practice the doctrine of *zuhd* may think that the world is fundamentally evil, and choose to leave it. Rahman, however, provides a coherent critique of the Ṣūfī predilection for the world-negation doctrine -- a doctrine which both the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* deny:

> For the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* had called upon Muslims to forgo comfort and, if necessary, property "in the Path of Allāh" i.e., to build something higher and positive -- a socio-moral order. But the new *Zuhd* taught the Muslim not to possess anything; you obviously cannot forgo or spend anything which you do not possess.[121]

In short, Rahman laments the fact that in its development, some Ṣūfīs failed to build a moral-social order on earth: "Instead, we have the Shaykh and his authority, an endless mythology of saints, miracles, and tombs, hypnotization and self-hypnotization and, indeed, crass charlatanism and sheer exploitation of the poor and the ignorant."[122] Rahman differed from Nasr and Corbin on this point, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, devoted considerable time to gnostic thought in Islam. Rahman, by contrast, emphasizes the importance of moral order and the importance of the sharīᶜah in the building of that moral-

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[119]A dictionary definition of "*zuhd*" is "to abstain," "renounce," "abandon" (Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English,* 383). Rahman does not define the term here; nevertheless, the context tells that it refers to the doctrine of the world-negation.

[120]Rahman, "Introduction," 53.

[121]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 107-8.

[122]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 117. See n. 111 above, where Rahman argues that *not all* Ṣūfīs perform miracles and worship saints and tombs. Thus, Rahman's criticism is aimed at those who leave the world and shirk the responsibility of building moral-social order on earth.

social order; a task which, according to him, the Ṣūfīs neglected.[123]

Fazlur Rahman, however, agrees with the aforementioned scholars in their contention that Islamic philosophy did not cease to exist with the death of Averroes. In *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* he clearly states that the aim of the book is to "expose the mythical character of the belief, generally prevalent in Western Islamic scholarship, that Islamic philosophy 'died' after al-Ghazālī's attack upon it in the eleventh century."[124] Even before Mullā Ṣadrā's time, during the 6th/12th century, Suhrawardī had laid the foundation of "the mystic Philosophy of Illumination (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*)" as a rebuttal to the doctrines of Peripateticism.[125]

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[123]At first glance, this argument seems to contradict Rahman's own criticism of the Muslim thinkers who declared good and bad to be *sharʿī*, as opposed to *ʿaqlī*. He, however, does not say that the sharīʿah is unimportant. His argument is aimed at the heavy emphasis on it and the negation of the nature of the human being; see n. 84 of Chapter I. Rahman's insistence on building a moral-social order on earth can be seen in many of his writings. On this point, his disagreement with some Ṣūfī practices is very clear: "Despite the fact that Sufism did take several middle of the road, orthodox and quite sober forms, the massive injurious effects of its uncontrolled expressions on the body of the community can never be overestimated. How does one square, for example, the insistent Qur'ānic call for establishing an ethically just and viable social order on the earth with the popular Sufi practices which had no relation to the moral and material welfare of the Muslim community as a whole" (Rahman, "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary," 239).

[124]Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), vii.

[125]Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā,* 1. Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī is well-known as the Master of Illumination (*Shaykh al-Ishrāq*). The Philosophy of Illumination is a "distinct, systematic philosophical construction designed to avoid the logical, epistemological and metaphysical inconsistencies which Suhrawardī perceived in the Peripatetic philosophy of his day" (Hossein Ziai, "Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī: Founder of the Illuminationist School," in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* eds., S. H. Nasr, and O. Leaman, 438). Ziai's article provides extensive bibliographical notes on Suhrawardī, see also his "The illuminationist Tradition," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds., Nasr and Leaman, 465-96. For a detailed study of Suhrawardī's analytical thought see Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Atlanta: Brown University, 1990). Suhrawardī's most important work, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq,* has been published in *Oevres philosophiques et mystiques: Opera Metaphysica et Mystica II,* ed. Henry Corbin (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaasi, 1954). Muḥammad Iqbāl has studied, from the philosophical point of view, the epistemological foundation of the philosophy of illumination in *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (London: Luzac and Co.,1908). For a comparative study of Suhrawardī's

While it is true that philosophy in Mullā Ṣadrā's time was coloured by Peripatetic-neo-Platonic doctrines, Rahman reasons that Ṣadrā's thought was quite distinct from the intellectual and spiritual traditions of his time: "Our philosopher, having learned the wisdom of past philosophical traditions --the Peripatetic and the Illuminationist-- wished to write a comprehensive work combining the wisdom of earlier masters with his own intellectual insights."[126] In Rahman's opinion, Ṣadrā "searched for a method that would give him certainty and would transform merely rational propositions into experienced truths."[127]

Ṣadrā's theory of knowledge was, in Rahman's estimation, a powerful counter to the Peripatetic doctrine that "knowledge comes about by way of gradual abstraction of the object of knowledge from matter and its relationships until pure intellective knowledge is attained."[128] He also opposed the Ṣūfī claim that mystic experience was devoid of any

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mystical thought with that of ʿAynulquḍāt Hamadhānī, see Hermann Landolt, "Two Types of Mystical Thought in Muslim Iran," *The Muslim World* 68 (1978): 187-204. For a discussion on the *Ishrāqī* school, see Nasr, "Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī," 372-98; Nasr, "The School of Iṣpahān," 904-32, and Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 52-82.

[126]Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 1-2.

[127]Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 3. Rahman's statement that Islamic philosophy after al-Ghazālī took on a new form, theosophic intuitionism --which emphasizes "rational argumentation and purely intellectual and logical thought-process," and "cannot be hoped to keep alive any intellectual tradition of high calibre"-- contradicts his appreciation of Mullā Ṣadrā. Rahman himself notices that Ṣadrā possesses a distinct method in approaching Islamic philosophy which, in turn, transforms the rational propositions into experienced truths. Yet, it might be argued that Rahman's overall judgment on the form of Islamic philosophy after al-Ghazālī's attack was written earlier in his book *Islamic Methodology in History* (1965), whereas a more positive argument on Mullā Ṣadrā appeared in his later work *Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (1975). Thus, he might find later in his study that Ṣadrā's was different from other philosophies adopted after al-Ghazālī.

[128]Fazlur Rahman, "Mullā Ṣadrā," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 10:151-2. See also Rahman, "Mulla Sadra's Theory of Knowledge," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1972): 141-52.

intellectual content. To Ṣadrā, "experience or intuition is needed not to produce new thought-content but to bestow on this thought-content a quality of personal experience."[129] Rahman, who was aware that Ṣadrā did not exert a great deal of influence in his lifetime,[130] credited him with original thought and felt that he had successfully synthesized "all significant thought-currents of the entire heritage of Islamic thought."[131]

In sum, Rahman regrets the fact that modern Western students of Islamic philosophy devote scant attention to the period following the death of Averroes. In Rahman's mind, this state of affairs persists simply because Islam's earlier philosophical movement "exerted an influence on medieval Western philosophy until his [Averroes'] time."[132] He warns that the study of Islamic philosophical tradition from "the point of view of its impact upon and relationship to Western philosophy" diminishes the integral body of Islamic philosophy itself. An even greater error is committed, Rahman argues, by failing

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[129]Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 4.

[130]Rahman, "Mullā Ṣadrā," 152, and *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā,* 19. Rahman's argument that Ṣadrā had little influence in his lifetime has some legitimacy, since some sources show that it was his students, namely Mullā Muḥsin "Fayḍ" Kāshānī (d. 1680) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1661) who gained prominence. See, among others James W. Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 46-7. Even though Nasr, in the two works mentioned below, does not discuss the influence of Ṣadrā during his lifetime, he does mention these two students as propagators of his works and teachings in Persia and India. See S. H. Nasr, "Mullā Ṣadrā," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 5: 411-3; and Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 38. Throughout the eighteenth century, Ṣadrā's treatises were kept alive by oral transmission. In Iran and subsequently in the Indian subcontinent, his thought has been taught for the past few decades. One of the most influential commentators or interpreters of Ṣadrā's doctrines was Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1878). For a more detailed account on Sabzawārī's life and his interpretation of Ṣadrā's philosophy, see Izutsu, *The Metaphysics.*

[131]Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā,* 13.

[132]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 223.

to give proper credit where the influence of Islamic ideas on Western thought itself is clearly evident.[133]

B. Connecting Rahman's Religious, Historical and Philosophical Thought

In almost every written work, Rahman seeks to ground his scholarship in Qur'ānic precepts, stating plainly that "the entire fabric of my belief rests upon the Quranic teaching."[134] Thus, the basis of Rahman's historical thought can clearly be found in his explication of Qur'ānic methodology. According to him, the Qur'ān is not a 'book' for "it was never formulated as a connected whole but rather was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, (peace of God be upon him) piecemeal as situations demanded."[135] Accordingly, the Qur'ān should be understood against the background of its revelation. Mecca on the eve of Islam provided a natural context for the Qur'ānic message with its social, economic and political problems.[136]

The method of Qur'ānic analysis proposed by Rahman consists of a double

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[133]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 223. Actually the fact that modern Western scholars do not pay full attention to Islamic philosophy after al-Ghazālī's attack is not simply the result of its lack of influence on medieval Western philosophy. It has much to do also with their understanding of the *meaning* of Islamic philosophy itself. When "Islamic philosophy" is understood in its strict or technical sense, strongly characterized by its Hellenic nuance, then it is understandable why there has been scant attention paid to the subject after that period, since many believe that al-Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* indeed put an end to "Islamic philosophy."

[134]Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 156.

[135]Fazlur Rahman, "Interpreting the Qur'an," *Inquiry* 3, 5 (May 1986): 45.

[136]Rahman, "Interpreting," 45. For further reading on Rahman's thought on the situation of Mecca immediately before Islam, see Fazlur Rahman, "Pre-Foundation of the Muslim Community in Mecca," *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976): 5-24, and Rahman, "The Religious Situation of Mecca from the Eve of Islam up to Hijra," *Islamic Studies* 16, 1 (1977): 289-301.

movement. In the first place, one analyzes the Qur'ān in the present and projects it back to the time of its revelation. In the second, one moves in the opposite direction -- from past to present.[137] He further elaborates these two movements in a detailed explanation:

> The first of the two movements mentioned above, then, consists of two steps. First, one must understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer ... The second step of the first movement, then, consists of understanding the meaning of the Qur'ān as a whole as well as in terms of the specific tenets that constitute responses to specific situations. The second step is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be "distilled" from specific texts in light of the sociohistorical background and the often-stated *rationes legis.*[138]

Thus, Rahman holds that any examination of the meaning of the Qur'ān must employ a historical approach, since the Qur'ān "is literally God's response through Muḥammad's mind" to a historically specific setting.[139] He criticizes Western Qur'ānic scholars, such as John Wansbrough, for abandoning the historical method in their approach to the Qur'ān, a fact which has rendered them incapable of a coherent understanding of the Qur'ān. Rahman disagrees with Wansbrough's thesis in particular, which states that "it [the Qur'ān] is a 'composite' work of several traditions" and hence "post-Prophetic", because,

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[137]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 5. For further discussion on the "double movement" method of interpreting the Qur'ān and its application, see Rahman, "Interpreting," 45-9. See also Rahman, "Translating the Qur'an," *Religion and Literature* 20 (1988): 23-30.

[138]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 6. Rahman does not explain the meaning of the term "*rationes legis*" in this passage, He merely defines it as "*'illat al-ḥukm*" (the reason behind the stated law) in his other work, "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary," 242. In another work, he clearly defines *ratio legis* as "the essence of the matter, the actual legislation being its embodiment so long as it faithfully and correctly realizes the *ratio*; if it does not, the law has to be changed. When the situation so changes that the law fails to reflect the *ratio*, the law must change" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 48). See also Rahman, "Interpreting," 48.

[139]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 8.

in Rahman's view, this thesis lacks "historical data on the origin, character, evaluation, and personalities involved in these 'traditions.' Moreover on a number of key issues the Qur'ān can be understood only in terms of chronological and developmental unfolding within a single document."[140]

Moving on to the philosophical movement in Islam, Rahman maintains that Muslim philosophers had participated not only in the cultural efflorescence of Muslim civilization, but in one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of human thought. That having been said, however, Rahman criticizes Muslim philosophers for their heavy reliance on rational activity which, he contends, contradicts the pillars of religious teachings.[141] This development is a consequence of the way in which Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā sought to clarify philosophical issues (for example, those pertaining to creation) through a religious idiom. The conviction soon arose that there exists a parallel between philosophical and religious truth, the "double truth." Rahman criticizes both al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā for making the capital mistake of assimilating religious or moral truth to intellectual or "natural" truth.[142] In criticizing the "double-truth" concept, Rahman regrets

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[140]Rahman, *Major Themes,* xiii. A more detailed debate on this discourse between Rahman, Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin will be discussed in chapter three in which an in-depth understanding of Rahman's methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān is needed to clarify his unique method. The discussion of his method here is merely given to place his historical approach into context.

[141]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 119. An example of his critique can be found in the previous chapter in the course of the discussion of, what Rahman calls, the neglect by Muslim philosophers of the field of ethics. See n. 62 of chapter one.

[142]Rahman further criticizes the Muslim philosophers for their misunderstanding of religious truth: "for them, a moral principle is, in its cognitive aspects, exactly like a mathematical proposition. They do not realize that religio-moral experience, although it certainly has a cognitive element, radically differs from other forms of cognition in the sense that it is full of *authority, meaning,* and *imperiousness* for the subject whereas ordinary form of cognition is simply

what he terms the lack of religious conviction and Islamic-minded initiative on the part of Muslim philosophers.

This explanation typifies Rahman's methodological approach in his critique of Muslim philosophers: first, he places their ideas in their historical context; second, he contrasts these ideas with his interpretation of those of the Qur'ān. His insistence on the importance of placing the historical scene "in the picture," when interpreting the Qur'ān, is clearly articulated in his account of Islamic philosophy. This is one example of how Rahman's religious belief, which in this discussion underscores the importance of historical specificity in the treatment of other disciplines, impacts upon his philosophical thought.

Tamara Sonn categorizes Rahman's Islamic methodology as, what modern thought in the West calls, "historicism,"[143] She stresses that in the Islamic, as well as the Euro-American world, historicism arose to revive Islamic society by "reapplying classic standards."[144] Sonn distinguishes Rahman's Islamic methodology from that of other Muslim

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informative... Because of this failure to recognize this difference and taking their stand firmly on the phenomenon of parallelism, the philosophers assimilated the Prophet to the philosopher, the prophetic experience to intellectual cognition [plus, of course, the capacity to influence people, which a philosopher does not possess]" (Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 123-4). In this respect, as when he criticizes Muslim philosophers' neglect of ethics, Rahman fails to put the discourse in its context. It should be noted, once again, that the intellectual milieu at that time was entirely different from that of Rahman. As an illustration of the Muslim philosophers' situation, see Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), and Adam Mez, *Renaissance of Islam*, trans. D. S. Margoliuth and S. Khuda Bukhsh (London: Luzac & Co., 1937).

[143]Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," 227. A dictionary definition of the term explains it as "the doctrine that knowledge of human affairs has an irreducibly historical character and that there can be no ahistorical perspective for an understanding of human nature and society" (Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), s.v. "Historicism," by K. Nielsen, 331).

[144]In Sonn's opinion, "Historicism began in the West in late nineteenth century in reaction to a similar set of assumptions, and grew into the movement (s) now known variously as 'post-structuralism,' 'post-modernism,' and 'neo-historicism.' Proponents of this approach question a

historicists such as Muhammad Arkoun (b. 1928) and ᶜAbd Allāh al-ᶜArwī (b. 1933). She notes the fact that both use Western historicist terminology, Arkoun employing the term "*al-tārīkhiyya,*"[145] al-ᶜArwī "*al-tārīkhāniyya,*"[146] while Rahman was a historicist in a totally Islamic idiom. In Sonn's view, Rahman's methodology "has roots deep within Islamic tradition, roots which far predate Western historicism."[147]

Charles Adams argues that Rahman's approach to philosophy was far from being historicistic. At first glance, this evaluation appears to contradict Sonn's. However, when one probes his argument further, it becomes clear that both scholars have arrived at similar conclusions. Adams argues that in discussing a particular stream of thought, Rahman never simply described nor simply reconstructed it. On the contrary, Rahman always sought to enter into the spirit of the body of that thought. Rahman's understanding of the history of

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range of the basic assumptions of formalism, but, in general, the term 'historicism' is used to refer to the recognition of the impact of specific socioeconomic and political circumstances on any given cultural formulation, including the formulations that comprise religious heritage" (Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic methodology," 227).

[145]Arkoun, an Algerian thinker, is an Arab Muslim scholar who pays great attention to the interpretation of religious and philosophical traditions through a hermeneutical method. From his writings, it is clear that he is inspired by contemporary Western critical methodologies; see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Arkoun, Mohammed," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World,* ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1:139. Arkoun attempts to represent historicism in the Islamic world, arguing that Muslims should advance critical thought, since modern ideologies take the place of traditional religions (M. Arkoun, *Arab Thought,* trans. J. Singh [New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. Ltd., 1988], 97).

[146]ᶜAbd Allāh al-ᶜArwī (or ᶜAbdallah Laroui) is a Moroccan university professor concerned with issue affecting Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition. He argues that historicism, which could be regarded as a "means of analyzing the Arab world," offers a "rationale for collective action--and it is action with which the Arabs must be concerned" (A. Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?,* translated from French by D. Cammell [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], x).

[147]Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," 227.

philosophy was different from that of many nineteenth-century thinkers, who were content with what little they derived from intellectual history and claimed that "they had understood as much of the intellectual history as it is possible to understand."[148] Another indication of Rahman's "anti-historicist" view was "his own judgment of the position that he was engaged in analyzing." That is to say, in Adams' estimation, Rahman was not "reluctant to reflect upon the content and the consequences of the ideas put forward by some of those whom he studied."[149]

A thorough examination of Rahman's works would lead one to discover the manner in which his historical approach influences his philosophical views. His approach to the history of Islamic philosophy was based on the study of the lives of individual philosophers. This meant that Rahman, in a sense, was forced to analyze the socio-economic and political background of the philosopher in question before obtaining a comprehensive impression of them. His analysis of a particular aspect of a philosopher's doctrines was, however, never merely descriptive since he strove always to unveil the truth behind the thought. Taking the theory of creation as an example, Rahman approached Ibn Sīnā's thought in light of the contradiction which seemed to exist in the tenth century between Greek philosophical thought and Islamic tenets. Having analyzed the socio-economic and political conditions that prevailed in Ibn Sīnā's time, Rahman concluded that the philosophers' formulations were not motivated by 'pure' philosophical reason, but by

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[148]Adams, "Fazl al-Rahman," 266.

[149]Adams, "Fazl al-Rahman," 266-7.

the fact that Islam demands a fundamental distinction between God and the world.[150]

One application of this method can be found in *Prophecy in Islam*, where he examines the thought of various Muslim philosophers on this subject. Here, Rahman engages in a discussion of prophetic revelation, a central tenet of Islamic dogma. He traces the Hellenic sources of the philosophical treatises produced by two of the greatest philosophical figures in Islam: al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. He begins by outlining the conditions which existed at their time. Having determined that the debate on the soul and its powers of cognition preoccupied most thinkers of that period, Rahman examines the process by which Muslim philosophers adopted Greek theories, elaborates them, refines them, and above all, recasts them.

To obtain a precise understanding of Rahman's methodology of Islamic philosophy, however, it is best to compare him with other scholars of philosophical thought. Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, for example, applies an analytic approach in his appraisal of the philosophical tradition in Islam. It is clear that Ha'iri bases his thought on the distinction between "knowledge by concept" or conceptualization (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuṣūlī*) and "knowledge by presence" (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*)[151] which, was enunciated for the first time in Islamic philosophical history, by Suhrawardī. From this angle, Ha'iri maps the historical background of philosophy in general and of Islamic philosophy in particular, and explains how, in Islamic philosophy, the concept of knowledge by presence is understood. He begins

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[150]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 222.

[151]The difference between these two types of knowledge is that *al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī* "signifies the priority of an immediate, durationless, intuitive mode of cognition over the temporally extended essentialist definitions used as predicative propositions," while *al-ʿilm al-ḥuṣūlī* signifies the Peripatetic view of "acquired knowledge" (Ziai, "Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī," 438).

his analysis by comparing the epistemological traditions of Plato and Aristotle. Plato held the view, for example, that "intellectual knowledge is an intellectual reflection by the human mind of unique, simple, universal, immutable, and immaterial objects." Accordingly, this type of knowledge is "an intellectual *vision* of these 'transcendent' objects."[152] On the other hand, Aristotle held to the conception that "there is no identification of 'seeing' and 'knowing,' since knowing is never seeing if there is no intelligible object to be seen." Aristotle then proposed the view that "the true objects of thought exist in sensible forms and are intellectualized by 'abstraction'."[153] Ha'iri comes to the conclusion that Islamic philosophy provides an ontological foundation for the "intellectual vision" of Plato or the "abstraction" of Aristotle through which all human knowledge can be deduced.[154]

Ha'iri nevertheless acknowledges the fact that the history of knowledge by presence was "pioneered by 'pagan' Neoplatonists starting with Plotinus and ending with Proclus in the West. They originated the notions of 'emanation,' 'apprehension by presence,' 'illumination'."[155] This tenet was further expounded by al-Fārābī as the "Theory of Divine

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[152]Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 6.

[153]Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 7-8.

[154]Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 8-9. "In principle, the Islamic approach shows that the two ostensibly contradictory systems of epistemology, the Platonic and the Aristotelian, can be employed in a simple philosophical framework for the purpose of arriving at a satisfactory solution to the problem of human knowledge. In this regard, Islamic philosophy maintains that the mind is constituted by its nature to function in different ways at the same time; being perceptive of intelligible substances on the one hand and speculative about sensible objects on the other" (Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 8-9).

[155]Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 9. Ha'iri realizes that in Plotinus' and other Neo-Platonic philosophers' works, one often finds the word "presence" or "awareness-by-presence." In this type of philosophy, however, the question of "why this form of awareness should have a seat in the very reality of an individual self in the first place" was not explicitly probed. It was

Forms and God's Knowledge," and by Ibn Sīnā as the "Theory of Human Knowledge." For al-Ghāzālī it appears as the "The Treatise on Light" and for Ibn Rushd as the "Theory of Man's Ultimate Happiness." Knowledge by presence was more fully developed by philosophers of *ʿirfān*, such as Ibn ʿArabī, who was famed for the doctrine (already referred to above) known as "unity of being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). In Suhrawardī and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī the system appears in illuminative philosophy for the first time in Islamic thought. Later, this tradition arose in another form that of "existentialist" philosophy (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) in the work of Mullā Ṣadrā, through his methodology of "meta-philosophy" *(al-ḥikmah al-mutaʿālīyah*).[156]

Rahman's view of the philosophical tradition in Islam diverges from Ha'iri's. This divergence can be explained as follows: Rahman employs a historical approach, the latter an analytic, philosophical one. It is true that Ha'iri also applies a historical approach, but he remains more focused on tracing the sources of epistemological tradition and on presenting an Islamic formulation of the subject. On the other hand, Rahman's religious orientation, particularly his emphasis on the use of the historical approach, influenced his

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Suhrawardī who proposed the prime question in the theory of knowledge: "What is the objective reference of 'I' when used in an ordinary statement like 'I think so-and-so,' or 'I do this-and-that'?" (Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 24).

[156]Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 10-26. Ha'iri further explains the nature of Ṣadrā's "meta-philosophy": "it provides a meta-linguistic method in philosophy by which independent decisions on the validity and soundness of all philosophical issues and logical questions – be they Platonic, Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, mystical or religious-- may be made. The process of decision making can be implemented without becoming involved in the particularities of each of these systems" (Ha'iri, *The Principles of Epistemology*, 25). Nasr argues that in Islamic philosophical tradition, Mulla Ṣadrā was given the highest title possible, "Ṣadr al-mutaʿallihīn," which means "foremost amongst the *mutaʿallihīn* or that group of men who are themselves the elite among all who seek the knowledge of things divine" (Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī,* 38-9).

interpretation of the philosophical tradition of Islam in a broader way than that of Ha'iri. Equally, in Rahman's works one finds a historical approach which clearly relates to his philosophical thought.

C. The Discourse Surrounding Essence and Existence

In his philosophical writings, Rahman devoted a great deal of space to a discussion of the discourse surrounding essence and existence.[157] He paid close attention to the philosophical formulations of Ibn Sīnā, holding them to be historically the most important. This is due to the fact that, in Ibn Sīnā's treatises, Islamic philosophy had been built and elaborated into a "full-fledged system."[158] Rahman also regarded Ibn Sīnā's attempt to harmonize Greek rational thought with Islam as original in its conception, making him "unique not only in Islam but also in the Medieval West."[159] Rahman also considered Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of Prophecy, in which no attempt was made to deduce the tenet from the Greek concept, to be original Islamic idea.[160]

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[157]Some of his writings on this topic include: "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958): 1-16; "Essence and Existence in Ibn Sīnā: The Myth and Reality," *Hamdard Islamicus* 4, 1 (1981): 3-14; "Avicenna and Orthodox Islam"; "Ibn Sīnā," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy,* vol. 1, ed. M. M. Sharif, 480-506; *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*; "Ibn Sīnā's Theory of the God-World Relationship," in *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, eds., D. B. Burrell and B. McGinn (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 38-52; and his "Introduction" to the *Selected Letters of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindi.*

[158]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 119.

[159]Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā," 480.

[160]It is true that in some places Rahman criticizes Muslim philosophers, including Ibn Sīnā, as heavily dependent upon rational activity. In this particular notion on prophecy, however, Rahman credits him as having an original Islamic idea: "the aspect of this theory of Prophecy that is closest and most intimately related to the ethos of historic Islam is its teaching that the Prophet, by virtue of his office, must function as legislator and must found a Community-state. This idea as such does

Ibn Sīnā's central metaphysical thesis posits the division of reality into contingent being and Necessary Being. In formulating this doctrine, Ibn Sīnā devised the theory of the distinction between essence and existence. Contemporary scholarship, which exhibits a wide range of opinions, has begun to question whether Ibn Sīnā really distinguished between essence and existence.[161]

There are a number of possible reasons for Rahman's predilection for the debate over essence-existence, especially with respect to Ibn Sīnā's system. One is that Rahman's view of the theory of essence and existence "arises out of a desire to formulate a fundamental distinction between God and created objects."[162] On the one hand, this tenet, a very central

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not come from Greek philosophy. Although there is much in the whole ancient atmosphere of thought which links the state-law with religion, the idea of the Prophet as such does not exist in the Greek tradition. Its more immediate source of inspiration must have been Islam" (Rahman, "Avicenna and Orthodox Islam," 675).

[161]Rahman states that many scholars claim that according to Ibn Sīnā existence is an accident. Rahman, on the other hand, argues that for Ibn Sīnā existence is not something additional to something that exists. It is true that to some extent Ibn Sīnā did treat existence as something happening to the essence, but not to the thing itself. Rahman regrets the fact that many scholars who study Ibn Sīnā did not make any distinction between the essence and the thing itself. He reasons that this misunderstanding started with Ibn Rushd, and preserved in the West by St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) (Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Ibn Sīnā," a lecture delivered at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies, April 29, 1970, and Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, 3. Rahman further argues that Ibn Sīnā's concept of essence and existence was mainly based on Aristotle's dualism of form and matter. In the Stagirite's view, form and matter are complementary, they "combine each other directly and make up one single thing without needing a third principle." Ibn Sīnā, however, introduced "a third principle or an agency which bestows existence on everything, a fundamental consideration which renders form and matter both as something potential *vis-a-vis* actual, concrete existence" (Rahman, "Essence and Existence," *Hamdard Islamicus*, 4). For a discussion of Rahman's opinion on this subject, see n. 157 above.

[162]Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies,* 11. See his other articles on the God-world relationship: "Ibn Sīnā's Theory of the God-World Relationship," 38-52, Rahman, "The Eternity of the World and the Heavenly Bodies in Post-Avicennan Philosophy,"and "God-World Relationship in Mullā Ṣadrā," in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 222-37, and 238-53, respectively.

one to Islamic thought, depicts the true concept of God and His relation to the world. On the other hand, Rahman believes that the doctrine developed by Muslim philosophers but formulated on the basis of Greek precepts has led to anthropomorphism. Now, in Rahman's judgment, "the guarantee against any such danger shall be in Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of essence and existence."[163] Secondly, he argues that the clarification of terms such as "existence," "essence," and "accident" is very important if we are to avoid confusion over their application.[164] More importantly, Rahman believes that in his theory of essence and existence, Ibn Sīnā solved "the contradiction that seemed to exist between the Greek philosophic world view and Islamic doctrine of creationism," which in turn led him to harmonize philosophy and religion.[165] It is safe to conclude, therefore, that in entering the debate over essence and existence, Rahman sought to examine the ideas held by certain Muslim philosophers on these matters in the light of his own methodological approach to Qur'ānic exegesis.

In his extensive introduction to the *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi,* for example, Rahman discusses some Greek and Muslim philosophers' concepts of essence and existence. He begins by examining Aristotle and Plotinus on this subject. Aristotle's argument for God's existence was based on the eternity of movement and change. In view of the constancy of change, therefore, a principle was needed on which to ground the phenomena of life. In Aristotle's thought, this principle is the Unmoved Mover. Change

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[163]Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā," 481-2.

[164]Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā," 486.

[165]Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy," 222.

also possesses "as yet unfulfilled but unrealisable possibilities, i.e. potentialities." In Rahman's understanding, therefore, Aristotle's God must be a necessary Being, i.e. actual and unchangeable.[166]

Plotinus, on the other hand, developed the theory of emanation in which everything flows from the One by stages, until it reaches the material realm. However, he stresses that in the emanation process, "the higher [the source] remains complete and within itself and does not flow into the lower [the effluent]." Similarly, "while the effluent flows out of the source, the latter does not give itself, either totally or even partly, to the former. The world, therefore, owes its existence to God but is not a part of Him." This doctrine has been termed "dynamic pantheism." Rahman concludes that this Plotinian doctrine of emanation is an attempt to bridge pure philosophical thought with the religious doctrine linking God to human beings.[167]

Rahman believes that the doctrine of a God-world relationship developed by Muslim philosophers, especially that of Ibn Sīnā, was a synthesis of the afore-mentioned doctrines. Based on his objection to the absolute dualism of Aristotle, on the one hand, and the pantheism of Plotinus on the other, Ibn Sīnā developed his own individual concept: "God

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[166]Rahman, "Introduction," 1. Rahman argues that even though Aristotle shared the opinion of Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn Sīnā on being or existence as the primary concept acquired by the mind, the doctrine of "the primacy of existence over essence," which distinguishes between existence in the external world and existence as a general concept, is not Aristotle's but developed after Ibn Sīnā's time (Rahman, "The God-World Relationship in Mullā Ṣadrā," 238). See also Rahman, "The Eternity of the World," 238.

[167]Rahman, "Introduction," 2-3. See also Rahman, "The Eternity of the World," 238-9.

is, then, the simple, necessary Being whose essence is existence."[168] Rahman argues that the orthodox scholastics of Islam, especially Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, also rejected the distinction between the two, based on their belief that philosophical doctrine is dangerous because "it affirmed eternal essences besides the eternal God." Suhrawardī, on the other hand, accepted the distinction between essence and existence but only on the mental level.[169] Interestingly, Sirhindī's early statement pointed to God's essence as absolute Being, in the sense that "nothing can be predicated of God." He argued that it can be said " 'God is Being' but not 'God exists'." He called this level the "level of primordiality [*asalat*]" or "implicitness [*ijmāl*]."[170] The question which he posited here is "How could there arise from pure Being and unmixed good, non-being and evil?" Rahman asserts that Sirhindī came to recognize this problem and changed his mind, stating that "God is beyond both being and non-being

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[168]Rahman, "Introduction," 7. Rahman argues that Ibn Sīnā is the first philosopher to formulate explicitly "the concept of contingency in order to introduce a radical distinction between God and the world." The concept of contingency is perceived by Ibn Sīnā as an exact response to the religious demand that it is impossible for God and the world to exist at the same level of being (Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā's Theory of the God-World Relationship," 38). This article gives a detailed explanation on how Ibn Sīnā arrived at this argument and what are its implications. Goodman maintains that from a historical point of view "Avicenna's synthesis did not hold up, at least not in the form he gave it. The reason for its ultimate failure of widespread acceptance was the same as the reason for its philosophic/scientific reputability in its more immediate intellectual environment, the fact that it was coupled with a rejection of the world's temporal creation" (Goodman, *Avicenna* [London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 108]).

[169]Rahman argues that Suhrawardī's thought is a critical interpretation of Ibn Sīnā based on the Zoroastrian terminology of Light and Darkness. Suhrawardī himself, while accepting the difference between essence and existence at the mental level, "rejects it as a *distinctio in re*: 'It is not admissible to say that existence *in reality* is additional to essence on the ground that we can conceive the essence without existence; for [in this case] even the existence is understood --e.g. the existence of the *ʿAnqāʾ*--as such [i.e. as conceptual existence], but we do not know whether it exists in actuality'" (Rahman, "Introduction," 10-11). See also *Rahman,* "The Eternity of the World," 227.

[170]Rahman, "Introduction," 35.

which take rise at the same time."[171] He quotes Sirhindī: "The Being of God is beyond this being and non-being; just as non-being has no place there, similarly being has no admittance. For, how can a being which is opposed by a non-being, be worthy of His Majesty."[172]

Rahman appears to concur with Ibn Sīnā's concept of essence and existence. While it may be true that the theory of emanation could "destroy the necessary and all-important gulf between the Creator and the creation and lead to a downright pantheistic world-view," he nevertheless argues that Ibn Sīnā's theory of essence and existence cannot mislead one into adopting such a view since it is "designed to fulfil equally both religious and rational needs."[173]

D. Conclusion

Rahman's approach to the history of Islamic philosophy, in which historical criticism plays an enhanced role, can be gleaned from his Qur'ānic methodology. From this starting point, he develops the view that to assess a particular intellectual trend, one must be aware of the time and place in which the philosopher lived. Rahman concludes that philosophy in Islam did not cease after the death of Averroes, pointing to the intellectual trends which subsequently emerged in the Islamic world.

In applying his historical approach, Rahman distinguished himself from other

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[171]Rahman, "Introduction," 41.

[172]Rahman, "Introduction," 41.

[173]Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā," 482.

thinkers such as Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi. Ha'iri placed heavy emphasis on the importance of knowledge by presence as a major distinguishing factor in Islamic philosophy. Rahman, on the other hand, applied his definition of Islamic philosophy as an approach to the study of history. One example of this approach was his criticism of Muslim philosophers who adhered to the "double-truth" view, which assimilates religious truth to intellectual truth, as deficient in their religious conviction. This is not to suggest that Rahman in any way diminished the Muslim philosophers' contribution to the development of human thought.

The above discussion reveals Rahman's ambivalent arguments relating to his view on the contribution of Muslim philosophers to the intellectual tradition in Islam. On the one hand, Rahman criticizes them, including Ibn Sīnā, for their heavy reliance on rationalism which contradicts religious tenets, and for their mistake of assimilating religious truth to intellectual truth. This also includes their assimilation of the Prophet to the philosophers, and Prophetic experience to intellectual cognition. On the other hand, he praises them for their original contributions, and especially Ibn Sīnā for his conception of essence and existence, a theory which rescues the concept of the relationship between God and the world from anthropomorphic interpretation and, at the same time, provides an answer designed to satisfy both religious and rational inquiry. The same case can be made for his theory of prophecy in which Rahman argues that Ibn Sīnā proposed an original Islamic idea.[174]

A question can be raised regarding the place of reason in Rahman's view. He assigns reason an important role by crediting "*ra'y*" or "personal considered opinion" with

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[174]See n. 160 above.

producing "an immense wealth of legal, religious and moral ideas during the first century and a half approximately."[175] The Mu'tazilites, on the other hand, who are usually but wrongly called free thinkers, and Muslim philosophers in general, come in for heavy criticism from Rahman. They show strong evidence of Hellenistic influence, which Rahman regards as antithetical to the spirit of the Qur'ān.

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[175]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 14.

CHAPTER III

ON THE VALUE OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

> The pressures exerted by modern ideas and forces of social change, together with the colonial interregnum in Muslim lands, has brought about a situation in which the adoption of certain key modern Western ideas and institutions is resolutely defended by some Muslims and often justified through the Qur'ān, the wholesale rejection of modernity is vehemently advocated by others, and the production of "apologetic" literature that substitutes self-glorification for reform is virtually endless. Against this background the evolving of some adequate hermeneutical method seems imperative.[176]

Chapter one has shown that Fazlur Rahman does not separate his religious belief from his philosophical thought, and that ethics plays an important role within his framework. Towards the end of that chapter, it was also pointed out that Rahman's definition of Islamic philosophy is specifically characterized by his methodological approach, which is not merely rational or theoretical, but grounded in the practical realm. In this sense, Rahman's method of interpreting the Qur'ān plays a great role in his understanding of the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world, since he argues that the needs of contemporary man can only be satisfied by grasping the true meaning of the Qur'ān.

The present chapter takes up, in three sections, Fazlur Rahman's interpretation of the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world. Section one examines how his Qur'ānic methodology is distinct from the theories of contemporary *tafsīr* scholars or exegetes. This section in fact covers different territory from that explored in chapter two, where the focus was the Qur'ānic basis for his philosophical thought. Instead, a comparison

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[176]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 4.

between Rahman's methodology and that of other exegetes is offered here to help in our analysis of Rahman's unique approach. Section two analyzes philosophical expressions which Rahman uses in understanding some themes in the Qur'ān. Finally, section three of this chapter will focus on the application of his methodology -- deriving from a study of the Qur'ān itself -- with a view to providing an answer, or answers, to social problems in the contemporary world. Sections two and three will focus on Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, which contains his philosophical expressions and the specific applications of his methodology. In that work, Rahman examines important topics affecting human worldly existence and man's final destiny, such as God, man, nature, prophethood, and eschatology. His other works will also be used so far as they relate to our main subject.

A. Fazlur Rahman's Qur'ānic Methodology

A general survey of the discourse on *tafsīr* is beyond the scope of this thesis. Our aim, rather, is to analyze Rahman's distinctive method in interpreting the Qur'ān and to compare it to that of other contemporary exegetes. For the purpose of comparison, the exegetical views of two Muslim scholars, Bint al-Shāṭi' (ᶜĀisha ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān, b. 1912)[177] and Mawlānā Abū al-Aᶜlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979),[178] will be examined. The reason for

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[177]ᶜĀ'isha ᶜAbd al-Raḥman is known by her pseudonym Bint al-Shāṭi'. She was Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of ᶜAyn Shams in Egypt, and was a visiting Professor at Umm Durmān Islamic University in Sudan. She is currently a professor at Qarawiyyin University in Morocco. She is also a prolific writer. Among her publications are: *Nisā' al-Nabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1961); *Sukayna bint Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1965); *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li Taḥrīr al-Mar'ah* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat Mukhaymir, 1967); *Bayn al-ᶜAqīdah wa al-Ikhtiyār* (Beirut: Dār al-Najāḥ, 1973), and other works on Qur'ānic studies.

[178]Mawdūdī was a famous Pakistani thinker. His work of *tafsīr* (*Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*) was originally published in Urdu and later translated into English as *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*,

choosing these two scholars is the fact that they were relative contemporaries of Rahman, even though their respective methodologies differed in many respects.

Rahman is well aware of the abundance of works in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation, both those written by Muslims and those of non-Muslims. In his discussion of earlier, modern, Western works on the Qur'ān, Rahman divides these works into three categories: "(1) works that seek to trace the influence of Jewish or Christian ideas on the Qur'ān; (2) works that attempt to reconstruct the chronological order of the Qur'ān; and (3) works that aim at describing the content of the Qur'ān, either the whole or certain aspects."[179] Among these three categories, the third is critical to a proper treatment of the subject. In Rahman's view, however, this has drawn the least attention from scholars, and among those that deal with it, "none is rooted in the Qur'ān itself."[180]

The number of studies on the Qur'ān in the West has increased over the past decade. This increase, in Rahman's view, is due to the greater perception of Western scholars of the importance of Islam as a world phenomenon. Rahman divides these studies into four

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trans. Z. I. Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988). On his life and work see Charles J. Adams, "The Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi," in *South Asian Politics and Religion,* ed. Donald E. Smith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 371-97); see also Kalim Bahadur, *The Jamā'at-i Islāmī of Pakistan* (New Delhi: The Chetana Publications, 1978), and Charles J. Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam,* ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 99-133.

[179]Rahman, *Major Themes,* xii. Rahman admires some early scholarly works done by Westerners on the Qur'ān, such as Abraham Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume Aufgenommen* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1883), and Hartwig Hirschfeld's *Judische Elemente im Koran* (1878). He also praises Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Mcmillan, 1926), despite some questionable theses.

[180]Rahman, *Major Themes,* xii-v. See also his article where he discusses the works on the Qur'ān in detail, "Some Recent Books on the Qur'ān by Western Authors," *The Journal of Religion* 64, 1, (1994): 73-95 (for his critique of Western scholars' lack of attention to the contents of the Qur'ān, see p. 74).

categories. Some of these studies have been written by Christian scholars, expressing for the most part Christian views and aims.[181] Other studies are concerned with the formation and collection of the Qur'ānic text. This includes the literary and structural analysis of the Qur'ān.[182] The third consists of works which are devoted to the meaning of the Qur'ān itself.[183] The fourth and final category includes works which do not deal directly with the

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[181]Rahman gives some examples of these types of works. He discusses the works by Johan Bouman, *Gott und Mensch im Koran* (Darmstadt, 1977), Jacques Jomier, *Les Grands Themes du Coran* (Paris: Le Centurian, 1978), and Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'ān* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971). Rahman argues that Cragg, unlike Jomier, does not necessarily write *for* Christians. Both of them, however, understand the Qur'ān "through Jesus and Christian doctrine, rather than on its own terms." Despite his critique of these scholars, Rahman praises their works, which "have been not only sincere and sympathetic but, and largely because of this, insightful and perceptive" (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 83, 86).

[182]In this category, Rahman notes three examples, namely: John Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), John Burton's *The Collections of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and Angelika Neuwirth's *Studien zur Komposition der Mekkanischen Suren* (1981). As might be expected, Rahman disagrees with Wansbrough's thesis that "the Qur'ān's genesis lies in the Jewish [and, to some extent, Christian] tradition, that the formation of the Qur'ānic text was not completed until nearly the ninth century C. E... and that the text thus exists essentially irrespective of whether Muḥammad ever existed or not" (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 86). See also his *Major Themes*, xiii. In regard to Burton's thesis that the Qur'ān is the work of the Prophet himself, Rahman maintains that it is too speculative, since Burton does not give positive evidence to support his argument (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 89). The case of Neuwirth, however, is different. Contrary to Wansbrough and Burton, she holds that the "*textus receptus*" of the Qur'ān was fixed under ʿUthmān. Her main thesis is that "the literary composition of the Qur'ān does not fit the classifications Western scholars have put it in." It is material for recitation, and, for this reason, "its formal features must be investigated to appreciate it as it deserves to be appreciated" (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 91-2).

[183]Here Rahman notes the works of Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis*, trans. A. T. Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), and Paul Nwiya, *Exegese coranique et langage mystique: Nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques Musulmans* (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1970). Rahman regards the first work as "a very helpful sample of representative Muslim Qur'ān commentaries" on a number of themes in the Qur'ān, while the second work is "highly scholarly with careful analysis" (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 92-3).

Qur'ān, but contain some form of Qur'ānic interpretation.[184]

Rahman maintains that early twentieth-century scholarship suffered from cultural and intellectual prejudices. In fact, he feels that it failed to distinguish between "the religious communities as the bearers of religious cultures and the normative truths or transcendent aspects of religions."[185] Because of this neglect, Rahman argues, Muslims are "often invited to accept scholarship which is very tight and neat [even dogmatic] so far as its methods and categories go, but which indulge in a free-for-all Islam at the same time."[186]

Rahman criticizes the strategy adopted by those who support Wansbrough's methods, which negates historical veracity and applies the "literary method." He further objects to Rippin's quotation of the accepted notion that Judaism and Islam are religions "in history." He considers misleading the thesis of Rippin, who argues for "the non-

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[184]Rahman points to two examples in this category, namely, John Wansbrough's *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Patricia Crone's and Michael Cook's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). These two works are similar, in the sense that both apply literary analysis in their research. Rahman criticizes these attempts as "uncontrolled desires and wishful thinking with a singular indifference to canons of sound scholarship and objectivity" (Rahman, "Some Recent Books," 74).

[185]Fazlur Rahman, "Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 194. Charles Adams shares the opinion of Rahman that it is a matter of fact that the Qur'ānic scholarship in the West pays more attention to critical approach, in spite of an attempt at discovering, explaining, and expounding its content. Adams, however, mentions some works on the field, such as Daud Rahbar's *God of Justice* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), which supports the idea "that the Qur'an possesses a distinctive world view of its own that should be appreciated for its own sake," and Fiegenbaum's "Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'an" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1973), which shows that the Qur'ānic ideas have been misunderstood by many scholars (Charles J. Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," in *The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, ed. L. Binder [New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976], 62-3).

[186]Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 197.

historicity of Islam by asserting that no extra-literary corroboration in terms of archaeological data are available for Islam."[187] Rahman also rejects the claim that Wansbrough offered a new historical method to deal with the theological problem of the origin of Islam. In his view, a historical approach "cannot get rid of the theological problem."[188]

Rahman agrees with Jacques Waardenburg's argument that an outsider cannot adequately, let alone fully, understand the meaning of other religions. Rahman also quotes W. C. Smith to the effect that "a statement about a religion by an outsider would be correct [or adequate?] if the followers of that religion say 'yes' to it."[189] Rahman proposes a method of studying Islam which aspires to intellectual understanding or appreciation. The first requirement of such a method is that the investigating subject should be open-minded and unprejudiced.[190] This leads to the second requirement that the researcher should be honest in constructing the reality and to avoid historical reductionism.[191] Rahman proposes a

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[187]Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 198-9.

[188]Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 199. Rahman does not agree with Rippin's claim that the literary method had been applied by Goldziher and Schacht in their critiques of *hadīth*. In Rahman's understanding, both Goldziher and Schacht relied instead on a historical method in showing that "certain Hadiths had, in fact, originated after certain other Hadiths." Rahman claims that he himself actually has applied historical criticism in his *Islamic Methodology of History* (Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 199).

[189]Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 190. See also p. 197.

[190]By the term "prejudiced" he means a situation which is preconditioned in a manner that is not conducive to the study of the object as it is. He argues that "prejudice" does not necessarily relate to religion or other emotional conditions: "Intellectual prejudice may come in the form of preconceived notions or categories" (Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 192).

[191]Rahman explains that "historical reductionism" is a method which tries to reconstruct history based on inadequate data while at the same time failing to recognize those inadequacies. An example of the application of this method can be found within the "attempt to 'explain' Islam's

phenomenological approach to the study of Islam, since with this approach the investigator is expected to "recognize the Qur'ān and the Sunna as normative criterion-referents for all expressions and understanding of Islam."[192]

At the same time, Rahman claims that Muslims themselves are afraid to offer views which differ from received opinions. He further criticizes their study of the subject for its lack of "a genuine feel for the relevance of the Qur'ān today, which prevents presentation in terms adequate to the needs of contemporary man."[193] The problem with most Muslim works on the subject, according to Rahman, is that they take the Qur'ān verse by verse and explain it accordingly. This procedure cannot produce a cohesive outlook on life or the universe. Meanwhile, the topical arrangements of the Holy Book that have been produced by both Muslims and non-Muslims cannot give a comprehensive answer to questions on the

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genesis and even its nature with reference to Jewish, Christian, or other 'influences'" (Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 193).

[192]Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 198. Another scholar, James Royster -- in his study of Muḥammad -- also discusses the phenomenological approach. He defines this approach as, "to accept that which appears, that which the religious tradition presents, on its own terms." He realizes that some weaknesses exist in this approach, since someone may base his research on inadequate sources, or unconsciously influenced by their personal bias. He, however, argues that the phenomenological approach is "the *sine qua non* for understanding the commitment and convictions of believers in another tradition," and "enables one to attribute ultimacy to the religious dimensions of Islam, and consequently, come to an understanding of the tradition from the perspective of Muslims themselves" (James E. Royster, "The Study of Muḥammad: A Survey of Approaches from the Perspective of the History and Phenomenology of Religion," *The Muslim World* 62 [1972]: 62, 64, 70). For a detailed study of this approach see also Royster, "The Meaning of Muḥammad for Muslims: A Phenomenological Study of Recurrent Images of the Prophet" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Hartford Seminary, 1970). Charles Adams, having defined the phenomenological approach in a similar way with that of Rahman and Royster, argues that "the stimulus they [the phenomenologists] offer is perhaps the brightest hope for the advance in our understanding of Islam as a religion" (Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," 51).

[193]Rahman, *Major Themes*, xii.

Qur'ānic concept of God, man, or society.[194]

Rahman's criticism of the exegetical works of non-Muslim scholars, especially that of Wansbrough, is nevertheless open to debate. Before analyzing his critique, it is important to note that the methodologies which Western scholars apply in their study of Islam may be divided into two categories: source-critical methods or the "revisionist" approach, and the "traditional" approach.[195] Both of these methods have their own characteristics. The source-critical approach is characterized by the denial of historical validity for those accounts which are based purely on "facts" derived from Muslim literary sources. This approach also includes relevant contemporary, non-Arabic literature and the findings of archeology, epigraphy, and numismatics.[196] The "traditional" method, on the other hand, is characterized by the use of Muslim literary sources.[197]

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[194]Rahman, *Major Themes,* xi. Rahman is very much convinced that this method will fail to grasp the general meaning of the Qur'ān behind the literal text itself, since its treatment of the subject cannot yield "an effective 'weltanschauung' that is cohesive and meaningful for life as a whole" (Rahman, "Interpreting," 45). See also Rahman, *Islam*, 38-9, and Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 2-3.

[195]J. Koren and Y. D. Nevo, "Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies," *Der Islam* 68 (1991): 87. Royster gives similar categories in discussing the methodologies used by Western scholars in their studies on Muḥammad. The first category is a non-empirical (normative) approach in which the aims of the studies "are attained with only limited recourse to the observable or demonstrable," and tend to be critical to the study of Muḥammad. The second is an empirical (descriptive) approach since the purposes "are manifestly sought within the realm of the observable or demonstrable" (Royster, "The Study of Muḥammad," 49).

[196]Koren and Nevo argue that the development of "revisionism" faces much opposition, especially from those who apply the "traditional approach" to Islamic studies. The general neglect, however, is not based on its methods or its evidence, but on its conclusion. Citing the example of R. B. Serjeant's review of Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* [1978]: 76-8), Koren and Nevo argue that the "traditionalists" tend to ignore or even to reject the validity of a source-critical method (Koren and Nevo, "Methodological Approaches," 88-9).

[197]Koren and Nevo argue that these two approaches never touch each other since the source-critical method "typically discounts the former's validity as historical enquiry," while the "traditional" method ignores the former altogether (Koren and Nevo, "Methodological Approaches,"

Wansbrough falls into the former category -- that of the source-critical method -- while Rahman employs the "theologico-historical" method.[198] Seen in this light, Rahman's critique of Wansbrough's thesis seems somewhat apologetic. Taking, for example, Wansbrough's second thesis that "the Qur'ān is a composite of several traditions and hence post-Prophetic," Rahman argues that "there is a distinct lack of historical data on the origin, character, evaluation, and personalities involved in these 'traditions.'"[199] When one examines Wansbrough's thesis critically and places his argument within its appropriate approach, one finds that Wansbrough's thesis is a logical consequence of the approach he applies. Rippin, who has severely criticized Rahman's critique of Wansbrough, argues that Rahman fails to consider the possible validity of other methods. His view is that Rahman has to distinguish between "the truth claims of the religion itself and the intellectual claims of various methods, for ultimate 'truth' is not susceptible to methodological procedures."[200]

Upon closer examination, however, one finds that Rahman does in fact realize that different approaches to a single object will yield different results. Nevertheless, the most important thing, in Rahman's understanding, is that some approaches -- such as literary criticism and historical reductionism -- cannot be applied to the study of Islam because if these wrong approaches were applied to Islam, they would give the wrong impression on

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[198]Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qur'ān, Tafsīr, and Sīra: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam,* 163.

[199]Rahman, *Major Themes*, xiii.

[200]Rippin, "Literary Analysis," 163. However, while criticising Rahman's work for not considering the validity of other methods of approach to the subject, Rippin judges Rahman's work as not being a scholarly endeavour for its lack of methodological awareness.

Islam itself. Therefore, he sought the approach that would best allow outsiders to understand Islam.[201]

Rahman's criticism of the inadequacy of Muslim works in the field of *tafsīr* in responding to the needs of contemporary people, on the one hand, and of the topical arrangements of the Qur'ān, which cannot give a comprehensive account of the Qur'ānic concept of God, man, or society, on the other, is justifiable. It is true that many *tafsīr* works analyze Qur'ānic teachings thematically; these works, however, do not respond to the needs of contemporary people. Instead, most of them try to translate the Qur'ān literally, and to escape from the real problems that need to be faced. Some works that translate the Qur'ān verse by verse face the same fate, in his view. This method cannot yield any insight, since the Qur'ān needs to be understood as a whole.[202]

Rahman realizes that the need to understand the Qur'ān as a unity requires a study of the views of the earliest Muslim generations, as well as of language, grammar, and style. However, he considers this need to be of secondary importance since never in Islamic intellectual history has the effort to understand the Qur'ān as a unity been seriously undertaken. Rahman argues that "the historical tradition will therefore be more an object of judgment for the new understanding than an aid to it, although this historical traditional

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[201]In this respect, Rahman argues that religious experiences are alive and constitute an integral unity, which cannot be conveyed by a historian or social scientist (Rahman, "Approaches to Islam," 191-8, see especially p. 193, and 197-8).

[202]As an example of Rahman's response to the needs of contemporary man, he states that family serves as a basis of society and takes pains to explain the role of society, the role of women, and how to face the changes of these roles. The discussion of these aspects will be treated in section three of this chapter, in discussing the application of Rahman's methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān.

product can undoubtedly yield insights."[203] The further effort that one has to make is the "intellectual endeavour or jihād," technically called *ijtihād*, i.e. "the effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or precedent in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by a new solution."[204]

With respect to this method, Rahman in his earlier works insists on the importance of studying the Qur'ān in the order of its revelation. The reason for this is that one can get "an accurate enough perception of the basic impulse of the Islamic movement as distinguished from measures and institutions established later." Rahman further argues that this method will "save us much of the extravagance and artificiality of modernist interpretations of the Qur'ān," and will "bring out the overall import of the Qur'ānic message in a systematic and coherent manner."[205] Although Rahman acknowledges that a study of this nature could help to reconstruct the Qur'ān passage by passage and provide detailed references to the verses, in his later writings he criticizes this method as being

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[203]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 6-7.

[204]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 7-8. The notion of *ijtihād* is central to Rahman's world view. He openly rejects the opinion that the gate of *ijtihād* in Islam was closed. He, however, admits that "whereas the gate of *ijtihād* was never formally closed by anyone --that is to say, by any great authority in Islam-- nevertheless a state of affairs had gradually but surely come to prevail in the Muslim World where thinking on the whole, and as a general rule, ceased" (Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 149-50, see also, pp. 170-2). Rahman emphasizes the importance of the originality of thought to reconstruct Islamic intellectualism: "It is the growth of a genuine, original and adequate Islamic thought that must provide the real criterion for judging the success or failure of an Islamic educational system" (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 1). See also Rahman's discussion of the concept of *ijtihād* in *Islam*, 77-80, 115, 198-9, in his "The Impact of Modernity in Islam," *Islamic Studies*, 5, 2 (1966): 121-2, and in his "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary," 240-2.

[205]Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method and Alternatives," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1 (1970): 329.

merely an explanation of "what is germinal in the original, master idea." He therefore came to offer a logical approach, as opposed to a chronological one, for synthesizing Qur'ānic themes.[206] This method, as we will see in the following section, has the potential to make a large contribution to *tafsīr* discourse, since Rahman uses it to understand certain Qur'ānic themes and to analyze them through a philosophical approach.

At first glance, Rahman's criticism of the chronological approach to the Qur'ān seems to contradict his emphasis on the importance of the historical background for understanding the Holy Book itself. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one finds that Rahman does not reject the study of the historical background of the Qur'ān; rather, he criticizes the chronological approach to understanding the whole picture of the Qur'ān, which leads us to understand the verses in an "atomistic" way.[207]

Rahman reasons that the application of an appropriate method of interpreting the Qur'ān depends on differentiating the goal or "moral ideal" which is meant by the Qur'ān from the legal specifics of the verse. It is this moral ideal which is universal and a guidance to Muslims for all time. While its specific legal provisions must be adaptable, given that the conditions of seventh-century Arabian society cannot apply everywhere and for all time, the moral principles behind them have to remain constant.[208] Rahman believes that "the basic elan of the Qur'ān is moral" and that "moral law is immutable."[209] Thus, for Rahman,

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[206]Rahman, *Major Themes,* xi-ii.

[207]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 2-3, 141-5.

[208]Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 121-2.

[209]Rahman, *Islam,* 32-3.

the eternity of legal specific of the Qur'ān is in its moral principles or in the values which underlie them, not in the text itself.[210] Rahman believes that this approach is the only acceptable interpretive method that can do justice to "the demands of intellectual and moral integrity;" only in this way can "the message of the Qur'ān become relevant to the contemporary situation."[211]

At first glance, this method bears a certain similarity to the approach elaborated by Bint al-Shāṭi'.[212] The latter consists of four steps. The first involves the collection of all suras and verses on the topic to be studied.[213] The second method consists in classifying these verses in chronological order in order to study the time and place of their revelation. The occasions of revelation, however, can only be considered insofar as they are the contextual conditions of the revelation. In her view, the meaning of these verses must be derived from the general meaning of the words, not from their specific reasons.[214] In the next step Bint al-Shāṭi' analyzes the original linguistic meaning of those words according to their various material and figurative (*al-ḥissiyyah wa al-majāziyyah*) applications. Their meanings can best be understood by collecting all forms of the word in the Qur'ān and by studying them both in the context of the verses and suras and, more generally, in that of the

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[210]Rahman, *Islam,* 33.

[211]Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 121. See also his *Islam and Modernity*, 154.

[212]She acquired her method from her professor, Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966) -- who later became her husband -- while studying at Fu'ad I University in Cairo. She elaborated her method based on al-Khūlī's book *Manāhij Tajdīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜrifah, 1961). So far, she has interpreted 14 short suras of the Qur'ān.

[213]ᶜĀ'ishah ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* vol. 1 (Egypt: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1990), 10.

[214]Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr*, 10-1.

Qur'ān.[215] The last step that she proposes is based on the idea that to understand the "secret" (*sirr*) of Qur'ānic words, one should consider both the letter (the explicit meaning) and the spirit (the implicit meaning) of the Qur'ānic text. Beyond this, she rejects any interpretation of the Qur'ān which included stories described as *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Jewish-Christian materials), as well as sectarian interpretations.[216]

The first and second steps, in particular, in which Bint al-Shāṭi' collects all suras and verses on the topic to be studied, and argues that the meaning of these verses are to be derived from the generality of the words, rather than from their specific reasons, resemble Rahman's method. Moreover, both authors believe that their methods can be used to understand the moral ideal behind the written text. Upon closer examination, however, one finds that Rahman's method differs from that of Bint al-Shāṭi'. Rahman does not simply group verses with common themes; rather, he employs a logical approach in order to identify the basic concept of each theme discussed: "in discussing God, for example, the idea of monotheism --which is logically imperative-- is made the foundation-stone of the entire treatment, and all other Qur'ānic ideas on God are either derived from it or subsumed under it, as seemed best to establish the synthetic concept of God."[217] Bint Shāṭi', on the other hand, applies a philological approach in her search for the original meaning of a key

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[215]Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr*, 11.

[216]Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr*, 11. For discussion of her *tafsīr* see Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method," *The Muslim World* 64 (1974): 103-13. See also J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 8-9, 58-9, 68-76; C. Khooij, "Bint al-Shāṭi': A Suitable Case for Biography?" in *The Challenge of the Middle East*, ed. A-El-Shaikh, et al. (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1982), 67-72.

[217]Rahman, *Major Themes*, xi.

word in a verse by examining its various applications.

One may also profitably compare Rahman's methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān with that of Mawdūdī. Mawdūdī states clearly that his *tafsīr* is not aimed at scholars and researchers. Rather, it is intended for "the lay reader, the average educated person, who is not well-versed in Arabic and so is unable to make full use of the vast treasures to be found in classical works on the Qur'ān."[218] His *tafsīr*, therefore, seeks to clarify the ambiguities one may encounter in reading the scripture. Mawdūdī applies a free form of interpretation of the Qur'ān as opposed to literal translation, which he believes cannot fill certain needs. He calls his work an "explanatory or interpretative exposition."[219] He begins his commentary on each *sūrah* with preface explaining the meaning of each title. This is followed by notes on the period of a particular revelation, the circumstances obtaining at the time, and its needs and problems.[220]

Mawdūdī's method is clearly different from that of Rahman. Mawdūdī interprets the Qur'ān verse by verse and, accepting the opinions of classical Muslim writers,[221] applies the traditional approach. Rahman, on the other hand, adopts the thematic approach and

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[218]Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding*, 1.

[219]Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding*, 4.

[220]Further discussion on his method of interpreting the Qur'ān, see Charles J. Adams, "Abū'l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. A. Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 307-23. For information concerning his works and other works written on him, see Q. Z. Siddiqi, S. M. Aslam, and M. M. Ahsan, "A Bibliography of Writings by and about Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Aʿlā Mawdūdī," in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlānā Sayyid Abul Aʿlā Mawdūdī*, eds. Khursid Ahmad and Z. I. Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), 3-14.

[221]Sayyid Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam* , trans. Al-Ashʿari (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1972), 30-3.

employs *ijtihād* to derive Qur'ānic principles. It is true that both authors emphasize the importance of the background of revelation, or the *asbāb al-nuzūl.* Rahman's disagreement with Mawdūdī, however, lies in his conviction that the Qur'ān should be understood "in its total and specific background [and doing this study systematically in a historical order], not just studying it verse by verse or passage by passage with an isolated 'occasion of revelation' (*sha'n al-nuzūl*)."[222]

B. Some Philosophical Expressions

An examination of Rahman's philosophical expressions, most of which are to be found in his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* is important if we are to see how far he applied

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[222]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 145. Rahman's disagreement with Mawdūdī's view of Islam is apparent. He claims Mawdūdī was more a journalist than a serious scholar. Rahman further argues that Mawdūdī's attitude, as well as that of the rest of the Jamāᶜat-i Islami and Muslim Brotherhood members, are anti-intellectual, "their reasoning being that Islam is really a 'simple' and 'clear cut' affair, that the Prophet was never the centre of an intellectual movement but rather headed a moral-practical movement..." (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 116-7). He recalls a conversation with Mawdūdī: "I myself remember well that after I had passed my M.A. examination and was studying for my Ph.D. at Lahore, Mawdūdī remarked, after inquiring what I was studying, 'The more you study, the more your practical faculties will be numbed. Why don't you come and join the Jamāᶜat? The field is wide open.' At that time my reply was, 'Somehow I love studying'" (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 117). See also Rahman's other articles dealing with Mawdūdī, "Internal Religious Developments," 878-9; "Muslim Modernism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21, 1 (1958): 96-7; "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," *Islamic Studies* 6, 3 (1967): 208, 212; "Currents of Religious Thought in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 7, 1 (1968): 2-6; "Islam and the Constitutional Problem of Pakistan," *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970): 277; "The Ideological Experience of Pakistan," *Islam and the Modern Age* 2, 4 (1971): 3-6; and "Islam in Pakistan," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 8, 4 (1985): 36-7. Despite his severe criticism of Mawdūdī, Rahman expresses his appreciation for the latter in one of his books: "Here I want to record that two Pakistani intellectuals, Abū'l-Aᶜlā Mawdūdī and Ishtiāq Ḥusain Qureshī, passed away in September 1979 and in January 1981. Their departure is a loss to Islam, despite my severe, and I believe perfectly justified, criticism of them" (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, ix). For a comparison between Rahman's and Mawdūdī's approaches to methodological, theological, social, political and economic issues, see D. L. Berry "The Thought of Fazlur Rahman," 130-60.

these "philosophical" concepts in order to express his understanding of the concept of God, man, nature, prophecy and eschatology in the Qur'ān, and if we are to investigate his agreement or disagreement with these concepts. The term "philosophical" refers in this case to concepts that have been discussed by Muslim and non-Muslim philosophers of the medieval period and antiquity -- God, man, nature, prophecy and eschatology. The aim here solely is to identify Rahman's "philosophical" enunciation of these themes, and not to attempt a description of the content of the concepts themselves.

In his treatment of the concept of God in the Qur'ān, Rahman discusses the notion of the contingency of everything in the Eyes of God. He explains that "the whole of nature is one firm, well-knit structure with no gaps, no ruptures, and no dislocations." It is, however, autonomous, but not autocratic, since "it has no warrant for its own existence and it cannot explain itself."[223] Rahman criticizes the established thinking on this issue, ranging from the Greeks to Hegel, to the effect that "nothing" is an empty word since "there can be no nothing and we cannot imagine it." In Rahman's view, it is theoretically possible that there should be no nature at all, and this is exactly what contingency means. He further argues that "a contingent cannot be thought of without that upon which it is contingent."[224]

The Qur'ān (16:9) teaches that when one thinks about nature, one must "find God." Rahman maintains that this is not a "proof" of God's existence, since "in the thought of the

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[223]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 2-3.

[224]Rahman further argues that "Those who think that nature is 'given' and therefore somehow 'necessary' are like a child for whom toys are 'given' and therefore somehow 'necessary'" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 3).

Qur'ān, if you cannot 'find' God, you will never 'prove' Him."[225] As a consequence of this discovery, he believes that "God cannot be regarded as an existent among other existents. In the metaphysical realm, there can be no democratic and equal sharing between the Original, the Creator, the Self-Necessary, and the borrowed, the created, the contingent."[226] Instead, Rahman regards God as the "dimension which makes other dimensions possible ... He is 'with' everything; He constitutes the integrity of everything... God, then, is the very meaning of reality, a meaning manifested, clarified, and brought home by the universe, helped even further by man."[227] It is interesting to note that in discussing God's mercy and power, Rahman describes Him as the "Light, whereby everything finds its proper being and its conduct," referring to the Qur'ānic verse (24:35):

> God is the light of the heavens and the earth: the likeness of His Light is that of a niche wherein is set a lamp; the lamp is [encased] in a glass; this glass is [so brilliant] as though it were a pearly star. [The lamp] is lit by [the oil of] a blessed tree which is neither Eastern nor Western, and whose oil is apt to catch light even though fire hardly touches it. [God is] Light upon Light and He guides to His

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[225]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 3. Rahman further argues that "the Qur'ān does not 'prove' God but 'points to' Him from the existing universe. Even if there were no ordered universe, but only a single being, it would still point beyond itself because it is a mere contingent; but there is not a mere single contingent, there is a whole ordered and perfectly working universe" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 10). Accordingly, in his view, "the recurring Qur'ānic invitations and exhortations, 'Do you not think?' 'Do you not take heed?'" does not relate with "devising formal proofs for God's existence or 'inferring' God's existence, but with 'discovering' God and developing a certain perception by 'lifting the veil' from the mind" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 11).

[226]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 4.

[227]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 4-5. By stating that God is "with" everything, or that "God is not an item among items," or that "His very infinitude implies not a one-sided transcendence but equally His being 'with' His creation," Rahman realizes the danger of "pantheism." That is why he explains that "we certainly do not mean to suggest that God *is* everything or is *in* everything, even though His presence is all-pervasive. When we say that God is concrete and that He cannot be narrowed by interpretations or approaches that are intellectual and cultural abstractions, we certainly do not imply that if all these approaches are mechanically combined, the aggregate could represent the truth" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 16).

Light whom He wills...[228]

The Qur'ān further maintains that God did not create the universe in sport. The universe points to a purposeful creator. Acceptance of this proposition, however, does not imply a blind faith, since it is based on a consideration of pure chance as well as a supreme creator. He criticizes the Greek thinkers who argued that the universe is solely a product of pure chance and their idea -- to which some modern astronomers also adhere -- of a cyclical universe. In his view, these notions contradict any purposefulness in creation.[229]

Since the concept of nature in the Qur'ān is closely linked to that of God, Rahman's philosophical attitude towards nature will be examined in this part. Rahman proposes the question: "Is it more rational to believe that this natural order, so vast and so complex, is also a purposive order, or is it more rational to believe that it is pure chance?" He rhetorically asks: "Can chance order be cohesive and lasting order? Does not chance itself, in fact, presuppose a framework of more fundamental purposiveness?" Rahman, then, argues that Faith in God "*is* stronger, than many pieces of empirical but contingent

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[228]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 7. Rahman argues that the Qur'ān aims at creating and maintaining man's attitude within two extremes, i.e., "devoid of hope or devoid of necessary humility." Further he postulates that it is for this reason that God is described as "Light of the Heaven and the Earth" (Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Concept of God, the Universe, and Man," *Islamic Studies* 6, 1 [1967]: 12-4). On the other hand, Ibn Sīnā interpreted this verse as having symbolic and metaphorical significance. He did so in order to expound what the Prophet received from his Lord. He understands the term "niche" (*mishkāt*) to imply the material intellect (*al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*) and the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*), while "lamp" (*al-nūr*) denotes the acquired intellect (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*). Ibn Sīnā contended that "light" has a metaphorical meaning -- either the good, or the cause of the good. Thus, it is God, who is in Himself the good and the cause that leads to the good (Ibn Sīnā, *Fī Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt,* edited with introduction and notes by M. Marmura [Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1969], 49-50. Marmura bases this edition on the text printed in Cairo in *Tisʿ Rasā'il* (1908). Marmura's translation of this text can be found in Ibn Sīnā "On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophet's Symbols and Metaphors," in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, eds. R. Lerner and M. Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 112-21.

[229]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 8. See also p. 79.

evidence. For, it is much less reasonable -- indeed, it is *irrational* -- to say that all this gigantic and lasting natural order is pure chance."[230]

It is true that Rahman employs these philosophical expressions, such as Self-Necessary, pure emptiness, light and darkness, pure chance, and contingency, to analyze the Qur'ānic concept of God and nature. This, however, does not mean that he holds all of them in high esteem. His criticism of the view that the universe is a product of chance -- which suggests the eternity of the world -- is a clear indication of his disagreement. Furthermore, he clearly states that in the matter of "the metaphysics of creation, the Qur'ān simply says that the world and whatever God decided to create in it came into existence by His sheer command: *'Be'*."[231]

Furthermore, Rahman rejects in essence the Muslim philosophers' conception of God. In his view, these philosophers took the Hellenized idea of God as "a principle which 'explains' this world, rather than a Creator who directs this world; as an intellectual formula rather than as a moral and dynamic imperative."[232] His criticism of the eternity of the world is therefore apparent. By discussing these terms and expressions, Rahman hopes to correct these conceptions and to offer an alternative understanding of the concept of God

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[230]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 11. See also F. Rahman, "The Message and the Messenger," in *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community*, ed. M. Kelly (New York: Praeger Publications, 1984), 43; Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 156, and Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Concept of God," 17.

[231]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 65.

[232]Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*, 124. See also Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 155.

and of nature in the Qur'ān.[233]

Moving on to the subject of man in the Qur'ān, one should note that Rahman's discussion is in two separate parts -- man as individual and man as society. In the first part, Rahman criticizes the mind-body dualism of Greek philosophy, Christianity, and Hinduism. He argues that the Qur'ān never speaks of man as being composed of two separate substances, the body and the soul.[234] In Rahman's understanding, the term *nafs,* often

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[233]The question of the origin of the world has preoccupied many thinkers throughout history. In Islamic history, there was heated debate between Muslim philosophers on the one hand, and the "orthodox," represented by al-Ghazālī, on the other. Most Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, argued that the world is eternal, and hence, not created. This belief stemmed from their understanding of the concept of natural causation in which the world proceeds from God's essence by the necessity of His nature. Since Ibn Sīnā believed that God is eternal, the world must also be eternal (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt* [Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-Saᶜādah, 1938], 254-5). In contrast, al-Ghazālī refuted Ibn Sīnā's view on the eternity of the world. Part of his argument is that the world was brought into existence by the Eternal Will, which called for its existence at the time it came to exist. The world was not created earlier because its existence had not been willed earlier (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, 53-4). This debate was later continued by Ibn Rushd, who answered each of al-Ghazālī's arguments in order to defend Ibn Sīnā's position (Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges, 3rd. ed. [Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1992), 4-117). One of the important secondary sources on Ibn Rushd's theory of creation is Barry Kogan's *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985). For a discussion on the controversy between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā on *ijmāᶜ* and *ta'wīl,* consult Iysa A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Orthodoxy:* Ijmāᶜ *and* Ta'wīl *in the Conflict between Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 84-110. For further reading on the debate between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd on the creation of the world, see O. Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Not all Muslim philosophers, however, subscribed to the notion of the eternity of the world. Al-Kindī, for example, rejected Aristotle's theory, and argued that the world was created in time (*Rasā'il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyah,* ed. M. A. H. Abū Rīdah [Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-Iᶜtimād, 1950], 197-8, 202-7).

[234]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 17. He argues that the Qur'ān "does not hold that a heavenly soul and an earthly body somehow come together in uneasy union or bond whence the soul seeks release as soon as possible" (Fazlur Rahman, *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition* [New York: Crossroad, 1989], 21). See also his "Islam and Health: Some Theological, Historical and Sociological Perspectives," *Hamdard Islamicus* 5, 4 (1982): 75-6. Rahman, however, realizes that in Islamic history, mind-body dualism was accepted by later orthodox Muslims, particularly after al-Ghazālī and through his influence (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 17). Al-Ghazālī's writings, especially *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, which takes up the subject of resurrection, refer to mind-body dualism as an accepted reality.

mentioned in the Qur'ān, should not be translated as soul; rather, it means "person" or "self." Accordingly, the phrases *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* and *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* should be understood as "states, aspects, dispositions, or tendencies of the human personality."[235]

It is interesting to note that in his treatment of the Qur'ānic concept of man, both as individual and social being, Rahman does not employ many philosophical expressions. Indeed, apart from the mind-body dualism, no such expressions can be found. One may wonder why this should be so. One explanation may be Rahman's insistence on morality, which colours his view of the concept of man in the Qur'ān. In this sense, Rahman tries to bring the discussion on man into the practical realm, since "the goal of man-in-society is to build an ethically-based order on the earth but that cultivation of *taqwā* or a true sense of responsibility is absolutely necessary for man-as-individual if such an order is to be built."[236]

Issues surrounding prophethood and revelation occupy a large part of Rahman's discussion. In this treatment of the subjects, Rahman does not merely refer to Muḥammad; he examines prophecy in Islam in general. He regards prophets as "extraordinary men" who have "sensitive and impregnable personalities."[237] In his view, these prophets or human

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[235]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 17. In Rahman's understanding, "A person is not just the outer body, the 'physical frame,' but includes an inner person which may be called 'mind'; together they form one organized unit" (Rahman, *Health and Medicine*, 21). See also Rahman, "Islam and Health," 75-6.

[236]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 106. Tamara Sonn rightly points out that for Rahman "fully human interpretation is expressed in actions, not in words; the interaction with the text is not complete without its behavioural manifestations. The behaviour is, in fact, the interpretation of the words" (Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Existential Hermeneutic," unpublished paper delivered at the conference "Islam and Modernity: The Fazlur Rahman Experience," Istanbul, February 1997).

[237]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 80.

messengers are "recipients of some special or extraordinary power which emanates from the ultimate source of all being and which fills the hearts of these prophets with something which is light whereby they see and know things the way others are not able to."[238]

In discussing the question of the *miʿrāj*, or the ascension of the Prophet, Rahman enters the longstanding debate on whether this was a spiritual or physical journey. He argues that the Prophet's *miʿrāj* was spiritual in nature and not physical-locomotive, since the Qur'ān clearly states: "his heart did not lie about what it saw."[239] Yet, he holds that "when a spiritual experience is of great intensity, where the distance between subject and object is almost completely removed, 'voices' are 'heard' and 'figures' 'seen' by the subject and the inner experience takes on a quasi-concrete form."[240]

On the whole, Rahman's description of the prophets as recipients of an extraordinary power which *emanates* from the ultimate source of all being shows its closeness to Muslim philosophers' understanding of prophecy in Islam. However, he does not discuss the intelligences which emanate from the Active Intellect. He emphasizes more

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[238]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 98.

[239]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 92-3. In discussing verses 53:5-18 of the Qur'ān, Rahman argues that they refer to five things: "(1) that the reference is to experiences at two different times; (2) that in one experience the Prophet 'saw' the Angel of revelation at the 'highest horizon,' and he possessed extraordinary, almost suppressive strength, while on an earlier occasion he had 'seen' him at the 'furthest lote-tree --where the Garden of Abode is located'; (3) that instead of the Prophet 'going up' in Ascension, in both cases the agent of Revelation 'came down', (4) that the experience was spiritual and not physical-locomotive: 'his *heart* did not lie about what it saw'; (5) finally, that these revelatory experiences involved an expansion of the Prophet's self by which he enveloped all reality and which was total in its comprehensive sweep --the reference in both cases is to ultimate, be it the 'highest horizon' or the 'furthest lote-tree'" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 92).

[240]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 93. See Rahman's discussion on *ʿālam al-mithāl* (realm of images) wherein he discusses the possibility of the Prophet to contact the unsees both in waking life and in dreams, and how the doctrine was understood in the history of Islamic philosophy (Rahman, "Dream, Imagination," 167-80).

the human aspect of the Prophet, who, despite his superiority, remains *human.*[241] In Rahman's opinion, "Muḥammad's prophetic career was likewise geared toward the moral improvement of man in a concrete and communal sense, rather than toward the private and metaphysical."[242]

Yet one may still wonder why Rahman was so preoccupied with whether the *miʿrāj* was a spiritual or a physical journey. The controversy may be traced back to the Muslim philosophers' doctrine of the ascension. Some philosophers believed that Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* was spiritual, since they thought it impossible for a human being to achieve ascension. Other philosophers argued that ascension was both a physical and spiritual journey. In his *tafsīr,* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī argued that it was "rational" rather than physical.

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[241]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 89. In the history of Islamic philosophy, Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā discussed the concept of prophecy at great length. Their concepts are mainly based upon Greek theories of the soul -- as expressed, for the most part, by Aristotle in the third book of *De Anima* (*The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W.D. Ross [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931]). In this respect, the concept of emanation of the intelligences is very central. In al-Fārābī's view, when human intellect becomes "self-intelligible" and "self-intellective," it becomes "acquired intellect" (*al-ʿaql mustafād*) (al-Fārābī, *Risālah fī al-ʿAql*, ed. M. Bouyges [Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1983], 19-20; and al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsāh al-Madanīyah* [Dār al-Maʿārif, 1345H.], 49). This notion of *al-ʿaql al-mustafād* actually served as a basis to explain the existence of the Prophet. Al-Fārābī argues that in a few cases when the *ʿaql al-mustafād* contemplates the Active Intelligence, the Active Intelligence becomes the form of the *ʿaql al-mustafād* and "the perfect philosopher, or Imam (*al-failasūf wa al-raʾīs al-awwal*) or the Legislator (*al-malik*) comes into existence" (al-Fārābī, *Taḥṣīl al-Saʿādah*, [Dār al-Maʿārif, 1345H.], 43). See also Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 14. In al-Fārābī's view, however, the Prophet should go through the stages of ordinary philosophical thought before attaining revelation (al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsāh*, 49; and al-Fārābī, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ Arāʾ Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍila*, a revised text with introduction, translation, and commentary by R. Walzer [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985], 242-5). Ibn Sīnā shared this view. The difference between his and al-Fārābī's notion lies in Ibn Sīnā's argument that the capacity to receive intelligibles directly in the ordinary human soul must exist essentially in the angelic intellect (*al-ʿaql al-malakī*), which receives emanations from the active intellect without mediation. Thus, prophetic revelation is something which happens "all at once" (*daf atan*) (Ibn Sīnā, *Avicenna's De Anima:* (Arabic text): *Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā,* Maqālah 5, *Chapter 2*, ed. F. Rahman [London: Oxford University Press, 1959], 249). Rahman discusses these two philosophers' noetic in detail in his book *Prophecy in Islam.*

[242]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 2.

Based on verse 11 of surah 53, al-Rāzī held that Muḥammad saw God with his heart, not his eyes. This implies that he came closer to God in a spiritual sense. Al-Rāzī concluded that Muḥammad, in his spiritual ascension, reached the highest station of certitude, beyond which there is none greater.[243] Another thinker, Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385),[244] contended that the ascension could be both physical (*al-miʿrāj al-ṣuwarī*) and spiritual (*al-miʿrāj al-maʿnawī*). It can be physical because it is impossible not to accept the fact that perfect men could possess special powers. On the other hand, the *miʿrāj* can be spiritual, since it needs no physical movement.[245] In this sense, Rahman's explanation remains unique, since he argues that "the Qur'ān not only does not speak of a physical ascension of the Prophet but even describes it as an 'act of the heart'; and in two places, far from speaking of the prophet as ascending, it speaks of God as descending to him."[246]

The last topic to be examined here is eschatology. In Rahman's view, the Qur'ān

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[243]Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 28 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1980), 286-94.

[244]Bahā' al-Dīn Ḥaydar b. ʿAlī al-Āmulī was an early representative of Persian theosophy and a commentator of Ibn ʿArabī. He combined "Shīʿī convictions hereditary in his family with an ʿIrāqī and Persian ṣūfī tradition strongly imbued with the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī." Among his treatises are: "Jāmiʿ al-Asrār wa Manbaʿ al-Anwār" in *La Philosophie Shīʿite*, ed. Osman Yaḥya and Henry Corbin (Tehran-Paris, 1969), 2 ff; see also Āmulī, *Naṣṣ al-Nuṣūṣ*, a commentary of Ibn ʿArabī *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam,* ed. O. Yaḥya and H. Corbin (Tehran-Paris, 1975) (Josef van Ess, Ḥaydar-i Āmulī," *EI²*).

[245]Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Asrār al-Sharīʿah wa Aṭwār al-Ṭarīqah wa Anwār al-Ḥaqīqah* (Tehran: Cultural Studies and Research Institute, 1983,) 158-61.

[246]Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 122. He refers to the process of receiving revelation: "although the standard revelatory experience of the Prophet was a matter of the 'heart', this experience nevertheless automatically took the form of words, as is the case with all spiritual experiences of great intensity" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 93). For a discussion on the Prophet's manner of receiving revelations, see among others: Rahman, *Islam*, 30-3; Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era," in *Essays on Islamic Civilization,* ed. D. P. Little (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 299-302; Rahman, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet," *Hamdard Islamicus* 1, 2 (1978): 66-72.

does not talk about the destruction of the universe, but rather about "its transformation and rearrangement with a view to creating new forms of life and new levels of being."[247] As with his views on the ascension of the Prophet, Rahman maintains that even if the Qur'ān seems to convey a physical conception of Judgment Day, the actual reward or punishment will be moral or spiritual, not just physical. Rahman disagrees with the Muslim philosophers who argued that the Hereafter will be filled by disembodied souls, and that the Qur'ānic verses which speak of physical happiness and physical hell are purely metaphorical. In fact, as Rahman insisted earlier, the Qur'ān does not recognize the dualism of the soul and the body.[248]

In view of the above, Rahman's insistence on the transformation of the world on the Day of Judgment contradicts his view on the creation of the world, since "transformation" -- as opposed to "destruction" -- illustrates the eternity of the world. In a transformed world, "new forms of life and new levels of being" will be created, and this clearly suggests the eternity of the world. There is, however, one possible answer that Rahman might have: in his explanation of the transformation of the world, he does not claim that the new forms of life and new level of being will be transformed into another world. On this point, Rahman is of the opinion that the world simply is not eternal.

On the question of whether the Hereafter will be filled with the disembodied souls,

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[247]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 111.

[248]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 112. In his words: "although the Qur'ān, particularly in the early and middle Meccan periods, persistently details the horrors of the Judgment Day for evildoers, the real punishment will undoubtedly be the irremediable pain suffered by those who have perpetrated evil in this life when they realize that there is no 'going back' and that they have lost the only opportunity in the life of this world to do good" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 108).

Rahman adopts a critical attitude. He criticizes the theory advanced by the Muslim philosophers of the non-resurrection of the body in the Hereafter by arguing that the actual reward or punishment will be moral or spiritual, and not just spiritual.[249] To quote Rahman:

> The Qur'ān, therefore, does not affirm any purely "spiritual" heaven or hell, and the subject of happiness and torture is, therefore, man as a person. When the Qur'ān speaks -- so repeatedly, so richly, and so vividly -- of physical happiness and physical hell, it is not speaking in pure metaphor, as Muslim philosophers and other allegorists would have it, although, of course, the Qur'ān is trying to describe the happiness and punishments as effects, i.e., in terms of *feeling* of the physical and spiritual pleasure and pain. The vivid portrayals of a blazing hell and a garden are meant to convey these effects as real spiritual-physical feelings, apart from the present psychological effects of these descriptions.[250]

C. The Application of Rahman's Methodology

In the view of Rahman, contemporary problems cannot be solved by relying on conservative, medieval theories, since one needs knowledge in order to cope with advances in science and technology. On the other hand, one has also to beware of Western influence,

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[249]The Muslim philosophers' arguments concerning bodily resurrection in the Hereafter stemmed from the concept of the dualism between mind and body. Ibn Sīnā argued that "The soul achieves its first entelechy through the body; its subsequent development, however, does not depend on the body but on its own nature... the soul does not die with the death of the body and is absolutely incorruptible" (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 185. This English translation is taken from Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology. An English translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI* [London: Oxford University Press, 1952], 58). As in the case of the origin of the world, al-Ghazālī attacked Ibn Sīnā's argument on the ground that the latter's concept was against the Qur'ānic teachings. Al-Ghazālī contended that in the time of Truth, the body and the soul will be joined together. He argued that one can interpret metaphorically the verses giving human attributes to God. The description of Heaven and Hell, however, is very clear and leaves no room for metaphorical interpretations. Thus, punishment and reward in the Hereafter are, as described in the Qur'ānic verses, both physical and spiritual (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, 288-9, 298). In this sense, Rahman's position may be analyzed from two perspectives. On the one hand, his view of the supremacy of spiritual reward or punishment is close to Muslim philosophers' contentions. On the other, Rahman's insistence that physical punishment and happiness are literal, not metaphorical, is close to al-Ghazālī's position.

[250]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 112.

since the danger of neglecting human and moral values is closely tied to technological development. Rahman's solution is to return to "the pure Islam of the Quran."[251]

As discussed earlier, Rahman's emphasis on the importance of moral order on the earth is to be found in almost all of his writings. Chapter one of this thesis, in which he explains the elements of his philosophy, contains a discussion of *īmān,* a concept which combines doctrine with act. It is this call for combining theory and action which appears to characterize Rahman's book *Major Themes* as well as his other works. Basing himself on a logical approach and proper understanding of the moral ideal of the Qur'ān, Rahman tries to respond to the problems of the contemporary world.[252]

In *Major Themes*, the very first theme he discusses is the Qur'ān's concept of God. Rahman insists that the Qur'ān addresses human being, referring to itself in fact as "guidance for mankind."[253] This has both a practical and a political application; indeed Rahman insists that the Qur'ān "was not a mere devotional or personal pietistic text."[254] Thus, the Qur'ān is not a "treatise about God and His nature," even if it speaks about Him at almost every turn. In the Holy Book, therefore, God's existence is "strictly functional --

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[251]Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 1158-9. See also Fazlur Rahman, "Perception of Desirable Societies in Different Religions: The Case of Islam," unpublished lecture presented at United Nations University (Bangkok, March 12-5, 1984), 1-4.

[252]Not all themes discussed by Rahman in this book will be analyzed. In order to discern his unique methodology, those elements of his views which reflect the application of his methodology will be discussed. The discussion and examples will be taken mainly from this book, although his other treatises which relate to the implementation of his methodology will also be assessed.

[253]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 1,3. See also Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 2.

[254]He postulates that the Qur'ān, together with the Prophet, holds the position as "a unique repository of answers to all sorts of questions" (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 2).

He is Creator and Sustainer of the universe and of man."[255]

Rahman regrets the fact that many Western scholars portray the Qur'ānic God as "a concentrate of pure power, even as brute power -- indeed, as a capricious tyrant."[256] He realizes that the Qur'ān speaks about God in many different contexts. While it is true that the Qur'ān sometimes depicts God's power, it equally discusses His "infinite mercy."[257] Here lies the importance of understanding the moral conception of the Qur'ān, which cannot be achieved through a verse-by-verse approach.

God's power is closely related to the notion of *qadar*, "measuring," which is often misunderstood as the blind determinism of all human acts, since the Qur'ān (77:23) seems to state clearly "So We determined [these laws] and how fine measurers We are." Rahman postulates that as a Qur'ānic term, the word *qadar* actually "'measures out' everything, bestowing upon everything the range of its potentialities, its laws of behaviour, in sum, its character."[258] Taking the example of producing a test tube baby, Rahman applies a strict logic, yet sticks to the moral ideal of the Qur'ān stating:

> This [verse 77:23] in itself does not mean that man cannot discover the laws of the process whereby a sperm and an egg meet and then, at a certain temperature and

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[255]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 1.

[256]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 1. One example of the contemporary Western depiction of God in the Qur'ān is provided by Michael Cook: "He is eternal -- He has always existed, and always will. He is omniscient: not a leaf falls without His knowledge. He is omnipotent: when He decides something, He has only to say 'Be!' and it is. Above all, He is unique: He is one, and there is no other god but Him; He has no partners in His divinity. Furthermore, He is merciful and beneficent -but for reasons we shall come to, He is frequently angry" (M. Cook, *Muhammad* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 25).

[257]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 6.

[258]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 12. See also Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Concept of God," 6.

> with certain materials and other conditions, produce a perfected baby; and then apply those laws to produce a baby in a tube, for example. Many people think that this is "vying with" God and trying to interfere in His work and share His divinity, but the real worry is not that man is trying to displace nature or imitate God, for man is encouraged to do so by the Qur'ān. The fear, on the contrary, is that man may "vie with" the devil to produce distortions of nature and thus violate moral law.[259]

In his discussion, Rahman does not refer to all the Qur'ānic verses concerning God. Instead, he analyzes the concept of God in the Qur'ān. He identifies the basic principle behind this concept and, from there, analyzes the moral ideal of those verses. Rahman reiterates that a selection of any number of verses from the Qur'ān will yield a partial and subjective point of view. Studying it as a concrete unity, however, will allow it to emerge in its fullness.[260]

It is clear from his discussion of the concept of God that Rahman's idea of monotheism is the "foundation-stone" of the discourse. A proper understanding of the concept of God in the Qur'ān, in turn, leads to the human capacity of avoiding all kinds of "spiritual drugs," so common nowadays,[261] because "it is the moral aspect of man's

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[259]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 13. Rahman verifies and gives a specific example of the use of the term *qadar*: "When a certain car, for example is manufactured to run for a maximum estimated at 150,000 miles, then the power to run so much, which is inlaid in it, is called its *taqdīr*. This *taqdīr* brings it about that this car, which is an automobile vehicle of a certain type, will not, e.g., be able to fly like an aeroplane, that it will be able to run faster than a man, etc." (Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Concept of God," 6). Consequently, in Rahman's view, there could be no objection in Islam to "test-tube babies," if the union is between the genes of husband and wife. However, it should be realized that "this unique opportunity also carries with it grave and unprecedented risks." He further argues that "Perhaps it is this fact that renders this opportunity pregnant with both tremendous possibilities and an unprecedented opportunity for moral training and maturity for human kind" (Rahman, *Health and Medicine*, 108). In Rahman's view, however, the advance of knowledge should be in accordance with the moral perception to avoid the abuse of its application (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 34).

[260]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 15.

[261]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 16. In Rahman's view, once a person loses contact with God, the next step is to fall into one of two conditions: to worship "one's own [subjective] desires" or

behaviour which is most slippery and difficult to control and yet most crucial for his survival and success."[262]

With respect to man as individual, Rahman argues that human's task is to create a moral social order on earth.[263] It is true that the Qur'ān recognizes human weaknesses, and even the weaknesses of the prophets and the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Human beings, however, should actively try to overcome these weaknesses and not just passively accept them.[264] In this regard, Rahman criticizes the fatalism allegedly espoused by the Ashᶜarite school, as well as the Ṣūfī teachings on "pantheism." He feels these tenets run against the Qur'ānic idea of *qadar*. It is clear, in Rahman's view, that the concept of a blind fatalism pre-determining all human acts is not Qur'ānic; for, in reality, the Qur'ān discusses the term *qadar* with an optimistic outlook.[265] Here Rahman, once again, emphasizes the importance of *taqwā*: "the unique balance of integrative moral action."[266]

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to worship "socialized desires." Rahman firmly believes that "when man's moral vision is narrowed and the transcendental dimension is gone, then, from the universally objective moral point of view, it is immaterial whether one worships oneself as God or one's society or nations as God [*pace* Emile Durkheim!]" (Rahman, *Major Themes,* 27-8).

[262]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 9.

[263]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18.

[264]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18. In Rahman's words: "It is this deep-seated moral fact that constitutes the eternal challenge for man and renders his life an unceasing moral struggle. In this struggle, God is with man, *provided man makes the necessary effort.* Man is squarely charged with this effort because he is unique in the order of creation, having been endowed with free choice in order to fulfill his mission as God's vicegerent" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18).

[265]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 12-3, 23. He further discusses the difference between man and other creatures: "The only difference is that while every other creature follows its nature automatically, man *ought* to follow his nature; this transformation of the *is* into *ought* is both the unique privilege and the unique risk of man" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 24).

[266]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 28.

Thus, a true understanding of the Qur'ānic concept of man as individual should encourage responsibility for one's behaviour, since the Qur'ān rejects the concept of intercession.[267] Indeed, a true understanding of the Qur'ānic concept of man as individual makes people understand the long-range moral goals of the human endeavour.[268] The problem of disorientation today, where people undergo a similar ritual day after day and lose sight of their long-term goals, reflects the loss of such an understanding.

In discussing man in society, Rahman postulates that the aim of the Qur'ān is to establish "a social order on earth based on ethics."[269] He argues further that this goal is pointed out together with "a severe denunciation of the economic disequilibrium and social inequalities prevalent in the contemporary commercial Meccan society."[270] The question remains as to why the Qur'ān continuously criticizes economic disparities. Rahman maintains that this is because "they were the most difficult to remedy and were at the heart of social discord."[271] It should be noted, however, that the Qur'ān does not discourage the

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[267]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 31. See also Fazlur Rahman, "The Status of Individual in Islam," *Islamic Studies* 5, 4 (December 1966): 320, and Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 122.

[268]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18.

[269]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 37.

[270]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 38.

[271]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 38. In Rahman's view, the Qur'ānic idea of social justice includes a discussion of, among other things, economics, human rights, human equality, democracy, and freedom. See his articles "Implementation of the Islamic Concept," 209-11; "Some Reflections," 103-7, 115; "Islam and the Problem of Economic Justice," *The Pakistan Economist*, 24 (August 1974): 14-39; "A Recent Controversy over the Interpretation of Shūrā," *History of Religions* 20, 3 (1981); "The Principle of Shura and the Role of the Ummah in Islam," in *State, Politics and Islam*, ed. Mumtaz Ahmad (Indianapolis: American Trust Publication, 1986), 87-96; "The Sources and Meaning of Islamic Socialism," in *Religion and Political Modernization*, ed. D. E. Smith (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 243-58.

earning of wealth. The Qur'ān refers to wealth as "the bounty of God [*faḍl Allāh*]" and "good [*khair*]."[272] However, in keeping with its criticism of economic disparities, the Qur'ān reminds people to consider the needs of others; one of the weaknesses of man is his neglect of these needs. It also reminds people to be wary of abusing wealth, since this "prevents man from pursuing higher values."[273]

In this, one finds a clear example of the application of Rahman's method of understanding the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān teaches that "wealth should not circulate only among the rich" (59:7). The purposes of *zakāt* are given in detail in 9:60, and include, in Rahman's view, "all the activities of a state."[274] Thus, for Rahman, *zakāt* is "a social welfare tax in the widest possible meaning of 'welfare,'" and the only tax levied by the Qur'ān."[275] In our own day, when the needs of mankind have increased immensely, he argues that the rate of *zakāt* needs to be readjusted. Rahman disagrees with the ʿulamā', who forbid any change of the rate of *zakāt*, and yet allow, instead, other taxes. Rahman claims that these ʿulamā' are the ones "responsible for secularism in the Muslim world."[276]

In order to maintain economic balance in society, the Qur'ān banned usury. Rahman,

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[272]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 38-9. See also Fazlur Rahman, "Economic Principles of Islam," *Islamic Studies* 8, 1 (1969): 2.

[273]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 39. In Rahman's words: "However, without the establishment of socio-economic justice, it is inconceivable that the individuals of a society as a whole can develop. Further, economic justice is the cornerstone even of social justice although, of course, social justice is much more than that" (Rahman, "Economic Principles," 1).

[274]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 41.

[275]Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 119.

[276]Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity," 119.

however, highlights the phrase which serves as the foundation for this banning -- i.e. that usury "grows several-fold" (*aḍ'āfan muḍā afah*), threatening the public's welfare. Nevertheless, one has to understand that under modern conditions, the role of banking has changed. The term *ribā'*, which was practised in pre-Islamic times and declared to be *ḥarām* by the Qur'ān, does not have the same meaning or application as does bank-interest in the context of a "developing economy."[277]

Rahman next considers how the Qur'ān tries to strengthen the basic family unit, and how it urges one to give truthful evidence, encourages good behaviour even towards one's enemies, prohibits dissension and cliquing and imposes equality for the entire human race. All these prescriptions are practical,[278] and are discussed within an ethical context and serve as the foundation-stone of the discourse on man in society.

In his discussion of the social reforms advocated by the Qur'ān, Rahman argues that one has to distinguish between "legal enactments and moral injunctions."[279] As pointed out before, this distinction is central to Rahman's method of interpreting the Qur'ān. He takes the example of polygamy. First, one must understand that the permission for men to marry up to four women (3:3) arose in a context where there were many orphan girls, and where the men who were the guardians of the orphans were often dishonest with the orphans' properties. Second, one should note that another verse of the Qur'ān (4:129) clearly states

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[277]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 40-1. For further discussion of *ribā'*, see Fazlur Rahman, "Ribā and Interest," *Islamic Studies* 3, 1 (1964): 1-43. See also his works: *Islamic Methodology*, 67, 68, 79; *Islam and Modernity,* 16, 18, 30, 127, 13; "Some Islamic Issues," 291-5; "Islam and the Problem of Economic Justice," 31.

[278]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 42-6.

[279]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 47.

that "You shall never be able to do justice among women, no matter how much you desire to do so." Thus, for Rahman "The truth seems to be that the permission for polygamy was at a legal plane while the sanctions put on it were in the nature of a *moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move*, since it was not possible to remove polygamy legally at one stroke."[280]

On the subject of nature, Rahman argues that the Qur'ān regards the whole universe as "Muslim," having surrendered to God's will. The case of man, however, is different, since people may choose to be or not to be Muslim.[281] Rahman believes that the universe is the primary sign (*āyah*) of its Creator. Nevertheless, when natural causes impinge on man's role, he tends to "forget" God. When they fail him, he tends to "discover" God.[282] It

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[280]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 48. Cases regarding the equality between men and women, the laws of inheritance, and male vs. female witnesses should be understood in the same way by allowing for the distinction between the legal specifics of the text and the *ratio legis* behind it. In the case of equality between men and women, for example, Rahman argues that verse 2:228 ("And for women there are rights [over against men] commensurate with the duties [they owe men] -- but men are one degree higher") does not suggest an inherent inequality between them. This is due to the fact that in another verse (4:36), the Qur'ān shows that men's superiority over women is only functional, and not inherent: "Men are in charge of women because God has given some humans excellence over others and because men have the liability of expenditure [on women]." That is why, in the contemporary world, when women become economically self-sufficient, "the male's superiority would to that extent be reduced, since *as a human,* he has no superiority over his wife" (Rahman, *Major Themes*, 48-9). Rahman was very much concerned with these issues, a concern which needs to be interpreted in the light of his methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān. For his treatment of these issues see his articles: "The Controversy Over the Muslim Family Laws," in *South Asian Politics and Religion*, 414-27; "A Survey of Modernization of Muslim Family Law," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2 (1980): 451-65; "The Status of Women in Islam; A Modernist Interpretation," in *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia,* eds. H. Papanek and G. Minault (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1982), 285-310; "Status of Women in the Qur'an," in *Women and Revolution in Iran*, ed. G. Nashat (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 37-54; and "The Impact of Modernity," 120-2.

[281]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 65.

[282]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 68.

is a matter of fact that most people think of the processes of nature as "having self-sufficient causes." For many naturalists, for example, the universe is the ultimate reality; however, "they do not realize that the universe is a sign pointing to something 'beyond' itself, something without which the universe, with all its natural causes, would be and could be nothing."[283]

Eschatology is another theme discussed by Rahman. The Qur'ān describes eschatology in terms of the joys of Heaven and the punishments of Hell. Human weaknesses are selfish, narrow, and materially oriented. That is why the Qur'ān terms the end of life as *al-ākhirah* -- the "end"or "the moment of truth"[284] -- when all deeds will be weighed. In keeping with the responsibility of man as an individual being, each individual will be alone when facing his Maker on that Last Day. In this sense, the Qur'ān encourages people "to send something for the morrow."[285]

Still on the subject of the Last Day, Rahman quotes the verse 6:94, which states that it is the moral quality of one's actions that will remain with Him.[286] Qur'ānic descriptions of that moment which show a complete dislocation of the earth, are, in Rahman's view, only designed to show the absolute power of God. In fact, the Qur'ān does not speak of "the

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[283]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 69.

[284]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 106. Rahman further emphasizes that "the most fundamental weakness of humans, for the Qur'an, is their pettiness, narrow-mindedness, and selfishness. Even their idolatry directly springs from pettiness of mind, for idol-worship presupposes the closure of one's mind to the infinitude of transcendence" (Rahman, *Health and Medicine*, 12-3). See also Rahman, "Islam and Health," 76-7; Rahman, "The Qur'ānic Concept of God," 12.

[285]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 107-8. See also Rahman, "The Message and the Messenger," 44.

[286]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 107.

destruction of the universe but of its transformation and rearrangement with a view to creating new forms of life and new levels of being."[287] By realizing that life is a serious matter wherein every body is responsible of what they have done, and that there will be a continuation after this life, Rahman highlights the importance of developing *taqwā*, the "inner torch which can enable one to distinguish between right and wrong."[288]

D. Conclusion

Rahman's methodology of interpreting the Qur'ān helps to clarify the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world. One of the elements of his philosophy, the word *īmān,* suggests the need to combine doctrine with action, and this is exactly what Rahman did in his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān.* Rahman's concerns about today's problems are to be found in many of his other writings. In fact, while claiming that the answers to these problems may be understood by having recourse to "the pure Islam of the Quran," Rahman testifies that "during the ensuing years of my life the bulk of my activity will be directed toward the realization of this end."[289]

Tamara Sonn characterizes Rahman's understanding of the Qur'ān as an "existential hermeneutic." She argues that, for Rahman, "interpretation of religious texts was not a

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[287]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 110-1.

[288]Rahman, *Major Themes*, 120.

[289]Rahman, "Fazlur Rahman," 159. Some of the social issues which are not discussed in his book *Major Themes* include birth control, mechanical slaughtering, artificial insemination, circumcision, genetic engineering, the law of inheritance, divorce, and homosexuality. See among his works: *Health and Medicine*, 107-24; "The Status of Women," 302-9; "A Survey of Modernization," 463-5; "The Ideological Experience," 10-13.

purely cognitive event. Intellectual events, obviously, are a component of fully human behavior. But, on their own, they are incomplete."[290] When one analyzes Rahman's interpretation of the Qur'ānic concepts of God, man, nature, eschatology, and prophecy discussed above, one finds that Sonn's analysis is correct. Indeed, upon closer examination, one realizes that the notion of *taqwā,* which strongly indicates moral value, is present throughout his works.

Rahman believed that the current situation of Islam, which demonstrates a "relative lack of ability to cope with the modern world creatively," is due both to an inadequate knowledge of Islamic traditions and a lack of understanding of modern developments. Therefore, he argues that the problem can be faced only by reforming education in the Muslim world. To quote him: "The remedy for this highly undesirable and dangerous situation lies of course in the educational reform in the Muslim world... a creative synthesis is still lacking that would enable Muslims to carry out a re-interpretation of traditional Islam and its values for the present and the future."[291] Rahman believes that only an adequate study of Islamic goals can enable Muslims to deal effectively with questions concerning how to teach and implement them in the contemporary world.

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[290]Sonn further examines the correlation between Rahman's existential approach --which distinguishes between eternal relevance of the Qur'ānic verses and the specific circumstances of revelation-- and the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* issues (Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Existential Hermeneutic," 1-4). For Sonn's discussion on the effect of Rahman's existential approach on his concepts of *ijtihād* and *nasīkh/mansūkh* controversy, see Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism," *Fazlur Rahman Memorial Volume* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), forthcoming.

[291]Rahman, "Perception of Desirable Societies," 3-4. Rahman discusses the educational system in the Islamic world at a great length in his book *Islam and Modernity.* He also proposes some useful solutions in chapter four of the latter work. For a discussion on the same subject with specific reference to the educational problem in Pakistan, see Fazlur Rahman, "The Qur'anic Solution of Pakistan's Educational Problems," *Islamic Studies* 6, 4 (1967): 315-26.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Fazlur Rahman has made a significant contribution to Islamic philosophical discourse. He argued that Islamic philosophy should not be preoccupied with metaphysical notions, recommending instead a greater attention to a moral philosophy which is practically grounded in the precepts of the Qur'ān. Consequently, he was not of the same opinion as those who argue -- such as Hossein Nasr and Henry Corbin -- that Islamic philosophy consists of pure metaphysics or that it has traditionally engaged solely in *ḥikmah*. On the contrary, he criticized Muslim philosophers for their focus on metaphysical issues to the neglect of the field of ethics.[292] Indeed, Rahman's disagreement with Muslim philosophers over their concepts of God, man, prophecy and nature emerged as a consequence of his philosophical world-view, where the notion of ethics occupied his mind -- as a direct reflection of his belief -- to a great extent. It is true that in his works, Rahman employed many philosophical expressions similar to those of the Muslim philosophers. He seems however to have borrowed these expressions only in order to turn them against the philosophers as a tool of criticism.

Rahman's philosophy is characterized by three religious terms, *īmān*, *islām*, and *taqwā*. This shows the practical, rather than purely rational approach of his thought. Stated differently, Rahman's philosophy includes his faith commitment -- there is no clear

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[292]It should be noted, however, that Rahman was not completely anti-metaphysics. His critique was directed towards Muslim metaphysicians due to the fact that they based their weltanschauung on Hellenic thought, not the Qur'ān. Rahman regarded Iqbāl's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* as the only systematic attempt to metaphysical discourse in modern time. This work, however, cannot be categorized as a work based on Qur'ānic teaching since "the structural elements of its thought are too contemporary to be an adequate basis for an ongoing Islamic metaphysical endeavor" (Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 132).

separation between his philosophical and religious thought. It should be noted, however, that Rahman's point of departure differs, at least from his own perspective, from that of other Muslim philosophers. In Rahman's view, these latter assimilated religious to intellectual truth, while for Rahman, his philosophy is a part of his religious belief.

This is precisely how one should read Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* and his other works as well. This work is considered as a reflection of his religious philosophy since Rahman examines in it many important topics concerning human wordly existence and his final destiny by applying his method of interpreting the Qur'ān. His approach to the Qur'ān played a central role in his understanding of the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world, since he believed that the changing needs of society can only be satisfied by grasping the true meaning of the Qur'ān. One, however, finds that Rahman was dogmatic in arguing that his approach to the Qur'ān is the only interpretive method that can truly do justice to "the demands of intellectual and moral integrity."[293]

Denny argues that Rahman may be closer to the Muslim philosophical thought than many of the theologians of classical Islam. He rightly points out that Rahman was certainly not a Muʿtazilī, since this school of thought had gone much farther in its reliance on rationalism, an attitude which Rahman severely criticizes in many passages.[294] Denny's argument may be true to the extent that Rahman assigned reason a high position in his system of thought. The clear differences between the Muslim philosophers' views and those of Rahman, however, lie in their emphasis on the metaphysical realm and -- in Rahman's

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[293]See n. 211 of chapter three.

[294]Denny, "The Legacy of Fazlur Rahman," 101.

judgment -- on their lack of ethical nuance, whereas Rahman, by contrast, stressed the practical realm.

Rahman's other contribution to the study of Islamic philosophy is his argument -- shared by some eminent scholars of Islamic philosophy -- such as Henry Corbin, Toshihiko Izutsu, Majid Fakhry and Seyyed Hossein Nasr -- that Islamic philosophy did not cease with the death of Averroes. This view underlines an important point, both for students of Islam and scholars in general, i.e. that the study of Islamic philosophy should be conducted not only with respect to its impact upon Western philosophy, but more importantly, as an integral body of thought.

However, Rahman's position on the Muslim philosophers' contribution to the intellectual tradition of Islam is, to some extent, inconsistent. On the one hand, he criticized the philosophers for their dependence on rational activity, and for mistakenly accommodating religious to intellectual truth; on the other hand, he praised them for their achievements in this area and especially Ibn Sīnā, for his conception of essence and existence. For Rahman, Ibn Sīnā's views on essence and existence and on prophecy, for example, are very convincing and persuasive; it is possible that Rahman would never have had the same certitude about God without Ibn Sīnā's notion of essence and existence.

Despite the ambivalent nature of Rahman's views concerning the legacy of the Muslim philosophers, Charles Adams underlines a number of his contributions to the study of Islamic philosophy. Adams is right in pointing out that Rahman has advanced our appreciation of Ibn Sīnā's theory of essence and existence. He took pains to "correct" the received opinion that for Ibn Sīnā, God's existence was something added to His essence,

since according to Rahman's understanding, Ibn Sīnā argued that God's essence is His existence. Another important contribution by Rahman, in Adams' view, is his attempt "to claim the philosophers as genuine -- and important -- elements of the true Islamic heritage."[295]

There is no easy way to reconcile Rahman's ambivalent attitude towards the legacy of the Muslim philosophers. It seems that his attitude emerged as a consequence of his own need to understand and accept Islam, both in rational and normative ways. Adams, having known Rahman personally, notes that "there can be little doubt that he [Rahman] felt a natural sympathy with the concerns of these great thinkers [the Muslim philosophers]; his own temperament after all was strongly intellectual and rational."[296] Further research clearly needs to be undertaken to reveal Rahman's reasons for adopting such a position.

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[295]Adams, "Fazl al-Rahman," 271.

[296]Adams, "Fazl al-Rahman," 267.

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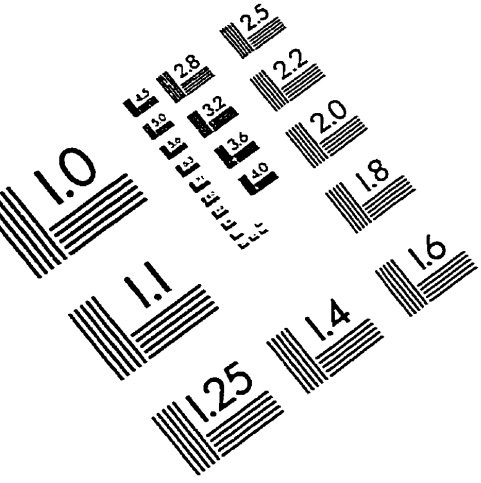

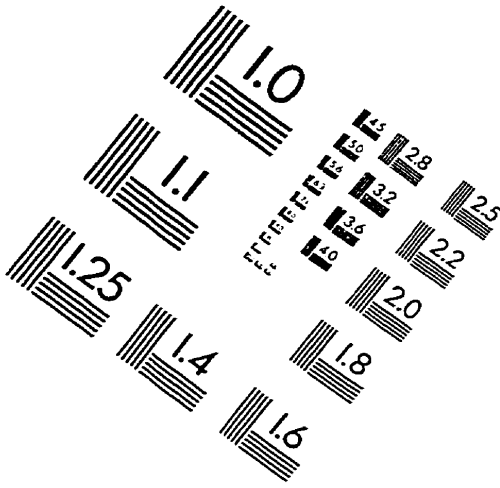

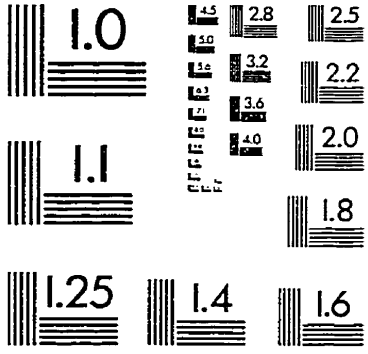

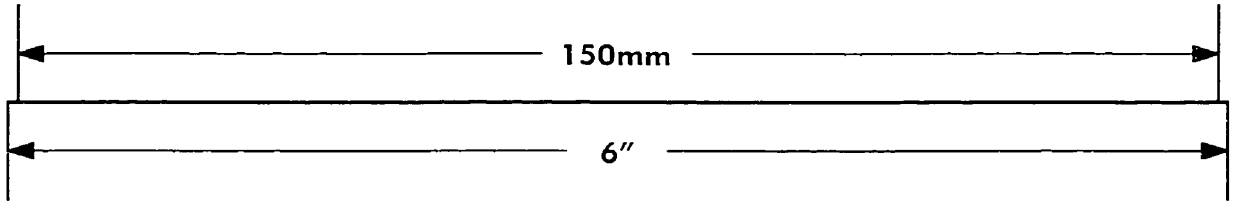

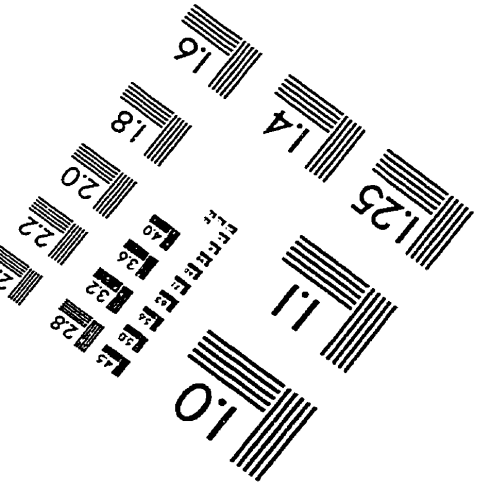

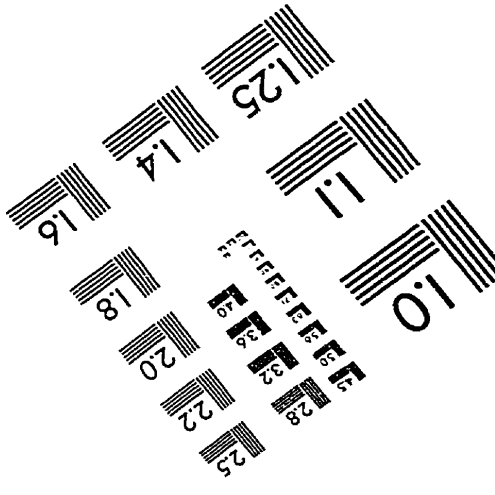

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