An Ontological Inquiry in Early Qur'ān Commentaries

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Abstract

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This study examines the influence of Qur'ānic teachings on the development of *falsafa* on the one hand, and the position of *tafsīr*s in the intellectual history of Islam on the other. To do so, in the introduction it attempts to situate the place of *falsafa* and its connections with *kalām* and *tafsīr*, and to explain the approach that will be followed in this research. In the first part it treats some of the ontological vocabulary of the Qur'ān, while in the second, it concentrates on the questions raised by the Qur'ān about the ontological status of pre-existing things as well as on the notions of creation and existence. To this purpose it surveys some early *tafsīr*s in order to see how the debate over these issues evolved therein and how philosophical discussions were appropriated and naturalized by the *mufassirūn*.

Résumé

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Cette étude examine l'influence des enseignements coraniques sur le développement du *falsafa*, d'une part, et la position des *tafsīr*s dans l'histoire intellectuelle de l'Islam, de l'autre. Dans ce but, elle tente dans l'introduction à situer le *falsafa* et ses liens au *kalām* et au *tafsīr*, et à expliquer l'approche qui sera suivie dans la recherche. Dans la première partie, elle traite du vocabulaire ontologique du Coran, tandis que dans la deuxième elle fixe son attention sur des questions soulevées par le Coran a l'égard de l'état ontologique des choses préexistantes, ainsi que sur les notions de la création et de l'existence. Pour cela elle étudie plusieurs anciens *tafsīr*s afin de voir comment le débat sur ces questions s'est développé et comment les discussions philosophiques ont étés appropriés et naturalisés par les *mufassirūn*.

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The idea for this thesis was conceived in conversation with many and it developed and took form through the encouragement and counsel of my supervisor, Dr. Robert Wisnovsky, director of the Institute of Islamic Studies. His support and critical comments and necessary corrections of my English diction were essential at every stage of this study. Without his inspiration, and scholarly advice it is unlikely that it would have been completed. For his competent advice and patience I am very thankful. Appreciation and thanks are also due to professors Michelle Hartman, Bilal Kuspinar, Eric Ormsby and Uner Turgay for their advice and encouragement; to the staff of the Islamic Studies Library, Salwa Ferahian, Adam Gacek, Steve Millier, and Wayne St. Thomas; to the efficient staff of the Institute office Kirsty McKinnon and Ann Yaxley; and to the Institute of Islamic Studies and Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies for the granting of fellowships.

I am thankful too, to all my colleagues and friends who willy-nilly listened to my long arguments about creation and existence and discussed the topic with me, especially, to my best friend Gülbeyaz Karakuş, to Bilal Baş, Anthony Canez, Aliye Uzunlar and Pelin Yazar. They know how much I owe them. I would like to express my eternal gratitude to my parents Satı and Musa Meral, my lovely sister Aysel, and my brothers Ferhat and Murat for their love and unconditional support without which I would never have reached this stage. *Teşekkürler...*

Transliteration

This thesis makes use of the following table for the transliteration of Arabic words and names as is used by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

b	=	ب	z	=	ز	f	=	ف
t	=	ت	s	=	س	q	=	ق
th	=	ث	sh	=	ش	k	=	ك
j	=	ج	ṣ	=	ص	l	=	ل
ḥ	=	ح	ḍ	=	ض	m	=	م
kh	=	خ	ṭ	=	ط	n	=	ن
d	=	د	ẓ	=	ظ	h	=	ه
dh	=	ذ	'	=	ع	w	=	و
r	=	ر	gh	=	غ	y	=	ي

Short vowels: a = ´   i = ِ   u = ُ

Long vowels: ā = ا   ī = ي   ū = و

Diphthong: ay = ي ا   aw = و ا

Introduction

The history of philosophy records man's search for knowledge by way of reason from antiquity to the present. Numerous studies have been devoted to the critical historiography of the history of philosophy,[1] but few of them address *falsafa* (Islamic/Arabic philosophy)[2] and its role in the universal historical development of philosophical thought. Unfortunately, even within the field of Islamic studies, there are few works devoted to a detailed scrutiny of the historiography of *falsafa*,[3] the kind of study that could bring out the variety and subtlety of Islamic thought in particular and of universal philosophical thought in general. The task is made even more difficult by the fact that much of this literature exists in manuscript only. It would seem, therefore, that further investigation is needed, involving the edition, translation and study of hundreds of texts, to situate the position of *falsafa* in the structure of Islamic thought in all its diversity, and as well as in the structure of world thought. The studies that have so far

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[1] See, for example: *The Historiography of the History of Philosophy: History and Theory*, Beiheft 5, ed. J. A. Passmore, ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1965); R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner, *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[2] In order to avoid the religious and national connotations of labels like Islamic or Arabic philosophy this study will employ the terms *falsafa* (philosophy) and *falāsifa* (philosophers), as they were used in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Strictly speaking, the term Islamic philosophy does not include important non-Muslim philosophers, like Maimonides, who wrote in Arabic; Arabic philosophy excludes non-Arabs who wrote in Arabic, as well as some Muslims, like al-Fārābi, Ibn Sīna or the Ishrāqī philosophers like al-Suhrawardī. For the discussions about the usage of these terms see, P. Morewedge, "Contemporary Scholarship On Near Eastern Philosophy," *The Philosophical Forum* 2/I (1970): 122-140; D. Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29, 1 (2002): 5-25.

[3] An invaluable resource is H. Daiber's *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 1999), and his article in the same work presents an informative survey of the studies on the history of *falsafa*. "What is the Meaning of and to What End Do We Study the History of Islamic Philosophy? The History of a Neglected Discipline," xi-xxxiii; see also Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy."

been undertaken concerning *falsafa*[4] lack the approach which is well defined by H. Jones:

> It is, I believe, a profound truth, never laid sufficiently to heart by philosophical teachers and writer of text-books, that the only true method of instruction is that which follows the path of discovery. To understand a philosophical system we must retrace the steps of its construction, and company the mind of its author in its quest for the truth. And I think it is universally true that philosophers are driven to construct their systems by the pressure of particular problems.[5]

With Jones' statement in mind it is important to highlight the two extreme approaches described by I. A. Sabra in a 1987 article.[6] Although he deals therein with the transmission of scientific knowledge from one culture to another, it is very applicable to the study of *falsafa*. According to Sabra, these two extreme approaches are reductionism and precursorism: "Reductionism is the view that the achievements of Islamic scientists were merely a reflection, sometimes faded, sometimes bright or more or less altered, of earlier (mostly Greek) examples. Precursorism is equally familiar: it reads the future into the past, with a sense of elation." Sabra attempts to shift the emphasis of the discussion from these two extreme approaches[7] to the idea of

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[4] For an account of certain bibliographic information and some critical evaluation of studies undertaken on *falsafa* up until 1983, see, C. E. Butterworth, "The Study of Philosophy Today," in *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction*, ed. T. Druart (Washington D.C. : Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1988): 55-140; also see, T. Druart, "Medieval Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Bibliographical Guide (1996-1998)," *Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales* 24 (2000): 381-414.

[5] In his introduction to *A History of the Problems of Philosophy* by P. Janet, G. Séailles, trans. A. Monahan (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), xii.

[6] I. A. Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement," *History of Science* 25 (1987): 223-243. Also see R. Wisnovsky's introduction to his book *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 17.

[7] For an example of reductionism, see, for example, T. J. de Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. by E. R. Jones (London: Luzac & Co., 1903), 29; R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1962), 35. O. Leaman's article also seems to be an example of reductionism in a broader sense that sees *falsafa* nothing else but a dispute over the values of religion and philosophy. "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 525-538. Gutas, presenting three approaches, identified as: the orientalist, the mystical/illuminationist and the political, provides a detailed report with its valuable references. "The Study of Arabic Philosophy," (as n. 2). Cf. M. Mahdi, "Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Philosophy," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 73-98; and "Islamic Philosophy in Contemporary Islamic Thought,"

'contextualism,' which is the interpretation of works in their proper context, as Jones emphasized in passage quoted above.

By adopting Sabra's approach, this study attempts to understand *falsafa* in its intellectual and historical context. Like all other philosophical systems, *falsafa* grew within an intellectual and cultural milieu of which it was a part and to some degree in reaction to that milieu. The point to be stressed is the need for seeing *falsafa* in its historical setting and connections. There is, apparently, no doubt as to the debt owed by the early *falāsifa* to Greek philosophy. Yet Greek thought informed the *falāsifa* through many different channels (especially the ancient centers of Jundi-Shapur, Alexandria, Edessa, and Harran)[8] and played an important role in the transfer of various elements from Greek, Christian, Jewish, Babylonian, Egyptian, Indian, and Zoroastrian traditions. Thus the heritage from which the *falāsifa* derived some of their ideas was not only an Islamic one: many different civilizations contributed in different ways. Nevertheless, it is also important to keep in mind that the teachings of the Qur'ān, the *hadīth* (prophetic teachings/tradition), the writings of *mutakallimūn* (theologians), and the *sūfīs* (mystics) were part of the milieu in which *falsafa* developed. Of particular interest here is the

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in *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought,* ed. C. Malik (Beirut: American University of Beirut Centennial Publications, 1972): 99-111. Emphasis on the originality of *falsafa* is very much done by S. H. Nasr. While discussing the meaning and the role of the philosophy in Islam, Nasr points to a Qur'ānic term "*hikmah*", by which according to him *falsafa* unfolds itself to us. Moreover, he considers *falsafa* "a handmaid to illumination and gnosis, thus creating a bridge between the rigour of logic and the ecstasy of spiritual union." "The Meaning and Role of Philosophy in Islam," *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973): 57-80. Also cf. his argument in which he defines *falsafa* as a "precisely prophetic philosophy." "The Pertinence of Studying Islamic Philosophy Today," in *Islamic Life and Thought* (London: George Allen & Unwin: 1981), 150. In this sense cf. H. Corbin's introduction to *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London & New York: Kegan Paul International, 1993). P. Morewedge also argues in his article against the assumption that "Near Eastern philosophy is essentially Greek Philosophy, but modified by the Muslim culture, and that it did not continue to be productive or to grow after the death of Ibn Rushd." And he concludes that "the investigator who approaches Near Eastern philosophy free from the preconceptions to which we have objected will find himself richly rewarded by the discoveries he will make, discoveries which will prove the Near Eastern philosophy is far more than the reflection of Islamic theology and Greek classical philosophy," "Contemporary Scholarship," 141 (as n.1).

[8] D. L. O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs,* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).

interrelationship between *tafsīr* (Qur'ān commentary)[9], *kalām* (Islamic theology), and *falsafa*. It is well known that while philosophical thought depends on reason, theological thought depends on revelation and tradition. However, by developing its own set of axioms and principles, *kalām* soon became more philosophical.

Although the traditional approach has been to view *kalām* and *falsafa* as always in opposition, some scholars have recently argued that the relationship between *kalām* and *falsafa* is more complicated, and rather than being in opposition they mutually influenced each other.[10] But very few studies have been undertaken concerning the relationship between *tafsīr* and *falsafa*.[11] It is the aim of the present study to inquire whether Qur'ānic teachings had an influence on the development of *falsafa* by studying certain verses and their interpretation in some early *tafsīr*s.

Falsafa is based most of all on logic and metaphysics, which concerns itself chiefly with the subject of *wujūd* (being/existence), both in and of itself and in terms of its relation to *māhiyyah* (essence). Since Plato and Aristotle, the debate over the concepts of being and existence has been one of the main themes of metaphysics.

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[9] The word *tafsīr* signifies the act of interpretation. Although the word is used for commentaries on Greek scientific/philosophical works, being equivalent to explanation, the most significant usage of the word, and the focus of this study is its reference to the science of the interpretation of the Qur'ān, which is one of the most important part of the wider Islamic hermeneutics, see, J. M. Scarce, "Tafsīr," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* New Ed. v. 10, (Leiden: Brill,2000): 83-88. The word *tafsīr* appears once in the Qur'ān (25:33) and commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, interpret it as the equivalent of *tafṣīl* and *bayān*. *Ta'wīl* is another term used in the sense of *tafsīr* partcularly in early period of Islam.

[10] See, for example, J. Jolivet, "Aux Origines de l'Ontolgie d'Ibn Sīnā," in *Études sur Avicenne,* eds. J. Jolivet and R. Rashed, (Paris, 1984): 19-28; H. A. Wolfson, "The Kalam Problem of Non-existence and Saadia's Second Theory of Creation," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (1946): 371-391; I. R. Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology,* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989); R. Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness (šay'iyya)," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 181-221; and "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65-100; F. Klein-Franke, "The Non-existent is a Thing," *Le Muséon* 104 (1994): 375-390; R. M. Frank, "*Kalām* and Philosophy," in *Islamic Philosophical Theology,* ed. P. Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979): 71-95.

[11] Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness." Although S. H. Nasr does not argue the relationship between *tafsīr* and *falsafa*, he indicates the role of Qur'ānic teachings in the development of *falsafa* in his article, "Existence (*wujūd*) and Quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in Islamic Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1989): 409-428.

Aristotle defined metaphysics as a science that investigates first principles and causes. He said it was the science of being in general, or being *qua* being.[12] Although the *falāsifa* adopted Aristotle's definition of metaphysics as a starting point, they reached some different conclusions in their study of being. In fact, concepts are in constant need of clarification in terms of both giving meaning to our own lives, and in understanding others. In order to understand the content of *falsafa* it seems necessary to discover how certain concepts come into being and what they mean in terms of their origins.

Turning to the term *wujūd*, the teachings of the Qur'ān about God as the creator of the world played a crucial role in the study of the term. The Qur'ān states that "when He decrees a thing He needs only say: 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)" (36:82), and speaks repeatedly about the act of creation. Nevertheless, in dealing with other related verses, the study of *shay'* (thing/entity), which is decreed by God 'to be', becomes the first subject of examination. So, the present study will revolve around the answers to the questions: (1) How did the debate over the ontological status of pre-existing things play out in Qur'ān commentaries? (2) How do things exist or come into being according to the *mufassirūn* (Qur'ān commentators)? The two questions are interdependent, because any claim we make about *wujūd* will depend on how we define *shay'*. Furthermore, in light of what the Qur'ān says, it is necessary to grasp the ontological status of things in the state of pre-existence in order to explain their creation and existence.

To explore these issues, the study is divided into two parts. Part I is a treatment of certain basic concepts in their linguistic aspects and mostly in their Qur'ānic context, constituting a map of signification and providing us with the tools for dealing with the objectives of the study. These concepts are: *amr, qaḍā, arāda, shay', khalq, kāna,* and

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[12] Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 1.1, 982b, 9-10.

some related ones that are used in a metaphysical context. Although there are many other words that deserve to be examined in connection with the ones we have mentioned, limitations of space and time have made such a selection unavoidable. Part II on the other hand concentrates on the ontological status of pre-existing things, as well as certain related issues including creation and coming into being, and surveys the early Qur'ān commentaries on the relevant verses.[13]

The objective of the study is to cast some light on the role of the Qur'ān in the development of philosophical discussions on the one hand, and how those problems were dealt in a religious genre on the other. The Qur'ān was one of the sources of philosophical discussions in the sense that some questions -- such as what it means to be a *shay'* or how creation operates -- were not explicit in the text; therefore, the activity of interpretation of the Qur'ān was very important to all schools of Islamic thought, whose representatives were all familiar with the teachings of the Qur'ān and the questions raised by the Qur'ānic text itself. *Tafsīr*s in general are an understudied resource of the intellectual history of Islam that does not advertise itself as philosophy or theology. Yet, the individual *tafsīr*s demonstrate the appropriation and naturalization of philosophical arguments in a religious genre and contain evidence of how philosophical problems were dealt with in other sources.

Since texts cannot speak for themselves and must be interpreted, hermeneutics comes into play as an aid to understand the meanings in texts. Plato warns us against the claims of the written word and the difficulty of interpreting it, since, "when it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately

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[13] Basically; Q., 2:117; 3:47,59; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68 in connection with some related ones such as 6:19; 19:9, 67; 28:88; 42:11.

those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it does not know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not."[14] Indeed, there are several theories about the interpretation of texts. For the purposes of this study, hermeneutics, defined as the theory/philosophy of the interpretation of meaning, is applied to: (1) the ascertaining of the meaning of a word, sentence, or a text; (2) the discovery of the teachings below the surface.[15]

The limitations of this study are clear: It would be best if we could study the related vocabulary of the Qur'ān in all its usages, and extend our inquiry to the other early *tafsīrs*. On the other hand, it might be more illuminating to compare the findings of this study with some early philosophical texts, although it seems not to be feasible within the scope of this study. However, with all its limitations, it is hoped that this small study will revive interest in a neglected feature of Islamic thought.

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[14] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275e.

[15] J. Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London, Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 11. For other meanings and the history of hermeneutics, see for example, D. E. Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, 2 vols. AAR Studies in Religion 43/44; vol. 1 *The Interpretation of Texts;* vol.2 *The Interpretation of Existence*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986); R. E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evaston: Northwetsern University Press, 1969); W. G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); G. L. Bruns, *Hermenuetics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven and London: New York University Press, 1992).

PART I

Ontological Vocabulary of the Qur'ān

> The abstraction, inherent in the development of
> language, has its dangers. It leads away from the
> realities of the immediate world. Apart from a balanced
> emphasis, it ends in the triviality of quick-witted
> people. And yet, for all its dangers, this abstraction
> is responsible for the final uprise of civilization.[16]

The evolution of technical terms in *falsafa* is partly traceable to the Qur'ān, early

kalām discussions, and Arabic translations from Greek in which terminology is not yet

completely technical. Our purpose in this part of the study is to analyze some of the

ontological vocabulary of the Qur'ān which seems to have played a decisive role in

forming the terminologies used by the *mufassirūn*, the *mutakallimūn*, and the *falāsifa*.

Although the main interest of the *mufassirūn* was not philosophical, it may still be

instructive to see how they understood those concepts that have metaphysical aspects. Of

the concepts examined here, some have a consistent meaning throughout the Qur'ān,

while the others have different meanings in certain passages; yet, they do not stand in

isolation, but are closely interdependent and derive their meanings both from their

relations to each other and from the whole structure of the Qur'ān. In fact, some verses

may seem meaningless if read in isolation from all its contexts. Nevertheless, we are

never informed by the Qur'ānic text of the exact meaning of these concepts. The only

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[16] A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1938), 55.

solution is to look at how the given concepts manifest their meanings throughout the whole of the Qur'ān. Our task is to see if we can perhaps reconstruct them in such a way that the discourse of the *mufassirūn* can be assessed. By doing so, we may gain some clearer understanding of what the *mufassirūn* thought about each concept.

The focus of our inquiry is to ask how a word is used and what its equivalents are in the Qur'ān. Hence this part deals mainly with the basic meanings of the concepts and their usage in the Qur'ān and leaves the question of their role in constructing the meaning of the term *wujūd,* and how they formed the point of departure for the speculations of the *mufassirūn,* to the second part. Deciding on what concepts to investigate involved a choice: it may be that some other important concepts could shed light on the term. In fact, our examination of the concepts relevant to our topic is inevitably limited by the fact that they by no means appear throughout the Qur'ān. Concepts discussed here were chosen due to their usage as almost technical terms in theological discussions and their fundamental role in metaphysical arguments in Islamic thought in general.

For the lexicographical meanings of the concepts studied herein three dictionaries are used comparatively, namely, *Lisān al-'Arab, Tāj al-'Arūs,* and Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon;[17] however, we should bear in mind that we do not have sources contemporary with the Qur'ān that allow us to compare the precise meaning of each word, and that these lexicons belong to a comparatively late period and therefore reflect

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[17] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ,* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl & Dār Lisān al-'Arab, 1988); M. M. H. al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'Arūs,* (Kuwait: Maṭba'ah Ḥukūmah al-Kūwait); E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863).

the notions of a more sophisticated time period.[18] The translation of the Qur'ān referred to throughout is that of N. J. Dawood,[19] while *al-Mawrid al-Mufahras* was used to locate the different appearances of the concepts in the Qur'ān.[20] The vocabulary that we will investigate might be grouped as shown in the following scheme:
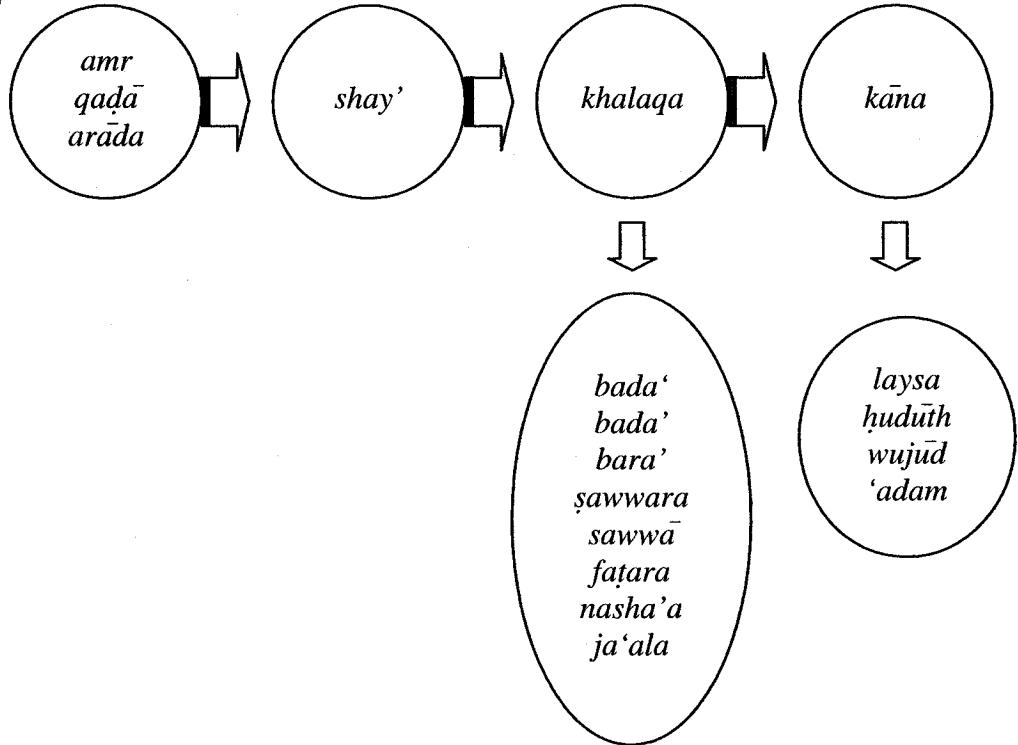
Amr

The term *amr* signifies command, instruction, task, order, bidding, injunction, decree, ordinance, or prescript. Its plural form, *umūr*, can denote affair, business, matter, concern, state of a person or a thing, condition, case, accident, event or action.

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[18] Being contaminated by later developments does not make these sources useless; rather this fact makes us cautious about not delimiting the meanings of concepts to the ones given by them on the one hand, and compels us to compare the given concepts within all their usages in the Qur'ānic text itself on the other.

[19] N. J. Dawood, *The Koran,* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

[20] R. al-Baʻlabakki, *al-Mawrid al-Mufahras li-Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* (Beirut: Dār al-ʻIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1999).

Amr appears in many places in the Qur'ān, mostly used in connection with *Allāh*. For example, we have *amr-Allāh* (will, decree, ordain, judgment, ways or command of God), *amr-rabb* (commandment, retribution, will or bidding of God), and *lillāh-al-amr* (all things/affairs are subject to God's will).[21] Twice it is used in connection with Pharaoh, e.g., *amr-fir'awn*, (behest/order of Pharaoh) (11:97), twice for authority, such as in the phrase *ūlu-l-amr* (those who hold command or rule as well as learned men) (4:59; 4:83), once in connection with transgressors, i.e., *amr-al-musrifīn* (bidding of transgressors) (26:151), once in reference to the business of the Final Hour *amr-al-sā'ah* (16:77), and once applied to the heavens (41:12).

Also in the singular form, it is used in reference to the conduct of affairs (3:159; 24:62), events or news (4:83), case (5:52), command (7:54; 45:17; 65:12), ordaining (8:43; 27:33), predestined end (54:22), matter (22:67), state (50:5), bidding (11:59), and decree (97:4).[22] It is also used with the verbs such as *qaḍā* (to fulfill, do or make), *dabbara* (to ordain or govern), and *'azama* (to decide) (47:21).[23] Four of the verses that our study is concerned with include the concept of *amr* and the verb *qaḍā* together to signify the divine command.[24] Throughout the Qur'ān *amr* usually refers to different stages of the cosmic order, and the *amr* of God refers to the divine command of God.

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[21] Q., *amr-Allāh*: 4:47; 9:48, 106; 11:43, 73; 13:11; 16:1; 33:37, 38; 40:78; 49:9; 57:14; 65:5; *amr-Rabb*: 7:77,150; 11:76, 101; 16:33; 17:85; 18:50; 19:64; 46:25; 65:8; *lillāh-al-amr*: 13:31; 30:4; 82:19.

[22] See, *amr* with *qadr* and *idhn* which are related to the cosmic order: 7:54; 14:32-3; 16:12; 22:65; 30:25, 46; 41:12; 45:12; descent of *amr* happens in a different time-order: 16:77; 32:5; 54:50; 70:4; 97:4; *amr* and *rūḥ*: 16:2; 17:85; 40:15; 42:52; 97:4; *amr* and *nafs*: 12:53, 18, 83; *amr* and angels: 2:210; 16:50; 21:27; 66:6; 97:4; *amr* and Satan: 2:169, 268; 4:119; 7:12; 18:50; 24:21; *amr* and guidance: 45:17; *amr* and its subjects (thought, action, prayer, belief, reason): 2:93; 11:87; 39:64; 52:32; *amr* and political conduct: 3:21, 104; 4:59, 114; 9:71; 16:76; 19:55; 21:73; 32:24; acting against *amr*: 3:52, 154; 8:43; 18:21; 20:62. To see *amr* and different contexts in which it appears, see, for example, Ş. Kocabaş, *The Word Constellation (Amr) in the Qur'ān: Foundations of Scientific Thought in Islam* (London: Fine Art Press, 1987); also, see his book, *Islam'da Bilginin Temelleri* (Istanbul: Iz yayıncılık, 1997).

[23] See, for example, *amr* with *qaḍā*: 6:8, 58; 11:44; 12:41; 14:22; 15:66; 19:39; 28:44; with *dabbara*: 10:3, 31; 13:2; 32:5; some other verbs are: *yursilu, yunzilu, yulqī, awḥā, bālighu, yurji'u, yufraqu*, etc.

[24] Q., 3:47; 2:217; 19:35; 40:68.

Depending on the context, it also denotes God's guidance and grace or God's justice and damnation.[25]

Qaḍā

The word *qaḍā* primarily means to finish, to bring a thing to a close. It also signifies to decree, to judge, to accomplish, to pay, to discharge, to fulfill, to perform, to relate and to explain.

In the Qur'ān, the terms *qaḍā* (decision), *mashī'a* (will), *irāda* (will), and *idhn* (permission) of God are used synonymously (e.g., 3:47). Thus the term *qaḍā*, which is widely understood to mean destiny, is not used in the same sense in the Qur'ān, instead, it refers to decision.[26] In the following verses the verb *qaḍā* is used with God as the subject and means "to decree"[27]:

> 2:117 "Creator of the heavens and the earth! When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*), He need only say: 'Be,' and it is."

> 3:47 'Lord,' she (Mary) said, 'how can I bear a child when no man has touched me?' He replied: 'Even thus. God creates whom He will. When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*) He need only say: 'Be,' and it is.

> 19:35 God forbid that He himself should beget a son! When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*) He need only say: 'Be,' and it is.

> 40:68 It is He who ordains life and death. If He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*) He need only say: 'Be,' and it is.

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[25] J. M. S. Baljon, "The 'Amr of God' in the Koran," *Acta Orientalia* 23-24 (1958-1959): 7-18.

[26] D. Rahbar, *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'ān*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), chap. 9, and also see his app. 7 for a collection of Qur'ānic contexts of the derivatives of *qaḍā*.

[27] The other verses for *qaḍā*: 2:200; 4:65, 103; 6:2; 12:68; 15:66; 17:4, 23; 28:15, 28, 29,44; 33:14, 23, 36, 37; 39:42; 41:12; 80:28. Cf. its passive usage *quḍiya*: 2:210; 6:8, 58; 10:11, 19, 47, 54; 11:44, 110; 12:41; 14:22; 19:39; 22:10; 39:69, 75; 40:78; 41:45; 42:14, 21; 46:29.

Arāda

The verb is built on the root *r-w-d*, and means to will, to wish or to desire. *Arāda* is frequently used in the Qur'ān with God as the subject, and synonymously with *shā'a* (to will). The *maṣdar* of the verb, *irāda* (will), has various technical meanings among theologians and philosophers;[28] however, in the Qur'ān the most frequently occurring derivatives of *arāda* are in the verb form either in the present or past tense (e.g. *arāda, arādanī, arādū, aradnāhu*).[29] In two of the verses *arāda* is used with God as the subject and with the term *shay'* (thing) as the object of His decree or will:

> 16:40 "When We decree (*idhā aradnāhu*) a thing, We need only say: 'Be,' and it is."

> 36:82 "When He decrees a thing (*idhā arāda shay'an*), He need only say: 'Be,' and it is."

We do not learn from these passages whether God actually has willed or not. Nor do we learn from the *irāda* passages anything about the nature of God's *irāda*. Furthermore these passages sometimes convey the idea of God's power rather than His will.

Shay'

The term *shay'* comes from the verb *shā'a*, which means to will, to wish or to desire. *Shay'* (pl. *ashyā'*) means thing, entity or something. In general, it signifies what may be known and that whereof a thing may be predicated. It also denotes existence and is a name for anything that has been made to have being, whether an accident, an attribute, or a substance, and such that it may be known. According to al-Iṣfahānī, it

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[28] Some of them have differentiated between God's *mashī'a* and *irāda*, however, the Qur'ānic conception of *irāda* should be distinguished from its metaphysical interpretation in later Islamic thought.

[29] Cf. 2:26, 233; 5:17; 12:25; 13:11; 17:19, 103; 18:82; 25:62; 28:19; 33:17, 50; 39:4, 38; 48:11; 72:10; 74:31.

denotes "whatever is caused to be or exist, whether sensibly, as material substances, or ideally, as sayings."[30] It is regarded also as the most general of general terms, equivalent to *dhāt, nafs* and *'ayn.*

In the Qur'ān, the term, *shay'*, refers for the most part to the objects of God's epithets. God has power over all things (*qadīr*), has knowledge of all things (*'alīm*), bears witness to all things (*shahīd*), controls all things (*muqīm*), keeps account of all things (*hasīb*), encompasses all things (*muhīt*), is the creator of all things (*khāliq*), is the guardian of all things (*wakīl*), is the Lord of all things (*rabb*), encompasses with His mercy all things (*wās'*), watches over all things (*hafīz*), has power over all things (*muqtadir*), takes cognizance of all things (*raqīb*), and observes all things (*basīr*).[31] In the Qur'ān, the epithets of God are consistently called God's most beautiful names, *al-asmā' al-husnā*,[32] and it was on these that the *mutakallimūn* based their expositions about the divine essence (*dhāt*) and its attributes (*sifāt*).[33] Although none of these passages refers to the total number of God's names, later writings identified ninety-nine of these. While a large number of them can be traced to the Qur'ān, others were identified by theologians.[34] The point here is that, rather than taking these epithets as

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[30] Quoted from E. W. Lane's "Arabic-English Lexicon."

[31] Q., *qadīr*: 2:20, 106, 109, 148, 259, 284; 3:26, 29, 165, 189; 5:17, 19, 40, 120; 6:17; 8:41; 9:39; 11:4; 16:77; 22:6; 24:25; 29:20; 30:50; 33:27; 35:1; 41:39; 42:9; 46:33; 48:21; 57:2; 59:6; 64:1; 65:12; 66:8; 67:1; *'alīm*: 2:29, 231, 282; 4:32, 176; 5:97; 6:80, 101; 7:89; 8:75; 9:115; 20:98; 21:81; 24:35, 64; 29:62; 33:40, 54; 40:7; 42:12; 48:26; 49:16; 57:3; 58:7; 64:11; 65:12; *shahīd*: 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6; 85:9; *muqīm*: 4:85; *hasīb*: 4:86; *muhīt*: 4:126; 41:54; *khāliq*: 6:101, 102; 7:185; 13:16; 16:48; 25:2; 39:62; 40:62; 51:49; 54:49; *wakīl*: 6:102; 11:12; 39:62; *rabb*: 6:164; *wās'*: 7:156; *hafīz*: 11:57; 34:21; *muqtadir*: 18:45; *raqīb*: 33:52; *basīr*: 67:19, etc. Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness," (as n.10).

[32] Q., 7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 59:22-4.

[33] G. Böwering, "God and His Attributes," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān,* V. 2 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2002): 316-331.

[34] J. W. Redhouse collected a total of five hundred fifty-two such names: see his article "The Most Comely Names," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* London 12 (1880): 1-69. He concludes that "doubtless many and many others will be chanced upon, and there is every possibility that a thousand can be collected and surpassed." See, also, D. Gimaret, *Les Noms Divins en Islam: Exégèse Lexicographique*

doctrinal expressions of the nature of God, as did theologians, one can regard them as expressions in praise of God, and understand them in their context in the Qur'ān. In this way we may recognize the significant difference that exists between Qur'ānic and theological usage of these epithets.[35]

Turning to the term *shay'*, two verses in which *shay'* refers to God became the subject of theological argument:

> 42:11 "No thing can be compared with Him." (*Laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un*).

> 6:19 "Say: which thing is the greatest in terms of witnessing? Say: God is witness between you and me." (*qul ayyu shay'in akbaru shahādatan, qul Allāhu shāhidun baynī wa baynaka*).

The question arising here centers on whether God is a thing. If things are other than God, then how should one interpret these verses? Furthermore, in 28:88 it is stated that "every thing will perish except His face" (*kullu shay'in hālikun illā wajhuhu*), just as in 55:27 we read that "all that lives on earth is doomed to die. But the face of your Lord will abide for ever, in all its majesty and glory (*wa yabqā wajhu rabbika dhū al-jalāl wa al-ikrām*)." In connection with these verses there are two other controversial passages:

> 16:40 "When We decree a thing, We need only say: 'Be,' and it is." (*innamā qawlunā li-shay'in idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun-fa-yakūn*)

> 36:82 "When He decrees a thing He need only say: 'Be,' and it is." (*innamā amruhu idhā arāda shay'an an yaqūla lahu kun-fa-yakūn*)

The debate over these two verses tends to focus on to whom God addresses the decree of *kun* (Be!). Are there things before existence? If there are, then does it cause a problem

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et Théologique, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cref, 1988), 51-84. For a classical commentary on these names, see D. Burrell and N. Daher's translation of al-Ghazali's *Maqṣad al-Asna, The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

[35] Böwering, "God and His Attributes"; For some objections to the traditional lists of the most beautiful names of God, see, for example, Rahbar, "God of Justice," chap. 1.

with the precept of *tawhīd* (one-ness of God)?[36] Obviously, the Qur'ān does not

explicitly answer these questions, but, theologians and philosophers did argue over the

issue at length -- as we shall demonstrate later when dealing with some of the early

Qur'ān commentaries in the second part of this study. The term *shay'* is also used in the

sense of "nothing" by implication.[37]

Since the term **wajh** is so essential to the definition of *shay'* (as mentioned

above), we need to deal with the meaning of the term, which is usually defined as the

aspect of God that remains after all created beings perish. The term *wajh* (pl. *wujūh*)

normally signifies front, face, physiognomy, exterior, aspect, appearance, image,

surface, layer, place of honor, beginning, intention, aim, tendency, thrift, reason, cause,

respect, regard, essence, substance, or individuality. In the Qur'ān, moreover, it is

generally applied to the face(s) of human beings, but is also used to refer to the face of

God eleven times.[38] Depending on the context, the term is explained as countenance,

essence, being, will, favor, honor or sake of God. References to the face of God also

appear in descriptions of His glory and superiority.[39]

Although the Qur'ān does not speak about God as a composite entity, it

explicitly describes Him as having face, eyes, hands and as sitting on a throne,[40] all of

which attributes play a decisive role in discussions on the ambiguous verses of the

Qur'ān (*mutashābihāt*). Meanwhile, emphasizing that "there is nothing like Him"

(42:11), it excludes any similarity between God and human beings. When related to

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[36] For a broader discussion of the subject, see, for example; Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness."

[37] Q., 19:9, 67.

[38] Q., *wajh-Allāh* (face of God): 2:115,272; 30:38, 39; 76:9; *wajh-rabb* (face of the Lord): 13:22; 55:27; 92:20; *wajhuhu* (His face): 6:52; 18:28; 28:88.

[39] J. M. S. Baljon, "'To Seek the Face of God' in Koran and Hadith," *Acta Orientalia* 21 (1953): 254-266.

[40] Q., see, for example of having face: 2:115, 272; 6:52; 13:22; 18:28; having eyes: 11:37; 23:27; 54:48; 54:14; 20:39; having hands: 3:73; 5:64; 48:10; 57:29; 5:64; 38:75.

human beings in the Qur'ān, *wajh* generally denotes the self (*nafs or dhāt*),[41] yet it does also have particular meanings when predicated of God, such as His favor, glory or superiority.[42] The metaphor of the face of God emphasizes God's omnipresence and the desire of humans for God.

Khalq

The primary meaning of the verb is the act of measuring or determining the measure, proportion of a thing. It also signifies bringing a thing into existence according to a certain measure, originating or producing a new thing on a pattern that has not been previously employed, and the act of creation in its entirety.

In the Qur'ān the term *khalaqa* is used for the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, i.e., of human beings, of Satan and the Jinn, in short, of every thing. [43] God's creative activity is expressed in a "spoken" command, whereby God calls things into being through His creative imperative. God creates what He wishes[44] and gives existence by the divine command, "Be!" and it is. The Qur'ān does not offer a story of creation; instead, creation is seen as a process happening at each and every moment rather than as one single event at the beginning of the universe.[45] In relation to His creatures, God is called the creator (*khāliq*) (59:24), Who is ceaselessly engaged in perpetual creative activity (*khallāq*) (36:81). Although the root *kh-l-q* is

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[41] Cf. Q., 2:112; 3:20; 4:125; 6:79; 10:105; 30:30, 43; 31:22; 39:24.

[42] Cf. Q., 2:272; 13:22; 55:26, 27; 28:88. See, also Böwering, "God and His Attributes."

[43] Q., creation of the heavens and the earth: 2:29, 164; 3:190, 191; 6:1,73; 7:54, 185; 9:36; 10:3, 6; 11:7; 14:19, 32; 15:85; 16:3; 17:99; 18:51; 20:4; 21:16, 33; 24:25; 25:59; 27:60; 29:44, 61; 30:8, 22; 31:10; 32:4, 10; 36:81; 38:27; 39:5, 38; 40:57; 42:29; 43:9; 45:22; 46:3, 33; 50:38; 57:4; 64:3; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15; creation of human beings: 2:228; 3:59; 4:1; 5:18; 6:2; 7:11; 15:26; 16:4; 17:61; 19:9,67; 21:37; 22:5; 23:12, 14; 25:54; 30:20, 40, 54; 32:7; 35:11; 36:77; 37:11; 38:75; 39:6; 40:57, 67; 41:15; 55:3, 14; 76:2; 80:19; 90:4; 96:2; creation of Satan: 38:76; 7:12; 15:33; 38:76; of jinn: 15:27; 55:15; of every thing: 6:101; 25:2; 54:49.

[44] Q., 3:47; 5:17; 24:45; 28:68; 30:54; 39:4; 42:49.

[45] Q., 79:27, 33; 80:17, 42. See, D. C. Peterson, "Creation," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, V.1 (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001): 472-480.

employed most frequently to describe God's creative activity, there are some other

identical terms which are used for creation in the Qur'ān, namely, *bada'*, *bada'*, *bara'*,

ṣawwara, *faṭara*, *nasha'*, and *ja'ala*.[46]

Bada' signifies to originate, to invent, to innovate, to make, or to produce. The

fourth declension of the verb, *abda'a*, which occurs four times in the Qur'ān, denotes

causing a thing to exist, or bringing something into existence. *Badī'* is the *maṣdar* of the

fourth form and in the Qur'ān God is twice called *badī'* (the Innovator, the Originator, or

the Absolute Creator) of the heavens and the earth (*badī'u al-samāwāt wa al-'arḍi*)

(2:117; 6:101). In two other passages it is used in the sense of invention and innovation:

> 46:9 "Say: 'I am no prodigy (*bid'an*) among the apostles; nor do I know what will be done with me or you. I follow only what is revealed to me, and my only duty is to give plain warning.'"

> 57:27 "After them We sent other apostles, and after those Jesus son of a Mary. We gave him the Gospel, and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers. As for monasticism, they instituted (*ibtada'ūhā*) in themselves (for We have not enjoined in them), seeking thereby to please God; but they did not observe it faithfully. We rewarded only those who were true believers; for many of them were evil-doers."

The verb ***bada'*** serves as an inceptive helping verb, and suggests the idea of a

beginning. It is used in 7:29 (and elsewhere) as a synonym for *khalaqa*, i.e., in the sense

of "begin to create."[47]

> 7:29 "Say: 'My Lord has ordered you to act justly. Turn to Him wherever you kneel in prayer and call on Him with true devotion. Even as He created (*kamā bada'akum*) you, so shall you return.'"

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[46] Cf. *banā*: 50:6; 91:5, *rafa'a*: 13:3-6, 10; 88:18-20, *madda*: 15:16-20; 50:7, *naṣaba*: 88:19, *ṭaḥā*: 91:6, etc.

[47] Cf. to 7:29; 10:4, 34; 21:104; 27:64; 29:19, 20; 30:11, 27; 32:7; 85:13 (by implication).

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Bara' likewise means "to create", and as a verb it appears once with God as the subject:

> 57:22 "every misfortune that befalls the earth, or your own persons, is ordained before We bring it into being (*nabraa'hā*) That is easy enough for God."

It appears twice as *bāri'*, the maker, the creator:

> 2:54 "Moses said to his people: 'You have wronged yourselves, my people, in worshipping the calf. Turn in penitence to your Creator (*Bāri'ikum*)...'"

> 59:24 "He is God, the Creator, the Originator, the Modeller..." (*huwa Allāhu al-khāliqu al-bāri'u al-muṣawwiru*)

Finally, it also appears in the sense of creature (*al-bariyyah*):

> 98:6-7 "The unbelievers among the People of the Book and the pagans shall burn for ever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures (*al-bariyyah*). But of all creatures (*al-bariyyah*) those that embrace the Faith and do good works are the noblest."

The verb *ṣawwara* means to give shape, to mould, to polish, to stabilize or to proportion. It is employed in the Qur'ān in both its verbal and noun forms:

> 3:6 "It is He who shapes your bodies (*yuṣawwirukum*) in your mothers' wombs as He pleases..."

> 7:11 "We created you and gave you form (*ṣawwarnākum*)..."

> 40:64; 64:3 "...He has moulded (*ṣawwarakum*) your bodies into a comely shape (*ṣuwarakum*) ..."[48]

It is used once as *muṣawwir*, "the shaper/form giver" (59:24) for God,[49] while the *maṣdar* of the verb, *taṣwīr*, denotes the constitution of a shape or a composition. The Qur'ān links the creative act to the informing act by the particle *thumma*. R. Arnaldez points that since there is a relation of diminishing order between *wa* (and), *fa* (and then)

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[48] Cf. 82:7. The term *ṣūra* is used by the translators to express both Aristotle's term 'form' and Plato's eternal archetypes of which the things of this world are imperfect imitations.
[49] Cf. 7:11; 3:6.

and *thumma* (and afterwards), there is a certain distance between the act of creating (*khalq*) and the act of giving form (*taṣwīr*).[50]

A similar word, **sawwā**, i.e., to level, to smooth, is also linked to creation (*khalq*) by the particle *fa* in two verses:

> 82:7 "Who created you and gave you due proportions and an upright form (*alladhī khalaqaka fa-sawwāka fa-'adā la-ka*)."

> 87:2 "Who has created all things and gave them due proportions (*alladhī khalaqa fa-sawwā*)."

The close relationship between *ṣawwara* and *sawwā* indicates a kind of explanation of the etymological meaning of *khalaqa*.[51]

Faṭara, primarily, means to cleave, to part, to separate. It can also have the sense of to create. In the Qur'ān it is used for the creation of the heavens and the earth, and for humans.[52]

> 6:79 "I will turn my face to Him who has created (*faṭara*) the heavens and the earth, and will live a righteous life. I am no idolater."

> 11:51 "I demand of you no recompense, my people, for none can reward me except my creator (*faṭaranī*). Will you not understand?"

It also appears in the form of *fāṭir* (creator), used in reference to God.

> 6:14 "Say: 'Should I take any but God for my Defender? Creator (*fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth, He gives nourishment to all and is nourished by none..."[53]

Nasha'a denotes to make grow, to produce, to cause, and to create.

> 6:141 "It is He who brings gardens into being (*ansha'a*): creepers and upright trees, the palm and all manner of crops, olives, and pomegranates alike an different..."

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[50] R. Arnaldez, "Khalḳ," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New ed., vol. IV (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978):980-988.
[51] Ibid. Cf. 79:27-33.
[52] Q., for the heavens and earth, see, 21:56; 67:3; for humans, see, 17:51; 20:72; 30:30; 36:22; 43:27.
[53] See, also, 35:11; 36:15; 42:11.

13:12 "It is He who makes the lightning flash upon you, inspiring you with fear and hope, and gathers up (*yunshi'u*) the heavy clouds."

23:19 "With it We caused (*fa-ansha'nā*) palm-groves and vineyards to spring up, yielding abundant fruit for your sustenance."

56:72 "Observe the fire which you light. Is it you that create (*ansha'tum*) its wood or We (*munshi'ūn*)?"

This verb conveys the idea that God created humankind from a single soul (*wa-huwa alladhī ansha'akum min nafsin wāḥidatin*) (6:98), or from the earth (*ansha'akum min al-arḍ*).[54] It is used to express the stages of creation and the last creation, resurrection, as well.[55]

The verb, *ja'ala* means to make a thing, to prepare, to change a thing from its state or condition, to pronounce, to call, to name, to make something known, plain or perspicuous, to reveal, to lay a thing down, to put, to set about, to begin, or to commence.

In the Qur'ān *ja'ala* is used to describe God's creation of the earth and sky, of the constellations, of darkness and light, of the sun and moon, of animals and all things.[56] Indeed, it is very often used in precisely the same sense as *khalaqa*, for example:

6:1 "Praise be to God, who has created the heavens and the earth and ordained (*ja'ala*) darkness and light...."

6:96-7 "He kindles the light of dawn. He has ordained (*ja'ala*) the night for rest and the sun and the moon for reckoning.... It is He that has created (*ja'ala*) for you the stars..."

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[54] Cf. 11:61; 53:32; 67:23.

[55] Cf. 23:14; 29:19-20; 36:77-9; 53:47; 56:62. For the usage of the verbs derivated from this root, see, for example, 6:6, 133; 21:11; 23:14, 31, 42, 78; 28:45.

[56] Q., for earth and sky: 2:22; 20:53; 27:61; 43:10; 67:15, 23; 71:19; for the constellations: 6:97; 15:16 for sun and moon 10:5; 25:45; night and day: 10:67; 40:61; animals and all things: 21:30; 40:79; 43:10-2 etc.

25:61 "Blessed be He who decked (ja'ala) the sky with constellations and set (ja'ala) in it a lamp and a shining moon."

32:7-8 "He is the Mighty One, the Merciful, who exelled in the creation of all things. He first created man from clay, then made (ja'ala) his offspring from a drop of humble fluid."

40:64 "It is God who has made (ja'ala) the earth a dwelling-place for you, and the sky a ceiling..."

As we will see in the following chapter, the *mufassirūn* sometimes reduced more than a dozen words used for creation -- regardless of their different connotations -- to the word *khalaqa*. Thus, they explain physical, chemical or, metaphysical issues with the word they themselves define, mostly, according to their theological stance.

Kāna

The verb *kāna* comes from the root *k-w-n* and signifies to be, to occur, to exist, to happen, to take place. In this sense *kawn* is synonymous with *wujūd, husūl, thubūt* and *istiqrār*.[57] Although *kawn* does not appear in the Qur'ān, its derivatives are seen on almost every one of its pages. It is mostly used to indicate a relation between the subject and the predicate of a nominal sentence, which is called by grammarians the incomplete *kāna*. It functions as a copula and does the work of *is,* of predication. It is also used to introduce tense to a nominal sentence, or as an auxiliary verb to help to make tense more specific, or with *qad* for emphasis.[58] In this sense *kāna* with all its derivatives appears in the Qur'ān more than 1300 times. Beyond the Qur'ānic text, however, six different words were used in various forms to represent copula during the translation movement

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[57] For the discussion of some of these concepts in the context of *kalām,* see, for example, R. M. Frank, "The Aš'arite Ontology: I Primary Entities," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999): 163-231.

[58] F. Shehadi, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1982), 4.

from Greek into Arabic. They were *al-huwiyyah, al-aysiyyah, al-anniyyah, al-kaynūnah,*

al-ithbāt and *al-wujūd.*[59]

Kāna also has an existential meaning, which grammarians called the complete

kāna. In this sense it is used to express the existence of something or a fact, or to express

being itself. There is no proper equivalent for *kāna* as a complete verb. In the Qur'ān we

often find the complete *kāna* in its imperative form, e.g., "'Be!' and it is" (*Kun-fa-*

yakūn) (e.g., 36:82).

The opposite of *kāna* is *laysa*, which denotes negation. *Laysa* is a verb in the

present tense having no other tense, or derivation. It is a negative copula, the equivalent

of 'is not.' It is one of the sisters of *kāna* and negatively expresses being and existence.

It is actually composed of *lā* (no/not) and *aysa* (thing, entity, existent). Although in the

Qur'ān *laysa* is mostly used as an incomplete verb, in verse 42:12 (*laysa ka mithlihi*

shay'un -there is no thing like Him-) it is used in an existential sense.[60] However, the

Qur'ānic context makes existential *kāna* pertain only to creation, i.e., not including God

himself. It is questionable, however, whether *kāna* designates the concept of being *per*

se.

Although they are not in the Qur'ān, the terms *ḥudūth* and *wujūd* are used in

theological and philosophical texts (besides Qur'ān commentaries) to express

being/existence in the later period. We do not know exactly when these terms appeared

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[59] S. M. Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology in Arabic and Persian* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 30. For the term "anniyyah," see, for example R. M. Franks's article in which after reporting the opinions of several scholars on the term, he aims to find in the early translations the source and the original meaning of the word al-anniyyah. "The Origin of the Arabic Philosophical term anniyyah," *Cahiers de Byrsa* 6 (1956): 181-201.

[60] Shehadi, 10.

first, but we need to understand what they mean to pursue our inquiry in the next chapter.

Ḥudūth is the *maṣdar* of *ḥadatha*, which signifies to appear, to arise, to come into existence, to take place, to happen, to begin, to originate, or to exist for the first time. It is used in two technical senses: the first is *ḥudūth zamānī*, which is a thing's being preceded by non-existence; and the second is *ḥudūth dhātī*, which is a thing's being dependent upon another for its existence. Thus, everything that comes into existence through creation is called *ḥādith* or *muḥdath*, and its creator called *muḥdith*.

Although the term *ḥudūth* is not found in the Qur'ān, other words derived from the same root (e.g. *ḥadīth*) appear in thirty six verses; nevertheless, there they have the meaning of word, story, dream, tale or legend -- none of which relates to its technical meaning of creation. In five other verses, some derivatives of *ḥ-d-th* are used in the sense of inventing or producing, which are close to the meaning of *ḥudūth* as a term. But in only one of these verses is the act of bringing into existence attributed to God (65:1).

The term *wujūd* comes from the root *w-j-d* which means to find or to come to know about something. The present passive *yūjadu* and the past passive *wujida* lead to the nominal form *mawjūd*, which means what is found or what exists, and the *maṣdar* *wujūd* denotes to be found, discovered, perceived and to be/exist. The latter is used as the abstract noun that represents existence. Besides its usage as in this sense, *wujūd* and its derivatives are also used to represent the copula *is*, as mentioned above.

Although the verbal form is used more than one hundred times in the Qur'ān, the noun *wujūd* had its own evolution, developing into a technical term used in discussions of being/existence in a philosophical sense. There it has two basic meanings: "to be" and

"to find."[61] Another form of the word, *ījād*, denotes something existentiated, created or originated. The meaning of "not being in want or need" is expressed by another form, *wājid*, while finding existence, or finding the reality that exists, is called *wijdān*.

The opposite of *wujūd* is **'adam**, which means to be lost, to lack, not to exist. The *masdar ma'dūm* signifies non-existent or lost. M. Al-Alousi states that the term was first used in a technical sense by Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 148/765): "Ja'far al-Sādiq held that God created the world out of nothing (*min la shay'*), and used the term *'adam* as opposed to *qidam*."[62] One does not find in the the Qur'ān the word *'adam* being used in verses related to the creation of the world; however, there is an implication of the meaning nothing (*la shay'*): "We created him when he was nothing before," (19:67), a verse that later became a yardstick for some *mutakallimūn* in discussions of whether a non-existent is a thing or not.

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[61] Nasr, "Existence (*wujūd*) and Quiddity," (as n.11); H. Landolt, "Wudjūd," in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* New ed., vol. XI, (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 216-18.

[62] H. M. E. Al-Alousi, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought: Qur'ān, Hadīth, Commentaries, and Kalām,* (Cambridge: The National Printing and Publishing Co., 1965), 161, also see his note 10.

PART II

Ontological Status of Pre-existing Things, Creation, and Existence

Khalq(creation)

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        Kun!
        (Be!)
          |
          |
          v
   Shay'  ---------->   Yakūn
   (thing)              (is)
                        Wujūd
                        (existence)
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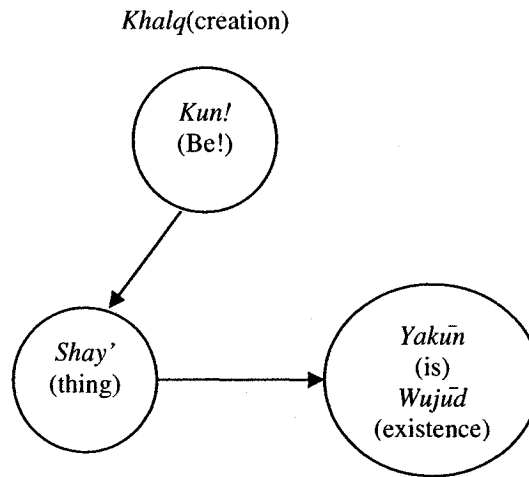
A. *An Outline of the Questions Raised by the Qur'ān:*

There are some passages in the Qur'ān that speak of how God creates things by

His command 'Be!' (*kun*). When He decrees the existence of a thing, God commands it:

"'Be!' and it is" (*kun-fa-yakūn*). The creative command appears in eight different

contexts. In three passages God's creative command is introduced to explain the origin

of Jesus without need of a father (2:117; 3:47; 19:35), and in another passage the

command is predicated of Adam and by implication of Jesus of both being created by

God's command 'Be!' (3:59). In the other four passages the creative command is used to

illustrate God's control over life and death, and especially to show that the resurrection

is true and that God can resurrect human beings as He created them first (6:73; 16:40;

36:82; 40:68). These *kun-fa-yakūn* passages are as follows:

2:117 "Creator of the heavens and the earth! When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*), He need only say 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

3:47 "'Lord,' she said, 'how can I bear a child when no man has touched me?' He replied: 'Even thus. God creates whom He will. When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*) He need only say: 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

3:59 "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created (*khalaqa*) him from dust and then said to him: 'Be,' and he was (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

6:73 "It was He who created the heavens and the earth in all truth. On the day when He says: 'Be,' it shall be (*kun-fa-yakūn*). His word is the truth. All sovereignty shall be His on the day when the trumpet is sounded. He has knowledge of the unknown and the manifest. He alone is wise and all-knowing."

16:40 "When We decree a thing (*idhā aradnāhu li-shay'in*), We need only say: 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

19:35 "God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*) He need only say 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

36:82 "When He decrees a thing (*idhā arāda shay'an*) He need only say: 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

40:68 "It is He who ordains life and death. If He decrees (*qaḍā*) a thing (*amran*), He need only say 'Be,' and it is (*kun-fa-yakūn*)."

The verse 2:117 objects to the idea that God has begotten a son. It is said that whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His, and that all is obedient to Him. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. When He wills to create a thing, He need only say 'Be!' and it is. In the second *kun-fa-yakūn* passage (3:47), Mary is surprised at God's promising her a child without a man having touched her. In response, she is told that God can and does accomplish what He wills. The verse explains the origin of Jesus by God's creative command without need of a father, and the first sense of the passage is the idea that when God wills to do a thing, He has the power to fulfill His will, and He does carry it out. The next passage in the same *sūra* (3:59) affirms the likeness between the creation of Adam and Jesus in that both were created by God's creative command.

Adam's creation, however, was different than that of Jesus. Because the verse states that God first created him (*khalaqahu*) and then commanded him to "be," this indicates that God animates things with His command rather than shaping or bringing them into existence from nothingness. On the other hand, Jesus' creation had nothing to do with dust or any other material. In 6:73, furthermore, it is said that God created the heavens and the earth with truth, and He will give His command on the Day and it will be -- meaning that the command in this passage refers to the resurrection. It obviously conveys the idea that when God decides to gather His creatures, He has the power to do so. The next passage (16:40) is also about the resurrection. It answers objections to the resurrection by stating that it will be effected by means of the creative command. The other verse about the creation of Jesus without need of a father is 19:35, and again His creation or origination is explained by the creative command. In the next passage (36:82), the creation of the heavens and the earth is given to illustrate God's ability to fulfill the resurrection by His command. The last *kun-fa-yakūn* passage (40:68) is about the creation of human beings and God's absolute control over life and death.

The first impression gained from these passages is the idea that God can do and does do what He wills, and there is no power above Him to stop Him accomplishing what He wills. On the other hand, they refer to God bringing things into existence by means of the imperative *kun*, which raises the question of who will receive the command, in other words: To whom does God address the command *kun*? Are they existent entities or non-existent? In which state are they: non-existence, existence or in God's knowledge? If we think that things are existent before God's command, this could be understood as positing that things are eternal, which contradicts the precept of *tawḥīd*. On the other hand, to think of a thing as non-existent might lead to the conclusion that

God has no knowledge of things before He called them into existence, which contradicts those verses that tell us God has the knowledge of things before they happen to be.

It is not clear in the Qur'ān whether the word *shay'* refers to something non-existent or existent. Given the passages in the Qur'ān we cannot say that things are essences or permanent archetypes or realities subsisting as intelligibles in God's mind or knowledge. Neither do we have enough evidence to say that they are forms or divine names. The nature of things that are commanded to be is not explicit. They possess an ontological reality, yet this is not explained in the Qur'ān. Al-Attas remarks that: "By virtue of their subsistence in a state of being non-existent, and of their potential role in the ontological evolvement to follow, the realities of things are also called 'possible things' (*mumkināt*)."[63] It might be said that they are in those passages in a state of non-existence in the sense that their being has not yet happened to emerge into a state of concrete existence. To see what commentators say about the ontological status of *shay'*, we will survey their interpretations of three related verses that indicate that God is a thing. These verses are as follows:

> 6:19 "Say: 'What counts most in testimony? (*ayyu shay'in akbaru shahādatan*)'
> Say: 'God is my witness and your witness. This Koran has been revealed to me
> that I may thereby warn you and all whom it may reach. Will you really testify
> there are other gods besides God?' Say: 'I will testify to no such thing!' Say: 'He
> is but one God. I disown the gods that you serve besides Him.'"

> 28:88 "Invoke no other god together with God. There is no god but Him. All
> things shall perish except His face (Himself) (*kullu shay'in hālikun illā
> wajhuhu*). His is the Judgment, and to Him shall you be recalled."

> 42:11 "Creator of the heavens and the earth, He has given you spouses from
> among yourselves, and cattle male and female; by this means He multiplies His
> creatures. Nothing can be compared with Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un*). He
> alone is hears all and sees all."

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[63] S. M. N. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islām.* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 251.

42:11 points to the fundamental doctrine of the Qur'ān that the natures of God and the world are completely different.[64] In Islamic theology, two terms are used to describe God, namely, *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. *Tanzīh* is an affirmation of Divine transcendence that is to assert God's essential and absolute incomparability with any created thing, or to emphasize that there is nothing similar to Him. The theologians often refer to the verse *"laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un"* in their explanation of the nature of God. *Tashbīh* is on the contrary to liken God to created things. Some theologians, on the basis of other Qur'ānic passages (e.g. God has hands, face, etc.) attribute human properties to God, which is an anthropomorphist approach. They hold that God, for example, sees with His eyes or hears with His ears, etc. In fact, the passage (42:11) is open to both interpretations, for the first part says that there is nothing like unto Him, while the second part describes God as All-hearing and All-seeing. However, both are a kind of delimitation. In another verse the Qur'ān says that "Exalted be your Lord, the Lord of Glory, standing above that with which they describe Him" (37:180).

In the Qur'ān we read that God occupies a position above everything else, and that the angels and the souls ascend to Him in a day which lasts a thousand years or fifty thousand years in our reckoning (32:5; 70:4), that He possesses a throne that supports Him, and around which the angels move (39:75; 40:7; 69:17), and that He rules from His throne, His authority descending from heaven to earth (10:3; 32:5).

In other passages, however, it is said that He is present everywhere (2:115), that He is the light of Heavens and the earth (24:35), that He is the manifest and the hidden (57:3), and that He is God in heaven and God on earth (43:84), yet He is distinct from the other created things (42:11).

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[64] This is also seen in the refutation of the divine nature of Jesus. Cf. Q., 5:79; 19:36; 43:59-60.

The various passages in the Qur'ān concerning the nature of God and the nature of the material world had some influence on the question of whether the world was created out of matter or out of nothing.[65] It seems that creation took place through the command of God, which indicates that God commanded something to be different from what it was before, and which suggests the idea of primary matter to which the command was addressed. We read in the Qur'ān that the heavens and the earth and human beings were created out of something, yet it does not say whether that material, say water or smoke, were eternal or created.

The concept of creation depends on a fundamental distinction between the Creator and His creatures. One of the most fundamental tenets of Islam is that the universe has been created by God. Other than God, who is unchangeable, incorruptible and all-sufficient, everything is contingent, created, and derivative; indeed, the whole universe is a theater of generation and corruption (*kawn wa fasād*). Creation is depicted in the Qur'ān as a free act of single Supreme God. He is unlike the Aristotelian First Mover, for He is always engaged in perpetual creative activity (*khallāq*). Neither can His creative activity be depicted in terms of the Platonic and Aristotelian dualism of form and matter nor in terms of the Plotinian metaphysics of emanation.[66]

It is insisted in the Qur'ān that creation reflects divine wisdom and purpose,[67] which also affirms God's peerless authority to command and to be worshipped.[68] As the Creator of everything He has no partners, no helpers and no peers; thus, He is uniquely

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[65] Al-Alousi, 24-5 (as n.61).

[66] Al-Attas, 12.

[67] See, for example, 16:3; 51:56; 54:49. For God's purpose in creating, Cf. Q., 3:191; 6:102; 10:5; 11:7; 13:2; 30:21; 36:22; 38:27; 51:56; 52:35; 67:2, etc.

[68] His being the creator is depicted as the main reason that He deserves worship, see, 2:21; 6:1; 11:61; 14:10; 36:22, etc.

worthy of worship. Creation is the free origination of all from the one God, who has no competitor in originating the universe. It is stated in the Qur'ān that God is the agent of His creation (10:12-4; 29:19, etc.), knowing all its details (5:97; 7:185; 57:41), and regulating it (17:12, etc.). Everything takes place by reason of His foreknowledge and His book, in which everything is decreed (11:6; 23:62). God is the ordering principle of this universe (22:65), and it is He who preserves the heaven and earth from destruction.[69] However, the Qur'ān does not speak of how the world was created in a theological sense. It only tells us that God created the world, and the word "created" is not defined. We read that the act of creation was accomplished by means of His power, will and particularly with His command 'Be!' without which the thing that is commanded would not be able to come into existence. The act of creation also involves the thing's capacity to respond His command becoming what it is commanded to be:[70] its hearing of the command, and its obedient acceptance of the command concerning its coming into being.

Although creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is not to be found in the Qur'ān, it was clearly affirmed by the *mutakallimūn* and was one of their consistent teachings (which gradually found its way into Qur'ān commentaries). They propounded and argued for the idea that there is no pre-existing material or thing and that things come to exist only by the word, creative power and will of God.[71]

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[69] Al-Alousi, 25.

[70] Al-Attas, 330.

[71] Although it is thought that God's creating the universe is a common teaching of Christians, the notion of creation out of absolute nothingness appears to have developed late in the history of Judaism and Christianity. It is also doubtful that a doctrine of creation out of absolute nothingness is to be found in either Old or New Testament. (Peterson, "Creation") To explain the origins of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* J. A. Goldstein proposes that Jews and Christians came to insist on it "because of their ever stronger adherence to the belief in bodily resurrection, especially in its most extreme form: viz., that the dead will be resurrected with the same bodies they had in life." "The Origins of Creation Ex Nihilo," *Journal of*

In contrast to traditional understanding, a critical reading of the relevant passages in the Qur'ān does not lead to the construction of a theory of creation from nothing (creation *ex nihilio*). Indeed, a survey of the verses in the Qur'ān containing reference to creation and the words used for creation, does not (as we showed in the first chapter of this study) reveal that God creates from absolute nothingness. Moreover, the Qur'ān does not offer a detailed theology of creation. It mostly uses the creative activity to refute polytheism and to prove God's power and wisdom.[72] Only two passages in the Qur'ān would seem to be susceptible to an interpretation indicative of creation *ex nihilo*, in which the term "nothing" is used to describe the previous condition of the creature. God is the one who can create what once was nothing and can produce a child in a barren woman and raise the dead at the end of the world. Those verses that mention "nothing" in connection with creation are:

> 19:7-9 "'Rejoice Zacharias,' came the answer. 'You shall be given a son, and his name shall be John; a name no man has borne before him.' 'Lord,' said Zacharias, 'how shall I have a son when my wife is barren, and I am well-advanced in years?' He replied: 'Thus did your Lord speak. That is easy for Me; even as I brought you into being when you were nothing before (*min qablu wa lam takun shay'an*)."

Jewish Studies 35 (1984): 127-135. In response to Goldstein, D. Winston argues that the reason for their adherence to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was the perception that pre-existent matter could readily be seen as equal in power to God, and thus, open the door to Gnostic dualism, rather than the need to establish the doctrine of resurrection. "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 88-91. See, also, D. B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). As for the origins of creation ex nihilo in Islamic thought, Al-Alousi states that we first find the doctrine of creation ex nihilo in the thought of Jahm Ibn Safwān (d. 128/745) and Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 148/765). For the detailed discussion of the subject see his book *"The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought,"* 166 onwards. H. A. Wolfson states that "the verbal problem whether the non-existent is something or nothing started with what was then one of the most vital problems, namely whether the world was created out of an antemundane matter or out of nothing." "Kalām Problem of Non-existence." (as n.10)

[72] T. J. O'Shaughnessy, *Creation and the Teaching of the Qur'ān*" (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985), 1. Cf. Q., 3:49; 13:16; 22:73; 23:91; 25:3; 35:3; 46:4. Ibn Rushd also states that the Qur'ān does not support the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, on the contrary it teaches creation out of something. *Fasl al-Maqāl*, with an introduction by Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jābiri, (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1997), 106.

19:66-7 "'What!' says man, 'When I am once dead, shall I be raised to life? Does man forget that We created him when He was nothing before? (*min qablu wa lam yaku shay'an*)"

Another verse is also sometimes taken as indicative of creation *ex nihilo* in connection with these two:

52:35 "Were they created out of the void (nothing) (*khuliqa min ghayri shayin*)? Or were they their own creators?"

In this passage, however, *min ghayri shay'* does not mean creation from nothing. Besides, the answer to the question contained the phrase is expected to be negative.[73] In this context it is interpreted by the commentators as meaning without a creator or an end in view.[74]

The story of the creation of man[75] starts with God's informing the angels that He would create man or a viceroy on the earth from clay. The angels objected that this creature would do evil and shed blood on the earth. God then asked the angels to recite the names of things to show they were speaking the truth, and they were unable to do so. Yet Adam was able to recite the names, for God had taught them to him. Then God ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam and they did so, except Satan. He refused to prostrate because of having been created from fire and Adam from clay. Satan then was expelled from heaven and he threatened to seduce all mankind. God then told Adam to dwell with his wife in paradise and not to eat of a certain tree, but Satan lured them and they ate it and became aware of their nakedness. When God asked them why they had done so, they asked forgiveness and confessed their sin. God forgave them

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[73] O'Shaughnessy, 5.

[74] See, for example, al-Bayḍāwī on 52:35, v.2, 290.

[75] The story occurs in several passages in the Qur'ān, see, 2:30; 7:11; 15:28; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:71.

but ordered them to descend to the earth and decreed enmity between humankind and Satan.

Leaving aside the story, the most common Qur'ānic expression for creation is the verb *khalaqa*, and the particle *min* "out of/from" to introduce the material worked upon, which means to bring into existence from something that already existed in another form or condition. For instance, the Qur'ān says that Satan and Jinn were created out of fire (*nār*).[76] As for human beings, the Qur'ān uses a rich vocabulary that describes the material employed by God, such as *ard* (earth) (20:55), *turāb* (dust)[77], *tīn*,[78] *salsāl* (clay), *mā* (water), *'alaq* (out of clots), *nutfa* (drop), or *mimmā ya'lamūn* (they know what).[79] In fact, in some passages the Qur'ān speaks of the creation of man without indicating any particular individual, while in others the Qur'ān speaks of the creation of Adam, in which case we read that the creation was out of dust. The passages speak of the material out of which human beings were created as follows:

Dust (*turāb*):

> 3:59 "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created him from dust (*min turābin*) and then said him: 'Be,' and he was."

> 18:37 "His companion replied, while still conversing with him: 'Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust (*min turābin*), from a little germ, and fashioned you into a man?'"

> 22:5 "You people! If you doubt the Resurrection remember that We first created you from dust (*min turābin*), then..."

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[76] For Satan: 7:12; 38:76; for jinn: 15:27; 55:15.

[77] *Turāb* is also depicted as the form to which the dead body returns after its decomposition; see, for example, Q., 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82; 27:67; 36:78; 37:16, 53; 50:3; 56:47; 71:11. See, also, H. Toelle, "Earth," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, v.2, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004): 2-4.

[78] For the usage of the term in the Qur'ān in a different context other than creation, see, for example, 28:38.

[79] O'Shaughnessy classifies the relevant passages and finds some correlation between the time of their revelation and the material cited, and says that the passages seem to be cited to emphasize the final judgment as proof of God' power. Chap. 2.

30:20 "By one of His signs He created you from dust (*min turābin*); and, behold, you became humans and multiplied throughout the earth."

35:11 "God created you from dust (*min turābin*), then from a little germ. Into two sexes He divided you. No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge. No man grows old or has his life cut short but in accordance with His decree. All this is easy enough for God."

40:67 "It was He who created you from dust (*min turābin*), then..."

Clay: 1- (*ṭīn*):

6:2 "It is He who created you from clay (*min ṭīnin*)..."

7:12 "Why did you not prostrate yourself when I commanded you? He asked. 'I am nobler than he.' Satan replied. 'You created me from fire but You created him from clay (*min ṭīnin*)."

17:60-1 "When We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam,' they all prostrated themselves, except Satan, who replied: 'Shall I bow to him You have made of clay (*ṭīnan*)?"

23:12 "We first created man from an essence of clay (*min sulālatin min ṭīnin*)."

32:7 "...He first created man from clay (*min ṭīnin*)."

37:11 "Ask the unbelievers if they deem themselves of a nobler make than the rest of Our creation. Or coarse clay (*min ṭīnin lāzib*)We created them."

38:71 "Your Lord said to the angels: 'I am creating man from clay (*min ṭīnin*)'."

38:76 "Satan replied: 'I am nobler than he. You created me from fire, but him from clay (*min ṭīnin*)'."

2- (*ṣalṣāl*):

15:26 "We created man from dry clay (*min ṣalṣālin*), from black moulded loam."

15:28 "Your Lord said to the angels: 'I am creating man from dry clay (*min ṣalṣālin*), from black moulded loam."

15:33 "He (Satan) replied: 'I will not bow to a mortal whom You created of dry clay (*min ṣalṣālin*), of black moulded loam'."

55:14 "He created man from potter's clay (*min ṣalṣālin kal-fajjār*)."

36

Water (*maʾ*):

25:54 "It was He who created man from water (*min al-māʾi*), and gave him kindred of blood and of marriage. All-powerful is your Lord."

77:20 "Did We not create you from a humble fluid (*min māʾin muhīn*)?"

86:6 "He is created from an ejaculated fluid (*min māʾin dāfiqin*).

Out of clots (*ʿalaq*):

96:2 "Created man from clots of blood. (*ʿalaq*)"

A drop (*nutfa*):

16:4 "He created man from a little germ (*min nutfatin*) : yet he is openly contentious."

36:77 "Is man not aware that We created him from a little germ (*min nutfatin*)? Yet is he fragrantly contentious."

53:45-6 "God created the sexes, the male and the female, from a drop of ejaculated semen. (*min nutfatin*)"

75:37 "Was he not a drop of ejaculated semen (*nutfatan min maniyyin yumnā*)?"

76:2 "We have created man from the union of the two sexes (*min nutfatin amshājin*), so we may put him to the proof. We have endowed him with hearing and sight."

80:18-19 "From what did God create him? From a little germ (*min nutfatin*) He created him and gave him due proportions."

They know what (*mimmā yaʿlamūn*):

70:39 "No! Let them remember of what We created them (*mimmā yaʿlamūn*)."

From a single soul (*min nafsin wāhidatin*):

4:1 "You people! Have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul (*min nafsin wāhidatin*)."

7:189 "It was He who created you from a single soul (*min nafsin wāhidatin*)."

39:6 "He created you from a single soul (*min nafsin waḥidatin*) then from that soul He created its spouse."

Another verse (15:29) describes God's creative breathing into Adam (*fa idhā sawwaytuhu wa nafakhtu fīhi min rūḥī*). The spirit breathed into the body also implies the soul's pre-existence, which refers to a state of being that is not explicit in the Qur'ān.[80]

All these expressions refer to the different stages of the process of creation. The Qur'ān affirms that human beings are created in stages (*wa qad khalaqakum aṭwāran*) (71:14), and refers to the process of creation in other verses.

22:5-6 "You people! If you doubt the Resurrection remember that We first created you from dust, then from a living germ, then from a clot of blood, and then from a half-formed lump of flesh, so that We might manifest to you our power. We cause to remain in the womb whatever We please for an appointed term, and then We bring you forth as infants, that you may grow up and reach your prime. Some die young, and some live on to abject old age when all that they once knew they know no more. You sometimes see the earth dry and barren: but no sooner do We send the water down upon it than it begins to stir and swell, putting forth every kind of radiant bloom. That is because God is Truth: He resurrects the dead and has power over all things."

23:12-14 "We first created man from an essence of clay: then placed him, a living germ, in a secure enclosure. The germ We made a clot of blood, and the clot a lump of flesh. This We fashioned into bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, thus bringing forth another creation. Blessed be God, the noblest of creators."[81]

At every stage the creation occured from pre-existing materials. In the end, God summoned humanity to serve and worship Him on account of His role as the only Creator. Creative activity, as seen in the above verses, is a sign of His Power, and the aim is to demonstrate His power by the sign of the creation of human beings. It does not seem possible therefore to construct a theory of creation *ex nihilo* on the basis of these

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[80] Cf. 32:9 and for the creative breath into Mary in Jesus' case, see, 21:91; 66:12.
[81] Cf. 3:19; 18:37; 24:45; 35:11; 39:6; 40:67; 55:11; 75:37-9.

verses. Nevertheless, the Qur'ān does not provide us with an account of the whole process of creation from beginning to end, so that we are compelled to collect the scattered passages about creation to arrange a coherent scenario. In fact, this subjective arrangement may be what led Muslim scholars to different conclusions about the doctrine of creation in the Qur'ān.[82] The Qur'ān states that God created heaven out of water and smoke.

> 21:30 "Are the disbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were but one solid mass which We tore asunder, and that We made every living from water? Will they not have faith?"

> 2:29 "He created for you all that the earth contains; then, ascending to the sky, He fashioned it into seven heavens. He has knowledge of all things."

> 41:9-11 "Say: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days? And do you make other gods His equals? The Lord of the universe is He.' He set upon the earth mountains towering high above it, and in four days provided it with sustenance for all alike. Then, turning to the sky, which was but a cloud of vapour, He said to it and to the earth: 'Come willingly or perforce.' 'We will come willingly,' they answered."[83]

The universe is depicted in the Qur'ān as having a single ruler who is not questioned about His works (21:33), who is the sovereign of all sovereignty (3:26), who is the east and the west (2:115). His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth (2:255), and it is He who created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them in six days, without tiring (50:38). The Qur'ān states in several verses that the creation of the universe was completed in six days. According to the passages in the Qur'ān, heaven and the earth were a mass that God separated, creating every living thing

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[82] Al-Alousi states that "most of the theologians and the commentators think that the Qur'ān teaches the idea of creation ex-nihilo, al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd consider that the Qur'ān implies a creation out of matter and that time and matter existed before creation. Ibn Sīnā thinks that the Qur'ān teaches something else, that is, creation from eternity, out of nothing, and not in time. Ibn Taymiya states that the Qur'ān does not indicate that this world was created ex nihilo, but indicates that there was time and matter existed before this world was created." 11-12.

[83] For the creation in six days Cf. Q., 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 50:38; 57:4.

from water.[84] God first created all that is on the earth and then created the seven

heavens. The creation of the earth lasted two days each of which in our reckoning is a

thousand years.

> 22:47 "They bid you hasten the scourge. God will not fail His promise. Each day
> of your Lord's is like a thousand years in your reckoning."

> 32:5 "He governs all, from heaven to earth. And all will ascend to Him in a
> single day, a day whose space is a thousand years by your reckoning."

After the creation of the heaven and the earth God placed the mountains on the earth,[85]

and placed the sun, the moon and the stars in the heavens,[86] and then created day and

night.[87] After the creation of the earth, God turned to heaven which was still smoke

(*dukhān*) and ordained the seven heavens in two days. He assigned to each its proper

order and then mounted the throne, directing all things.[88]

In the Qur'ān God is the Creator of all things, but only of heavens, the earth, the

sun, and the moon is He said to have created with the *haqq*.[89] The word *haqq*, mainly,

means justness, propriety, rightness, correctness, truth, reality, or the state of being

confirmed as a truth or fact, being necessary, requisite, obligatory or due as opposed to

butlān. *Al-haqq* is also one of the Divine names, and as an epithet it signifies just,

proper, right, correct, or true; authentic, genuine, sound, valid, substantial, or real;

established, or confirmed as truth or fact as opposed to *bātil*. In the Qur'ān, however, it

is not restricted to the Divine name, for it may refer to justice, a right, a due, a just claim,

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[84] Q., 11:7; 21:30; 42:9-12; 73:30.
[85] Q., 21:31; 27:61; 50:7; 77:72, etc.
[86] Q., 25:61-2; 50:5-6; 67:5.
[87] Q., 17:22; 21:33; 40:26.
[88] See, M. Jarrar, "Heaven and Sky," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, v.2, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004): 410-12.
[89] O'Shaughnessy, 35. See, also, Rahbar, App.I for the Qur'ānic contexts of the word *haqq* when it is not applied to God. (as n.25)

a duty or an obligation.[90] Passages that associate *al- ḥaqq* with the creation of the heavens and the earth are:

> 14:19 "Do you not see that God has created the heavens and the earth with truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*)? He can remove you if He wills and bring into being a new creation: that is no difficult thing for God."

> 15:85 "It was but to reveal the Truth (*illā bi-l-ḥaqq*) that We created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between the The hour of Doom is sure to come: bear with them nobly. Your Lord is the all-knowing Creator."

> 16:3 "He created the heavens and the earth to manifest the Turth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*)..."

> 29:44 "God created the heavens and the earth to establish the Truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*)..."

> 30:8 "Have they not pondered within their own minds that God created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them only for a worthy end (*illā bi-l-ḥaqq*), and for an appointed term? Yet many deny they will ever meet their Lord."

> 39:5 "It was to reveal the Truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*) that He created the heavens and the earth..."

> 44:38-9 "It was not in jest that We created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. We created them to reveal the truth (*illā bi-l-ḥaqq*). But of this most men have no knowledge. The Day of Judgment is the appointed time for all."

> 45:22 "God created the heavens and the earth to manifest the truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*), and to recompense each soul according to its deeds. None shall be wronged."

> 46:3 "It was but to manifest the Truth (*illā bi-l-ḥaqq*) that We created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them..."

> 64:3 "He created the heavens and the earth to manifest the Truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*), and fashioned you into a comely shape. To Him shall you return."

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[90] Rahbar, 31. D. B. Macdonald, "Ḥakk," in *Enccylopedia of Islam* 2nd ed., revised by E. E. Calverley, vol. III (Leiden: E.J. Brill, London: Luzac & Co.:1971): 82-3. Calverley states that "the occasional explanation of the Divine name *ḥakk* as "Creator" is based merely on its alliterative contrast with *khalk*, "creation"."

In the above passages the creative activity is also linked with a new creation, the final

Hour, the encounter with the Lord, and the Day of Judgment. Some other passages that

identify *al-ḥaqq* with God's creative activity are:[91]

> 3:59-60 "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created him from dust and then said to him: 'Be,' and he was. This is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) from your Lord: therefore do not doubt it."

> 6:73 "It was He who created the heavens and the earth in all truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*). On the day when He says: 'Be,' it shall be. His word is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*). All sovereignty shall be His on the day when the trumpet is sounded. He has knowledge of the unknown and the manifest. He alone is wise and all-knowing."

> 19:34-5 "Such was Jesus son of Mary. That is the whole truth (*qawl al-ḥaqq*), which they still doubt. God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When He decrees a thing He need only say: 'Be,' and it is."

> 21:16-8 "It was not in sport that We created the heaven and the earth and all that lies between them. Had it been Our will to find a diversion, We could have found one near at hand. Indeed, We will hurl Truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*) at falsehood until Truth shall triumph and Falsehood be no more. Woe betide you, for all the falsehoods you have uttered."

> 22:5-6 "You people! If you doubt the Resurrection remember that We first created you from dust, then... That is because God is the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*): He resurrects the dead and has power over all things."[92]

> 34:48 "Say: 'My Lord hurls the truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*). He has knowledge of all that is hidden.' Say: 'Truth has come. Falsehood has vanished and shall return no more.'"

The first three passages are of significance, for they include both the word *al-ḥaqq*

and the creative command of God, *kun*. The *ḥaqq* by which God creates things in this

context might be interpreted as God's creative command.[93]

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[91] O'Shaughnessy, 35.

[92] For the whole passage, see, p.38.

[93] O'Shaughnessy, Chap. III.

God's creative activity is therefore concentrated on bringing forth things that pre-exist by His will and command. His creating is a single act accomplished in the twinkling of an eye (54:50), but repeated in every moment. These creatures, unlike Him, are non-eternal and, being created, depend for the duration of their existence on His will. God creates once and does so again on the Day of Judgment,[94] when human beings are recreated.[95] God's first creation is used as a sign to point to the resurrection and as a proof of God's power to do it. The Qur'ān tells us that the second creation is within God's power and will certainly come true, because God has already performed the more difficult one when He first created the world.[96]

The teachings of the Qur'ān about God's will, command and creative activity were of significance to the development of the term *wujūd* both in and of itself and in terms of its relation to *māhiyyah*. What all things share in common, so to speak, is *wujūd* or existence, and that which differentiates them is *māhiyyah* or essence. Although a full examination of the term *wujūd* is beyond the scope of this study, we should, at least, review the importance of the term and its development in an Islamic milieu where even today it remains the very basis of most schools of Islamic thought.

In fact, the problem of existence (*wujūd*), -- part of the heritage of Greek philosophy -- was the greatest problem that Muslim thinkers had to face. If one looks at the intellectual history of Islam one sees that it has looked at many different streams, integrated some of them and developed these to the full. It is true that the abundant philosophical literature of the Greeks gave Muslim thinkers extensive material and led

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[94] Q., 10:4; 30:11; 32:10; 46:33-4, etc.
[95] Q., 13:5; 17:49-51; 32:10; 34:7, etc.
[96] Q., 6:95; 7:29, 57; 10:55-6; 13:5; 16:70; 17:49-51, 98-9; 19:66-7; 20:55; 21:104; 22:5; 27:64; 29:19-20, 120; 30:11,27: 31:28; 32:10; 36:76-8; 46:33; 50:2-11, 15; 53:45-6; 75:37-40; 86:5-8.

them to approach metaphysical questions on an entirely new basis. However, many

problems were raised by the absorbtion of Greek philosophy. Thinking, after all, is

restricted to some extent by the vocabulary and structure of the language in which we

express our thoughts, and that was true for the thinkers who wrote in Arabic. First of all

the translators had to create a technical terminology in Arabic for the new Greek

concepts and subjects that would serve to interpret a monotheistic religion for which the

doctrine of creation was, if not the first, one of the most important teachings of the

Qur'ān.[97]

The Arabic, for instance, has a pronoun that occupies the position of a copula

and performs the role of linking a name with a predicative expression. However, Arabic

has the verb *kāna* which like *'einai'* (to be) in Greek, can function as the verb of

existence or as the copula. The Greek that Plato and Aristotle wrote does not possess

separate words, as English does, for 'to exist' and 'to be'.[98] The translators developed

many terms to provide for the different usages of Greek *'einai'*, none of which was well

defined.[99] It was the term *wujūd* and its derivatives that later on became the technical

equivalent for existence or being. The term *wujūd* may be translated as existence, being,

or sometimes reality, in English. Yet *wujūd* cannot be rendered simply as existence, for

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[97] G. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations From Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosphy," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism,* ed. G. Endress, R. Kruk (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1997): 43-76.

[98] R. M. Dancy, "Aristotle and Existence," *Synthese,* 54 (1983): 409-442. The philosophers distinguish, at least, three senses of third person singular form of the verb 'to be', *is*: The 'is' of existence uses the existential quantifier. The 'is' of identity employs the predicate of identity. The 'is' of predication juxtaposes predicate symbol and proper name. For a thorough examination of the uses of the Greek synonym for 'to be', *'einai'*, see, C. H. Kahn, "The Greek verb 'to be' and the Concept of Being," *Foundations of Language: International Journal of Language and Philosophy* 2 (1966): 245-265; also see his article "On the Terminology for Copula and Existence," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition,* ed. by S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, and V. Brown (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1973): 141-158. For existence, see, D. C. Williams, "Dispensing with Existence," *The Journal of Philosophy* 59 (1962): 748-763.

[99] Like *anniyyah, huwiyyah, aysa, laysa, dhāt,* etc.

depending on the context it may also refer to the Absolute Being, to a universal concept encompassing all levels of reality, or to the reality of all things other than the Necessary Being.[100]

In the first part of this study we discussed the etymological derivation of the term *wujūd*, which is used in Arabic as a philosophical term. Al-Taḥānawī writes that there are two different modes of existence in everything. One is real (*al-'aynī*) or external (*al-khārijī*) existence, and the other is mental (*al-dhihnī*) existence.[101] For example, when we think of a person in our minds this person is said to exist by the mental mode of existence, but when we think of a concrete individual person, such as Zayd, the quiddity of that person exists in Zayd by the external mode of existence.

A further problem was tied up with the conceptions of God inherent in the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical traditions. These differed considerably from the conception depicted in the Qur'ān, which played a crucial role in the development of the term *wujūd*. There He is One God, living, powerful, knowing, willing, hearing, seeing, and etc. God's nature is depicted in the Qur'ān as being completely different than that of created beings. Thus, the theory of creation, which involves God's knowledge, will, and command, is another important Qur'ānic teaching that exercised a tremendous influence on the formation of the term.

Given the questions raised by the text of the Qur'ān itself, our purpose in the following pages is to display the relationship between *tafsīr*s and certain theological/philosophical arguments. In doing this we restrict ourselves to the classical

[100] Nasr, "Existence (*wujūd*) and Quiddity (*māhiyyah*)," (as n.11)

[101] M. A. al- Taḥānawī, "Wujūd," in *Mawsū'ah Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn wa al-'Ulūm*, v.2 (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnān, 1996): 1766-1770.

*tafsīr*s, attending to what the *mufassirūn* say and appear to mean when interpreting the *kun-fa-yakūn* and relevant verses.

B. *A Survey in A Religious Genre:*

In his study of the origins of grammatical studies in Islam, C. H. M. Versteegh states: "we are not saying that all Islamic disciplines have their origin in *tafsīr*; what we do maintain is that the first elements of scholarship for almost all disciplines, before they were established as disciplines *sui generis* are found in the early discussions about the revealed text."[102] These discussions can partly be seen in the Qur'ān commentaries, which reflect both the theological stance of the author and the counter arguments of the time period.

According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muḥammad was the first interpreter of the Qur'ān. After his death, his followers, Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), transmitted and added to his interpretations, after which the successors (*tābi'ūn*) transmitted and added to this body of knowledge. The generations that followed drew on their interpretations through authoritative chains of transmission (*isnād*). Although there are some questions about the beginning and early development of *tafsīr*, the formative period is understood to begin with early writings on the text of the Qur'ān, and to extend to the introduction of philological and grammatical sciences and the science of the readings of the Qur'ān (*qirā'a*) into the *tafsīr*s. [103]

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[102] C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1993), 92. In this regard, see also, H. Daiber, "The Qur'ān as Stimulus of Science in Early Islam," in *Islamic Thought & Scientific Creativity*, 2/2 (1991): 29-42.

[103] C. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopedia of Qur'ān*, v. 2 (Leiden-Boston; Brill, 2002): 99-124; I. Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi* 2 vols. (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 1988).

The main interest of the *mufassirūn* was to explain the meaning of each word and each verse in an attempt to understand what God had meant. They discussed almost all the aspects of the Qur'ānic text, such as grammar, variant readings (*qirā'āt*), the occasions of revelation, legal and religious issues, etc. And even though they showed no interest in the philosophical aspects of scriptural language, the *mufassirūn* did engage with the metaphysical issues raised by the text.

However, for the jurists, theologians and *mufassirūn*, the text of the Qur'ān was not only the subject of grammatical and linguistic studies. They did explain the difficult expressions of the Qur'ān by appealing to the science of grammar, but for the most part they depended on tradition when interpreting the text. In fact, most early *tafsīr*s were little more than compilations of traditions, with limited interpretation (based on theological, mystical or historical arguments) by the *mufassirūn* themselves.[104]

By the late ninth century, the study of the Qur'ānic text had reached a stage of doctrinal stabilization. The classical period of *tafsīr* is often considered to begin with the *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who saw his work as the summa of all previous commentaries on the Qur'ān. The literature of the interpretation of the Qur'ān grew steadily in the following centuries, yet al-Ṭabarī's commentary remained a fundamental source, due especially to the fact that it was a repository of tradition.[105] As time went on the language of the *mufassirūn* became more technical, as may be seen in the commentary of al-Rāzī which is saturated with theological and philosophical discussions in addition to arguments from the natural sciences, jurisprudence and grammar. In fact, some commentators grew far removed from the

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[104] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[105] Ibid.

literal meaning of the text, particularly when dealing with fundamental questions of theology, such as the creation of the world or the existence of God.[106] In the following pages we will survey some of the classical *tafsīr*s and see how *mufassirūn* interpreted these ambiguous passages and if they raised similar questions see how they answered them. The *tafsīr*s used for this purpose are the following:

___ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, (d. 310/923), *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* published in 30 volumes in Beirut, in 1986 (with (on the margins): *Tafsīr Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-furqān* by Niẓām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Qummī al-Nīsābūrī).

___ Abū al-Layth Naṣr ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibrahīm al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), *Baḥr al-'Ulūm,* edited in 3 volumes by 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ, 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd, Zakarīyā 'Abd al-Majīd al-Nūtī, published in Beirut, in 1983.

___ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī (d. 450/1058), *al-Nukāt wa al-'Uyūn,* edited in 6 volumes by al-Sayyid ibn 'Abd al-Maqṣūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm, published in Beirut, in 1992.

___ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* edited in 10 volumes by Aghā Buzurk al-Ṭihrānī, published in Najaf, in 1963.

___ al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl,* edited in 4 volumes by Khālid 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Akk, published in Beirut, in 1986.

___ Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl,* edited in 4 volumes by Aḥmad ibn al-

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[106] Al-Alousi, 82.

Munayyir al-Iskandarī, Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Muḥammad 'Ilyān al-Marzūqi, and Muḥammad 'Ilyān al-Madhkūr, published in Beirut, in 1947.

__ Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, edited in 30 volumes by Aḥmad 'Ārif al-Zīn, published in Beirut, in 1957.

__ Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *Zād al-Maṣīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, published in 9 volumes in Beirut, in 1974.

__ Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, published in 32 volumes, in Beirut, in 1980.

__ 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl*, edited in 2 volumes by Zakarīyā 'Umayrāt, published in Beirut, in 1995.

__ 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Baydāwī (d. 716/1316), *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, edited in 2 volumes by H. O. Fleischer, published in Osnabrück, in 1968.

The first important commentary, in effect a repository of various early writings on the Qur'ān, is the *Jāmi'al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* of Ibn Jarīr **al-Ṭabarī** (d. 310/923), who is perhaps more famous as a historian than as a *mufassir*. The commentary includes theological, legal, grammatical, philological and rhetorical elements and also contains references to the variant readings of the Qur'ān and poetic material. The most important feature of the work is the attention given to the *isnād*s or chains of authoritative transmission on which he depends when evaluating the statements of early authorities. For most verses of the Qur'ān, after citing the various

opposing views, al-Ṭabarī gives his own interpretation, and his reasons for it.[107] In his comment on 2:117, for instance, al-Ṭabarī reports from Abū Jaʿfar about the ontological status of pre-existing things:

In which state (ḥāl) is the thing (amr) commanded to 'be' (kun)? Is it in its state of non-existence (ḥāli ʿadamihi) or in its state of existence (ḥāli wujūdihi)? In the first case His command is not possible, for it is impossible to give an order while there is no (one) commanded (ma'mūr). The command is impossible (istaḥāla) if there is no (one) commanded, just as the command is impossible without a commander; thus, the command from the commander is impossible if there is no (one) commanded.

In the second case His command cannot happen to be (ḥudūth), because it is already existent (ḥādith, mawjūd). It cannot be said "be existent" (kun mawjūdan) to an existent other than according to this meaning: the command of being itself (bi- ḥudūthi aynihi). People before us discussed the meaning of this verse, and we report what was said about it:

(1) Some of them said: This is information from God about His absolute (maḥtūm) decree... that when He decrees He fulfills (naffadha) His command (qaḍā); thereby do His decrees come to pass (maḍā)... They interpreted this verse as particular (al-khuṣūṣ) but not general (al-ʿumūm).

(2) The others said that the verse is general (ʿumūm) in its exterior meaning (ẓāhir). No one can interpret its interior meaning (bāṭin) without proof. God knows every existent (kāʾin) before its creation (kawn). If it is like this, then things that exist in His knowledge before they come into being are not equal to the things that are existent. It could be said to them "be," and they can be commanded to come out from the state of non-existence to the state of existence (wujūd). Yet, their formation (taṣawwur), and knowledge of them in the state of non-existence (fī ḥāl al-ʿadam) belong to God.

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[107] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān"; C. E. Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," in Encyclopedia of Islam, New ed., v. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 11-15.

(3) The others said... the command is for death and life. If it is commanded to a dead person, it means "be alive"; if it is decreed to a living person, it means "be dead."

(4) This is information from God about all that He creates (*yunshi'uhu, yukawwinuhu*). He decrees, and creates (*qaḍāhu wa khalaqahu wa ansha'ahu*), and it is (*kāna wa wujida*). There is no word here for the speakers of this idea other than existence (*wujūd*) of the creature and happening (*ḥudūth*) of the decree.

Abū Ja'far then says that the verse is not particular but general (*al-'āmmun*) and concludes that God creates things with His command, *kun*, simultaneously with His decree and that a thing does neither exist before His decree nor after His decree. In other words, the receiver of existence starts "to be" simultaneously with the giving of existence (God's creative command). After discussing some related questions, al-Ṭabarī interprets the verse as meaning that since God originated (*ibtada'a*) the heavens and the earth without any *aṣl* (origin), He originated Jesus without a father.[108]

In his comment on 3:47 al-Ṭabarī interprets the phrase *yakhluqu mā yashā'u*, "He creates whatever He wills," as *yaṣna'u mā arāda*, thereby reducing the meaning of *khalaqa* to *ṣana'a*.[109] In his comment on 3:59 he presents a number of reports on the theological debate between the Prophet and the Christians of Najran concerning the person of Jesus. By reporting them al-Ṭabarī explains the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) for this verse, and concludes that God informed His prophet that His creation (*takwīn*) of things is effected by His word/command, *kun*. Next he compares the creations of Adam and Jesus, and says that He created Adam when he was existent

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[108] al-Ṭabarī, v. 2, 542-50.
[109] al-Ṭabarī, v. 6, 420-21.

(*kā'in*), and that what He created first did not have origin (*'aṣl*), beginning (*awwal*), or lineage/species (*'unṣur*).[110] In his comments on 19:35 al-Ṭabarī again says that God originates things by his command (*yabtadi'u al-ashyā' wa yakhtari'uhā*) and they are (*mawjūdan, ḥādithan*).[111]

In his comment on 36:82 al-Ṭabarī reports from Qatāda: "Has He, who created the heavens and the earth, no power to create others like them? He surely has. He is the creator, who continuously creates (*khallāq*) and is all-knowing (*'alīm*). And there is no thing in Arabic language lighter (*akhaff*) and easier (*ahwan*) than *kun*."[112] Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes here God's power and His being All-sufficient to accomplish whatever He wills to fulfil.

Concerning the verses that suggest that God is a thing, al-Ṭabarī interprets the *shay'* in one of these passages as witness. In his comment on 6:19 he says that "He is the greatest of all things as a witness to your prophecy."[113]

For him creation operates by the Divine command, yet he supports the idea that God creates from nothing; in other words, God brings things into existence from nothing by His command. He states that God created the heavens and the earth from nothing.[114] According to al-Ṭabarī, *khalaqa* means to bring something into existence out of nothing. For example, he interprets verse 19:9 as "He made you a human being (*bashar*) before

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[110] al-Ṭabarī, v. 6, 471-72.

[111] al-Ṭabarī, v. 16, 64.

[112] al-Ṭabarī, v. 23, 22.

[113] al-Ṭabarī, v. 7, 103.

[114] See, for example his comment on 40:57, he says that the creation of the heavens and the earth from nothing (*min ghayri shay'*) is greater than the creation of human beings, v. 24, 50.

you were nothing."[115] In his comment on 19:67 he writes that "Is He, who created you from nothing, not capable of giving life after your death?"[116]

The usage of the word *badiʿ* in connection with the creation of the heavens and the earth is significant, because he explains the meaning of the word as "originator," one who creates out of nothing. For example al-Ṭabarī writes on 6:101:

> ...*Badiʿ* means originator (*mubtadiʿ, muḥdith*) of the heavens and the earth after they were non-existent (*baʿd an-lam-takun*), and he reports from Ibn Zayd: "It is He who originated the creation of them and created them when they were nothing before (*wa-lam-yakūn shay'an qablahu*).[117]

Thus, for him, things come into existence from nothing through God's creative command. As for the creation with *ḥaqq*, al-Ṭabarī interprets the word *ḥaqq* as God's wisdom, a definite purpose, justice or an end in view.[118] In another passage he reports the views about creation with the *ḥaqq* and indicates that the latter term also refers to God's word or command:

> Some said that the meaning of *bi-al-ḥaqq* is it is He who created the heavens and the earth rightly and properly (*ḥaqqan wa ṣawāban*) not falsely or aimlessly (*bāṭilan wa khataan*)... They said that He created the heavens and the earth and what is between them wisely (*ḥikmatan*). The others said that the meaning of *bi-al-ḥaqq* is that He created the heavens and the earth with His word and His utterance to them "Come forward both, willingly or unwillingly."[119] They say that the *ḥaqq* here means His word.[120]

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[115] al-Ṭabarī, v. 16, 40.
[116] al-Ṭabarī, v. 15, 80.
[117] al-Ṭabarī, v. 7, 198; see also his comment on 2:117, v. 1, 404.
[118] See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, on 44:39, v. 25, 77, on 45:22, v. 25, 91, on 64:3, v. 28, 78.
[119] This passage refers to another divine command given in 41:11.
[120] al-Ṭabarī, on 6:73, v. 7, 155-6.

Abū al-Layth **al-Samarqandī** (d. 373/983), who was a Ḥanafite jurist and a theologian, relies largely on tradition in his commentary entitled *Baḥr al-ʿUlūm*.[121] In his comment on 2:117 he discusses the state of things that are commanded to be and presents three opinions about it:

> In which state does He decree it to be? Is it in the state of its non-existence or in its state of existence? If it is in its state of non-existence, it is not possible to command while there is no commanded, as it is impossible to be commanded in the absence of a commander. If it is in its state of existence, it is impossible to command it to be existent, because it is already existent (*mawjūdun, ḥādithun*). On this subject there are three opinions:
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> (1) It is information from God about His power of command over His existent creatures (*khalqihi al-mawjūd*), as in the verse *an yakūnū qirādatan*. This verse cannot be valid for the creation of the non-existents (*ījād al-maʿdūmāt*).
>
> (2) God is all-knowing of what is existent before its existence. The things which did not exist are in His knowledge. Before their existence they are like the things existent, and they can be said to be. Thus, God commands them to come out of the state of non-existence to the state of existence. However, their imagination and knowledge in the state of non-existence belongs to God.
>
> (3) This is information from God and it is general about what He brings into existence (*yuḥdithu*) and creates (*yukawwinu*). When He decrees its creation, it exists (*kāna wa wujida*)...[122]

In his comment on 3:59 al-Samarqandī starts by reporting on the discussion of the Christians of Najran with the Prophet. He then says "'created him from dust' (*turāb*) means gave him shape (*ṣawwarahu*), and when He said him to be, he became a human being (*basharan*). The difference between the creations of the two is that God created

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[121] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān."
[122] al-Samarqandī, v. 1, 178-79.

Adam from dust but not Jesus, and the similarity is He created Jesus without father as He did create Adam without father and mother."[123]

In his comment on 36:82 al-Samarqandī interprets the first part of the verse, *innamā amruhu idhā arāda shay'an*, as the decree of resurrection, and the second part of it, *an yaqūla lahu kun-fa-yakūn*, as creation.[124]

He interprets the face of God as referring to His power and the deeds done for His sake. On 28:88 he writes: "Every deed (*'amal*) will perish, there is no reward (*thawāb*) for it, except for ones that are done for the sake (*wajh*) of God. Everything is changeable other than His power/authority (*mulkuhu*), His *mulk* does neither change nor perish eternally."[125]

According to al-Samarqandī the object of the command must be something contingent, existing in God's knowledge. God knows the thing that will come into being before it does so. No thing is existent before the Divine command, yet it is an object of God's knowledge before its coming into being.

Abū al-Ḥasan **al-Māwardī** (d. 450/1058), the great Shāfi'ite jurist of Baghdad, wrote an accurate and brief commentary entitled *al-Nukāt wa al-'Uyūn*. On verse 6:73 he reports two opinions about the creative command of God, *kun-fa-yakūn*, i.e., that it is: "(1) for the day of resurrection, (2) a decree that the heavens be a trumpet blown for the time of doomsday."[126] On 36:82 al-Māwardī says that there are two aspects to the creative command:

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[123] al-Samarqandī, v. 1, 273.
[124] al-Samarqandī, v. 3, 107.
[125] al-Samarqandī, v. 2, 529.
[126] al-Māwardī, v. 2, 74.

(1) It means that He commands and it exists (*fa-yūjadu*). (2) Qatāda says that: there is no thing lighter (*akhaff*) and easier (*ahwan*) than the word *kun* in the Arabic language. God gave this as an example of His swift decree.[127]

Al-Māwardī does not deal with the ontological status of things that are commanded to be. He explains the Divine command as God's creative activity which brings things into existence and as His act to accomplish resurrection. He also writes that God creates with His word *ḥaqq*.[128]

In his comment on 42:11 al-Māwardī says there are two aspects of the verse: (1) there is nothing like man and woman, (2) there is nothing like God.[129] For him the verse does not indicate that God is a thing; rather, it differentiates between God and all the other creatures. For the face of God al-Māwardī provides six interpretations in his comment on 28:88: (1) "except for" Him (2) "except for" what is done for His sake, (3) "except for" His *mulk*, (4) "except for" the *'ulamā*, since their knowledge is enduring/everlasting, (5) "except for" His Glory, and (6) "except for" His deed.[130]

Abū Ja'far **al-Ṭūsī** (d. 460/1067), the author of *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, was a Shī'ite and Mutazilite, and dealt in his commentary with the variant readings of the Qur'ān, grammatical or philological explanations, and offered moderate points of view on passages of particular interest to the Shī'ites.[131]

In his comment on 2:117, after arguing the philological points of the verse, he says that *qaḍā* means *khalaqa*, *ḥakama* or *ḥatama*, and then interprets the meaning of

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[127] al-Māwardī, v. 5, 34.
[128] al-Māwardī, on 44:39, v. 5, 256.
[129] al-Māwardī, v. 5, 194.
[130] al-Māwardī, v. 4, 273.
[131] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."

"to decree a thing" as having two meanings: "(1) *Idhā qaḍā amran*: creates (*khalaqa*)

amr; (2) fulfilled, finished (*ḥakama/ḥatama*) the *amr*." For the meaning of *kun-fa-yakūn*

he says: "(1) Easiness of the work (*fi'l*) to God; (2) a sign to the angels that God says

'know that I am creating an *amr*.'" After discussing some views he states that God

creates things and they exist (*muḥdith*), and that the verse denies that God has a son.[132]

On 36:82 he states that "the meaning of this verse is the information about the

easiness of the act (*fi'l*) for God. When he wills/decrees the act (*fi'l*) of a thing, He does

so by saying to a thing that it be in the present state (*fi-l-ḥāl*)."[133]

As maintained by al-Tūsī, the purpose of the Divine command is to show that

God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. God

creates things by His command and these things exist at the time the command is given,

hence, they are not existent before the Divine command. According to al-Tūsī, God is

not a thing. In his comment on 6:19 he says that:

> God cannot be defined (*yuwaṣṣafu*) as *shay'* (thing). Because if it is like this the
> verse does not make any sense. As in the case of a person who asks "which
> person is the most trustful?" and is told "Jibrā'īl," yet Jibrā'īl is not a person but
> an angel. "*Ayyu shay'in akbaru shahādatan*" is a complete sentence, and "*qul
> Allāh*" is an inception (*ibtidā*) not an answer. Even if it was an answer the
> following part of the verse "*shahīdun baynī wa baynakum*" is not an inception
> and it does not have a meaning.[134]

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[132] al-Tūsī, v. 1, 427-434.
[133] al-Tūsī, v. 8. 479.
[134] al-Tūsī, v. 4, 99.

Ibn Mas'ūd **al-Baghawī** (d. 516/1122) was a traditionalist and a commentator of

the Qur'ān. His work, entitled *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, is a medium-seized commentary, most

of whose material is drawn from the commentary of al-Tha'labī (427/1035), the author

of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* -- a specialist on the readings of the Qur'ān, a traditionist, a

commentator of the Qur'ān, and a man of letters. However, al-Baghawī was criticized

for drawing too much material from biblical and other legends.[135]

In his comment on 3:59, after reporting on the discussion of the Christians of

Najran with the Prophet, he says that the verse is about the creation of Jesus without a

father (like Adam), and concludes that: "there is no bringing into existence (*takwīn*) after

creation. Its meaning is that He created and informed you that: I said to him, be, and he

was, without any arrangement (*tartīb*) in the creation, as happens in birth (*wilāda*)."[136]

In his comment on 6:73, al-Baghawī states that the verse refers to: (1) the

creation of the heavens and the earth; (2) doomsday with an indication of the speed of

the process of resurrection and *sā'ah* (hour).[137]

According to al-Baghawī, in performing Jesus' origination without a father, God

informs all His creatures that He is the One who is the Creator of everything and the one

Who ordains life and death. He interprets *kun-fa-yakūn* as the creative activity of God in

general and resurrection in particular. He does not go into metaphysical issues, such as

the ontological status of pre-existing things: his main concern is to point to God's

creative activity in general, and to the fact that the resurrection will come true.

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[135] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[136] al-Baghawī, v. 1, 309.
[137] al-Baghawī, v. 2, 107.

Jār Allāh **al-Zamakhsharī** (d. 538/1144), was a Muʻtazilite grammarian, commentator, man of letters, and author of *al-Kashshāf ʻan Ḥaqāʼiq al-Tanzīl wa ʻUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Taʼwīl*, which has long been considered a model of Muʻtazilite exegesis. However, his reputation rests on his profound analyses in grammar, philology, rhetoric, and literary criticism, rather than his Muʻtazilism.[138]

In his comment on 2:117, al-Zamakhsharī says that "whatever God decrees and wills to be, comes into being (*yatakawwanu*), it comes into existence (*taḥta al-wujūd*) without hesitation."[139] In his comment on 3:59, regarding the discussion between Byzantine Christian captives and their Muslim captor,[140] he states that "Creation without a father or a mother (in Adam's case) is to find external existence which is out of continual habit (*al-ʻāda mustamirra*)." On 16:40 al-Zamakhsharī says that:

> *Kun-fa-yakūn* means *ḥudūth* (coming into being), *wujūd* (existence). If We want the existence of a thing We say "*Uḥduth!*" (Come into being!), and it does so (*yaḥduth*) right after the command and does not stop... The thing connot disobey Him, its existence in God's will (*irāda*) cannot be stopped... If to create every *maqdūr* (creature) is very easy for God, then how can the resurrection escape His decree?[141]

In his comment on 36:82 he argues the subject in more detail:

> "*Innamā amruhu*: His business (*shaʼnuhu*). *Idhā arāda shayʼan*: when the Commander (*dāʻi*) wisely calls/commands (*daʻāhu*) its being (*takwīnihi*) there is no way to escape. *An yaqūla lahu kun*: to compose/create (*yukawwinahu*) without hesitation. *Fa-yakūn*: happens to be (*fa-yaḥduth*). It means it is absolutely a being (*kāʼin*), and existent (*mawjūd*). If you ask the truth about His

[138] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʼān."
[139] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 1, 181.
[140] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 1, 367.
[141] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 2, 606.

word *kun-fa-yakūn*, you are told that: it is a figure of speech (*majāz*), because no thing can avoid it among beings (*min al-mukawwanāt*), and when the decree of the Commander comes, it takes place."[142]

On 40:68 he states that God creates without *kulfat* or other means, and says that the verse indicates God's power in giving life and death.[143]

In his comment on 6:19 he says that "the term *shay'* replaces witness."[144] According to him *wajhuhu* in 28:88 means Himself (*iyyāhu/dhāt*),[145] and states that 42:11 serves to negate the similarity of anything to God's essence.[146]

For him, things are not existent before the Divine command,[147] which indicates that when God decrees a thing it exists at the moment He wills for it. He also holds that the command and obedience are not to be taken literally, for they signify the instantaneous fulfillment of His decree.

He defines the verb *khalaqa* as "to mold, to shape or to measure" in various passages,[148] and interprets the dust as constituting the origin of each human being. For example he writes on 71:14 that:

> ...Created you in stages: first created you as dust then as sperm, then as clot, then as blod clot (*mudgha*), then as bones and muscles, and then created you (*ansha'akum*) with another creation ...[149]

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[142] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 4, 31.

[143] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 4, 178.

[144] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 2, 11.

[145] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 3, 437.

[146] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 4, 213.

[147] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 3, 7.

[148] See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, on 2:21, he says that *khalaqa* means *ījād al-shay' 'alā taqdīrin wa istawā* (to originate a thing according to a measure or to give shape), v. 1, 91, on 3:59, v. 1, 368.

[149] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 4, 618.

He explains the word *haqq* as "an intent," "a definite purpose," "wisdom" or "justice."[150] He also writes in his comment on 4:171 "...The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle and His word (*kalimatuhu*) which He cast into Mary: a spirit from Him..." that *kalimatuhu* means God's word or command because God brought him into existence with His word and command.[151]

Abū 'Alī **al-Ṭabarsī** (d. 548/1153), who had a Shī'ite and Mutazilite outlook owes a considerable debt to al-Ṭūsī in his commentary entitled *Tafsīr al-Bayān*.[152] On 2:117 he states "it is said He decreed being of an *amr* [...] and also said that it means *hakama/hatama*." Then he reports three arguments about *kun-fa-yakūn,* and after weighing them refutes the third one: "(1) Easiness of the work for God; (2) God informs the angels, (3) Some say that non-existent things are known to God, and that with His command they come into existence."[153] In his comment on 3:47 al-Ṭabarsī writes:

> There are two opinions about the meaning of this verse: (1) That it informs (us) of the speed of God's will in everything that He wills to be without a fixed period of time, need (*mu'āna*), difficulty (*takalluf*), cause and means. It is expressed with the word be, because there is nothing faster than the phrase *kun-fa-yakūn* that penetrates man's imagination. (2) That it is a word that God wanted to make a sign for the angels. [...][154]

On 3:59 he states that "although Adam's creation is stranger than Jesus' in that he was created without mother and father, why do you deny the creation of Jesus without a father?" He created (*nasha'a*) him with His command 'Be!' and he was a

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[150] See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, on 14:19, v. 2, 547, on 64:3, v. 4, 546.
[151] al-Zamakhsharī, v. 1, 593.
[152] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[153] al-Ṭabarsī, v. 1, 438.
[154] al-Ṭabarsī, v. 3, 83.

living human being (*bashar*).[155] On 36:82 al-Ṭabarsī says "This informs us of the coming to be (*ḥudūth*) of something that God wills/decrees."[156]

For the face of God, al-Ṭabarsī (28:88) gives two possible meanings: (1) *dhāt*, Himself, (2) a deed for His sake.[157]

Ibn **al-Jawzī** (d. 597/1200) was a Baghdadi Ḥanbalite traditionist, preacher, and man of letters. In his commentary, *Zād al-Maṣīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, he gives more attention to the Qur'ānic readings and reduces the chains of transmission to the first figure.[158] On 6:73 he presents three opinions as to the definition of *kun-fa-yakūn*:

> (1) Doomsday, (2) what happens on doomsday, (3) the trumpet and what is mentioned indicating a trumpet. Rajāj said that doomsday is particular to the speed of creating a thing to indicate the speed of the act of resurrection.[159]

Ibn al-Jawzī asks in his comment on 16:40: "How a thing can be named a thing before its existence? The answer is that a thing is in God's knowledge before its creation."[160] According to him, God creates things with His command, and those things are in His knowledge before they come into being or they exist simultaneously with the giving of existence (by God's creative command). The purpose of the *kun-fa-yakūn* passages is to show that the resurrection will take place and that God has the power to do so, just as He created everything with His word or command at the beginning.

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[155] al-Ṭabarsī, v. 3, 100.
[156] al-Ṭabarsī, v. 22 , 43-4.
[157] al-Ṭabarsī, v. 20, 330.
[158] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[159] al-Jawzī, v. 3, 68.
[160] al-Jawzī, v. 4, 447.

Fakhr al-Dīn **al-Rāzī** (d. 606/1210), the Shāfiʿite jurist and Ashʿarite theologian, is an important representative of the commentators who was also *mutakallim*. The distinctive feature of his commentary, entitled *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, is its long philosophical and theological discussions on several matters. It certainly contains references to previous interpretations, after discussing which al-Rāzī always concludes with his own.[161]

On 2:117 he writes: "*qaḍā* means *khalq, amr, ḥukm, ikhbār, firāgh min al-shay'*." After discussing different aspects of the verse he reports four different interpretations and choses the first one as the best. These four opinions are: (1) the speed and power of God to create things, (2) a sign to angels, (3) particular to the created beings, (4) decree of death to alive ones and decree of life to dead ones.[162]

In his comment on 3:59 al-Rāzī starts, like other commentators, by observing that the verse was revealed on the occasion of the delegation of Najran. He then presents some arguments and counter arguments. In the fourth one he says that "when God says 'He created him from dust and told him to be and he is,' it entails that the creation of Adam precedes His command 'Be!' which is not possible." He then reports two different approaches to the phrase *kun-fa-yakūn*:

> (1) Abū Muslim said that: We explained that creation is *al-taqdīr* and *al-taswiya* (to shape or to mould) and it refers to God's knowledge. Its how-ness (*kayfiyya*), its happening (*wuqūʿihi*), and His will/decree for it to happen in a particular way (*ʿalā wajh makhṣūṣ*); and all this precedes the existence of Adam without beginning or end (*taqdīman min al-azal ilā al-abad*). *Kun* is an expression of coming into being/existence, so it has been proved (*thabata*) that the creation of Adam precedes God's word *kun*.

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[161] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[162] al-Rāzī, v. 4, 25-8.

(2) al-Qāḍī said "regarding the idea that God created Adam from dust (turāb), then declared him to be, which means gave him life, and that Adam was not existent when he was created from dust," this is weak because he not only consisted of body (jism), but rather had another special personality (huwiyyah)...[163]

On 6:73 he says that the day here refers to doomsday, and that God is the creator of the world and everything in it. He is the creator of the doomsday and resurrection and He is the One who returns spirits to the bodies, by way of His decree kun-fa-yakūn.[164] In his comment on 19:35 he writes that:

> Some people who interpret the verse on the basis of its outward meaning say that when God brings a thing into existence, He says kun. This is weak, because He either says to a thing kun before its existence, or in its state of existence. In the first case it means that God addresses a non-existent (al-maʿdūm) and this is absurd. In the second case the thing is already existent by His power and will: what then is the meaning of His word kun? Some people thought that the meaning of the word kun is creation (al-takhlīq wa al-takwīn). To have power (al-qudrah) is something, to bring a thing into existence (al-takwīn) is another... kun indicates takwīn.[165]

On 36:82 al-Rāzī reports that:

> (1) The Muʿtazila said that this verse indicates that al-maʿdūm (non-existent) is a thing. This is because He says kun-fa-yakūn when He wills, and before the decree 'it is not.' So in this state it is a thing, since He said Innamā amruhu idhā arāda shay'an. The answer is: this is an explanation of the non-existence of the thing ('adam al-takhalluf al-shay') in connection with the decree of God. The word idhā is a concept (mafhūm) of instant and time; and the verse is an

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[163] al-Rāzī, v. 8, 76.
[164] al-Rāzī, v. 13, 31.
[165] al-Rāzī, v. 21, 218.

indication of the decree of a thing at the time of connection of the decree with the thing. There is no indication in the verse that it is a thing before the time He decrees. When His decree connects with a thing, the thing happens to be or is existent (*mawjūd*). Neither does He decree it in time nor does it happen in another time. Instead, it is at the time of connection with His decree. Therefore, the thing is existent, but not non-existent. It cannot be asked how He decrees existence when it is already existent, or if this is a creation (*ījād*) for the existent. We say that this is the problem of intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) and we will answer it in its subject. Our aim is to cancel their affiliation with the literal meaning of the word (*lafẓ*). It became clear that He decrees what is a thing at the time He decrees it. There is nothing in the verse indicating that He decrees a thing which is existent before His decree.

(2) The *Karāmiyyah* said that God's will is created (*muḥdathah*) and that *idhā arāda* has two aspects: (1) Since He created time for the will, then time and everything that temporal is existent (*ḥādith*). (2) God connected His will to His word be, and be is connected with the being (*kawn*) and its happening to be (*wuqū'uhu*), because God says 'it is' with the particle *fa, fa-ta'qīb*. Yet, being (*kawn*) is existent; and what is before creation is connected to existent. Philosophers agreed with them in this problem from another aspect, and they said that His will is connected with His command (*amr*) and His command is connected with being; but His will is without beginning (*qadīmah*), and being (*kawn*) is *qadīm*, His creatures are *qadīmah*. The answer to the wrong doers (*ḍāllīn*), who clings to the literal meaning of the word (*lafẓ*), is the meaning of *idhā arāda* from the aspect of language is: *arāda* is a verb in past tense. When *idhā* comes before past tense makes its meaning future. We say that the meaning of our word is, *arāda-yurīdu, 'alima-ya'lamu*, which can be said to bring into existence. We say that the attribute of *qadīm* is for God. It is the will and this attribute that when connected with a thing, we say He willed/decreed or wills/decrees. Before the connection, we do not say *arāda*, but we say He has *irādah*, and with it He is the one who has will (*murīd*)... *irāda* is *amrun thābitun*

and if connected with existence of a thing we say He willed/decreed existence of it, or wills...[166]

In his comment on 40:68 he states that:

(1) He does not get tired of and does not need anything to fulfill His power in the *kā'ināt* and *muḥdathāt*. (2) States of transition in the creation of human being is a gradual progress, but the connection of the *jawhar* of the human's spirit exists once. It is the creation of the spirit. (3) Creation of the first human being was with the command then it continued from human being to human being.[167]

According to al-Rāzī, creation operates with the Divine command. By His decree God animates matter, as in the case of resurrection when He returns the spirits to the bodies. About the ontological status of things al-Rāzī explicitly denies their being existent before God's creative command, and says that things exist simultaneously with God's command. They are like intelligibles that exist in God's knowledge. For him, to think of *shay'* as non-existent does not lead to the conclusion that God has no knowledge of things before their concrete existence. In other words, the coming into being of a thing does not indicate a change in God's knowledge.[168]

al-Rāzī says that "the objective of verse 6:19 may be either to point out that God is the witness of prophecy of Muhammad or is the witness of His one-ness."[169] So, for him God is not a thing. He cites three opinions on 42:11: (1) No thing from the aspect of its essence is equal to God's essence (*dhātiyyatihi*); (2) there is nothing like Him in the way of exaggeration; (3) it is the negation of any similarity (*mithl*).[170]

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[166] al-Rāzī, v. 26, 110-1.
[167] al-Rāzī, v. 27, 86.
[168] See, for example, al-Rāzī, v. 6, 3-4.
[169] al-Rāzī, v. 12, 175.
[170] al-Rāzī, v. 27, 150-159.

In his comment on 19:67, by stating that "'Is He, who created you from nothing, not capable of giving life after your death?' ... This is the proof of resurrection, and the idea of 'non-existence is a thing' is a weak (*da'if*) idea to infer from this verse."[171] al-Rāzī sustains the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Abū al-Barakāt **al-Nasafī** (d. 710/1310) was a Ḥanafite jurist and theologian. His commentary, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl*, may be considered in part a shortened version of those by al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, while having an orthodox Sunni stance.[172] In his comment on 2:117 he writes: "*qaḍā* means *ḥakama/qaddara*. This is *majāz* about the speed of creation."[173] On 16:40 al-Nasafī states that it means *ḥuduth*, *wujūd*, the speed of creation (*ījād*), the easiness of every creation.[174]

He holds that the command is a metaphor and a symbol and that it explains the instantaneous fulfillment of God's will; in other words, it is a metaphor that signifies the immediacy of the fulfillment of God's will/decree. He creates things by His command. He does not speak of the ontological status of pre-existing things; rather he explains the Divine command as an indicator of God's power, His creative activity and being All-sufficient to accomplish whatever He wills.

As for the word *ḥaqq*, he interprets it as God's wisdom, a definite purpose or justice.[175] According to him, creation with the *ḥaqq*, thus, means that God creates with wisdom and with a purpose.

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[171] al-Rāzī, v. 21, 241.
[172] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[173] al-Nasafi, v. 1, 78.
[174] al-Nasafi, v. 1, 681.
[175] al-Nasafi, on 64:3, v. 2, 690.

Ibn 'Umar **al-Baydāwī** (d. 716/1316) was a Shāfi'ite jurist and a theologian. In his work entitled *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrar al-Ta'wīl* al-Baydāwī, to a great extent, follows al-Zamakhsharī and treats variant readings and issues of grammar more than the latter did. However, being a Sunni *mutakallim*, he removes al-Zamakhsharī's Mu'tazilite views. His commentary has often been regarded as the most popular commentary of the Qur'ān. Used for instruction in *madrasas*, it has been subject of many glosses.[176]

In his comment on 6:73 he states that Day (*al-yawm*) refers to time when God creates things and brings them into existence, or it refers to the time when Doomsday happens, bringing dead ones together at the moment of resurrection.[177]

He writes on 19:9 that "you were a pure (*sirf*) non-existent... This is the proof that non-existent is not a thing."[178] He interprets the verb *khalaqa* as "to mold, to shape or to measure" in various passages,[179] and says in others that *khalaqa* means to initiate what had no previous existence, and insists that *khalaqa* means to bring something into existence out of non-existence. For him God created the heavens and the earth from "nothing".[180]

Concerning the creation of human beings al-Baydāwī states in his comment on 71:14 that the first of the stages is inorganic or dust and that the others are sperm, a blood clot and the other materials stated in the Qur'ān. Like al-Zamakhsharī, since the common ancestor of the race was created out of it, he interprets dust (*turāb*) as the origin of each human being:

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[176] Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān."
[177] al-Baydāwī, v. 2, 298.
[178] al-Baydāwī, v. 2, 577.
[179] al-Baydāwī, on 2:21, v. 1, 33, on 3:59 he states that *khalaqa* means *qallaba* (gave shape), v. 1, 158.
[180] See, al-Baydāwī, on 40:57, v. 2, 214.

...created them first as elements, then as combinations (*murakkabāt*), as a mixture , then as a sperm, then as a clot, then as a blood clot (*muḍgha*), then as bones and muscles, and then originated them (*ansha'ahum*) with another creation. This means that God can repeat this another time.[181]

He interprets *ḥaqq* as God's wisdom, a definite purpose, justice or an end in view.[182] In his comment on 6:73 he says that *al- ḥaqq* is His word.[183] Thus, in addition to its meaning as wisdom, the word *ḥaqq* also represents the word of God or His creative command.[184]

As seen above, some commentators do not deal with the question of the ontological status of pre-existing things while others, whether they agree with it or not, report the views held on the verse. The commentators surveyed here elaborated no formal theory of the ontological status of things. That is to say, even though some of the explanations that are offered for *shay'* may be taken to suggest a restricted definition of what *shay'* is, no theory is set forth and none can be posited on the evidence of the texts that we have examined. They merely reflect the theological or philosophical discussions of the time period rather than originating them. The gradual adaptation of the theological and philosophical terms and discussions by the *mufassirūn* is an illustration of the mutual relationship between *tafsīr*, *kalām*, and *falsafa*, at least on the level of terminology. On the basis of our analyses of some passages of the *tafsīr*s, we have tried

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[181] al-Bayḍāwī, v. 2, 359.
[182] See, for example, al-Bayḍāwī, on 14:19, v. 1, 489, on 44:39, v. 2, 247, on 45:22, v. 2, 251, on 64:3, v. 2, 336.
[183] al-Bayḍāwī, v. 1, 296.
[184] O'Shaughnessy, 51.

to display how the *mufassirūn* speak of creation and existence and what kind of existence they seem to recognize.

They sometimes used different verses of the Qur'ān to justify their own ideas by an interpretative reading of the text, and for this reason Al-Alousi says that the method of *ta'wīl*, metaphorical interpretation, was used by all schools.[185] For example they interpreted the Divine command as being in favor of their doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. According to the *mufassirūn*, things arise from nothingness by God's creative command. It is questionable, however, whether the Qur'ān does teach creation from nothing. To be created out of nothing is simply not to be created out of anything. If to be created is to be given existence, then to what existence is given if there is nothing there to give it to? To give existence to nothing is not to give existence to anything, and thus not to create at all.

Notwithstanding the fact that the *mufassirūn* interpret "when he was nothing" as "when he was absolutely non-existent," the verses mentioned do not speak clearly of creation from nothing.[186] In fact, they are open to another interpretation, as O'Shaughnessy rightly points out: "God molded the creature when it was nothing of what it is now (*nihil sui*), but was something entirely different in kind, like clay or dust."[187] Furthermore we read in 13:5 that human beings will be dust once again at the final resurrection before the second creation.[188] What is involved here is creation not from absolute but from relative non-existence, from a condition when the human body did not exist as such but existed only potentially as dust or clay. The *kun-fa-yakūn*

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[185] Al-Alousi, 84.
[186] Arnaldez, "Khalk."
[187] O'Shaughnessy, 4.
[188] Cf. Q., 23:35, 82; 27:67; 37:16, 53; 50:3; 56:47.

passages which we have examined also exclude the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, for in none of them is absolute nothingness a necessary prerequisite for God's creative activity. Verse 3:59 is a significant passage which points to a characteristic of other *kun-fa-yakūn* references. It affirms that God first created Jesus and then said to him 'Be!' and he was. In this passage God's command does not bring forth the thing; rather, the command vivifies the inanimate body of the first man which is produced from dust. Thus, it seems to be a pre-existing matter to which God addresses his command.

Badi' is also of significance because the contexts in which this word is used, especially in connection with others that speak of the creation of the heavens and the earth, indicate that *badi'* means to create out of something. For example, in 41:11 the Qur'ān clearly states that the heavens were created out of smoke. Furthermore, the passages that contain the verb *khalaqa* or its derivatives appear to, in effect, rule out creation *ex nihilo*, while the etymological meaning of *khalaqa* denotes creation from something. The attempts of the *mufassirūn* to interpret the word in favor of creation *ex nihilo* reflect the influences of the theological outlook of a comparatively later time period.[189] The commentators tend to agree that the creation took place out of water, and that God created the water itself *ex nihilo*. Yet, they differ in which object was first created, some holding that it was the throne, and others that it was the water.[190]

In this chapter we have attempted to assemble the data that may tell us something about the questions raised by the Qur'ānic text and the naturalization of the philosophical discussions elsewhere by the *mufassirūn*. First we have looked at some controversial verses of the Qur'ān and brought together the *kun-fa-yakūn* passages and

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[189] Al-Alousi, 22.
[190] Al-Alousi, 28.

the relevant verses about the creation of human beings and heavens and the earth. Then we tried to show that the teachings of the Qur'ān about God and His creative act play a crucial role in the evolution of the term *wujūd*. Finally, we looked at the comments of the *mufassirūn* on the relevant passages in order to see how they explain the ontological status of pre-existing things, how they speak of creation, and what they understand by creation with *ḥaqq*.

Conclusion

The present study makes no attempt to examine the ontological doctrine of the Qur'ān in a philosophical sense, for no book of revelation can be reduced to a philosophical system. In other words, scriptures do not offer philosophy. Yet they have a dominant idea that explains the world of beings and that may give rise to the development of philosophical or theological systems. The aim of a critical analysis such as ours is to display the influence of the teachings of the Qur'ān on the one hand, and how the *mufassirūn* dealt with the passages that raise ontological questions on the other. If our analysis has been sometimes obscure it is because the Qur'ān is not explicit on some issues and the *mufassirūn* are not concerned with displaying a consistent ontological system. Moreover, we have not been able to examine all the relevant passages in the Qur'ān or all the questions raised in and by the *tafsīrs*. Nevertheless, we hope that we have been able to present the place and role of the *mufassirūn* and their efforts, and thereby the teachings of the Qur'ān in the intellectual history of Islam.

We shall now give a brief summary of the points raised in the present study. In the first part we tried to examine some of the ontological vocabulary of the Qur'ān and to show that these concepts are of significance in terms of their being the crucial elements of Islamic metaphysics in general. Indeed, all the ontological questions turn on these concepts. We confined ourselves only to their basic meanings and their usage in the Qur'ān, and pointed out that these concepts became comparatively more sophisticated over the course of time. This fact became clear when we investigated the meanings of some of these concepts in the Qur'ān commentaries. On the basis of our limited examination of certain specific concepts, we have seen that, although the task of

the commentators was to explain each word and phrase of the Qur'ān, they reduced the different meanings of different words to the one that best fit their theological stance, taking away from the more nuanced meanings of some of the most important terms. For example, it is with the development of *kalām* and *falsafa* that one finds extensive discussions about the act of creation from nothing, which does not occur in the Qur'ān.

In the second part, after identifying the relevant passages of the Qur'ān, we reported the comments of the *mufassirūn* on God's creative command, which is the pivotal point of Qur'ānic ontology, and discussed and analyzed these in some detail. Indeed, this command is depicted in the Qur'ān as the very basis of the world's existence. The entire ontological structure of the world turns upon it, and no part of this ontology is understandable without reference to the creative command of God, *kun*. So, by discussing some problems relating to this command we have tried to understand how *mufassirūn* understood the ontological status of things and the Divine act of creation.

Our conclusions can be classified under three headings: (1) the ontological status of things before they come into concrete existence; (2) creation *ex nihilo* or out of something; and (3) the role of the teachings of the Qur'ān in the development of Islamic intellectual history, on the one hand, and the introduction and naturalization of philosophical discussions in the Qur'ān commentaries, on the other.

(1) The first object of God's command is the thing which with His command comes into existence. The things commanded may be said to be in a state of potentiality before they come into existence. They are given concrete existence by the Divine command. What we learn about the state of things from the Qur'ān is that, they ontologically speaking, occupy a position between God and the world of sensible things.

We can say that they are in a state of non-existence in the sense that they are not endowed with concrete individual existence in this world. In other words, they do have a particular existence, and so we cannot say that they are non-existent in an absolute sense.[191]

The *mufassirūn* in general assert that God creates with His command and that things either exist in God's knowledge before they come into being or exist at the time the command is given by God. They say that things are not existent before God's creative command, and hold that command and obedience are metaphors signifying the immediacy of the fulfillment of God's will. However, these things are, according to the *mufassirūn*, in God's knowledge as intelligibles existing in the Divine consciousness. God knows each thing before it exists concretely, and on the basis of this knowledge God exercises His will and with the creative command bestows existence.

(2) It seems that with the bestowal of existence, creation operates and all the events that occur in this world are dependent on what is decreed by God. Ontologically every thing exists by the creative command of God, and as concrete individual things they are now qualified by existence.

Since the *mufassirūn* maintain that there is no pre-existing thing and that things come to exist only by the creative command of God, they assert that God creates from nothing. By assembling the relevant verses about the creation of human beings, the heavens and the earth, we have tried to show that, despite some arguments to the contrary, the Qur'ān does not speak of creation *ex nihilo*, but of creation out of

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[191] Thing or entity is an object that lacks spatiotemporal properties, but supposed to have being, to exist, or to subsist. They are sometimes collected under the category of universals. Historically, entities are associated with Plato's ontology of Ideas or Forms. For Plato, these are the abstract and only real entities, instantiated by spatiotemporal objects in the phenomenal world. Aristotle denied the independent existent of abstract entities, and redefined Forms as the seconday substances that inhere in primary substances.

something. By our examination of the word *ḥaqq* and its usage in relation to creation we pointed to the fact, as the *mufassirūn* themselves did, that God's creation through *ḥaqq* is also indicative of His creative command, *kun*. Next we tried to show how creative command of God and the doctrine of creation depicted in the Qur'ān had an important effect on the development of the term *wujūd*, which denotes both particular existence and Pure Being. It is hardly necessary to emphasize how important a role the concept of *wujūd* has played in the intellectual tradition, which stretches from the early period of Islam through the classical period and down into modern thought.

(3) Finally, it has been our intention to emphasize the fact that the Qur'ānic text itself is one of the main sources of the philosophical discussions on the one hand, and to underline the position of *tafsīr*s in the intellectual history of Islam and their mutual relationship with other disciplines, such as *kalām* and *falsafa*, on the other. On the basis of the data we have examined, it seems that the teachings of the Qur'ān had an important role in the formation of the ontological arguments of both *kalām* and *falsafa* schools. Indeed, the teachings of the Qur'ān on creation play a crucial role in all areas of Islamic thought, such as, for example, in *kalām*, where they constitute the very starting-point of all discussion. In fact, the Qur'ān and its commentaries were from the very beginning of central concern to the *mutakallimūn*, while the language of the Qur'ān had a deep influence on the formation and development of *kalām*, not to mention its importance to the grammatical and lexical structure of Arabic. Yet theological or philosophical discussions done elsewhere gradually infiltrated the *tafsīr*s and they became naturalized in them. As we stated in the introduction, *tafsīr*s are understudied resources for the intellectual history of Islam: they reflect the discussions of the time of their composition

and deserve to be scrutinized in order to see how those philosophical problems were dealt within a religious genre.

The scope of the study is narrowly restricted to the questions which appeared most essential and which are treated most extensively in the texts themselves. Analysis of some aspects of the questions has not been attempted due to limitations of time and space. On many points, no doubt, the present study is too restricted and incomplete, and will have to be revised. Nevertheless, we hope that it represents a modest contribution to a better understanding of the history of ideas in the structure of Islamic thought, and that it may serve to place the study of *tafsīr*s in a different light.

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