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The Qurʾān and the Future of Islamic Analytic Theology

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Abstract: Islamic analytic theology emerges into an uncharted territory that is dominated by two loosely defined areas: analytic philosophy and analytic theology. As a nascent field, this article argues that for Islamic analytic theology to move forward, it needs to place the Qurʾān at its centre. To have a clear understanding of our terms, I begin by attempting a definition of Islamic analytic theology. Taking a normative approach to the subject, I consolidate the discussion with five methodical questions. Firstly, what has been going on in Islamic theology? (The descriptive task). Secondly, why has this been going on? (The interpretative task). Thirdly, what ought to be going on? (The normative task). Fourthly, how might we, as Muslim theologians, respond? (The pragmatic task). Fifthly, why should Muslim theologians conduct analytic theology? (The functional task). To situate Islamic analytic theology within this wider discussion, I end the article by offering some insights on how Islamic analytic theology relates to old *Kalām*. By the end of the article, we will have laid the groundwork showing the way forward for a more developed Islamic analytic theology.

Keywords: Qurʾān; Islamic analytic theology; descriptive; interpretative; normative; pragmatic; functional

1. Introductory Caveats

Firstly, I embark on this subject as a "Muslim theologian" (whereby normativity is most overt and most intrinsic). However, I am cognizant of the challenges that may put the "academic character" of this article and its publication in an academic journal at risk. To slightly offset such challenges and pre-empt such risks, it is worth stating that the duality of normative/prescriptive–descriptive needs not to be mutually exclusive. That is to say that if the acceptance of "revisability" and "criticality" is what essentially distinguishes "academic scholarship" from "theological scholarship", then theological scholarship is not inherently devoid of "revisability" and "criticality". As Thomas A. Lewis argued, the espousal of "critical normativity" in tandem with "revisability" should refute the common claim that theologically-oriented approaches fall short of achieving the academic distance demanded by academic scholarship proper (Thomas A. Lewis 2009, pp. 87–98). Here, I am in affinity with Kevin Schilbrack who wrote, "The criterion for what belongs in the academy is not whether one's inquiries are value-laden—they always will be—but whether those values are open to challenge and critique". (Kevin Schilbrack 2014, p. 192).

Secondly, this article serves as the foundational and methodological basis for a larger project to which I am dedicating much of my future research. The project is a multi-volume one, entitled "The Philosophy of the Qurʾān", aiming to study, philosophically, the five key fields of philosophy (logic, aesthetics, ethics, politics, and metaphysics) from a Qurʾanic perspective.[1]

2. Defining Islamic Analytic Theology

One would be stating the obvious by saying that "defining Islamic analytic theology" is probably the most arduous task here, given that defining "analytic theology" itself has so far been the most challenging task for analytic theologians in general. This is for various

reasons. Firstly, analytic theology, since its emergence, has been "diverse" not only in terms of its usage of reason (substantive or procedural) but also in terms of its methods (application of formal or informal logic to theological matters) as well as its ends (Why should we apply philosophical tools to creedal matters?). Secondly, the subject from within which analytic theology emerged (i.e., analytic philosophy) is in and of itself hardly defined. Aloysius Martinich and E. David Sosa concurred that contemporary analytic philosophy is not only undefined but also that it should not be seen as resting upon any certain set of doctrines or methods (Martinich and Sosa 2001, p. 1). Analytic philosophers have endorsed diametrically opposed conclusions and have used various methods of inquiry, leading Aaron Preston to doubt the philosophical character of analytic philosophy (Aaron Preston 2010, p. 8). Thirdly, and as a result of the previous reasons, the barriers between the fields of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology are not clearly defined yet. With those reasons in mind, we may be chasing a mirage by attempting a definition of Islamic analytic theology at this stage.

However, with the increasing literature on the subject, we are now closer to understanding the general feature of Islamic analytic theology, which may help us have a loose definition. Namely, it is more of "a pluralistic enterprise". Consequently, the definition in and of itself needs to be "pluralistic", which necessarily means that pursuing a "stipulative definition" may be a futile exercise. Alternatively, attempting some "logical division" is perhaps more realistic than attempting a "logical definition". Logical division is a simple method of dividing a class into its sub-classes in order to explain and analyse any of its classes. Aristotelian logic assigns importance to division, so much so that they thought that to define means to divide and vice versa (see Copi and Cohen 1997 and Bhola R. Nath 1984). The key difference between logical definition and logical division lies in that while the former is the analysis of the denotation of a term, the latter is the statement of its connotation. In this type of definition, even without having a precise knowledge of the subject matter, which is being split, we may be certain that the rules of division have been observed (see Robert F. Howton 2010). Hence, with "logical division", we will probably be better positioned to offset the difficulty of establishing a strict logical definition of Islamic analytic theology.

What we mean by "division" in this context is the splitting up of a genus into its constituent species according to a certain principle. Hence, we may say that Islamic analytic theology is, in essence, the attempt to speak philosophically about Islamic creeds in one of two rational modes: procedural and substantive (Crisp 2009, p. 41). In the "substantive mode", philosophical tools are used not only to systematize the "content" of Islamic theology but also to "deduce" theological content. As for the "procedural mode", it does not "produce content" as such but rather is employed as a tool for establishing the logical connections between different premises; for clarity and precision; for distinguishing what we are talking about from what we are not, from being sensical or non-sensical, or for verifying the consistency and validity of our arguments. While the two modes differ in terms of the amount of rationality involved, the two agree on their attempt to implement common-sense theses and explanations (Crisp 2009, p. 41).

It is worth stating that much of the work that has been done so far in Islamic analytic theology has primarily used the "procedural mode". This becomes evident when we look at how the *Islamic Analytic Theology Website* defines Islamic analytic theology. It says: "It [Islamic Analytic Theology] is an approach that attends to the core doctrinal subject matter of Islam, which is God and His relation to creation, while seeking to be exact, precise and clear with language as well as aspiring to produce arguments, analysis, reflection and deliberation with a cogency, coherency and systematisation according to philosophical norms" (see Islamic Analytic Theology 2023). More importantly, the Website uses "Reason Serves Revelation" as its slogan, which indicates the centrality of the "procedural" mode to the Islamic analytic theology project up until now.

3. What Has Been Going on in Islamic Theology?

Given that analytic theology generally attempts to deploy the skills, resources, and virtues of analytic philosophy, I begin by examining some of the most common ways in which Muslim theologians, throughout the centuries, have understood the relationship between philosophy and theology (reason and revelation). Without this historical backdrop, it becomes all too easy to conceptualize the relationship in naïve, anachronistic, and facile ways.

The reason–revelation dichotomy was brought to the fore when Muslim theologians began to engage with foreign systems of knowledge, i.e., Greek philosophy and Christian theology, whereby this dichotomy was already established. In his *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, Yoram Hazony illustrated how the early fathers of the Christian Church adopted this dichotomy as a way of sharpening the discrepancies between the teachings of the New Testament and those of the philosophers with which they competed for converts in late antiquity. However, on the cusp of the Enlightenment, philosophers of the Enlightenment embraced this same dichotomy as a tool with which "to bludgeon the Church, using it to paint Christianity as a purveyor of superstition and irrationality" (Yoram Hazony 2012, p. 1).

With the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement and the cosmopolitan character of early Muslim civilization, the scholarly interaction between the Islamic tradition and those various systems of knowledge reached its peak (see Montgomery W. Watt 1998), and Muslim theologians largely ended up employing this dichotomy in some way or another. The key question that brought this binary to the fore was the perplexing question of God's relationship to the Qurʾān as His word. That is, "whether the Qurʾān, as God's speech, was to be considered an 'attribute' of the divine essence and therefore eternal (*qadīm*) or, rather, separate from God's essence and thus contingent and temporally originated (*muḥdath*)—or, as it was eventually described, 'created' (*makhlūq*)" (Carl Sharif El-Tobgui 2020, p. 35).[2] While the former view attempted to safeguard God's exclusive eternity in the face of Christian claims of Jesus's divinity on the basis of his status as God's word (*kalimat Allāh*), or logos, the latter happened to have stoked the ire of almost all contemporary Muslim scholars. This intellectual and cultural milieu gave rise to two opposing camps: theological "rationalists" and theological "traditionists".[3]

A key school that seems to have made significant use of the reason–revelation dichotomy was the Muʿtazilite school. While this school drew initially on the styles of reasoning and argumentation that had been developed in the indigenous Islamic sciences, they eventually appropriated and incorporated numerous instruments of Greek reasoning and methods of argumentation. Appealing to reason as opposed to revelation, they thought that the Traditionists "have compromised God's unique and incomparable nature by clinging to what they (the Muʿtazila) considered an overly literal and, therefore, overtly anthropomorphic understanding of scripture" (Carl Sharif El-Tobgui 2020, p. 42). Opposing the Muʿtazila, there existed a number of "non-speculative theologians" who eventually came to be most closely associated with the Ḥanbalī school or *ahl al-ḥadīth*, the most influential of whom was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). This school rejected the rational tools of the *Mutakallimūn* (philosophical theologians) and instead insisted on deriving creedal doctrines solely from the scripture. The clash between those two schools came to the fore in the first half of the third/ninth century with the infamous *miḥna*, or "inquisition" (Watt 1998, p. 291), when, during the rule of three successive Abbasid caliphs, scholars were publicly compelled to espouse the Muʿtazilī doctrine that the Qurʾān was "created". This remained the case until the tables were turned against the Muʿtazila when al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861) became the caliph and abandoned the Muʿtazilite creedal system (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 47).

When the *miḥna* was over, a group of theologians emerged in Baghdad to draw a balance between the two camps, with a view to holding the *content* of Ibn Ḥanbal's theology while supporting them with the rationalist *tools* borrowed from Greek philosophy. This was the Ashʿarī school, named after its eponymous founder Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935

or 936), who, even when in the process of an argument, would quote from the scripture, would not only build up a "considerable structure of rational argument" around the verses at hand (Watt 1998, p. 307) but also contended "unapologetically for the legitimacy of systematically defending theological doctrines by means of formal rational argumentation based on the very methods developed and employed by the Muʿtazila, whose substantive theological doctrine he had so resolutely rejected" (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 49). In doing so, al-Ashʿarī claimed that the Qurʾān itself contained the germ of certain rational methods employed by the Muʿtazila, deeming that such methods were "value-neutral" and will not affect the creedal content of the orthodox doctrines, as opposed to Ibn Ḥanbal who deemed this engagement in and of itself a dangerous enterprise (Ramli 2016, p. 219). Such was the horizon around which philosophy began to flirt with theology.

With the Translation Movement, Aristotle's works were rendered into Arabic, acting as precursors to the emergence of the most outstanding Muslim philosophers of the time, most notably al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866), al-Fārābī (d. ca. 339/950), and more prominently Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037). With the dichotomy of reason-vs-revelation lurking in the background, Muslim philosophers and theologians were almost obsessed with the idea of "reconciliation". Al-Kindī attempted this reconciliation by equating philosophy with the Qurʾānic term *ḥikma* (wisdom) and partially by attempting to demonstrate that such rational tools were consistent with Islamic theology (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 55). The two, properly understood, he said, could not truly be antithetical, for they both served the common goal of making accessible to people the knowledge of the True One (*al-Ḥaqq*), God (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 55). Therefore, he espoused the application of philosophical methods to the texts of revelation (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 55), attempting to find solutions from within philosophy to some of the issues being debated in *Kalām*, most notably the question of Divine Oneness in his *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* (On first philosophy), and how it can be reconciled with multitudes of this world (Adamson 2005, pp. 38–39).

Nevertheless, philosophy and *Kalām* remained two separate disciplines until Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) had some sustained attempts to get the two disciplines intertwined (Ayman Shihadeh 2005, p. 175). Key ideas in his genre were appropriated by theologians, most notably his differentiation between essence and existence, between that which is necessary by virtue of itself (*al-wājib bi-dhātihi*), i.e., God, and that which is necessary but by virtue of another (*al-wājib bi-ghayrihi*), i.e., "everything other than God (which is deemed to exist necessarily, albeit by virtue of God and not by virtue of itself)" (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 61). It is under his influence that al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) contended that *naẓar* (independent theological inquiry) is an obligation for the faithful who have reached the age of maturity and is a necessary attempt for their faith to be deemed valid (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 64). Even though al-Ghazālī launched a staunch attack against his philosophy in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), he was arguably Ibn Sīnā's door to have a seminal influence on Islamic theology. In fact, not only did al-Ghazālī represent Ibn Sīnā's window into Islamic theology, but he also presided over the sustained venture of incorporating logic into the Islamic sciences as a whole and not only theology (see Ahmad, ʿAzmi T. Al-Sayyed 1981, Ph.D. diss.). In the introduction of *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl* (The Essentials of Islamic Legal Theory), he argued that "he who does not master [Greek] Logic, cannot be certain of his knowledge" (al-Ghazālī 1997, vol. 1, p. 45 and see also Frank Griffel 2009).

Notwithstanding, this cross-pollination was not a one-way process. That is to say that philosophy also benefitted from its engagement with theology not only in terms of the topics treated but also, as Robert Wisnovsky highlighted in his *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, in terms of their conceptual vocabulary, arguments, examples employed, and sometimes substantive positions adopted (Wisnovsky 2003, pp. 145–60, 227–44). Here, Wisnovsky showed how this cross-pollination manifests in Ibn Sīnā's very distinction between essence and existence, which was taken up by various Muslim theological schools, including Ashʿarism.

Another instrumental figure here is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). In his *Rāzī: Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Jaffer 2015), Tareq Jaffer pointed

out al-Rāzī's venture to found Islamic theology on solid philosophical foundations, embodied not only in his philosophical and theological works but also in his 32-volume Qurʾān commentary, entitled *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Keys of the Unseen). One key motive of this work, argued Jaffer, was to synthesize Islamic revelation with the rich Aristotelian–Avicennian philosophical tradition. Second, to place theology on a firm epistemological footing by basing it on philosophical principles that may put boundaries to possible Qurʾān interpretations. Third, to show that the Qurʾān's method of reasoning goes in line with human discursive reasoning (Jaffer 2015, p. 14).

At this point, even the Ḥanbalī quarters, which are known for being hostile to rationalist theology, began to be engaged in philosophy themselves, most notably Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Although he thought that Ibn Sīnā's reinterpretation of cardinal Islamic doctrines in terms of an independent philosophical system constituted a danger to Islamic theology (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 62), he was not against rational inquiry per se. In fact, he argued that *naẓar* is fundamental to Islam as a whole. What he essentially questioned was the authenticity "of the methods and content of what passed for *naẓar* among later *kalam* theologians . . . and to replace this with a reconfigured 'sound reasoning' (*ḥusn al-naẓar*) that he identifies with that of the early community of the pre-*kalām*/pre-philosophy stage, in which 'reason and revelation' . . . were not experienced as dichotomous" (Tim Winter n.d., p. 8).

Nevertheless, this cross-pollination between theology and philosophy largely stumbled at this juncture. Philosophy was barely domesticated as a Muslim science; it was temporarily used to serve theology, which means, as Tim Winter indicated, that "Once Muslims found that their need for a sophisticated philosophical theology was satisfied by the *kalam*, *falsafa* [philosophy] as an independent discipline naturally withered" (Tim Winter 2008, p. 13). Fazlur Rahman explained this further, indicating that philosophy in the Islamic tradition was a disconnected effort and "never took the form of a movement or a tradition expressing itself through established schools of thought" (Fazlur Rahman 1963, p. 303).

It is worth stating, however, that despite the fact that there was no effective room for any high-level teaching of philosophy in the Madrasahs, sharpening the minds of the pupils came in the form of introductory compendia and glosses, commonly known as *ḥawāshī* (sing. *ḥāshiya*), or tertiary commentaries, known as *taqārīr* (sing. *Taqrīr*), that is, commentaries on those glosses (the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries). However, as Ahmad El Shamsi showed in his *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics* (El Shamsy 2020), compared to the "classical" period of Muslim scholarship (the ninth to fifteenth centuries), the *ḥawāshī* and *taqārīr* modes (with their limited benefit acknowledged) did not provide the most fertile conditions for "high-level, original thought-activity" (Rahman 1963, p. 303). Also, the *ḥawāshī* and *taqārīr* were largely employed as a handmaiden to theology, as opposed to being superintendent to it, given a procedural role rather than being given a substantive one.

With the rising dominance of Traditionist theology, there developed a strong tendency amongst some mainstream quarters against the study of not only philosophy but also philosophy-engaged theology. Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), in his *Bayān zaghal al-ʿilm* (Exposition of False Knowledge), urged "his readers to abstain from the study of theology and uses Ibn Taymiyya as a cautionary illustration of the potential of theological discussions to lead to acrimonious disputes and strife among Muslims" (Ahmed El Shamsy 2020, p. 214).

This discouragement of theology was accompanied by the encouragement of a discipline that barely engaged with foreign systems of knowledge and hence was seen as an indigenous, i.e., "safer" science. That is, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). George Makdisi noticed this shift in the Islamic tradition, pointing out that law, not theology, has been "Islam's ideal religious science" (George Makdisi, in von Grunebaum 1971, p. 75). In his *Intent in Islamic Law: Motive and Meaning in Medieval Sunni Fiqh*, Paul Powers also observed this epistemic turning point, stating that law has been "the undisputed queen of

the sciences in medieval Islam" (Paul R. Powers 2006, p. 2). Or, as Marshall Hodgson calls it, the "Sharīʿah-mindedness" of Islam, on which he wrote:

> Every individual's life should be directly under the guidance of God's laws, and anything in society not clearly necessary to His service was to be frowned upon. Among both Sunnī and Shīʿī Muslims, a host of pious men and women who came to be called the "ulāma", the "learned", worked out what we may call the "Sharīʿah-minded" programme for private and public living centered on the Sharīʿah law. As might be expected, these "ulāma" scholars dominated Muslim public worship. They exercised a wide sway, but not exclusive control, in Muslim speculative and theological thought. (Marshall Hodgson 1974, vol. 1, p. 238)

On the other hand, Makdisi observed that while classical Sunni madrasas taught jurisprudence, they did not teach theology, neither Ashʿarī nor otherwise, to the degree that some jurists-cum-theologians had to teach their theology privately at home after regular school time (Frederick M. Denny 1994, p. 1073). At Al-Azhar University, for instance, *Kalām* was and still is not taught as such, but rather as *ʿilm al-tawḥīd* (The Study of the Divine Unity) (Denny 1994, p. 1073). This was, as Rahman put it, "a tragic and unnecessary development" in Islamic thought (Rahman 1963, p. 302). Brilliant exceptions did exist,[4] but the norm was a sense of stabilization if not attenuation.

Despite the fact that some novel trends of theological thought emerged from the late nineteenth century to the present times, e.g., the Indian Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), the Egyptian Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), and the Indian Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), those trends were barely incorporated into the mainstream theological schools. This is not to underestimate their contributions, but rather to say that the long-established theological schools often viewed such trends with suspicious eyes, which largely limited the impact they could have had on the theological frame of philosophical theology (see M. G. Abdelnour 2022, pp. 31–38; Wielandt 2016, pp. 707–64).

4. Why Has This Been Going on?

While the reasons for this stabilization and attenuation are varied and complex, one may argue that the development of Islamic theology was impeded by two key hindrances. First is the fact that Islamic theology, for the most part, was perceived as a defensive enterprise rather than a positive one. A quick examination of al-Ghazālī's and Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) definitions of *Kalām* may reveal this fact. In his *al-Munqiḏ min al-ḍalāl* (The Deliverer from Error), al-Ghazālī argued that the aim of Islamic theology "was merely to preserve the creed of orthodoxy and to defend it against the deviations of heretics" (al-Ghazālī 1962, p. 132). As for Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Muqaddima* (The Introduction), he defined it as the "science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy" (Ibn Khaldūn 2004, p. 205). Along the same lines, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) in *Īḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* (Encyclopaedia of the Sciences) assigned a defensive function to theology (al-Fārābī 1996, pp. 86–87) and similarly ʿAḍud al-dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) in his catechistic *Kitāb al-mawāqif* (Book of Stations) (ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī n.d., p. 7). This is not to say that *Kalām* never played a positivist function, but that the defensive role dominated the scene of Islamic theology such that the constructive/positivist function of the field was largely side-lined.

Second is that *Kalām*'s defensive function also meant that its epistemic paradigm was not primarily defined by its own theory of knowledge but largely by the paradigm of its immediate opponents, with a view to meeting the challenges of the moment. For instance, when Christian theologians appealed to Aristotelian logic in their debates with Muslim theologians, the latter were pressed to similarly appeal to it so that they could respond to the challenges at hand. While this engagement with foreign epistemes was not necessarily negative (in fact, it was vital and revitalizing), it should have come *after* the internal establishment of Islamic theology, as it largely overshadowed/side-lined the

"indigenous tools" that might well have better suited the scriptural nature of the tradition (see Josef Van Ess 2006, pp. 79–115).

5. What Ought to Be Going on?

Continuing our normative posture, two normative suggestions are offered here. Firstly, "domesticating" philosophy into the Islamic tradition, including its substantive mode. This is not to say that Islamic theology must conform to reason in order for it to be taken seriously as an intellectual discipline but to say that the Qurʾān gives reason more than a "procedural" role. In future research, I aim to address how the Qurʾān encourages this position through what can be called "Abrahamic skepticism". By "Abrahamic skepticism", I refer to Q. 2:260, which describes Abraham's asking God to show him how He gives life back to the dead. God, according to the verse, asks Abraham: "Have you not believed?" to which Abraham replied by saying: "Yes, but I ask only that my heart may be satisfied". Commenting on this verse in a *ḥadīth*, Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said the following: "We have more claim to skepticism than Abraham" (Ibn al-Ḥajjāj n.d.). That is, Abraham had more faith than theirs, and yet he asked for more certainty. Therefore, reasoning and skepticism should not be perceived as antithetical to the Islamic faith. Furthermore, an enabling factor to this is the fact that Muslim theologians themselves never had a "monolithic understanding" of the relation between reason and revelation. Namely, they are already not in agreement on the reason-revelation dichotomy; while there are schools that historically gave precedence to the former (e.g., Muʿtazilites), or more rightly were perceived as such, there are also schools that gave precedence to the latter (e.g., Ashʿarites), or were perceived as such.

Secondly, if it is conceded that the reliance on indigenous tools played a key role in the maturation of Islamic law, one may argue that the same should have happened with Islamic theology. That is to say that had the *mukallimūn* (Muslim theologians) developed a more native approach and used more indigenous tools similar to those of the *fuqahāʾ* (Muslim jurists), the role of Islamic theology could have been more integral to the Islamic tradition. While the nativeness of the methods of Islamic law is also a contested question (see Vesey Fitzgerald 1951, pp. 81–102), one can safely argue that while Muslim jurists did benefit from non-Islamic methods, they managed to systematically "examine" and "domesticate" such methods so much so that they have largely become "part" of the Islamic tradition (see Aayesha Rafiq 2016, pp. 113–29). On the other hand, when Muslim theologians used such methods of Greek philosophy, the processes of examination and domestication were not as Rigorous as those of Islamic law. Hence, the field remained underdeveloped (as compared to Islamic law). Accentuating this, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) argued that while Greek philosophy largely broadened the outlook of Muslim theologians, it obscured their vision of their own scriptural tradition. He wrote:

> This is what the earlier Muslim students of the Qurʾān completely missed under the spell of classical speculation. They read the Qurʾān in the light of Greek thought. It took them over two hundred years to perceive—though not quite clearly—that the spirit of the Qurʾān was essentially anti-classical, and the result of this perception was a kind of intellectual revolt, the full significance of which has not been realized even up to the present day. (Iqbal 2012, p. 3)

Therefore, Islamic analytic theology, as proposed in this project, should attempt to develop the field of Islamic theology via those two steps: 1. The "domestication" of philosophy; 2. The "indigenization" of its methods. In *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology* (2022), I attempted to do so by demonstrating the value of reasoning to Islamic theology and by drawing inspiration from the indigenous methods of *Fiqh* towards this "indigenization paradigm". In doing so, we do not discredit the engagement with non-Islamic philosophical and theological epistemes but rather apply some more rigorous and vigorous examination of such borrowings for the domestication to happen healthily. This way, Islamic theology will have attained two gains. Firstly, an Islamic theology that speaks a language that is more relevant to the hermeneutic nature of the Islamic tradition. Secondly,

by virtue of its Qurʾān-centeredness, Islamic theology will have deeper interventions to introduce to philosophy when it encounters foreign systems of knowledge.

6. How Might We Respond?

While the Qurʾān together with the Sunna constitute the key sources of the Islamic tradition, it is suggested here that we begin with reading the Qurʾān first as a philosophical text. Here, it is not the authority of the Prophet that is being challenged, but rather that of the Sunna, which constitutes the locus of what we know about what the Prophet had taught. Therefore, the key question becomes primarily one of "authenticity" and not one of "authority". Having realized the probable (ẓannī) nature of the Sunna, mainstream Sunni theologians did not consider reports of the Sunna to be authoritative and binding in theological articles, as theology is thought to be demanding "certitude", which is lacking in much of the Sunna tradition, for they engender "probable" rather than "certain" knowledge (see Ibn ʿAbd al-Shakūr al-Bahārī 2002, vol. 2, pp. 120–36).

Here, I appeal to al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya, and I would like to proceed from where they landed. First, al-Rāzī's unfinished attempt to unpack the philosophical content of the Qurʾān, most notably in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*. Second, Ibn Taymiyya's call to rethink the reason–revelation dichotomy and his reconciliation of the perceived break between the two modes in his *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql*. I find their approaches instructive for our purposes here, demonstrating a vision towards which we believe this field should be moving.

With those premises in mind, it is suggested here that we begin by focusing on the Qurʾān as our raw material for the future of Islamic analytic theology. There are two key reasons behind the call to focus on the Qurʾān. Firstly, Muslims largely believe that the Quran is the actual word of God and that He is both the creator of reason and the giver of revelation. Hence, by approaching the Qurʾān philosophically, we are addressing the same subject through different lenses. Secondly, the Qurʾān has a lot to say about non-Islamic traditions, more particularly, Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, by concentrating on the Qurʾān, not only will we be able to develop a more indigenous theology but also an Islamic theology that can speak to those traditions philosophically.

This proposal has two key stages to it. Stage I attempts an interpretive framework for reading the Qurʾān as a work of reason/philosophy, grappling with three key methodical and theoretical questions upon which any philosophical endeavour is anchored: structure, purpose, and making arguments of a general nature. Relating this to the Qurʾān, our questions will be: What is the Structure of the Qurʾān? What is the purpose of the Qurʾān? How Does the Qurʾān Make Arguments of a General Nature? Together, these questions provide a roadmap for "how to read the Quran" as a work of reason or philosophy.[5]

With the first question, we survey the internal structure of the Qurʾān using the concept of *munāsabah* (coherence/organic unity), which has been developed by various Qurʾān commentators. Considerable debates exist on whether the Qurʾān possesses such a coherence, given the fact that it was not arranged chronologically or in a linear or logical manner, with the majority believing in the existence of an organic unity within the Qurʾān whose inimitability and authenticity is beyond dispute. However, this outlook is often disturbed by the fact that there might be cases where the themes in consecutive verses are not related to the same topic. Here, we attempt to investigate, despite this apparent thematic dysconnectivity, how philosophically meaningful arguments can be drawn from the Qurʾānic structure.

With "What Is the Purpose of the Qurʾān?", we grapple with what might be termed *maqāṣid al-Qurʾān* (The Higher Objectives of the Qurʾān). Here, we trace and typologize the discussions scholars had on this area, with a view to demonstrating the extent to which this genre contributes to the establishment of political, moral, and metaphysical truths of a general nature that uncover the purpose of the Qurʾān.

As for the third question, we grapple with the Qurʾānic narratives, which are often said to be a medium that focuses one's attention on the particular, not the universal.

Furthermore, the metaphors that appear in the Qurʾān are considered to be the stuff of poetry, not reasoned argument. Here, we look at some of the techniques and strategies the Qurʾān uses to advance arguments applicable to the generality of human experience, with a view to deducing the general from the particular and the essential from the temporal.

Once this theoretical framework is settled, we then turn to the application of this framework to particular case studies of the Qurʾān, offering a series of five interrelated studies that correspond and extend to the different realms of philosophy: logic, aesthetics, ethics, politics, and metaphysics, whereby attempts are made to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal. Here, we discuss how the Qurʾān attempts to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal in the following manner:

Logic is the study of ideal methods in thought and research, including observation and introspection, deduction and induction, hypothesis and experiment, analysis, and synthesis; these are the forms of human activity that logic tries to fathom and guide. Here, we examine the methods the Qurʾān endorses and consider ideal, not in logic's shrivelled abstractness and formality, but clothed in the form of metaphors and rhetoric.

Aesthetics is the study of ideal form or beauty, which is the philosophy of art. Here, we look at how the Qurʾān addresses the question of "beauty" and how it places it on the map of Islamic values, especially in relation to "truth". In *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology*, I argued that the pursuit, preservation, and promotion of "truth" is the single most overriding objective of Islamic theology. However, Muslim theologians have barely dealt with the question of what this means to the value of "beauty" and how how "beauty", which is often subsidized and compromised by "truth", can get to meet "beauty" according to the Qurʾanic narrative.

Ethics is the study of ideal conduct. Here, we investigate the moral framework of the Qurʾān, tracing the confluence of ethical themes in the Qurʾān and their place within the history of Islamic moral thought. As Ebrahim Moosa has shown, even though Muslim ethicists would emphasize that the Qurʾān shapes the core of their ethical discussions, the fact remains that a conjunction of factors shaped Muslim ethical discourses, most notably Greek philosophers (see Moosa in Shah and Haleem 2020). With this in mind, more work needs to be done on founding distinct Qurʾān-based ethics. Here, we also compare Qurʾān-based ethics to Bible-based ethics. Hazony argued that the Bible is often said to espouse an ethics of obedience. However, this view involves a serious misreading of the Torah in that the principal figures in the biblical corpus are esteemed for their "disobedience", rather than "obedience" (Hazony 2012, p. 24). On this basis, he suggested that the biblical narrative endorses what he named an "outsider's ethics", which "encourages a critique even of things that appear to be decreed by God in the name of what is genuinely beneficial to man. For in the eyes of the biblical authors, what is genuinely beneficial to the human is that which will ultimately find favour in God's eyes" (Hazony 2012, p. 24). In this context, we may compare and contrast the ideal ethics of the Qurʾān to its Biblical counterpart.

Politics is the study of ideal social organization (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, socialism, anarchism, feminism), which are the key aspects of political philosophy. Here, we focus on the political theory of the Qurʾān and its philosophy of the ideal social organization, with a view to showing how the Qurʾān aims to advance a consistent political philosophy. Political questions were addressed when Prophet Muhammad formed his Medinan community in the first/seventh century in the light of numerous Qurʾānic revelations. However, as Stefan Wild showed, new political problems arose when a successor to the Prophet had to be found after the Prophet's death (see Wild, in Shah and Haleem 2020). In our day, the question of if and to what extent Qurʾānic principles that addressed the socio-political realities of Medina should hold sway on the Muslim generations to come is an essential question for our understanding of the Qurʾān's political philosophy.

Metaphysics: The ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy of the Qurʾān treated to this point raise critical questions of epistemology, ontology, and philosophical psychology; an area that "gets into so much trouble", as Will Durant said, "because it is not, like the other forms of philosophy, an attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal" (Will

Durant 1962, p. 4). Here, we attempt a coherent way of understanding what is meant by "truth" in the Qurʾān, and we may aim to situate it with the dominant theories of truth, grappling with questions such as: What is knowledge? Is knowledge possible? If so, how do we attain it? How can humans escape their own opinions to attain knowledge of that which is "normative"?

7. Why Should Muslims Conduct Analytic Theology? (The Functional Task)

Abbas Ahsan, a key voice in the nascent Islamic analytic theology, argued that analytic philosophy is of limited benefit to Islamic theology and that it can merely be used in a *procedural way* and not in a *substantive one*; otherwise, it would go against certain Islamic beliefs that are not open to modes of human reasoning. An example of this, he wrote, is the question of God's essence and attributes, which defies the law of non-contradiction, as it says, for example: "God has pre-eternal attributes subsisting in His essence. They are not He and nor other than He" (Ahsan 2021, vol. 6, No. 1, p. 64). Consequently, appealing to a substantive mode of reasoning would be detrimental to such key articles of belief when it is meant to be a handmaiden to religious truth (Ahsan 2021, p. 64). Moreover, analytic philosophy, in its substantive usage, cannot occupy a completely neutral position, as it naturally concedes various underlying theoretical assumptions (Ahsan 2021, p. 74). An example of this is one's conception of truth and the fact that it determines one's philosophical praxis. He put it this way:

> If subscribing to the laws of logic, it means that I hold them to be true. Therefore, I would declare that a contradiction must necessarily be false, and a tautology must necessarily be true. My acceptance of these fundamental axioms would then demand that I accept whatever outcomes emerge, where they are validly applied. Otherwise, accepting the laws of logic as true while rejecting the consequences of these laws would be inconsistent. Logic thus presupposes a notion of truth and falsehood. (Ahsan 2021, pp. 71–72)

Hence, he contended that for analytic philosophy to go hand in hand with Islamic theology, it should be more open to questioning the foundational axioms that it deems to be self-evident, such as having arguments being framed in a specific way that includes a proposition and premises endorsing that conclusion, which is not the case with self-evident propositions, as they are independent of endorsing premises (Ahsan 2021, pp. 71–72). More importantly, Ahsan argued that this kind of philosophy would thus not be in harmony with the aim of Islamic theological education, that is, the preservation of the Islamic faith. In fact, it "would actively call into question particular articles of faith which are themselves not consistent with the modes by which analytic philosophy primarily operates" (Ahsan 2021, p. 68). Therefore, despite his recognition that the procedural mode is of limited benefit to Islamic theology, Abbas thinks that it is more congruent with it and can be entertained (Ahsan 2021, p. 65).

Despite the sophistication of Ahsan's proposal, it calls for some qualifications. Otherwise, as it is, it can lead to some forms of intellectual ossification and theological paralysis. In what follows, I attempt to unpack the key claims of this proposal. Initially, the usage of the question of divine essence and attributes as an example of how Islamic theology defies the law of non-contradiction is not particularly precise. This is for three main reasons. Firstly, theologians who adopted this view barely thought that their position defied the law of non-contradiction. In fact, many of them have already relied on Greek logic as a bedrock for their theological thought, which has the law of non-contradiction at its core. Secondly, even if we concede (for argument's sake) that they thought so, this should not necessarily mean that the Qurʾān endorses theologies that defy the law of non-contradiction, for the Qurʾān in and of itself employs it (consider, for instance, Q. 52:35) and denies that it has contradictions (consider Q. 4:82). Thirdly, the question of divine attributes is probably not the most helpful question to speak for the nature of Islamic theology, for it is arguably the most controversial one. Hence, drawing generalizations on its basis will be problematic (see Watt 2014, pp. 280–96) and can get challenged by the fact that there are many other schools

that actually attempted to comply with the law of non-contradiction (see Ibn Taymiyya n.d., vol. 5, pp. 16–20).

As for the claim that analytic theology cannot occupy a completely neutral position, this seems to conflate religion as divinely revealed and the interpretation of religion per se/religious knowledge, which is based on socio-historical factors, and not merely scriptures. In fact, scriptures themselves are somehow silent, and when we aim to understand such texts, we invariably draw on our own expectations, questions, and assumptions. Consider how many Muslim scholars expected Islam, or more particularly, the Qurʾān, to have superseded previous forms of revelation. Hence, they developed theories of abrogation (*naskh*) and introduced modes of qualifications (*takhṣīṣ*) to account for the verses that speak positively of pre-Islamic revelations. However, when such theories were questioned, some novel interpretations that were still faithful to the Qurʾān were developed. These are available, most notably in *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Therefore, no interpretation whatsoever can be possible without appealing to some assumptions, questions, and expectations. Thus, all theologians use tools that are not value-neutral.

Concerning the question of truth and his claim that one's response to it is what gives shape to the way in which one practices philosophy, I would agree with that, but only to say that this is exactly the reason we need analytic philosophy in its substantive usage. That is to say that Ahsan's view of religious truth seems to be monolithic when the reality is that Muslim theologians disagreed largely on the question of "truth" itself. Considering Islam's relation to the Jewish and Christian truths, Muslim scholars differed on what the Qurʾān has to say about the validity of such religions. Their disagreement is primarily a result of their appeal to certain assumptions. In her *Christian and Islamic Theology of Religions*, Esra A. Dag expressed this in this way:

> In spite of the Qurʾānic affirmation of non-Islamic traditions' certain values, early scholars developed a supersessionist theory which assumed that other religions were superseded by Islam. The doctrine of abrogation in Islamic studies has been discussed in the literature of Islamic jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh). The classic, medieval and contemporary forms of exclusivism have been shaped in the light of supersessionist theory. Thus, the positive affirmation of non-Islamic traditions in the Qurʾān has been regarded as abrogated. In other words, the Qurʾānic verses which value the Christian and Jewish traditions have been considered to be part of this abrogation process. (Dag 2017, pp. 90–91)

In response to this, other views emerged. For instance, Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010) critiqued this Exclusivism, holding that the tools of legitimization of classical Islamic theology do not possess any "epistemological relevance for us today", as their findings are badly damaged by the "biases imposed by the ruling class and its intellectual servants" (Rifat Atay 1999, Ph.D. diss., p. 37). He, therefore, distinguished three levels of divine revelation. First is the absolute level, which is unknowable by humankind, even though the prophets revealed some fragments of the word of God. Second are the prophetic manifestations of the word of God, such as those of the Israelite prophets, Jesus, and Muhammad, from a period when the revelation was orally transmitted and preserved through memorization. The third level is the textual objectification of God's word in the Torah, the New Testament, and the Qurʾān (see Arkoun 1994, pp. 16, 33).

In light of the above, I argue that substantive analytic philosophy is of great benefit to Muslim theologians, for it provides the most fertile land for two intellectual virtues: theological humility and intellectual audacity. Those virtues should naturally lead to what Oliver Crisp called a "*generative research program*". Relating this program to Islamic theology, if all this is properly done, Muslim theologians will get to produce original ways of thinking about their theological traditions or better ways of reflecting upon a body of doctrines that have been developed themselves through our resort to certain methods, and then they may well be able to provide more satisfactory accounts of those, or that they may discover new aspects to the traditional approaches.

Substantive analytic theology can be dangerous only to dogmatic theology, a theology that seeks to defend certain presupposed truths, not a theology that seeks to pursue them (see Abdelnour 2022). Here, I find the Kantian distinction between the "phenomenon" (the way we see things) and the "noumenon" (the-thing-in-itself) particularly helpful for Muslim theologians (see Immanuel Kant 1999). Even though this distinction has often been used as a key axiom supporting the relativist narrative of truth due to the deep epistemological divide that it creates between the knowable and unknowable, the thinkable and unthinkable, I take a "methodological", not a "theological", inspiration from it. I see the vitality of this Kantian distinction in challenging the sense of "theological absolutism" prevalent in contemporary Islamic theology and cultivates a sense of "intellectual humility" when one delves into metaphysics. This Kantian distinction calls for a sense of "methodological agnosticism" when one delves into metaphysical discussions, wherein the process and results of thought engender an empirical conclusion rather than an a priori assumption about the questions under review, without taking truth-claims for granted but instead suspend belief in them long enough to investigate alternative explanations.

Methodological agnosticism implies a sense of "provisional relativism", in order for the inquiry process to be "effective" and "genuine" (see Douglas V. Porpora 2006, pp. 57–75); a position that seems to go in line with the Qurʾān itself, for it encourages the methodological suspension of belief in a certain proposition until after the pursuit of its truth is concluded. Taking this as a disciplinary premise, al-Rāzī, in his explanation of Q. 34:24–25, leaves us with a telling comment, stating: "In this verse there is a divine instruction from God to Prophet Muhammad to guide his scholarly and non-scholarly debates. Otherwise, if one of the debaters says to the other: 'what you say is faulty and you are mistaken,' they will get angry, and anger precludes constructive thinking. However, if they say: 'let us, for the sake of Truth, practice reasoning to know which one of us is mistaken,' then the counterpart will be drawn further from prejudice" (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 25, p. 258).

While the Qurʾān gives Muslims access to aspects of the *noumena*, this access is often clouded by the biases and subjectivities that accompany one's quest for the Truth. Indeed, the famous parable of the elephant and the blind men may reveal two key subjectivities: "individual" subjectivities hampering the absorption of the Truth and subjectivities caused by our "horizon/context". To explain, the old allegory of the "elephant in darkness", which has its roots in the Buddhist tradition, provides a clear demonstration of the contextual deficiency. According to Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) version of the story, a group of Hindus bring an elephant to a town at night. People of the town, impatient to wait until morning, go to the "dark room" where the elephant is kept. Unable to see the animal, they can only perceive it by touching it. Upon touching different parts of the elephant's body, each person describes the elephant differently. One, who has touched its ear, describes it as similar to a fan. Another, who has touched its trunk, says the elephant is like a gutter. A third man, who has touched its leg, describes the elephant as similar to a pillar. Finally, a person who has touched its back describes it as like a bed. If each of them had a candle at hand, there would be no difference in their statements (Cyrus Masroori 2010, p. 250). That is the contextual deficiency, whereby the deficiency to conceive the reality of the elephant is not due to an inherent disability in the human per se but due to the darkness/context surrounding it. This darkness caused by night constitutes a thick veil preventing those approaching the elephant from the full comprehension of the truth.

While Rūmī's version of the story of the elephant indicates a contextual deficiency, al-Ghazālī's version shows an individual deficiency instead. While, in Rūmī's version, the visitors' inadequate perception of the elephant is due to the darkness of the room at night, al-Ghazālī described those visitors as "physically blind" (al-Ghazālī 2005, p. 1340). Therefore, one may conclude that, for al-Ghazālī, humans are incapable of grasping Truth in its ultimacy due to individual subjectivities/inadequacies. Although they both differ with regard to the causes of such deficiencies, the individual in the case of al-Ghazālī and

contextual in the case of al-Rūmī, they both come to the same conclusion: humans' quest for the Truth is, more often than not, clouded by individual and contextual deficiencies.

With this in mind, substantive analytic theology may help Islamic theology in its ongoing "pursuit" of Truth, in tandem with "speaking" of it in the way one "provisionally" believes it to be. Therefore, Islamic Truth is not static but dynamic and discursive, and therefore, "audacious". The theological Truth that Islam pursues, preserves, and promotes is not necessarily "fully present" but is "provisionally" so. Simultaneously, Islam urges its followers to seek bits and pieces of this Truth wherever it may arise, which is an actualization of the Prophetic, powerful statement when he said: "A wise word is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it, he has more right to it" (Ibn Mājah n.d., p. 4169). Consequently, theology should be in the service of the Ultimate Truth and should act as a handmaiden to it, not the other way around (see Abdelnour 2022, pp. 53–67).

However, and despite the stark methodological differences between these overarching modes of philosophizing (procedural and substantive), both modes, as far as Islamic analytic theology is concerned, work toward a common goal, i.e., reasonableness and speaking meaningfully. Matthew Lipman succinctly summarized this in the following manner:

> In a sense, informal logicians and rhetoricians attack the same problem from different directions and in the best of all worlds could be expected to meet somewhere in the middle, like the crews building a tunnel by starting at either side of a river. Both are examining claims to reasonableness (and therefore are concerned with the theory of rationality). But the informal logicians move toward a new conception of reasonableness by broadening and refining the concept of logic, while the rhetoricians do so by examining writing that is not or does not appear to be formally logical, in an effort to determine what justification such prose may claim to have to being reasonable. Moreover, both are inclined to focus on argumentation, but the one group emphasizes the persuasive force of argument while the other emphasizes its logical force. (Matthew Lipman 2003, pp. 41–42)

In light of the above discussion, analytic theology should not be seen as an entirely new program to the area of Islamic theology but rather a critical continuation of the *Kalām* tradition in its classical phase, which almost did the same function, i.e., bringing theology and philosophy into conversation, more particularly in a substantive manner. As a reminder, we could see how Ibn Sīnā famously took up many of the issues put forward by the theologians, and henceforth, post-Ibn Sīnā philosophy became more concerned with introducing philosophical solutions to many theological problems. Similarly, Islamic theology per se was seminally impacted not only by Ibn Sīnā's categories and ideas but even his terminology (see Robert Wisnovsky 2004, no. 1, pp. 65–100). On top of that, analytic philosophy today has the potential to bring to the fore the "constructive" function of Islamic theology, which has largely been buried under the defensive and apologetic functions of *Kalām*. It can do so by virtue of its encouragement of the intellectual humility and intellectual audacity mentioned above.

Notes

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2   For a comprehensive treatment of this question, see (Madelung 1974). See also (Hoover 2004).

3   I am aware of the issues associated with this dichotomy, but I am using those terms in the sense in which those two camps related to foreign systems of knowledge.

4   For an extensive treatment of the exceptional figures of this period, see: Khaled al-Rouayheb, Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb (al-Rouayheb 2015).

5   Here I draw inspirations from Hazony's *The Philosophy of the Hebrew Scripture*.

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