Imagination, Secularism and the University: The Presence and Consequences of Islamic Education

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Abstract: This paper asks the question, 'What does Islamic education mean for the 21st century university?' To begin with, the paper addresses the modern university as an institution facing numerous challenges, which can be conceived of by understanding the nature of the 'academic imagination'. In so doing, this argument draws on the fundamental elements of thought itself by foregrounding imagination as a primary route by which knowledge is conceived, created and disseminated. At root, it is an argument that suggests that to understand the university is to apprehend its imaginative functions. 'Problems of the imagination' are thereafter defined as 'depth perception', 'vertigo' and 'paralysis', respectively. In light of these challenges, the rise of Centers of Islamic Theology in Germany, and Islamic education as a discipline in particular, are considered as uncharted paths towards a discussion of the dilemmas of contemporary academia. Methodologically, the paper is a philosophical reflection on the role of the future of the university and the place of Islamic Theology and Islamic education therein. As such, use of the contemporary literature on higher education, as well as classical works on Islamic education, shall be employed for the purposes of the argument. In so doing, this paper turns the normative discussion of contemporary Islamic education on its head: from how we may make room for such education in the modern university, to consider how its presence may help the institution and its imaginative conundrums.

Keywords: university; imagination; Islamic education; theology; sacred–secular; anatheism

The university is amongst the most successful institutions to have emerged from the pre-modern world. Though not unscathed by the perturbations of centuries of conflicting intellectual interests and exogenic pressures, its success remains in its ability to be recognized, however faintly, by its medieval roots, as an institution for the transmission, creation and dissemination of knowledge. This longevity and institutional inventiveness have seen it become what sociologist David Baker (2014) terms a 'primary institution' in the emerging Knowledge Society. As a consequence of the rising educational revolution, in which educational credentials take their seat as social arbiters for human success and fulfillment more generally, this global institution has come to exert social and intellectual influences matched by few others in terms of resources and, more profoundly, in terms of its indispensable presence in modern society. However, in tandem with the social honoring and prominence of the institution, perennial questions remain and seem ever more relevant: what is the university for, what role do traditional religious ideals have for education, what ought to be the university's central 'idea', etc. (Marginson 2016).

With regard to these questions, the philosophical pivot of this paper is to reconceive the *bien pensant* secular–sacred debate within the university, in order to better produce institutional answers as to how the university now encounters the traditional *éminence grise* of religion within its walls. It shall attempt to do so by defining the modern university with recourse to a novel analytical tool, namely, that of imagination. The university is, as with other institutions more generally, formed by imaginative impulses which direct its ideas and perceptions about the world in which it operates. In light of these concerns, there are three 'problems of the imagination' drawn from the broader academic literature, particularly evident in the 21st century institution. These I define as the problems of

'depth perception', 'vertigo' and 'paralysis', with each focusing on a specific reaction by the university related to imagination. Next, I define what particular form of imagination contemporaneously defines this historically religious institution, this now being termed the Anatheistic University (the institution which is 'beyond' God), with attention given to what this means specifically in the secular contexts of today's universities. Having done so, the second part of the paper discusses the consequences of the rise of Islamic Theology departments across European universities in recent years and the potential consequences of their presence for the university, arguing that, since the institution is now comfortably anatheist, i.e., a post-God institution, it still faces an unresolved and longstanding 'religion– secular' bifurcation, now set deep within its institutional core. I explore the presence of Islamic Theology in Europe as providing a propitious case for the re-examination of religious diversity in the modern (anatheist) university. With special reference to Islamic education, the argument *ad fontes* drawing on the obscure regions of the imagination, the paper stands as a means to discuss the hitherto foundational precepts of these problematics in an institutional manner, availing itself of the long-standing debates on the sacred–secular divide. Part philosophical inquiry, part social history and part sociology of religion, this paper intends to shed light on the existential meanings of the university in the 21st century and to ask whether traditional 'ideas' of the institution are still tenable. Methodologically, the paper is a philosophical reflection on the role of the future of the university and the place of Islamic Theology and Islamic education therein. As such, use of the contemporary literature on higher education, as well as classical works on Islamic education, shall be employed for the purposes of the argument.

1. The University and Problems of the Imagination

The concept of imagination retains a consistent, if mercurial, presence in intellectual history. Defined as the 'faculty or action of creating new ideas' (OED) and derived from the Latin *imaginari*, i.e., to picture oneself or something, early investigations into the origins and construct of the *imaginari* offer important insights for the university and its own imagination. From the pre-Socratics to Aristotle's systematization of the concept in his *Metaphysics*, questions continue to inform the philosophy of mind, ideas of consciousness and the creative powers of the human subject more generally, regarding the contents and influence of imagination (Kind and Kung 2016). The tempestuous history of the concept is one which David Lyons' (2005) penetrating study demonstrates as a remnant of changes to the idea in the late 19th century. Lyons claims that an embodied notion of imagination, accessible to all and innate, had prevailed before this time, and a 'disembodied turn', formalized in Romantic thought as the privilege of a few, was subsequently championed. Against this alterity of imagination, more recent work in philosophy has attempted to return to an 'embodied frame' and one which draws contiguously, as a potential institutional marker, beyond philosophies of the self. Jacob Bronowski (1963), an early exponent of the influence and power of imagination in the study of culture and organizations, argues, for example, that the university occupies certain imaginative forms for its intellectual endeavors. This is manifest in its varying forms of disciplinary knowledge forged by its questions, methods, epistemic and ontological presuppositions and pronouncements.

To speak of the university in terms of 'embodying' imagination/s requires, then, a need to side-step approaches which often see the institution in normative sociological accounts, and which rather proffer its symbolic inferences, its sociality, as well as, more recently, their agential capacities. The genus of such analytic descriptions, whilst offering the basis for the study of institutional interactions, social meanings and their consequences for agents, is less successful as a means to designate the university as a 'thinking entity', or as having 'imaginative' propensities. To do so would entail apprehending the ontic realities of the institution, as a consummate institution in whom the collective resources of history, memory, culture and *weltanschauung* offer a way to perceive its 'thinking'. It is for this reason that to speak of the 'imagination of the university' requires a wider and perhaps a more novel parlance. Therefore, speaking then of the 'imagination of the university' is

to argue that the institution can be understood, in part, by a *geist* which interpolates an attitude and mien. In this reordering of the sociological basis for institutional analysis, institutions are marked by certain imaginative impulses, and the university is one which draws from its decidedly religious/sacred origins, which still arguably informs the ways it operates. It is in this sense that a theory emerges from which we may speak of the imagination as an 'embodied' principle in the university, namely as a category of analysis.

The university, addressed in this manner, allows one to consider present critiques of the institution in a new theoretical vernacular, reorientating the analysis of problems facing the university. These can be identified, in light of those abstracted from various works in higher education and related fields, as being primarily three in number. These are problems of 'depth perception', 'vertigo' and 'paralysis', respectively. Firstly, 'sociologically' I define the problem of 'depth perception' as referring to the place and comportment of the university in the society in which it operates. The problematizing of institutional conduct within the social world of the institution remains part of the intellectual interest of much sociological work on the subject, with a long-standing and sustained intellectual eye resting upon matters of its future and current state of affairs. Defined by an historical distance from state authority, most modern universities are now deeply embedded social actors and thus are hindered by an inability to express their autonomy, have true academic freedom of speech, etc. (Peters and Barnett 2018; Bourdieu 1988). 'Depth perception', therefore, is an analogy of boundaries lost where the university and society stand. Secondly is the orientating problem of 'vertigo'. This relates to 'conservative' critiques of the hierarchy and order of knowledge in universities. Whilst faculties (especially in the humanities) retain their genus in the medieval disciplines which bore them, increasingly, how the pursuits of knowledge speak to one another or the humanities and sciences may communicate and learn from each other remains a 'mystery' (Slingerland 2008). This is, for example, the theme of James Turner's (2014) superlative account of the history of Philology, which he argues stood as the last gravitating discipline through the medieval and early modern period and now has all but been forgotten.

Finally, there is the critique of 'paralysis'. This I refer to as the loss of creativity in universities, as documented in the literature, and how knowledge relates to the world, the emphasis on 'newness' in academic research and how we may respond to our collective and respective intellectual heritage. At the root of this problem is one which may become the next great battle for universities in the 21st century, namely the creativity paradox. This is explained by sociologist Peter Murphy, as since advances in technology and science have risen, we are less able (paradoxically) to be truly innovative. Murphy (2015), a prominent contemporary theorist of institutional imagination, takes the position that the university has failed to deliver on its promises of being imaginative and innovative in the Knowledge Society, due to a number of systemic factors. He summarizes his position by arguing:

> The promise of post-industrialism was innovation. The primary cause of modern economic growth, the theory went, was innovation. Innovation is the social application of the power of creation. Modern societies that lack the capacity for creation struggle socially and flounder economically. The theory was not wrong. The extended economic stagnation in many OECD countries that follow 2008 was a symptom of depressed innovation. But this despondent state pointed to a deeper problem: namely that the post-industrial 'knowledge society' ... had stopped innovating on a large scale—or rather it has never lived up to its self-image as an innovating epoch ... The university was the symbolic core of the post-modern age. It embodied its desires. It presented its aspirations. It was emblematic of the knowledge and infliction that, supposedly, elicited the technological and sociological innovations that energised economies and enlarged social prosperity.

(p. 1)

Such problems of imagination highlight aspects, albeit essential ones, of the modern institution, and whilst there are reasons to remain positive for the university, such dilemmas

potentially speak of a superordinate imaginative listlessness. Since the sociological, conservative and creative critiques deal individually with facets of institutional imagination, there are intimations of an imaginative directive driving, in part, these occurrences. Whilst these 'intimations' cannot be considered the cause of such problems, they may be registered as extenuating a broader insight into the university. In so doing, they affect the presence of unresolved tensions which may be new or remanences of historical trauma. A candidate for such possibilities would be the traditional role of 'religion' in the institution. Such presences can be read in, for example, the 'sociological' critique as the traditional boundaries of church, state and university division, the 'conservative' as theology's traditional role and the ordering of knowledge and finally the 'creative' as telos or debates over the ideals/ends for the institution. As essentially a 'religious' institution whose character has been defined by its history, place and position, the necessity to address this issue is potentially a way for further fecund intellectual possibilities. This requires firstly acknowledging and tethering its historically religious and contemporary (non-religious) character for the purposes of re-examining these unresolved tensions. Specifically, to do so, Richard Kearney's theorization of the secular–sacred debate provides an especially fruitful medium.

2. The Anatheistic University and Dealing with Religion

In the discourse on secularization, Richard Kearney (2011) stands amongst those theorists whose studies offer a compromise between the objective structures laying claim for the rise of secularity and those who discursively complexify the modern nature and experience of the 'sacred'. As a claim for God specifically, Kearney's synthesis offers a third way between dogmatics cast in revelatory history and the reductionism of new atheisms, to expound a responsa to once again encounter the Divine in deeply existential, vulnerable and indelibly 'modern' terms. Defined as 'anatheism', he argues we are defined by a point in history in which we face "God after God. Ana-theism: another word for another way of seeking and sounding the things we consider sacred but can never fully fathom or prove" (p. 3). Using Paul Ricœur as a hermeneutic anchor to substantiate the encounter of 'strangeness' which occasions the presentation of a post-God image in a post-God world, the verisimilitude leaves the rediscovery of God as newness untethered to traditional forms of theistic vision. Whereas the narrative form of revelatory history remains dominant (which for Kearney means the Abrahamic traditions), it is precisely in distancing oneself from the essential contents of theism which requires readdressing in the modern world. Whilst the *semper reformanda* of religion is not (Kearney would agree with religionists) new to contemporary religious discourses, rather it is our particular moment in history which allows a dialogic encounter privileging the quotidian perception of God as image of God. In other words, through a recognition of the foregrounding of the human subject, the ground for a God discourse as affable and immanent inevitably presents itself. As Kearney argues (Kearney 2011),

> Anatheism, in other words, is nothing particularly new. It is simply a new name for something very old and, I hasten to add, constantly recurring in both the history of humanity and of each life. The anatheist wager has gone by different names throughout the course of human culture. We find it in various moments of creative "not knowing" that mark a break with ingrained habits of thoughts and open up novel possibilities of meaning. For without the suspension of received assumptions we cannot be open to the birth of the new.
>
> (p. 7)

In suspension of the reception of the Divine through varying human channels in favor of the immanence of God, we find Kearney advocating an epochal moment, an elective affinity consummate to the conditions of awakening to a new encounter with a once unknowable Theos (Tetragrammaton). The varying currents which this theory of a (non)religion opens to the study of God has itself been much debated, but where it may find a novel affinity in institutional analysis is in its encounter with the modern university. How then does the university relate to anatheism? One, perhaps apparent, answer is

that as a medieval, 'religious' institution, anatheism presents itself as a potential vehicle for explicating the dynamics of contemporary and contested secular–sacred discourses. Whilst a theo-centricism does not dominate the modern institution, the architecture of its ontological claims, epistemic organization and cultural enunciations arguably remain perceptible even within the 21st century. The modern university can therefore be said to be 'religious' not in a Durkheimian sense (as cultural forms worshipping themselves) but as remnants of a larger tradition of intellectual constructions. In this reading, the problems (of imagination) which the university faces partly revolve around the unresolved contestation of the palimpsest presence of God in its institutional consciousness.

However, a potentially more fruitful use of anatheism in the university may arise by subverting the specter of religious necessity and thus not concede to its overtures. Harnessing Ricœur's initial hermeneutic moment of reflection, anatheism can be read as the modern university's attitude to formalized religion, potentially analogized as designating God's role in the institution. Specifically, this role, though one not without qualifications, helps circumvent its hitherto dialectical relations with a 'God discourse'; the use of anatheism in the 21st century university then, we may speculate, intends not to engage with religion per se, but rather the strangeness (after Ricœur) of observing the university 'as religion'. In other words, modern education, having incorporated itself into a magisterium, becomes the social Monad (God). David Baker explicates the extent of the university's success in taking such a role by sociologically designating it as a "primary institution" whose influences as well as dedicates impact all institutions in the 21st century. He argues that the

> education revolution *socially constructs* significant portions of the culture of modern society, rather than merely reproducing it. Not only are people trained and credentialised through schooling, but the institution itself changes other social institutions and the entire culture of society.
>
> (p. 10, italics in original)

In light of this pre-eminence of the university as secular god, we should not obviate critiques from the academic community on the institution more generally. These range from the rise of neo-liberal paradigms of managerialism, the privileging of scientific research narratives, increasing dissatisfaction amongst academics concerning work life, etc., and all become features of academic reflection on higher education. Therefore, to speak of an anatheistic university entails acknowledging that indeed the institution is 'beyond God'; yet, the University as God remains vulnerable (intimating theologies of vulnerabilities). The strength of the anatheistic university, however, lays in its epistemic encounter with the world, enveloping a specific worldview (nomos) related to the role and place of formalized knowledge. Therefore, its contemporary success, its God-like power (*exousía*), issues from knowledge and nomos as conforming to strictures of objectivity, academic freedom (*Lernfreiheit*) and the democratizing of epistemic narratives to a singular (secular) plain. Under these terms, it wishes to engage with the world, by controlling the ways which intellectual narratives (disciplines) are subsumed into its gravitation of affinities. For Kearney, this is to be read as being

> The key to the encounter [as] is not through God forcing a divine meeting with the self, but through and when the self ventures to show the gift of hospitality instead of the act of hostility towards the other.
>
> (Bentley 2018, p. 230)

In this reading, the university as anatheistic seems less graced with the generosity of spirit initially envisaged by Kearney, such that whilst 'God is not forced into a meeting with the self, he is the one sort after' equally for the university, not all knowledge is coterminous with the spirit of the anatheistic university; yet, all succumb to its gaze on the world. Such a gaze implies it has 'theologically' traversed the Monadic principle of knowledge, as formal cause, for the endeavors of the university. Moreover, it has 'sociologically' assumed a social permanence in its form and structure, or one of the many modern churches for the many selves the individual has in the secular world. In this sense, the university is a

sacred institution, though no longer a religious one, and as such, it curates religious and all disciplinary narratives under its own purview. What then remains of this conception of the university in light of the antipodal developments on the European continent with the rise of departments of Islamic Theology? This question and its implications form the following discursive part of the paper.

3. The Rise of Islamic Theology and Its Implications for Education

The rise of Islamic Theology on the European continent began with the mandating of centers for the teaching, research and public outreach of Islam such that they may inform, enculture and popularize Islamic values for new generations of European Muslims. In 2010, the German Council of Science and Humanities proffered a recommendation to introduce Islamic Theology within universities. Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Centers for Islamic Theology have since been established at universities in Tübingen, Münster, Osnabrück, Erlangen-Nuremberg, Giessen and Frankfurt am Main, Berlin and Paderborn, respectively. The German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, WR), amongst the most influential advisory boards on higher education in Germany, recommended that the

> higher education portfolio in Islamic [Theological] Studies or Islamic religious education, respectively, aims to (1) prepare future teachers of religious education for their role in religious instruction, (2) meet the demand for Islamic religious scholars at mosque communities, (3) train qualified Islamic social workers, (4) and produce Islamic theologians for university-level teaching and research.
>
> (Agai 2015, p. 78)

Marking a watershed moment in the history of German higher education, these centers were created to sit alongside existing Christian theological faculties to offer new horizons for robust, confessionally oriented academic studies of Islam in Germany. Agai argues, however, that their rise comes at a time when public debates on the problematic implications of state policies towards Islam has led to a shift in the basic assumptions of the political discourse. Islam is now considered to be a problem and a solution at the same time. On the one hand, problems of social integration are still linked to religion, despite occasional acknowledgments that the deficiencies of the "Muslim subject" in this area might originate in other, non-religious causes. On the other hand, Islam is no longer represented as eternally and ontologically linked to foreign countries and cultures, but rather is seen as part of German social reality that needs to be integrated functionally, politically and epistemologically. It is noteworthy that this development was initiated under a government led by the center-right CDU (Christlich-Demokratische Union), which had hitherto conceptualized immigrants and their religions as something alien to Germany (p. 334).

Whilst their independence from governmental and religious oversight is relatively free, the project itself remains a curious experiment for an institution which feels confident in the utilizing of governmental means for ostensible social programming namely, creating socially viable religious identities (Engelhardt 2016). Moreover, the controlling of dissenting voices and fashioning versions of 'Islamic thought', practice and identity which are amenable and contrite to superstructures are all contentious issues for such fledging institutions. The problem is here exacerbated by the fact that religion in this governmental initiative does not mean any or all religions, but one which comes to the anatheist university as the harbinger of the old stereotypes of religion, namely dealing with Islam and the 'Islamic other'. These are self-consciously being faced and justified through such programs of governmentally funded centers of theology. The 'strangeness' of Islam manifests itself as a self-consciously orientalized reality in such discourses of otherness, wherein it reaffirms itself as either a warring religion, the Moor as irrational and capricious, the historical neighbor and foe, the oriental exotic, etc., all of which present problems for ways of seeing and handling religion in the modern university. It is for such reasons that the establishment of Islamic Theology

departments can only be compared perfunctorily to Christian Divinity faculties, whose place, remit, and purpose for existence are existentially different.

One may occasion these developments as a purified, even abstracted, dialectic of sacred and secular discourses in the 21st century, since the anatheist university is housing confessionally taught Islamic Theology. This, however, would foster less of the sociological imperatives of the university as a 'primary institution' (after Baker) or more importantly as an anatheistic one to religion. Such frameworks ensure the place and status of Islamic Theology in the university, yet do so only in the sense that the broader and superintending critiques of the university are not considered, most notably the problems of imagination. Whilst the anatheistic institution firmly designates itself as such, questions over what qualities Islamic Theology may palimpsestically appear and serve as a presence for meeting and sparking imaginative responses are essential. In other words, it is the presence of Islamic Theology which serves to potentially encounter the problems of imagination facing the anatheist university.

The meeting with God afresh and perceiving the relationship anew is perhaps more contentious than Kearney first allows, when taking into consideration the case of Islamic Theology. His theorization, seeing the traditional non-ecumenical laity, as a new *éminence grise*, to the encounter with God would mean that Islamic Theology and its architecture of 'traditional' forms of knowledge are woefully ill-equipped to meet such challenges. However, co-opting the rise of Islamic Theology as 'stranger' in the anatheistic university potentially offers new sight lines for the seemingly interminable problems of imagination. It is precisely in this seemingly antipodal encounter between the anatheistic rejection of theistic privileging and the presence of Islamic Theology in the modern university that ensures the potential for an intimate strangeness (Desmond 2012). It is perhaps the sense of strangeness of presence which allows Islamic Theology to be an outsider that may at first occasion this encounter. This suspicion is, as Kearney continues, the means for a productive awakening to new ways of seeing ourselves and those whom we turn towards in a state of hospitality. Perhaps this hermeneutic of suspicion, the over-cautious response of considering the other as a threat (and acting on the premise that the other is a threat), lies at the heart of the perpetuating cycles of violence and self-isolation that we witness in the world today. Kearney then responds with a call to actively and deliberately take the risk of making oneself vulnerable to the other by offering the gift of hospitality. This requires a shift in thinking, a move that Kearney calls the transition from optocentrism (emphasis on sight) to carnal hermeneutics (emphasis on touch). As beings who are embodied in the context of a particular time and space, reality is mediated through the senses (Bentley 2018, p. 227).

The intentions of emerging departments of Islamic Theology to train new generations of Muslim intellectuals, teachers, social workers, etc., within established traditions of Islamic intellectual traditions, and provide answers, as all curricula must do, to fundamental questions about life, learning and the ends of education. The initial 'suspicion' of such ventures seems natural, in lieu of the contemporary political climates surrounding Islam; however, it is through offering the gift of hospitality which may provide a means to explore the dynamics of 'meeting the other'. As a marginalized field of inquiry and one which does not fit easily within the broader nomos of the anatheistic university, Islamic Theology sits as a minority within a minority whose presence is troubled by and weary of the superstructures which support, monitor and expect from it. Here, its presence may potentially draw about new and fecund ways for the university to function. The situation offers the presence of Islamic Theology as potentially illumining as well as facing the larger problems of the imagination in the university. It is therefore in the strange encounter of the anatheistic university with Islamic theology that it confronts its own self of identity and purpose. This encounter moreover stands to exist as a pluralist experiment of the kind which Marsden (1994) would argue is necessary for the amelioration of scholastic vitality in the modern institution. In other words, it offers the chance for pluralistic ideas, a true invitation of the other, in the post-secular university to see how differences in the academy,

and beyond, may manifest themselves and therefore be truly tolerant of intellectual voices spoken in unknown tongues within unfamiliar epistemic vernaculars.

4. The Meaning of Islamic Education

What role then does Islamic education play in this modern matrix of disciplinary knowledge? Parochially defined, Islamic education, within the remit of secular approaches to religious studies, is an inquiry into religion and culture, rendering its varying purists and ambitions limited to the affairs of religion. In so doing, such a working definition offers a limited, though practical, framework through which other religions may be compared and analyzed. However, other iterations of what Islamic education could be, namely a dynamic force for the study of religion *in toto*, are only possible if we are to seriously commend religious life as an internally conceived and outwardly practiced dynamic of life. This would require conceiving a theological underpinning which conceives Islamic education as grounded in sacred ideas of knowledge, ethics and existential meaning. If done so, Islamic education may constitute a definition of Islamic civilization itself (Pomerantz and Shahin 2016). To do so would mean to have it placed rather uneasily within the normative bounds of disciplinary knowledge, since Islamic education could be used to operationalize a study of the religion itself. Our particular attention here is that education serves as a specific and perhaps hitherto unexplored method to address to achieve, this end. It is partly due to the special recognition of knowledge (*'ilm*), learning (*ta'līm*) and etiquette (*adab*) which hold significance in Islam and make it, according to the prominent oriental scholar Franz Rosenthal (2006), unique in world religions.

That knowledge draws a fundamental horizon for Muslim life wherein one's relations to the Divine and its antecedent accord to creation is forged highlights its relation to the nature of belief itself (Cook 2010). Knowledge, conceived within the realm of belief, holds the special role of being a gift, a Divine benefaction, through which we come to know God, the meaning of things and our place in the realm of being. The Prophet Muhammad says in a prominent hadith that 'the *scholars are the successors of the prophets*. Verily, the prophets do not pass on gold and silver coins, but rather they only impart knowledge' (quoted in al-Bazzar, italics added). The Quran itself makes great mention of knowledge on numerous occasions and gives as one of God's exalted names, *Al-Alīm*, The Knowing (Q. 8:61).

The privileged status of knowledge in the Islamic imagination has historically translated into a body of literature, often exhortatory in nature, treating education, the journey of learning and its responsibilities as a sacred duty, requiring refined comportment (*adab*) and probities which match its honored status (Günther 2020). A hadith mentions in this regard

> Verily, the angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge. The inhabitants of the heavens and earth, even the fish in the depths of the water, seek forgiveness for the scholar. The virtue of the scholar over the worshiper is like the superiority of the moon over the stars. The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets. They do not leave behind gold or silver coins, but rather they leave behind knowledge. Whoever has taken hold of it has been given an abundant share.
>
> (Ibn Mājah)

The conflation of knowledge and ethical comportment is again impressed in the hadith literature, wherein the Prophet has said "my Lord educated me, and He perfected my education (lit. most rarefied my comportment)" (*addabanī Rabbī wa-aḥsana ta'dībī*) (al-Sam'ānī). In this tradition, education is paired to a recognition of character (forging a connection between knowing and becoming). The connection with knowledge and ethics vitally undergirds the project of education, and within Islamic history, it is grounded in the person of the Prophet Muhammad. Since he is, for Muslims, the final Divine dispensation of prophecy, the entirety of human potential is realized through him, since he is the paragon of beautified excellence (*iḥsān*). Emulating his manner (*sunnah*) becomes a goal for Muslims who are called to merge knowledge, ethics and virtue as an embodiment of the good life. In a similar vein, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, the Prophet's cousin and fourth caliph,

stated that "a learned man is better than one who fasts, prays, and battles in the path of God" (al-Quḍāʾī. Muḥammad ibn Salām 2013, p. 15). The challenge this rich tradition offers today is that of awakening an historical memory and ushering its rich legacy within the doors of contemporary discussions and practices of education. An Islamic conception of learning, comparable to the ideals of Greek *paideia* or the modern liberal tradition, can never merely be achieved through inculcation of facts and information alone but is a journey towards the blossoming of one's internal and moral life such that one may achieve its fullest expression. As the prominent theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) notes in his reflection upon the purposes of learning:

> Whatever you read look into a field of learning, it should be something that improves your heart and cleanse your soul, as though you had learned that you had but one week to live.
>
> (quoted in Cook 2010, p. 106)

In becoming sensitive to the subtleties of life, one may reach what al-Ghazālī is referring to here as *iḥsan*, defined as the greatest part of religious life (Chiabotti et al. 2017). The Arabic term *iḥsan* being derived from beauty (*husn*) and can be defined by a directive towards perfected excellence where the ends and means of learning are imbibed with an attentiveness of reaching their respective fullness. Early examples of such practices, promoted by scholars exhorting those in the teaching profession to uphold the nobility and honor it, come from the Cairene scholar Ibn Jamāʾah (d. 1333). Having penned a popular text on the subject, he offers guidelines for teachers and students on how to practice appropriate inner and outer conduct in the classroom. In reference to the physical (and before discussion of the inner preparation of teachers), he mentions that a teacher ought to prepare himself in the following way "... Before he goes to the institution of learning, he should purify himself from pollution and filth, cleansing and perfume himself, and dress in some of his best clothes, as befits him among the people of his time, in order to honour learning and exalt the religious law" (Cook 2010, p. 165). The rich details of such accounts are not limited to formal education but extend to non-formal practical, guild-based, learning as well. Here the education of craftsmen and women was meant as an initiation into a trade with aesthetic and moral priority such that craft may beautify the world as well as the soul of the maker (Aščerić-Todd 2015).

What this tradition of Islamic education means for the contemporary context is potentially an ability to harness the historical energy of such ideas and practices in order to engage with the world today. For modern theological institutions in Germany, and elsewhere, to help receive students into this worldview is perhaps one of the most pertinent tasks of Islamic theology in the 21st century. This may, in practical terms, look like adapting and conceiving theological matters in contemporary academic life as living traditions to grasp and work out the 'theology of the moment'. This means, in part, an antipodal historicized mien to Islamic knowledge, which defines much of contemporary Islamic studies (Bulliet 2020), and how we may usher a vision of learning within the spirit of historical traditions of wisdom. That may practically look like revising and stimulating the cause of classical texts (something like the revival of 'The Greats' in the Oxford tripos at the end of the Victorian era). However, such a reorientation would only be one side of the morbius strip of the issue and draws questions of curating and reinterpreting the tradition of 'classical' Islamic knowledge (Shamsy 2020). As has been argued above, at the center of the anatheistic university, there is a greater question of existential consequence, namely that of meaning. The problem of imagination, and how we create meaning in the world of knowledge, infers a greater discussion of the implicated view of knowledge and its inimitable connectivity with the world around and within us. A discipline such as Islamic Theology may be able to do this, albeit drawing from premodern methodologies, and does nonetheless extol modern readers of how such an architecture of knowledge may harness the collective interests of individuals by seeing the individual as a consummate whole. For Islamic Theology to preach or proselytize its unique voice in the academy in this unexpected moment would be premature. Rather, in strengthening its own voice and ideas

and securing its vista upon knowledge, it may in time surface a subtle institutional irony, namely, that by holding onto and considerately conceiving Islamic learning in a post-secular institution, it may offer to potentially enrich the institution as a whole. This argument in many ways inverts Kant's important discussion in his 'The Contest of the Facilities' (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*), which argues that the role of Theology may become subordinated (though a higher discipline, in Kant's view) by the natural autonomy of Philosophy (Bahti 1987). Part of the significance of the argument comes from the inculcation of these ideas into Humboldt University (Berlin), which subsequently helped shape the modern institution and its face towards the nature of disciplinarity (Turner 2014).

In this regard, an intellectual discussion on the nature of Islamic Theology would require contemplating upon methodology and its informing research and teaching. Methodology here means, as it did for Kant, deciphering and clarifying the spirit of the discipline, namely how it may imbibe an inherent confidence to find and draw from the deep wells of scholarship and experience defining the Islamic tradition. This meditative exertion towards methodology will invariably interface with modern scholarship and disciplinarity. In terms of teaching, an approach to Islamic Theology may find more expression, for example, through use of classical materials and harnessing them for contemporary development in young scholars. If the significance of classical ideals of Islamic education are to be inculcated, then holistic visions of learning ought to be made available for learners, such as memorizing, the slow and meditative reading of specific texts as well as helping students take care to understand the inner life as part of the journey and responsibilities of education. As the 13th century Muslim pedagogist al-Zarnūjī (d. 11.95) says, "And it behoves him who seeks knowledge not to the base himself by desiring what should not be desired, and abstained from those things which degrade science and its bearers. One should also be modest, for modesty lies between arrogance and humility" (quoted in Cook 2010, p. 14). Returning to definitions of Islamic education, we may differentiate a discipline which helps us to learn *about* Islam, namely treating it to the normal restrictions as any other religions, or learning *through* Islam, i.e., acknowledging the theological, historical and social practices which forge a dynamic image of religious life itself. This latter, 'maximalist' view of education necessarily rebels against normative disciplinary fragmentation, which requires education to be subject to Procrustean measures, breaking its natural concordance with metaphysical and physical meanings of being. This does not mean that one ought to be become an 'insider' to fully explore the bounds of Islamic education either. Alternatively, perhaps more can be achieved through the study of Islamic education, in the manner described above, since it is a field where traditionally Islamic studies and its increasing specialisms (Bulliet 2020) cannot be readily accommodated.

Reviewing again the imaginative dilemmas of the modern university, what Islamic education would 'offer' the problems of 'depth perception', the conservative analysis of 'vertigo' or the creative paradox of 'paralysis' is an indeterminate case. The thought experiment of this paper does not have any obvious answers to these problems, though it potentially shows, via its presence from the stark 'other', that Islamic Theology departments tackle questions which the modern university has more recently in its history availed itself of. Therefore, instead of directly voicing responses to the problems of imagination, we may focus on philosophical questions which these problems gravitate towards. Such questions are not defined by Islamic Theology and Islamic education, respectively, as self-evident or even agreed upon by the varying departments which constitute this discipline; they are rather ideal types standing for general comparisons with the anatheist university. And whilst both may presume answers to the following fundamental philosophical questions, it is important for them to meet and reflect, such that they may learn from one another and ultimately enlighten the anatheist university (together). This they may do via a focus on the following superintendent and often underlying claims of education.

Human Subject. Questions over the nature of the human being form a superordinate backdrop to all pedagogic endeavors and philosophies of learning. Thus, considering the essential need to reflect upon and postulate ideas about what

it means to be human at the beginning of the 21st century is increasingly evident. Moving away from answers derived purely from the sources of scientism (Slingerland 2008) to those which host the possibility of humans as consummate selves and engaging with the questions of metaphysics, *noumena* and the purpose of education, may occasion the possibility for such a move.

Hierarchy of Knowledge. How does knowledge (if at all) connect and communicate itself within the walls of the university? This is an increasingly important question within the discourse on contemporary universities and one which moves beyond divisions between the natural sciences and humanities.

Tradition/History. As a project of modernity, the modern university has been defined by its awareness of place in the story of history (Dupré 1993). Conscious of a decision to subvert history then, how does the anatheistic university relate to the past (as well as its own future)?

5. Conclusions

In light of the questions raised in this paper concerning the modern university, the presence of Islamic education is not a guarantor for their resolution. The above areas of philosophical inquiry are embedded into the structures of the imaginative and superintending forms of the functioning institutions, and for such reasons, contemplating a panacea is unlikely (and ironically unimaginative). Such questions alternatively present a possible meeting (the gift of hospitality) for reflection and introspection at a time in which the university has accumulated an unprecedented social capital in the modern world. However, with increasing discontent within academe over such issues, what will the mere presence of Islamic education awaken in the imaginative potential of the anatheistic university? At root, this encounter is one which ponders philosophical questions and none more pertinent than those within the philosophy of education. In understanding the content and character of education, the university has made clear, in almost a thousand years of operation, its intentions upon civilization. Hutchins, in his acclaimed *The University of Utopia* (Hutchins 1953), reminds us that "... civilization is the deliberate pursuit of a common ideal. Education is the deliberate attempt to form men in terms of an ideal. It is the attempt of a society to produce the type of man that it wants" (p. 52).

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