Modern Islamic Political Thought

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The Response of the Shī‘ī and Sunnī Muslims to the Twentieth Century

Hamid Enayat

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To Anna, Hādī and Āmeneh

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Foreword

by
Roy P. Mottahedeh

It is a great pleasure to introduce Hamid Enayat's *Modern Islamic Political Thought* to a new generation of readers. Political thought is by its nature a diffuse subject stretching from political philosophy to everyday sentiments on proper and/or necessary political order. Its history may be written with a view to emphasising the continuity of a tradition or the pressures of immediate political circumstances on the Islamic political thinkers considered.

Hamid Enayat was a scholar of great depth and breadth. He was a social as well as an intellectual historian and in his preface he acknowledges that hundreds more pages would be needed to place the books he considers in the full day-to-day context in which they appeared. By and large he omits this day-to-day context.

Enayat's book is, nevertheless, a classic because he chose clearly defined topics and wrote about them with insight and great learning. He was unusually well-placed to do so. He had devoted his life to intellectual history and was as well-read in secular as in Islamic sources. His translations into Persian of Aristotle and Hegel are still much admired. Moreover, he was one of the very few scholars who truly knew both Arabic and Persian. His enormous reading in these languages created a book that emphasised not only the old stand-bys such as Rashīd Ridā and Tabātabā'ī but also somewhat less well-known authors such as Muhibb ad-Din al-Khatīb and Khālid Muhammad Khālid.

The clearly defined areas of interest that he chose to treat in this book, such as Shī'ī -Sunnī disputes and the arguments over the caliphate in the twentieth century, are masterfully done. The light cast on many of these subjects has never been surpassed. In particular, his treatment of Shī'īsm in all periods has detail and nuance that repay many readings. It is the continuing relevance of the categories he suggests that makes his book essential reading for contemporary students of political thought. When he proposes that the 'basic' mood of Shī'īsm (allowing for many exceptions) was: 'particularism, esotericism, historicism, idealism, a pessimistic conception of human nature, a paradoxical apathy in politics, and emotionalism' (p.30), one recognises that this is a well-thought through catalogue with which one might disagree, yet which one would be foolish to disregard. In similar ways Enayat's classifications and points of view find continuing relevance in suggesting categories and perspectives, the importance of which continues to impress.

The book has another unusual advantage in that, while being generally objective in its portrayal of modern Islamic thought, it is written by an ‘insider’ who is intellectually engaged with his sources and not by an ‘antiquarian’ who describes discussions which have no value whatsoever in and of themselves. He even enters into some of the arguments, for example his defence of the ideas of Ali Abd ar-Rāziq.

Thanks to his engagement with the intellectual history he discusses, the scholarship with which he illuminates the topics he chooses and the very precise yet handsome language in which he expresses himself, his work nearly becomes a primary source itself to which we necessarily return. In spite of later developments and recent detailed studies of the figures he treats, Hamid Enayat leaves us with a vision which any serious student of this subject must reckon. Readers of this book will join his many admiring students, colleagues and friends in regretting that we lost him so early in his life.

Roy P. Mottahedeh
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Preface

This book describes and interprets the major political ideas among Muslims in the twentieth century, particularly those expressed by the Egyptians and Iranians – but also a few writers and thinkers in Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. It is a book concerned mainly with ideas: history and sociology have been called to aid only on those occasions when they help to illuminate the background of thoughts. But what needs more emphasis is that it is a book concerned not so much with ideas set forth by Muslims, as with those which are Islamic – that is to say, are articulated in the recognised terms and categories of Islamic jurisprudence, theology and related disciplines, however much they may sound ‘unorthodox’ or unconventional. This naturally leaves out a great many Muslim intellectuals who may deserve serious study in other perspectives, but it arises from the conviction that in any effort to understand, let alone criticise, Muslim contributions to the political debates of our time, the procedure by which a thinker has arrived at an idea should be given as much weight as the idea itself. It is not enough to extol a writer for his brave new ideas without first ascertaining the extent to which his credal, epistemological and methodological premises have ensured the continuity of Islamic thought. Otherwise, one is apt to allow fascination with novelty to keep oneself from differentiating what is germane from what is extraneous to Islamic culture. The question of any ulterior or hidden motive that these authors may have harboured has been kept out of the analysis, not only because a thorough examination of them threatens to turn a history of ideas into *histoire événementielle*, but also because ideas seem to have a life of their own: people, especially those of the generations subsequent to the authors’, often tend to perceive ideas with little or no regard for the authors’ insidious designs, unless they are endowed with a capacity for mordant cynicism.

The book starts with an introduction outlining the way in which the traditional heritage has impinged on the development of modern thoughts, or can make them cogent and appealing to religious-minded audiences. This is followed by a study of the political differences between the two main schools or sects in Islam – Shī‘īsm and Sunnīsm, and especially on the two-fold process of conflict and concord between them. The main intention is to show that the relationship between the two has been slowly changing in recent times, at least in the realm of political doctrines, from confrontation to cross-sectarian fertilisation. This approach later re-emerges at several other points of the book, with more examples of the implicit or explicit convergence between the two. The remaining chapters are devoted to two basic themes and their ramifications: the concept of the Islamic State from the time it was revived after the abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey in the ’twenties till the late ’seventies, and the Muslim response to the challenge of the alien, modern ideologies of nationalism, democracy and socialism.

Contemporary Islamic political thought cannot be properly appreciated without a knowledge of that set of doctrinal reformulations and reinterpretations which has now come to be known as Islamic modernism. Since a fair number of books have been published in various European languages on this once-promising movement, discussion of it in the present study has been kept to the minimum – with the exception of Shīʻī modernism, which, having been neglected until recently, is treated in some detail in the concluding chapter. Instead, there has been some concentration on the lesser known but equally or potentially important authors.

The amount of political writing and pamphleteering within strictly Islamic framework, and even in the few countries mentioned above, is still staggering, and a student looking for broad trends and patterns has no option but to take some individual writers as representatives of whole schools of thought. This inevitably opens the arena for critics who might point to other writers and publications presenting different standpoints in order to disprove or question some of the conclusions reached in this book. But such criticisms, however unfair they might be, will be welcome in so far as they bring to light still more facets of the mental efforts of Muslims in their strivings for freedom and progress.

Hamid Enayat

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of my colleagues and friends who read the draft of this book and made useful comments for its improvement. Albert Hourani and John Gurney read the whole of the draft, and spent considerable time discussing its content with me. I particularly benefited from stimulating conversations with Professor Madelung, and my compatriot, Husayn Mudarresī Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who commented on the Introduction, and the chapters of Shī'īsm. Michael Cook and Roger Owen made helpful criticisms respectively on Sunnī–Shī'ī polemics and the chapter on 'Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism'. So did Nikki Keddie on the section dealing with Constitutionalism in Chapter 5. However, responsibility for any controversial opinions or inaccuracies in the text is entirely mine. Mrs Angela Turnbull, of Macmillan Press editorial staff, gave me valuable help in making the transliterations and the dates consistent.

I must thank the Tahereh Research Centre for Contemporary Iranian History for their support from October 1979 to March 1980, when I was working on this book. I am also grateful to the staffs of the Libraries of the Middle East Centre of St Antony's College, Oxford, the Oriental Room of the Bodleian Library, and the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for their patient and unfailing services.

* * *

The original idea of this book would never have been conceived were it not for my friendship with the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, Professor of Islamic Philosophy at Tehran University, a most original and creative thinker, a dedicated Muslim, and a humanist.

On the System of Transcription, Dates, etc.

For the sake of consistency, Arabic and Persian words have been transliterated both according to the same system, except that the vowel of the Arabic definite article has been given the value 'u' in Persian names and words (hence Faḍlullāh instead of Faḍl Allāh), and the consonantal *vāv* has been rendered as ‘v’ for Persian and ‘w’ for Arabic words. The main consideration throughout has been to convey exact phonetic structure. Some inconsistencies have, however, inevitably occurred either because of the necessity of observing the common usage, or in quotations, or owing to the different systems of transliterating Turkish words.

Most years before the sixteenth century have been given according to both the lunar Islamic calendar and the Christian calendar, separated by a stroke. The years after that have been given in the text only according to the Christian calendar.

Translations of the Qur’ānic verses are from J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran* (London, 1861), unless they are paraphrased.

H.E.

Introduction: the relevance of the past

Political thought has been the most active area of Muslim intellectual life over the last two centuries. This can be explained primarily by the ongoing struggle of various Muslim peoples in this period for their domestic freedoms and independence from Western powers – a struggle which has not yet reached its avowed goals and, therefore, ensures the continual politicisation of the Muslim mind in the future. A further stimulant may be found in the conjunction of substantial economic, strategic and political interests on the part of the outside world in the heartland of the 'abode of Islam', resulting in the Western obsession with the 'energy crisis' syndrome. Neither of these explanations can, however, be enough to understand the primacy of politics in modern Islam without considering a more fundamental issue: the inherent link between Islam as a comprehensive scheme for ordering human life, and politics as an indispensable instrument to secure universal compliance with that scheme. The authoritarian connotation of this link is a point most frequently seized upon by the Western critics of Islam. But – as we shall try to show in this book – Muslims do not have a unified and monolithic perception of their faith, any more than the followers of other great religions. However much the orthodox dislike it, different groups of Muslims interpret the Qur'anic injunctions and the Prophet's sayings differently – each according to its historical background, and the realities encircling it – and not always in terms conducive to a dictatorial conduct of individual and social affairs.

Another misconception about the fusion of religion and politics in Islamic culture is to think that in historical reality too all political attitudes and institutions among Muslims have had religious sanctions, or have conformed to religious norms. Often the reverse was true: the majority of Muslims, for the greater part of their history, lived under regimes which had only the most tenuous link with those norms, and observed the *Shari'ah* only to the extent that it legitimised their power in the eyes of the faithful.

With these points in mind, there can be little doubt that the Muslim consciousness has a certain leaning towards politics which stems directly from the spirit of Islamic precepts. But it is a leaning which is often hidden behind an air of submissiveness, or political apathy, or both. If the essence of politics is the art of living and working with others, then four of the five 'pillars' of Islam (prayer, fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage, the excluded fifth being testimony to the unity of God and messengership of Muḥammad) are perfectly suited to promoting *esprit de corps* and group solidarity among its followers (*jihād* or holy war, which is considered by some Muslims to be the sixth, has even greater potential for producing the same effect). If, according to another viewpoint, the hallmark of politics is struggle for power, there can hardly be a more political world-vision: always conceiving of human nature in terms of both its physical and spiritual needs, Islam is never content with the mere exposition of its ideals, but constantly seeks the means to implement them – and power is an essential means towards this end. The Qur'ān challenges believers to follow the example of the Prophet Muḥammad, whom it describes as the 'noble paradigm' (*uswah ḥasanah*, 33:21). Since Muḥammad's principal achievement was to lay the foundations of a state based on Islamic teachings, the Muslims have a duty to follow his example in this respect as well.

There is a simpler reason for the concern with politics as the art of government: the accomplishment of a number of the 'collective duties' of Muslims of which the most important are 'enjoining the good and forbidding the evil' (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa'n-nahy 'an al-munkar*) and the defence of the Muslim territory possible only in a state which is, if not totally committed to Islam, then at least sympathetic to its goals. By this token, a Muslim who lives under a regime devoted, or even favourable, to Islam should actively work for its survival; conversely, one who lives under a regime hostile to Islam should struggle for its overthrow whenever the opportunity presents itself. Finally, if the dispute as to *who should rule?* and *why should we obey the rulers?* is the hub of politics, no conscious Muslim can study his history even in the most casual fashion without feeling the urge to ask these questions, and discuss them with his co-religionists. The impulse to do so would be much more powerful when Muslims are subjugated, as large numbers of them have been during the last four centuries, by alien rulers, or those associated with them.

These are all merely the theoretical or potential elements of the politicisation of the Muslim mind, the doctrinal antecedents which should logically predispose a Muslim to be a political creature of the most assertive type. But the actualisation of these elements plainly depends on a favourable environment, of which the most essential feature is the availability of the freedoms of speech, assembly and action. That is why, despite what we have said so far, political thought as an independent and distinct branch of intellectual activity is a fairly recent addition to Islamic culture. Most Muslims have lived, and still live, under regimes which deny them these essential freedoms. Sociologists would dismiss this reasoning as secondary, arguing that the absence of these freedoms is less important than the absence of the social and cultural conditions which should precede or accompany the emergence of any democratic system in its broadest sense—such as the development of commerce and industry, and the rise of an autonomous bourgeoisie. This objection raises a host of issues which are not always related to the doctrinal foundations of Islam. Since we are concerned in the present study with ideas, we have to leave these issues aside, although some will be discussed in our chapter on 'Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism'.[1]

Apart from political and social factors, there has also been a methodological reason for the absence of independent political thought in Islamic history. Traditionally, Muslims rarely studied politics in isolation from related disciplines. Problems such as the nature of the state, the varieties of government, the qualifications of rulers, the limitations on their power and the rights of the ruled were discussed as part of the comprehensive treatises on jurisprudence and theology—all securely within the unassailable walls of the *Sharī'ah*. It was only under the trauma of European military, political, economic and cultural encroachments since the end of the eighteenth century that Muslim élites started to write separate works on specifically political topics. One remarkable feature of such works from the viewpoint of the cultural interaction between Islam and the West in modern history is the language in which they were written. So long as Westernisation had not alienated large segments of the new educated groups from their traditional heritage, most reformers expressed their ideas in the language of Islamic sciences—using stereotyped legal phrases, citing Qur'anic verses and Prophetic sayings, with only occasional quotations from foreign sources. But as time went on, with Westernised intellectuals supplanting traditional leaders at most levels of the educational system, and the growing tendency of the literate classes to hold all that was old responsible for Muslim backwardness, the cultural unity of the élites was shattered. While the majority of the literate and the learned remained loyal to Islamic ideas and values, a small but increasingly influential group had come to praise Western culture and civilisation as being superior to everything else humanity had created, and that in a phraseology largely unknown to most Muslims—whether literate or illiterate. The breakdown of the cultural integration of traditional society was thus reflected in a linguistic rift, which has been one of the chief obstacles to a coherent, sustained and fruitful debate among Muslims of all classes and ages over their social and political problems. One of the remarkable changes in the Muslim mentality since the Second World War has been a growing trend in the opposite direction—namely an awareness that no political idea, however valid and vital for the freedom and prosperity of Muslims, can mobilise them in a successful movement to cure their ills, unless it is shown to conform in both form and substance to the dictates of their religious consciousness.

This book deals with the ideas of those Muslim writers who have been mindful of the necessity of this conformity, and in whose formation the legacy of Islamic culture, particularly the tradition of political thinking as a subsidiary element of the *Sharī‘ah*, has played the largest part. A brief survey of the basic strands of that tradition is therefore essential for the understanding of the main issues in modern Islamic political thought.

* * *

The fact that political thought among Muslims in the past was always subsumed under some other discipline in the spectrum of classical Islamic sciences did not by itself restrict its scope, or impoverish its content. Indeed, a student of political ideas will find Muslim history in its first six or seven centuries a fascinating mosaic of competing schools, each with a different perception of the foundations of state authority and the limits of individual obedience to the rulers. Immediately after the Prophet's death dispute broke out at the Saqīfah assembly over the choice of his successor. It was, on the face of it, a dispute over personalities, but underlying it were the same fundamental themes that have preoccupied lively political minds the world over, and at all times. From wrangling over personalities, it was a short step to doctrinal and theoretical altercations. These may now be summarised, but only in so far as they can clarify our later discussions: what will be of interest to us is not so much the original or the real form of such altercations, but the way in which they are interpreted by Muslim writers today, and this is often a function of not only their sectarian and ideological bias but the political needs of their societies as well.

One group of Muslims, which proved to be a minority, believed that the Prophet had in fact designated his successor, and that was his son-in-law and cousin, ‘Alī. According to them, the designation had taken place during the Prophet's journey from his last pilgrimage to Mecca, on the eighteenth day of the month of *Dhu'l-ḥijjah*, in the eleventh year of his Hijrah (632), at a place called the Ghadir (pool) of Khumm, where he made a fateful proclamation which has been reported in different versions, the most popular being: 'He for whom I was the master, should hence have ‘Alī as his master.' This group came to be known as the *Shī‘ah* (literally, followers) of ‘Alī. Another party close to them held that the succession should go to the Prophet's uncle, ‘Abbās, on the grounds that if being a relative of the Prophet was to count as the decisive qualification, ‘Abbās, being senior to ‘Alī, had a greater right by virtue of the Qur'anic verse which requires that among 'those who are akin' some must be prior to others (8:75). The Shī‘ī case, however, went far beyond the personal qualities of ‘Alī. It asserted that it was inconceivable given God's justice and benevolence (*luṭf*) towards human beings that he should have left the issue of the leadership (*imāmah*, *imāmate*) undecided. The same rational considerations which necessitate the sending of His emissaries and prophets also require that in their absence faultless leaders should be appointed for the custodianship (*wilāyah*) of their followers. Furthermore, the logical corollary to the acceptance of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings was the commitment to their implementation. Only a sound and thorough knowledge (*ʿilm*) of the true meaning of the Qurʾān and the Prophetic Tradition could help the young Muslim community in this direction. That knowledge was available to those who were near and dear to the Prophet, especially ʿAlī, and, through him, to his eleven male descendants: this at least was the position of the Shīʿism of the Twelver school (*Ithnā ʿAsharī*), whose political views will be discussed in this book.

The Shīʿīs also argued – mainly in response to the criticisms of those who defended the principle of the electiveness of the successors to the Prophet – that the problem of the leadership of the community was too vital to be left to the deliberations of ordinary individuals who might choose the wrong person for the position, thereby countering the purpose of the divine revelation. Only God is aware of the presence of the qualities of knowledge and infallibility and impeccability (*ʿiṣmah*) in individuals, and can therefore secure the triumph of his revelations by making these individuals known through his emissaries. It is here that the issue of personalities enters into the debate, because the Shīʿīs maintain that only those individuals who were closely associated with, or related to, the Prophet could have possessed such qualities, and these were none other than ʿAlī and his male descendants.[4] This part of the Shīʿī argument complemented another thesis which is perhaps the most important element in Shīʿī political theory – namely the absolute and irrevocable necessity of justice as a condition of rulership, in accordance with the Qurʾānic injunction: '"My covenant", said God, "embraceth not the evil-doers" (*al-ẓālimūn*)' (2:124). A sequel to the Shīʿī case for the Imāmate is the justification of the place of the ʿUlamāʾ or *mujtahids* in the Muslim community after the disappearance of the Imāms. The word '*ʿulamāʾ*' is the plural of *ʿālim*, meaning a scholar, or more specifically, religious scholar; *mujtahid* literally means a person who exerts his mental faculties, but is applied to an *ʿālim* qualified to derive legal norms from the sources of the law. If the Imāms are charged with the duty of guiding the Muslims after the end of the 'cycle of revelation', that is, after the death of the last of God's emissaries, the ʿUlamāʾ and *mujtahids* are charged with the duty of guiding the Muslims after the end of the 'cycle of Imāmate', that is, after the disappearance of the Imām – the difference being, of course, that the ʿUlamāʾ do not partake of the quality of *ʿiṣmah*, or other extraordinary attributes of the Imāms.

Another group, which formed the majority of Muslims, took the view that the Prophet had deliberately left the question of his succession open, leaving it to the community to decide who would be the most competent person to assume its leadership. These Muslims came to be known as the Sunnīs, or the followers of *Sunnah* (tradition), an appellation which may be taken to symbolise their adherence to principles rather than personalities. Certainly they must have been helped in their conviction by the fact that the Prophet had left no son. Many of them do not deny the authenticity of the Ghadir story, but contest the construction that the Shī'īs put on it, particularly their understanding of the term *master* (*mawlā*) in the Prophet's proclamation. The Sunnīs instead stand for the right of the Muslim community to choose the Prophet's successor in political leadership rather than the pre-emptive title of any particular individual to it. Typical of this stand is the stress laid on a saying attributed to the Prophet, to the effect that his followers are more knowledgeable or better informed (*a'lam*) in their worldly affairs than him – presumably after his death.

Whatever the true intentions of the Prophet, it was the Sunnī view that prevailed at the Saqīfah assembly. Its proceedings, as reported by Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) and other early Muslim historians, raise some doubts about the spontaneity of its decision. But the fact of the matter is that an animated, and at times stormy, debate *did* take place, and that the assembly finally *did* elect a successor. Abū Bakr, the man chosen and given the title of '*Khalīfah* (Caliph, successor) of God's messenger' was also a distinguished member of the community and a close companion of the Prophet. He was older than other contenders for the Caliphate, had been chosen by the Prophet to accompany him on his migration from Mecca to Medina, an event of such importance as to deserve a mention in the Qur'ān (9:40), gave the Prophet his daughter 'Ā'ishah in marriage and acted as his chief adviser. All this means that in justifying the Saqīfah affair, and the continuation of the basic feature of its procedure, that is, the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the élite, or the 'people who loose and bind' (*ahl al-ḥall wa'l-'aqd*) in the election of Abū Bakr, as well as his three immediate successors ('Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, who, together with Abū Bakr, are known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*Khulafā' rāshidūn*), the Sunnīs also have to introduce a good deal of personalised politics into the controversy. Besides *ijmā'*, the election of the Caliphs consisted also of *bay'ah*, literally clasping of hands, but meaning the taking of the oath of allegiance to the Caliph by his electors, and *'ahd*, or the covenant whereby the Caliph undertook, in the face of the Muslim community, to rule in accordance with the provisions of the *Sharī'ah*, and the community promised to obey him. So whereas the key political terms for the Shī'īs were *imāmah*, *wilāyah* and *'iṣmah*, those for the Sunnīs were *Khilāfah*, *ijmā'* and *bay'ah*. Overlappings were, of course, inevitable: the Sunnīs used the title Imām for the Caliph, especially whenever they referred to his spiritual functions; and the Shī'īs accepted the validity of *ijmā'*, provided that it included the opinion of 'the infallible one' (*ma'ṣūm*).[1]

The third major political trend in early Islam was a rejection of both the Sunnī and Shī'ī positions, and its followers came to be appropriately known as the *Khawārij* (plural of *Khārijī*, meaning an outsider or seceder). It came into existence twenty-five years after the death of the Prophet as a result of the first great schism in Islamic history, when a group of Muslims revolted against the Caliph 'Alī because he had agreed to refer his dispute with the rebel Mu'āwiyah to arbitration. Apparently seeing the dispute as a clear-cut conflict between right and wrong, they emphatically argued that in such matters there could be no arbitration or judgement (*ḥukm*) except by God. This opinion, for which the Khawārij could find literal warrant in the Qur'ān, typified their strict adherence to the letter of the Book. Later on, upon gaining control over some Muslim territories, they modified their idealism – as most revolutionary groups do once they are in power. Allied to their uncompromising attachment to the Qur'ān was a democratic temper insisting on the right of all Muslims, irrespective of their tribal, racial and class distinctions, to elect or depose, or to be elected as rulers. This set them against the Sunnīs, who for the most part confined the Caliphate to the Meccan aristocracy (Quraysh), and the Shī'is, who restricted it to one branch of it, the House of the Prophet (Banū Hāshim). When all this is added to the Khārijī exaltation of action as a criterion of faith, and their use of violence against their opponents, the full import of their radicalism and the conscious or unconscious affinity that some fundamentalist groups in modern history have had with them, becomes apparent. The Muslim Brothers in Egypt have sometimes been accused of being Khawārij. They have always denied the charge, and even spoken of the 'errors' of the Khawārij, but have nevertheless praised their 'rectitude', and their 'struggle in the path of God'.[4] So although the Khawārij never transcended their status as an extremist minority detested by both the Sunnīs and Shī'īs, and have today vanished except in isolated groups in Algeria, Tunisia, Oman and East Africa, they played an important, albeit indirect, part in the development of Islamic political thought by acting for a while as the incorruptible conscience of the Muslims, forcing them to keep in sight the absolute and the ideal, as opposed to the relative and the actual, in their efforts to construct an Islamic society.

These were the three principal political trends in the first four decades of Islamic history, although they do not by any means exhaust all the divisions and the variations within them – for instance, those in terms of class differences, or the rivalries between the *Muhājirūn* (the Meccans who *migrated* with the Prophet to Medina) and the *Anṣār* (the *helpers* or allies of Medina). But such alignments have little or no bearing on what we are going to study in this book. The same largely holds true for the period from the end of the era of Rightly-Guided Caliphs up to the fourteenth century. There are, however, one or two features of the intellectual history of the period which are relevant to our study because it was in this period that the first stirrings of philosophical thought enlivened the Muslim mind, confronting it with questions about the limits of Man's freedom within the Islamic scheme of things – questions which are very much at the heart of the modern Islamic critique of traditionalism. They were often raised by inquisitive souls who were perhaps unaware of the political implications of what they asked, or if they were, philosophy for them was a convenient disguise to conceal their unconventional ideas so as to avoid provoking both the wrath of the rulers and the terrifying reaction of the bigoted public.

Foremost among the thinkers who aroused the Muslim appetite for speculative investigation were the Muʿtazilah, who flourished in the second/eighth century, and are often associated with the first attempts at reconciling reason and revelation in Islam. Now few of the Muslim modernists in our time would admit that they have been inspired by the pioneering work of the Muʿtazilah, especially in giving a rationalist interpretation of Islam: on the contrary, many of them deprecate the Muʿtazilah either for their intellectual excesses, or their neglect of 'non-conceptual' dimensions of the religious experience—meaning intuition and mysticism.[5] But the similarities between some of the substantive positions of the two groups are so striking that one can hardly escape the conclusion that many of the modernists must have been secretly delighted to find such early precedents for their innovative ideas. Like the Muʿtazilah, the majority of the modernists emphasise the high place of reason in their scale of values, and try to show the perfect compatibility of 'true Islam' with the findings of a mind free from the scourge of ignorance, prejudice and superstition. Like the Muʿtazilah, the modernists think that Islam upholds the principle of free will (*ikhtiyār*), as opposed to that of predestinarianism (*jabr*), since it has been obvious to both groups that Muslims will never desist from meekly enduring injustice unless they become first convinced of their capability to determine their destiny. A favourite theme in the rare philosophical writings of the modernists is commenting on the Qurʾānic verse: 'Verily God will not change (the condition of) a folk, till they change what is in themselves' (13 : 11). Nowadays, belief in free will is not obviously regarded as a heresy, but in the second/eighth century, apart from the Khawarij and the Shiʿis, the only other major group of Muslims who were persecuted for their unorthodox ideas were the advocates of *ikhtiyār*, a notion which soon acquired the same significance in Islamic history as the concept of liberty in Western political thought.

Attitudes towards the West provide another parallel: the Muʿtazilah saw no harm in adopting rationalism and logic to sharpen the tools of dialectic theology in order to defend Islam against Christianity, Manichaeism and other alien creeds; the modernists overtly or covertly apply categories of thought derived from Western philosophy, political theory and science to enrich their own reformistic or revolutionary propositions apart from urging Muslims to emulate the West in its technological and scientific achievements while condemning its moral and spiritual depravity. Another similarity, which may be accidental, but nevertheless deserves attention, is the prominence afforded by both groups to the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the unity of God. The Muʿtazilah did this to vindicate the oneness of God against not only its non-Muslim detractors, but also against those Muslims who, through a literal interpretation of the Qurʾān, threatened to erect God's attributes into independent hypostases, which made nonsense of His unity. The modernists reiterate the meaning of *tawḥīd* to denounce devotion to anything other than God, and this includes not only the apotheosis of 'perfect man' as suggested by Ṣūfī teachings, but also servile obedience to the tyrants and *ṭawāghīt* ('satans', or illegitimate rulers); the result in both cases, however, is to turn the meaning of *tawḥīd* from a mere theological formula into a comprehensive system of faith and political action.

Another instance of the catalytic role of intellectualism in the politics of early Islam can be noticed in the movement of *Al-Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ* (the Brethren of Purity) who probably lived in the third or fourth/ninth or tenth centuries. Their *Rasāʾil* (Epistles) constitute the first known Islamic encyclopedia, an impressive compendium of the sciences of their time. The Ikhwān appear to have espoused the Ismāʿīlī school of Shīʿism, which was at that time more radical than the Twelver school in challenging the orthodox regimes, and their agitations convulsed the lands of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate until the Mongol invasion in the seventh/thirteenth century. It may be true, as has been suggested by some scholars, that the Ikhwān's central teaching had no direct relevance to politics, being essentially concerned with matters such as the transmigration of souls or the doctrine of emanation. But the circumstances in which the *Rasāʾil* were composed, as well as some of their contents, tell a different story. The fact that their authors undertook such a momentous enterprise in secrecy and anonymity, evidently to protect themselves against both obscurantist rulers and ignorant masses, should in itself be of great political significance. More to the point, there are extensive passages in the *Rasāʾil* which indicate that their authors took a serious interest in the social conditions of the Muslims, and endeavoured to identify some of the causes of their moral bankruptcy and enslavement by despotic systems of government. They did this chiefly through the expedient of allegory which has always been the favourite literary style of elitist esoteric movements in Islam, whether revolutionary or conservative. Their political theses do not seem to be different, in essence, from those of Shīʿism, especially in their emphasis on the functions of the Imams, and their attacks on "unjust temporal rulers". One theme which unfailingly runs through their entire work is the necessity of knowledge and consciousness as the pre-condition of worldly and other-worldly salvation. But instead of leaving this enlightened teaching to wither into a sterile lesson in public morality, the Ikhwān made their tracts a strong proof of their dedication to the dissemination of knowledge among the people: knowledge not only in the customary sense in such texts, that is, understanding religion, but the combination of the 'sciences and wisdoms' of their time. What is more, they valued only that kind of knowledge which could be conducive to action, which they conceived as an effort for both the spiritual and material amelioration of the individual and society. Combined with their belief in free will, and the inevitability of change and movement in all natural and social phenomena, the *Rasāʾil* contained the outlines of an indictment of Muslim beliefs and practices in the third and fourth centuries, plus a thinly veiled call for a watertight programme of doctrinal re-education and revolutionary struggle.[7] All this makes the Ikhwān irresistibly appealing to all those Muslim intellectuals today who find their co-religionists in the same state of moral drift and social stagnation as that prevailing in the third or fourth century. This statement is meant not to overstate the importance of the *Rasā'il* as such, but rather to underline the relevance of its genre, and of literary symbolism in general as a vehicle of political expression. Modern Arab, Persian and Turkish literary works, as those of medieval times, contain innumerable applications of the same style, on a scale which is rarely matched by the legacy of those cultures in which freedom of expression has enjoyed a longer and more secure tradition.

However successful the Sunnī rulers were in suppressing the movements of Shī'ism, the Khawārij, the Mu'tazilah and Al-Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā', they could not for long ensure the immobility of the political institutions which constituted the targets of such oppositions. Gradual but far-reaching changes in political reality worked against their conservatism. The linchpin of all political institutions, the Caliphate, soon fell victim to the process of the disintegration of the 'Abbāsid state. The rise of the rival Caliphates in Cordova (Spain) and Cairo, and of autonomous Persian and Turkish dynasties, together with the causes intrinsic to all empires held together by a mixture of naked force and unifying myths, deprived the Caliphate in Baghdad of real power, and turned it into a hollow shell of pontifical honours, performing the ceremonial act of endorsing the transfer of powers into the hands of less dignified figures. The formulation of the theory of the Caliphate dates back to this period – a further proof of the rule that it is the decline of an institution that prompts deliberation on its structure. So far as the Sunnī thinking on the Caliphate enjoyed any continuity and sequence, one can detect in it a pronounced sense of realism, an eagerness to adjust theory to practice. Three names stand out in the history of Sunnī realism: Abu'l Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Badr ad-Dīn Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 732/1332).

Māwardī defined and justified the necessity of the Caliphate at a time when the ascendancy of the Sunnī Ghaznavids had put an end to the humiliations suffered by its occupants under the pro-Shī'ī Buyids, and had created a favourable atmosphere for affirming its authority. But in fact nothing had changed: it was the Ghaznavīd and later the Saljūq dynasties which wielded the real power. Ostensibly, Māwardī defended the supremacy and indivisibility of the Caliphate, but since in elaborating the qualifications, methods of investiture and duties of the Caliphs, he relied not only on the precepts of the *Sharī'ah*, but also on historical precedents as crystallised in the *ijmā'* (consensus) of the community, his work amounted to an implicit admission that political authority can be as valid as religious norms. More significantly, by envisaging the seizure of executive power by local rulers as one of the conditions under which the Caliphate is

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