



TOPIC 1: Debate on values

Collection of materials

Islamic political thinkers in the Middle Ages

T 1/25 The Mu'tazalites' view: there exists a natural moral law

"An action is in itself good or evil and does not gain this recognition only through the revelation; it was good or evil before there was the revelation and it is good or evil wherever a prophet has or even has not appeared, and this for all people, whether they have heard of the revelation or not. A good, meritorious action cannot therefore be converted into an evil, punishable action or vice versa, by anyone, not even by God. And because good is good in itself and evil is evil in itself, because good and evil actions do not receive the predicate "good" or "evil" through the revelation, human reason is able to differentiate between good and evil without this revelation." (KHOURY et al., 1991, p. 218f)

T 1/26 The Mu'tazalites' three principles

"The first principle states that knowledge starts from this world. We can only speak of the other „invisible, metaphysical world“ on the basis of indications given to us by the obvious reality of this „visible“ world.

The second principle states that all people of whatever race, skin colour, religion, language or culture are provided with the necessary capacity to understand, with the necessary "intellect". They do differ, however, in their ability to progress by reflection from the level of necessary knowledge to the level of acquired knowledge. This act of reflection consists either of deduction or induction, i.e. of studying evidence or clues.

To acknowledge God is a religious duty. The acknowledgement of God is also the highest goal of intellectual reflection. God provided man with intellect, that is, He gave him the power to reflect so that he could arrive at the true knowledge of God independently of divine revelation. God and His attributes can only be recognized through reflection and acquired knowledge, not through immediate or revealed knowledge...

The third principle is the rejection of the idea of consensus or majority opinion, because it is in no way obviously true. Mohammed's followers, for example, were a small minority at the beginning, but their conviction is nevertheless true. Reference to the authority of tradition leads to an endless chain of errors. Neither the authority of the majority nor the authority of another traditionalism can guarantee the correctness of following tradition." (ABU SAID, 2003)

T 1/27 The duties of a caliph according to Al Mawardi

"1. He must protect the religion in its principles and must conserve what the consensus of the ancestors made holy; if a new one appears or someone diverges from this, the ruler must explain to him his errors, admonish him to follow the truth and if necessary punish him, so that the community and its order should suffer no harm. 2. The ruler must see to it that all regulations of the law are observed between dissenting parties in order to stifle any quarrel and to create a state of complete lawful security. 3. He must ensure public safety in the area of Islam, so that people can pursue their trades and commerce without fear of attack.

4. The caliph must administer the punishments prescribed in the Koran for capital crimes such as high treason.. 5. The borders must be secured and manned so that enemies can be fended off at any time. 6. The caliph is responsible for holy war (jihad). 7. The ruler must see to it that the taxes and tributes laid down in divine law are collected; this is to be done without force. 8. State revenues must reach the right hands at the right time. 9. The caliph should entrust the administration of the country to competent, reliable and upright men. 10. He should himself oversee the conduct of state business and himself organize checks on the correctness of everything; guiding the Islamic state is his responsibility alone. For this reason he should not abandon himself to unbridled pleasure after delegating all tasks. Since one person can never be in a position to carry out the many tasks involved in the leadership of an Islamic state, all other state offices derive from the office and authority of the caliph. In connection with this, Al Mawardi draws up a hierarchy of offices under the caliph, at the top of which is the visier, followed by the emirs, the judges, the finance officials etc." (HEINE, 1996, p. 149f)

T 1/28 Al Ghasali tries to legitimize government by sultan

"His theory rests on a metaphysical concept of the world, but the ideal community is no longer the early Islamic community in Medina, and its existence is no longer guaranteed by the sharia and Imam. He explains the meaning of the phrase „Obey God and the Prophet and those of you who possess power“ as obedience to God, the Prophet and the emirs, i.e. the secular rulers. The sultan has divine splendour and must be obeyed as the elect of God; but only he who administers justice is a true sultan. Religion is strengthened by the kingdom, the kingdom by the army and the army by wealth. Wealth is guaranteed by the land being populated and thrives through justice. Al Ghasali lays considerable importance on the necessity for a strong sultan." (LAMBTON, 1983, S. 197)

T 1/29 Rational theology is not good for society in general

"This contradiction in Ibn Ruschd's teaching is very similar to the one we find in the rational theology of modern Islamic thinking. Ibn Ruschd's insistent demand not to deliver up philosophical knowledge to society in general closed the door to enlightenment and preserved it as a privilege for the élite. His concept of a "half-brother relationship" between religion and philosophy did not bridge the gap between the élite and the common people. Al Ghasali's writings dominated Islamic discussion right up to the 19th. century. Only at the beginning of the 19th. century did the European challenge open up the circle of debate." (ABU SAID, 2003)

T 1/30 Is the early Islamic community a model for the future?

Ibn Taymiyya: "For him the early Islamic community represents the ideal Islamic community and is therefore binding. The bond between religion and state is in his opinion irrevocable. Without the state there is hardly any possibility of imposing the norms of religion, without religion on the other hand it is to be feared that tyranny and caprice will gain the upper hand in society. In his opinion it is the state's main duty to make sure that justice predominates and good is promoted and evil prevented. Only within such a state is it possible that man, by nature weak, will be persuaded to observe God's laws. The consequences of his evaluation of the actual political situation in his time are not without their individualistic aspects. It is his opinion that a Muslim only owes God and the Prophet Mohammed obedience As a member of the community of believers each single person has the duty, but also the right, to counsel his brothers in the faith to the best of his ability, to set them on the right path and avoid anything that could weaken the community of Muslims. In this he could recall the saying of the Prophet that the Muslim should advise his brother with truthfulness and patience. The fact that there are different Islamic states is taken for granted by him. He is concerned with the unity of the Islamic community, rather than with a single state structure." (HEINE, 1996, p. 152)

T 1/31 The end of the secular tradition in Islam

"The witch-hunt of philosophers and heretics organized by the orthodox Islamists was particularly aided by the disintegration of the Arab-Islamic empire and the return to agricultural activities and the geographical breaking up of the empire. The latter phase of the Abbasid period marks the end of the Arab golden age. Ibn Khaldun's Prolegomena in the 14th. century represents the last valuable social-philosophical work in Arabic. The way Ibn Khaldun keeps philosophy at a distance in this splendid work and leaves the philosophical nature out of his work is a clear indication of the persecution of philosophers at this time. The example of Ibn Khaldun's Prolegomena as well as of the previous great philosophical works of Avicenna and Averroes show how much Arabic developed into a scientific language and moved away from the sacred Koran-Arabic.

The decline of the Abbasid empire, the existence of many small states after it and the Osman predominance which followed meant the end of this secular tradition and the restoration of religion and archaic social structures." (TIBI, 1991, p. 109f)