

The Philosophy of Taha Abderrahman: A Critical Study

Farid Suleiman

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany

farid.suleiman@fau.de

Abstract

This paper provides a critical reading of some of the most important elements in the philosophy of the Moroccan thinker Taha Abderrahman (TA) (b. 1944), who has had a significant impact on contemporary Arab thought. It examines (1) his views on the essence of being human and the degrees of reason, (2) his concept of *i'timāniyya* (trusteeship paradigm), (3) his concept of the 'discursive field' (*al-majāl al-tadāwulī*) and how it relates to his struggle for intellectual emancipation from the hegemony of the West, and (4) his views on politics and democracy. First, the paper argues that TA is not as innovative as he repeatedly claims to be in his works; rather, he promotes a traditional type of Sufism that he skilfully cloaks in modern language, as well as in numerous neologisms that he himself has invented. Second, it is shown that any reading of TA's philosophy must take into account his affiliation with the Budshishiyya Sufi order (one of the most influential players in the internal power structure of the Moroccan state). This paper contributes to the study of philosophy in the modern Arab world in general and to the study of TA in particular, who thus far has received only limited attention in Western academia.

Keywords

Taha Abderrahman – Islamic philosophy – Islamic ethics – modernity – Sufism – Morocco – Budshishiyya Sufi order – politics

1 Introduction

The Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahman (TA) (b. 1944), is one of the most prolific intellectuals of the Arab world.¹ He trained as a philosopher of logic and language at Sorbonne University, where he completed his doctorate in 1972 (*doctorat de troisième cycle*) and his postdoctoral lecture qualification in 1985 (*doctorat d'État*).² He then served as a professor of philosophy at the Mohammed V University of Rabat until his retirement in 2005. He has published more than twenty monographs on philosophical and religious issues and continues to be active in his field. As the steadily increasing amount of Arabic secondary literature about him indicates, TA plays a significant role in contemporary Islamic thought.³ His presence in the media, which includes a documentary on him by the satellite channel Al-Jazeera⁴ and many websites that discuss his work, demonstrates that TA's impact extends beyond academic circles. Conversely, Western research has paid little attention to him.⁵ Indeed, to date only small portions of his writings, which are almost exclusively in

- 1 Taha is his surname, and Abderrahman his first name. This fact is not well-known, as all his books have been published under the name Taha Abderrahman. To avoid confusion, this order of names is adopted here.
- 2 Taha Abderrahman, *Langage et philosophie: essai sur les structures linguistiques de l'ontologie* (Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 1979); Taha Abderrahman, *Essai sur les logiques des raisonnements argumentatifs et naturels* (Sorbonne University, 1985).
- 3 In the preface to one of TA's books, Riḍwān Maḥmūd provides a list of non-Western secondary literature up to 2014 (mostly in Arabic, some in French); see Taha Abderrahman, *Su'āl al-manhaj: Fi ufuq al-ta'sīs li-ummūdḥaj fikrī jadīd* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Fikr wa-l-Ibdā', 2015), 13-16, fn. 3.
- 4 Available at *Tāhā 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-faylasūf al-mujaddid*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MF_mN7oQ3Q> (last accessed Feb. 2019).
- 5 Perhaps the most important contribution is Wael Hallaq's *Reforming modernity: Ethics and the new human in the philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha*. The release of this book is scheduled for late 2019, and it was not yet available to me at the time of submitting the present article for publication. Further studies are Nelly Lahoud, *Political thought in Islam: A study in intellectual boundaries* (London: Routledge, 2010), 36-39; Mohammed Hashas, *The idea of European Islam: Religion, ethics, politics and perpetual modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), chap. 6; Samuel Kigar, "Arguing the archive: Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān, Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jābirī and the future of Islamic thought", *Comparative Islamic Studies* 11:1 (2017), 5-33; Mohammed Hashas, "Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm", *OM* 95:1-2 (2015), 67-105; Azelarabe L. Bennani, "Der Protest und die Verpflichtung zur Einhaltung der Gesetze bei dem marokkanischen Philosophen Ṭāhā 'Abd ar-Raḥmān", in *Historizität und Transzendenz im Islam: Offenbarung, Geschichte und Recht*, ed. Jameleddine Ben Abdeljelil, *Islam im Diskurs* 4 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2017), 193-210; Mohamed Turki, "Über einige Schwierigkeiten des Übersetzens in die arabische Sprache", in *Über-Setzen: Sprachenvielfalt und interkulturelle Hermeneutik*, ed. Gabriele Münnix (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2017), 60-76; and Ahmad Z. Obiedat, *Mario Bunge's world-view and its implications for the modernization of Arabic-Islamic Philosophy* (McGill University: unpubl. PhD diss., 2011), esp. chap. 5.

Arabic, have been translated into a European language.⁶ While TA writes primarily for a readership in the Arabic-speaking world, his larger philosophical inquiries address problems relevant globally, and he engages critically with the dominant Western philosophical traditions in many of his writings. He is also a fierce critic of contemporary Arab-Islamic intellectuals, especially of the philosophers ‘Ābid al-Jābirī (d. 2010) and Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), whom he has accused of blindly following non-Muslim (especially Western) thinkers.⁷ Yet, in his own writings TA purports to be an innovative and original thinker. Thus, one should consider TA's comments in light of a wider struggle for intellectual emancipation from the hegemony of the West, and the birth of an indigenous modernity that is in line with an Arab-Islamic identity. Since the turn of the millennium, TA has written numerous works on his vision of Islamic ethics and the necessity of dialogue between civilisations. Also, he has criticised the dominant Western form of modernity, including liberalism, secularism, and capitalism as some of its main constituents.⁸

6 Non-Arabic primary literature (mostly translations) includes Taha Abderrahman, “The separation of human philosophy from the wisdom of the Qur’an in Said Nursi’s work”, in *Islam at the crossroads: On the life and thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi’, SUNY series in Near Eastern studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 199–214; Taha Abderrahman, “A global ethic: Its scope and limits”, *Tabah Paper Series* 1 (2008), 1–19 [transl. of TA’s book *Su’āl al-‘amal*, 111–42]; Taha Abderrahman, “Renewing Religious thought in Islam: prerequisites and impediments”, *Islam Today* 25 (2008), 87–100 [translation of TA’s book *Su’āl al-akhlāq*, 187–99]; Taha Abderrahman, “The globalization of economy and the crisis of values”, *Islam Today* 30 (2014), 112–28 [trans. of TA’s book *Su’āl al-akhlāq*, 209–26]; Taha Abderrahman, “Wie erneuern wir unsere Sicht auf das Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Religion?”, in *Kontexte, Methoden, Inhalte*, ed. Ömer Özsoy, Frankfurter Schriften zum Islam 1 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 103–112 [translated by Thomas Hildebrandt; for the original Arabic, see TA’s *Su’āl al-‘amal*, 295–301]; Taha Abderrahman, “On the trusteeship critique of modernism”, *Islam Today* 32 (2016), 57–70 [trans. of TA’s book *Bu’s al-dahrāniyya*, 11–24]; Taha Abderrahman, “Spiritual modernity and intellectual servitude”, *Islam Today* 33–34 (2017), 79–100 [trans. of *Bu’s al-dahrāniyya*, 131–154]; Taha Abderrahman and Tabah Foundation, “Language matters: A dialogue on language and logic”, *Tabah Essay Series* 1 (2010), 1–34; Daniel P. Talayero, “La modernidad vista desde la perspectiva del pensamiento de Taha Abderrahman: traducción y estudio del primer capítulo de la obra al-ḥadāṭa wa-l-muqāwama (La Modernidad y la Resistencia)” [incl. a trans. of TA’s work *al-Ḥadāṭha wa-l-muqāwama*, 13–43], available at <https://gredos.usal.es/jspui/bitstream/10366/132712/1/TG_PorrasTalayeroD_Lamodernidadvista.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 2019).

7 The case of al-Jābirī differs, as TA accuses him of being a blind imitator of a blind imitator, by which he means that al-Jābirī uncritically follows the footsteps of Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), who did the same in relation to Aristotle. For TA’s critiques of al-Jābirī’s thought, see esp. Taha Abderrahman, *Tajdid al-manhaj fi taqwīm al-turāth*, 2nd ed. (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 1994).

8 Before that, he was concerned mostly with logic and language and involved himself in

This paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive survey of TA's philosophical project; rather, it attempts to explore and connect some of the most significant concepts that have recurred in his publications over the last two decades. To do this, a descriptive approach is adopted for the ensuing sections in the paper, which is then followed by a critical assessment. First, the paper argues that TA is not as innovative as he claims to be in his works; rather, he promotes a traditional type of Sufism that he skilfully cloaks in modern language with numerous neologisms that he invented. Second, it is shown that any reading of TA's philosophy must take into account his affiliation with the Budshishiyya Sufi order (one of the most influential players in the internal power structure of the Moroccan state). Thus, before addressing the main subject of this article, it is necessary to examine the Budshishiyya order and its relevant political and religious views. Last, since there is a substantial inventory of material on TA's biography, that information is not recounted again here.⁹

2 The Budshishiyya Order and the Moroccan State

Sufism has long been a very popular phenomenon in Morocco. In addition to the Budshishiyya order, numerous other Sufi orders exist, including the Hamadsha, Tijaniyya, and Shadhiliyya orders. In the absence of reliable statistics, nothing definite can be said about numbers of members or the precise structures of the orders; however, the Budshishiyya order appears to be one of the largest (if not the largest) and best-organised orders in the country.¹⁰ It is a branch of the Qadiri order,¹¹ named after its founder Sidi Boumediene Budshish (1955). He inherited his nickname Budshish (*Abū al-Dashīsh*) from one of his ancestors, who, as the story has it, acquired the name because he provided a traditional soup called *al-dashīsh* to the poor during a famine. Shortly before

debates on the concept of *turāth* (the heritage of tradition) that started in the 1970s and continue today.

9 See Hashas, "Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm", 71–74.

10 See Abdelilah Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco: Activism and dissent* (London: Routledge, 2017), 9f. On the Budshishiyya, see, in addition to the literature cited below, 'Akkāsha Birhāb, *al-Zāwiya al-Būthshīshīyya: Dirāsa mu'azzaza bi-l-wathā'iq* (Rabat: Dār Abī Raqrāq, 2004); Mouna Khaled and Abdelaziz Hlaoua, "Du corps incarné au corps identitaire. Le cas du cheikh Sidi Hamza el Qadiri Boutchich", in *Penser le corps au Maghreb*, ed. Monia Lachheb (Tunis, Paris: IRMC; Karthala, 2012), 21–34; Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Musāhama fī l-baḥṭh fī zawāyā Banī Yaznāsīn: al-Qādirīyya al-Budshishiyya namūdḥajan* (n.p.: n.p., 1998).

11 The order traces its roots to the famous Hanbalite Sufi 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlī (d. 1166).

Sidi Boumediene died, he appointed one of his disciples, Sidi Abbas, as his successor. Sidi Abbas led the Budshishiyya order until his own death in 1972. Sidi Abbas was followed by Sidi Hamza, who introduced the most dramatic reforms to the Budshishiyya order. Under Sidi Boumediene, members had to be a minimum of forty years old, have some existing knowledge of Sufism, and be strictly committed to the religious commandments. In contrast, Sidi Hamza welcomed members from all sections of society, without differentiating between youths and adults, the learned and the ignorant, or the pious and the sinner.¹² The Budshishiyya order also began to acquire new members outside Morocco, notably in Europe and North America. As part of its strategy, it attempts to attract figures who are in a position to impact the societies in which they live, such as intellectuals. TA is a good example of the effectiveness of this approach, as his monograph *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql* (1989) prompted many people to join the Budshishiyya order.¹³ TA has been a member of the order since at least the 1980s and has repeatedly praised Sidi Hamza, calling him his spiritual mentor and teacher.¹⁴ A video dating from 1992 shows TA participating in a Sufi gathering and dancing ecstatically in front of him.¹⁵ Since TA does not target readers outside the Arab world, as nearly all his writings are in Arabic, it is unclear as to how the order's international orientation may be beneficial to him. Shortly before Sidi Hamza died in 2017, he handed the leadership of a then-globalised Sufi order (with significant social and religious influence in Morocco) to his son, Jamal al-Din.

The Budshishiyya order has repeatedly confirmed that loyalty to the Moroccan monarchy is one of its immutable pillars. Aside from this nod to royalty, it does not promote any political doctrine; rather, it eschews the realm of politics completely. The order takes part in demonstrations only for religious causes (e.g., the Muhammad cartoons controversy) or in support of the Moroccan king. For example, when the so-called 'Arab Spring' reached Morocco in 2011, the Budshishiyya order was able to draw tens of thousands of its followers onto the streets in support of the king and his proposed reforms.

¹² See Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco*, 74.

¹³ Mark Sedgwick, "In search of a counter-reformation: Anti-Sufi stereotypes and the Budshishiyya's response", in *An Islamic Reformation?*, ed. Michaelle L. Browers and Charles Kurzman (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2004), 124–46, 134.

¹⁴ See, e.g., the introductory note in the first edition of TA's *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql* (23–28), which has, for reasons unknown to me, not been included in any of the subsequent editions.

¹⁵ See "*al-Duktūr Tāhā 'Abd ar-Raḥmān wa-l-zāwiya al-būdshīshīyya 1992*", <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElOoQFF5bTY>> (last accessed Feb. 2019).

In return, the regime patronises the Budshishiyya order and has done so especially since the reign of Muhammad VI began in 1999. In several speeches, the king has declared that Sufism is an essential part of Moroccan heritage and culture. The king also finances cultural and religious festivities organised by the Budshishiyya order and facilitates regular appearances of its members on state-owned television channels. More importantly, he has appointed Budshishiyya members to key positions in the political and administrative system, such as the governorship of the province of Berkane (given to one of Sidi Hamza's sons) and the ministerial post for religious endowments.

The Budshishiyya serves the regime as a tool for sustaining political equilibrium in Morocco, and as a bulwark against the dissemination and influence of oppositional groups, such as the Jamā'at al-ʿAdl wa-l-Iḥsān¹⁶ (AWI; the Justice and Charity Movement), and violent ideologies, such as militant Salafism. However, the relationship of the Budshishiyya to politics may be more complex than it first appears. In his book, Abdelilah Bouasria gives a refreshingly unconventional insider's account of the Budshishiyya order and its political (dis-)engagement. He writes:

The Boutchichi Sufi order appears to be politically quiescent when one looks at the official, open, and observed interaction between the Sufi order and the political monarchy, a site known as public transcripts (appointments of its members to public positions, public marches, writings of the members, and public positions towards politics), but when one analyzes the apparently nonpolitical off-stage texts and subtexts of the Boutchichi order, known as hidden transcripts (rumors, dreams, festivals, tales, songs, and jokes), one finds that the order has potential for political dissent.¹⁷

Further, Bouasria notes that within the Budshishiyya order, the leader ranks higher than the king. According to the order, it is the Sufi master who controls the king in this world through paranormal activities, and it is again the Sufi master 'who asserts his power over the king [...] through the use of the gift of seeing the abode of the dead—in heaven or in hell—and he makes sure his closest disciples hear it' after the king's death.¹⁸ This order of dominance is never acknowledged in public.

16 Its founder, Abdessalam Yassine (d. 2012), was a member of the Budshishiyya order but parted with it in 1973 due to its alliance to the regime.

17 Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco*, 31.

18 See Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco*, 20, 87.

The superiority of the Sufi masters also applies in relation to intra-religious hierarchies. The Budshishi Ahmad, Lisan al-Haqq (d. 2011), pointed this out by citing a statement attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 765), the sixth Shiite Imam revered also by Sunnites. According to the statement, the Sufi inherits the knowledge of the interior (i.e., the secrets of the law) of the prophet Muhammad, while the Sunni inherits the knowledge of the exterior (i.e., formalities of the law).¹⁹ As will be shown below, TA concurs when he says that Sufism constitutes the most profound form of religious engagement, and when he describes the jurists (*fuqahā'*) as being obsessed with the outward formalities of Islam.

The recently deceased Sidi Hamza held the view that Sufism needs to adapt to the challenges of the present day. Previously, Sufis delved into the 'secrets of reality'; however, it is now necessary to intensify efforts to uplift the moral character of man.²⁰ Thus, it is not so much the gnostic aspects that are at the heart of Sufism nowadays, but the purification of the self (*tazkiya*). TA's philosophical project for the last two decades, to which we will turn now, reflects this, focusing on *tazkiya* as its central element.

3 Insights into TA's Philosophical Project

a *The Essence of Being Human and the Degrees of Reason*

TA contends that Muslim thought has uncritically accepted the view that human beings differ from all other animals by virtue of their capacity to reason. He believes there is no valid argument against considering human reason the same kind of sensory power as that which enables animals to differentiate between what is beneficial or harmful to them. Thus, reason would not be an exclusively human characteristic, but rather an attribute shared by all living beings, perhaps in differing degrees. For TA, humans are foremost moral beings, and it is this trait that differentiates them from all other animals.²¹ This position, for which TA is probably most well-known, is very much in line with the focus on ethics in Muslim reformist thought. TA does not situate his

19 See Karim Ben Driss, *Le renouveau du soufisme au Maroc: Sidi Hamza al-Qâdiri Boudchich* (Beyrouth, Milan: Albouraq; Archè, 2002), 27.

20 See, e.g., <<https://www.maghress.com/alalam/117404>> (last accessed March 2020); the Budshishiyya website <<http://www.boutchichiya.com>> seems to have been switched off after Sidi Hamza's death in January 2017.

21 See Taha Abderrahman, *Su'āl al-'amal: Baḥṭh 'an uṣūl al-'amaliyya fī l-fikr wa-l-'ilm* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 2012), 80f.

position within this larger context, and the way he characterises his arguments might lead the reader to believe that TA fights a lonely battle against Western intellectuals and their alleged blind followers from the Muslim world. In reality, however, several thinkers, such as Muḥammad Qutb (d. 2014) and Alija Izetbegović (d. 2003), have already stressed that moral agency is what differentiates humans from other animals.²²

In support of his view that morality is the essential character of humankind, TA puts forward four arguments. First, he posits that humans strive for perfection. Conversely, animals do not expend any effort to rectify themselves morally in the same way that they expend effort to obtain food. This is because animals are mentally incapable of conceptualising moral values, insofar as values are normative ideas that transcend the material realm. TA counters this by saying that animals can indeed develop observable moral traits (e.g., the loyalty of dogs and the cleanliness of cats). However, he classifies them as in-born instincts and not as moral traits that animals have strived to obtain out of desire for moral perfection.²³

Second, TA opines that rational acts have a moral dimension. Accordingly, human acts are never neutral, as they lead to either moral progression or regression. He excludes any abstract reasoning that produces human acts resembling those of machines. Under the banner of technical progress, reasoning has been reduced to a mere instrumental tool, and this type of reasoning should not be perceived as being at the service of humans. In fact, quite the opposite is true: humans are made subservient (*musakhkhar*) to this type of reasoning.²⁴ The ideology of progress has deceived many Muslim reformers who have begun to believe that the Muslim community will regain its strength and will fulfil its divinely ordained role by building factories and erecting cities. However, members of the Muslim community desperately need to revive their moral values in theory and practice; technical progress not only is of secondary importance but will follow easily once the moral revival has been achieved.²⁵

Third, in its archetypical form, morality is inherent in any rational act (*al-khuluqīyya al-namūdhajīyya li-l-fi'l al-'aqlī*). This is because a rational act is

22 See Muḥammad Qutb, *Lā ilāha illā Allāh: 'Aqīda wa-sharī'a wa-manhaj ḥayāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1995), 82; and Alija Izetbegović, *Islam between East and West* (Oak Brook: American Trust Publications, 1984, repr. 2012), 33–35.

23 See Abderrahman, *Su'āl al-'amal*, 82.

24 On this point, TA may have been inspired by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, both of whom made similar arguments. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947), esp. 70f. Further, the term 'instrumental rationality' can be traced back to Horkheimer.

25 See Abderrahman, *Su'āl al-'amal*, 82f.

an act of the human heart, and the heart is the locus of human morality and spirituality. Thus, a rational act is not merely a moral act; rather, it constitutes an archetypical ideal for other sorts of actions. This disproves the belief that reasoning is above all concerned with theoretical knowledge that has no direct link to practice.²⁶

Finally, TA argues that freedom is archetypically characterised in a rational act. He states that as it is commonly known, Muslim jurists and speculative theologians have connected the concept of religious accountability (*taklīf*) to the concept of reason, insofar as reason is the precondition for accountability. Unfortunately, they have focused on hardship (*mashaqqā*) as the central element of the practices that come with *taklīf*, on the basis that it constitutes the reason why God rewards such practices. This is also reflected in their interpretation of the Quranic verse ‘We offered *amāna* to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains; but they refused to bear it and were apprehensive of it; but the human being accepted it. He was unfair and ignorant.’²⁷ They understood the term *amāna* to refer to the religious obligations that come with the hardships that the heavens, the earth, and the mountains were incapable of bearing. According to TA, this term refers not to moral obligations but to responsibility (*mas’ūliyya*), which, as will be seen later in his discussions on his trusteeship paradigm (*i’timāniyya*), presupposes freedom. Thus, instead of focusing on hardship, Muslim thinkers should have placed responsibility and freedom at the heart of the concept of *taklīf*.²⁸

It is not entirely clear how these points, particularly the last two, substantiate TA’s view that morality is the character that differentiates human beings from other animals; however, they do provide further insight into his understanding of human nature.

In his monograph *al-Ḥaqq al-‘arabī fī l-ikhtilāf al-falsafī* (2002), TA elaborates further on the essence of human beings. There, he uses the term identity (*huwiyya*) and essence interchangeably, defining the former as ‘the characteristics through which a thing distinguishes itself from others’.²⁹ On several occasions, he reiterates his objection to the belief that reason alone constitutes human identity, ascribing this belief to the majority of past thinkers. His counterargument is based on linguistic considerations. There are three nouns, TA

26 See *ibid.*, 83f.

27 Q 36:72.

28 See Abderrahman, *Su’āl al-‘amal*, 84f.

29 Taha Abderrahman, *al-Ḥaqq al-‘arabī fī l-ikhtilāf al-falsafī*, 3rd ed. (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2014), 172.

says, that Arab speakers use exclusively with reference to human beings: humanness (*insāniyya*), manhood (*rujūliyya*), and virtues (*murū'a*). He explains:

All these three nouns, *insāniyya*, *rujūliyya*, and *murū'a*, share in that they signify the meaning of 'acquisition of noble manners' (*iktisāb al-akhlāq al-karīma*). From this it follows that what makes humans different from animals – i.e. what defines their identity – is not, as is widely believed, exerting reason or what one may call 'intellection' (*ta'aqqul*), but exerting morals or what one may call 'assuming virtues' (*takhalluq*). Once a human being fails to assume virtues, he descends to the level of animals and beasts.³⁰

According to TA, these three nouns refer to hierarchical levels of human morality. Furthermore, they do not exhaustively describe actual humans' possible states, for humans can both fall behind or excel beyond all three levels. The former may be said of contemporary Zionist Jews, TA says, for they commit iniquities, such as besmirching sacredness and killing infants, and those who commit such acts have descended to the moral level of beasts.³¹ The latter possibility (i.e., even superseding the stage of *murū'a*) can be achieved by those who follow the most perfect religion of their time (today, Islam). They may reach a stage that TA calls *futuwwa* (lit.: youthfulness). He describes it as perfect religiosity (*kamāl al-tadayyun*), perfect physical and spiritual strength (*kamāl al-quwwa*), and perfect action (*kamāl al-'amal*). The way TA elaborates on the concept of *futuwwa* shows that it is connected to the concept of *jihād* (struggle), both in a military and spiritual sense. Indeed, the concept of *futuwwa* goes back to pre-Islamic culture, when it came to mean, foremost, tribal loyalty and bravery in wartime. *Futuwwa* is often translated as "chivalry," a term that preserves its relationship to militancy. Later, the term found its way, among others, into Sufism, where it came to refer to the embodiment of the noblest characters (*makārim al-akhlāq*) not necessarily tied to military virtues.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 174.

³¹ Ibid., 178.

³² There is plenty of literature on the origin and development of the term *futuwwa*. See, e.g., Franz Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa* (Zurich: Artemis, 1979); Mohsen Zakeri, "Javanmārdi," Encyclopaedia Iranica Online, <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/javanmardi>> (2008, last update 2012); Lloyd V.J. Ridgeon, "Futuwwa (in Šūfism)", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 17 February 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27218>.

Though TA's concept of *futuwwa* is indeed closely related to warfare in general, he focuses exclusively on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He writes:

If we take a close look at how the Arabs positioned themselves towards the *Intifāda* [lit.: tremor; here: Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation], we come to know that the people from among the Arabs who deserve to ascribe to themselves this most high state of morality [i.e., *futuwwa*] are those who have decided to rise up (*tantafīda*) until freedom is achieved. They did so, taking thereby charge of themselves, fighting against the presence of the Zionist enemy and exerting their right to militant struggle (*jihād*) and martyrdom (*istishhād*).³³

Those Arabs, TA adds, who support normalisation (*taṭbīr*) of Arab relations with Israel occupy the lowest rank of human morality. The term *futuwwa* is important to the Budshishiyya as well, and TA's influence notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that his understanding may not be representative of the order. This can be inferred from an observation by Bouasria, who himself spent a long time in the order. Comparing the attitudes of AWI followers to those of Budshishiyya followers regarding the Mideast conflict, he writes: 'The struggle in Palestine is an important component of their [the AWI's] Islamic belief, while many Boutchichi disciples cross bridges with Israeli musicians and artists, and this, in turn, pushes them towards a normalizing behavior regarding the Hebrew state.'³⁴

After this exposition of TA's views on the essence or identity of human beings, we will now turn to consider his stance on human reasoning. TA divides reasoning into three hierarchical stages. The lowest one is that of 'abstract reasoning' (*al-'aql al-mujarrad*). This kind of reasoning is at the heart of Greek philosophy; from there, it entered Western and Islamic thought. It is the equivalent to what Muslim scholars termed *naẓar* (speculative reasoning), and it is most widespread among philosophers (*falāsifa*) and speculative theologians (*mutakallimūn*).³⁵ It functions independently of religion (*mustaqill 'an al-shar'*) and does not have any practical import. As we will see later, TA considers principles such as the law of excluded middle to originate from 'abstract reasoning'.

33 Abderrahman, *al-Ḥaqq al-'arabī fī l-ikhtilāf al-falsafī*, 185.

34 Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco*, 152.

35 See Taha Abderrahman, *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql*, 2nd ed. (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1997), 23.

The next higher stage of rationality is 'guided reasoning' (*al-'aql al-musaddad*). The Islamic tradition refers to it as *sam'* (transmitted tradition), and it is exclusively the domain of Muslim jurists (*faqīh*).³⁶ Followers of 'guided reasoning' consider themselves obedient to the prophet Muhammad and commit themselves to the religious commandments as explicated by jurists. 'Guided reasoning' provides certainty that the commandments serve higher purposes (*maqāṣid*). This type of reasoning is superior to abstract reasoning as it requires practice and is not confined to mere speculation; it is limited in its nature, though, as it does not grasp more than the outward formalities of religious commandments. According to TA, the worst effects of the limits of 'guided reasoning' can be seen in the way in which Islamic law has been practised across history and in the ideology of Salafism.

'Guided reasoning' is in dire need of the highest form of rationality – that is, 'supported reasoning' (*al-'aql al-mu'ayyad*). In his article, Mohamed Hashas incorrectly describes *al-'aql al-mu'ayyad* as the 'rationality of Sophist belief'.³⁷ This description could be related to an erroneous English translation of the Arabic original *al-yaqīn al-ṣūfī*, which appears on a website concerned with the thoughts of TA.³⁸ In fact, the Arabic term is best described as 'Sufi or gnostic certainty'. Thus, according to TA, this type of reasoning shows up nowhere as clearly as it does in the Sufi tradition.³⁹ It is of a high practical import and, consequently, is inextricably connected to the act of self-purification (*tazkiya*). Purifying the self is an act to which adherents of both abstract and guided reasoning are committed. The former ascribes the act of purification to the individual, the latter ascribes it to the prophet Muhammad, while the follower of supported reasoning knows that the act of purification should not be ascribed to anyone but God alone.⁴⁰ Exercising this type of rationality provides insight into how all things point to the divine (*fa-yudriku al-ashyā' bi-l-wajh alladhī tadullu bihi 'alā l-ḥaqq*), and furnishes one with a state of high morality (*takhalluq*) to strive to renew and perfect one's own acts.⁴¹

In his book on the Budshishiyya, Ben Driss interestingly links the three levels of reasoning proposed by TA to a famous prophetic saying that is of

36 Ibid., 68f.

37 Hashas, "Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm", 80.

38 See "Professor Taha Abdurrahman", <http://www.arabphilosophers.com/English/philosophers/contemporary/contemporary-names/Taha_Abdurrahman/English_Article_Taha_Abdurrahman/English_Abdurrahman.htm> (last accessed Feb. 2019).

39 See Abderrahman, *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql*, 146.

40 See Taha Abderrahman, *Rūḥ al-dīn: Min ḥiq al-'almāniyya ilā sa'at al-ʿitimāniyya*, 2nd ed. (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-ʿArabī, 2012), 270, fn. 49.

41 See Abderrahman, *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql*, 225.

enormous importance in the Sufi tradition. TA refers to this saying in passing, providing little elaboration. However, in light of the above, it seems that Ben Driss' reading of TA is certainly correct. One version of the saying, narrated by al-Bukhārī, reads as follows:

One day, while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, [the angel] Gabriel came and asked, 'What is faith (*īmān*)?' Allah's messenger replied, 'Faith is to believe in Allah, in His angels, in meeting Him [on Judgement Day], in His prophets and to believe in resurrection.' Then he [Gabriel] further asked, 'What is submission (*islām*)?' Allah's messenger replied, 'To worship Allah alone and no one else, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay alms and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan.' Then he further asked, 'What is benevolence (*iḥsān*)?' Allah's messenger replied, 'To worship Allah as if you see Him and if you cannot see Him, then be sure that He is seeing you.'

TA contends that this saying is implicitly related to the three levels of reasoning as follows: The *mutakallimūn*, who are concerned with the issues of *īmān*, use abstract reasoning. The issues of *islām* comprise the field of religious commandments, which the *fuqahā'* (jurists) approach with 'guided reasoning'. Finally, the Sufis or Gnostics are credited with the most profound form of religious engagement, termed *iḥsān*, which can only be attained by applying 'supported reasoning'.⁴²

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that TA's tripartitioning of reason has similarities to the one proposed by the Moroccan philosopher al-Jābirī.⁴³ According to al-Jābirī, the three forms of (Arab) reason are *al-burhān* (demonstration), *al-bayān* (lit.: elucidation; here: analogy) and *al-ʿirfān* (Sufi gnosis).⁴⁴ In TA's system, 'abstract reasoning' comes close to what al-Jābirī calls 'demonstration', as is also true for 'guided reasoning' in regard to 'analogy', and 'supported reasoning' in regard to 'Sufi gnosis'. However, the two thinkers differ substantially from one other when it comes to their evaluations of these three forms of reason. For al-Jābirī, the highest form of reasoning, and the solution to

42 See Ben Driss, *Le renouveau du soufisme au Maroc*, 39–43, 292.

43 This has already been noticed by 'Abd al-Nabī al-Ḥurri, *Tāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān wa-Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī: Širā' al-mashrū'ayn 'alā arḍ al-ḥikma al-rushdiyya* (Beirut: al-Shabaka al-'Arabiyya li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Naṣr, 2014), 187f.

44 See Abdelkader Al Ghouz, *Vernunft und Kanon in der zeitgenössischen arabisch-islamischen Philosophie: Zu Muḥammad 'Ābed al-Ġābirīs (1936 - 2010) rationalistischer Lesart des Kulturerbes in seinem Werk "Kritik der arabischen Vernunft"* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2015), esp. chap. 2.

Islam's intellectual crisis, is 'demonstration' or 'abstract reasoning', while for TA it is 'supported reasoning' or 'Sufi gnosis'.

TA notes that reasoning is commonly held to be a cognitive power (*madra-ka*) inherent to humans; however, he rejects this claim and argues instead that reasoning is an inner sensory or perceptive act that arises from the human heart.⁴⁵ According to TA, just as sight relates to the eyes, reasoning relates to the heart.⁴⁶ TA further states:

Reason is not, as is commonly and widely perceived in philosophical heritage, a cognitive entity embedded within humankind. It is instead an internal cognitive act that springs from human's heart; just as humans' external sensorial acts originate from their senses. And since reason is a cognitive act, *it is automatically linked to intention* and there can be no intention in the absence of direction. Reason should have a *specific direction*, but this direction is in fact two-dimensional: a *horizontal dimension* where the mind becomes attached to the visible part of matters in their interconnectedness, and a *vertical dimension* that prompts it to seek the mysteries of these matters with regard to its own existence. For the mind to maintain its horizontal direction and *avoid a reversal*, it should be guided (*yusaddad*; referring to *al-'aql al-musaddad*) toward a specific objective. And for the mind to preserve its vertical direction and *avoid degeneration*, it should be supported (*yu'ayyad*; referring to *al-'aql al-mu'ayyad*) by appropriate means. There can be no *guarantee* of this guidance towards the desired objective and no *guarantee* of this support by appropriate means except through the *practice of the true religious act*. [This is true] since abstract reason is not overly bothered by this practice of religion, nor is it immune to the risk of reversal in its objectives or degeneration in its methods, and since guided reason limits itself to the *outward formalities* of this practice of religion. Even when it is safe from setbacks in its objectives and has attained conviction in its objectives, it remains at the mercy of setbacks in its means and methods. Since supported reason goes beyond the formalities of religious practice and reaches its *inner meanings*, it achieves safety from reversal in its objectives, being sure about their benefits, and is also safe from the risks of degeneration in its means, being sure about their effectiveness.⁴⁷

45 See Taha Abderrahman, *Bu's al-dahrāniyya: Fī l-naqd al-i'timānī li-faṣl al-akhlāq 'an al-dīn* (Casablanca: al-Shabaka al-'Arabiyya li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 2014), 13f.

46 Abderrahman, *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-'aql*, 18.

47 Abderrahman, *Bu's al-dahrāniyya*, 13f. (emphasis in original). Adapted translation from Abderrahman, "On the Trusteeship Critique of Modernism", 59f.

By making use of all three levels of reason, the philosophy of TA, which he calls genuinely Islamic, supersedes not only secular thought, insofar as it is limited to abstract reasoning, but also mainstream Islamic thought, insofar as it does not go beyond guided reasoning. TA labels his philosophy *i'timānī*, and in the following section this term will be examined more closely.

b *The Concept of i'timāniyya*

TA introduces the term *i'timāniyya* (trusteeship paradigm) at a relatively late stage (i.e., in his book *Rūḥ al-dīn*, 2012).⁴⁸ However, the concept behind it was already present in his earlier writings. Indeed, it lies at the heart of his philosophical vision. In *Rūḥ al-dīn*, TA is interested predominantly in the relationship between religion and politics, and his elaborations on the trusteeship paradigm are limited to this issue, which is considered further below in relation to his political views. For now, the focus is on his later works, in which he provides a broader treatment of the trusteeship paradigm.

In *Bu's al-dahrāniyya* (2014), TA gives a critique of secular philosophy in general and the separation of religion and morality in particular. The fallacious separation stems from the fact that secular philosophy does not go beyond 'abstract reasoning'. On the contrary, TA notes that the trusteeship paradigm is grounded in 'supported reasoning'. This protects the paradigm from the fallacies that come from abstract and guided reason. Secular philosophy and the trusteeship paradigm are both built on three principles. The former comprises the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle, while the latter is built upon the principle of witnessing and observing (*mabda' al-shāhidiyya*), the principle of entrusted property (*mabda' al-amāna*), and the principle of the purification of the self (*mabda' al-tazkiya*).

The principle of *shāhidiyya* is the counterpart to the law of identity. According to this principle, human beings strive to recover their original dispositions. By doing so, they discover their real identity and the meaning of their existence. Human beings bear witness to the oneness of God over themselves and over all of humanity. The law of identity states that a thing is identical to itself. Conversely, the principle of *shāhidiyya* states that a thing is identical to itself when someone else witnesses or observes it (*al-shay' huwa huwa matā shahida 'alayhi ghayruhu*). The witness or the observer could be God alone or with Him, the prophet, a fellow Muslim being, a fellow non-Muslim being, or any other created entity. The Quran, to which TA does not allude, repeats the idea that God and everything created is a witness at several points.⁴⁹ This was not

48 Abderrahman, *Rūḥ al-dīn*, esp. 447–509.

49 See, e.g., Q 2:143; 'the Witness' is also one of the most beautiful names of God; see Q 4:166.

only taken up by the Sufi tradition but also became one of its most important concepts.⁵⁰ Within TA's trusteeship paradigm, each and every thing has the right to bear witness. TA considers the principle of *shāhidīyya* to be superior to its counterpart in secular philosophy (i.e., the law of identity), as it goes beyond abstract reasoning to consider not only the identity of a thing with itself but also its relation to 'the other' (*al-ghayr*).⁵¹

The second principle refers to the entrusted property (*amāna*). According to this principle, human beings have to rid themselves of the spirit to desire possessions (*rūḥ al-tamalluk*) and take over all responsibilities obligated by reasoning. Here, too, TA does not refer to the Quran; however, the terminology he uses is close to that of Q 36:72 (see translation above). TA states that some believe the term *amāna* in this verse refers to reasoning ('*aql*'), others believe it refers to religious accountability (*taklīf*), while still others believe it refers to freedom (*ḥurriyya*). As the latter two presuppose reasoning, TA concludes that the *amāna* given to human beings by God is either reasoning or at least necessarily entails reasoning. TA states (without elaboration) that anyone with insight would already have noticed that this principle forms the counterpart to the law of non-contradiction advocated by secular philosophy. He further states that the principle of *amāna* prescribes rational consistency (*ittisāq 'aqlī*). The principle accords with the law of non-contradiction (i.e., that it is impossible for two contradictory statements to be true at the same time); however, it further states that this holds true once reasoning is held responsible (*matā kāna al-'aql mas'ūl^{an}*). The type of reasoning that forms the basis for the law of non-contradiction is free from all moral constraints and nothing prevents it from judging what fits the individual best, regardless of how harmful this might be to others. Thus, the principle of *amāna* is superior, as this principle holds reasoning responsible for its actions, and the consequences of actions for human beings and creation.⁵²

The third and last principle addresses the importance of the purification of the self (*tazkiya*). TA defines *tazkiya* as the activity that removes the cover of the ego (*naḥs*) from the soul (*rūḥ*) and establishes a connection to the unseen world.⁵³ He believes that there is no alternative to *tazkiya*, as it is the only way for human beings to 'discipline the ego in order to attain the divinely revealed moral values and spiritual meanings'.⁵⁴ *Tazkiya* not only adjusts behaviour as

50 See, e.g., William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), index, s.v. "witnessing (*mushahada*)".

51 Abderrahman, *Bu's al-dahrānīyya*, 14f.

52 Ibid., 15f.

53 Abderrahman, *Rūḥ al-dīn*, 511.

54 Abderrahman, *Bu's al-dahrānīyya*, 16.

education does; it also puts into effect the hidden moral and spiritual potentialities of human beings, thereby elevating them in their degree of humanness. In fact, human development is promoted primarily through the purification of the self and promoted only secondarily through material and technological progress.

TA further claims that *tazkiya* is the best of all possible means to counter the maladies of society and global evils, be they moral or spiritual. He provides three reasons in support of this contention. First, *tazkiya* may widen the narrow realm of existence of human beings and lead them to the amplest existence, which may go beyond society to the world and what transcends it.⁵⁵ Second, the moral and spiritual richness of the individual is the fruit of the interaction between the educational efforts made inside the community (*jamā'a*) and the struggle for renewing one's self to renew the fellow other, on the ground of one's commitment to fulfilling the duty of developing humankind. Third, the moral and spiritual potentialities of human beings that are realised through *tazkiya* extend beyond the efforts that limit modernists (i.e., the mere fight against the emergence of moral diseases).

As the reader may have anticipated, TA argues that the principle of the purification of the self is the counterpart to the law of excluded middle. Again, the principle of the trusteeship paradigm comes with a further specification of that law. In this respect, it states that once an action is called for, a thing is either that or its opposite (*al-shay' imma huwa aw naqīḍuhu matā kāna al-'amal maṭlūb^{an}*).⁵⁶ By this, he means that actions cannot but purify or corrupt the self. Consequently, he contends that the principle of *tazkiya* is similar, but superior to, the law of excluded middle, as it does not remain stuck at the level of abstract reasoning and instead focuses on human actions.

TA concludes that the three principles of the trusteeship paradigm are derived by applying 'supported reasoning' to the revealed sources of Islam and that the philosophy behind the paradigm can thus rightfully be counted as purely Islamic.

In the first volume of his *Dīn al-ḥayā'* (2017), TA elucidates the trusteeship paradigm further by comparing a follower of it to what he calls a 'contemporary human being' (*al-insān al-mu'āṣir*). By this, he means a person who breathes the spirit of an originally Western, but now globalised, modernity. This entails following an abstract concept of morality that the person tries to apply in his or her life. Such a concept derives from abstract reasoning and is far from religious moral values and their respective, but related, concrete

55 Ibid., 18.

56 Ibid., 19.

religious moral teachings. TA defines the inborn nature of humans (*fiṭra*) as the 'locus of the moral values that are rooted in religion'. Thus, 'contemporary human beings' have divested themselves of their *fiṭra*. He concludes that such people are dead actually, as the loss of the *fiṭra* necessarily leads to the death of the (spiritual) heart.⁵⁷ He believes that the revolution in media and communication has shaped 'contemporary human beings'; however, their roots can be traced back to the social contract theory. This theory claims that human beings developed from a natural state, in which they were constantly ready to fight one another, to a state of civilised, peaceful coexistence. TA observes that there are other views regarding the natural state of human beings, such as the state in which human beings' rights were constantly violated or in which human beings were still morally neutral animals. However, according to him, these conceptions are all equally wrong, as they assert that human beings have never experienced anything other than the material realm of existence (a term to which he applied the famous Sufi term *ʿālam al-mulk* [lit.: world of rule]). This error stems from a materialistic understanding of human beings that does not leave space for the soul.⁵⁸

TA challenges the social contract theory with an alternative theory called the 'theory of the covenant' (*al-naḥariyya al-mithāqīyya*) that promotes shame (*ḥayāʾ*) as its core value and seeks to revive the 'contemporary human being'.⁵⁹ Under this theory, human beings existed in their primordial state before they entered the *ʿālam al-mulk* – that is, the time when they inhabited the *ʿālam al-malakūt* (lit.: world of sovereignty) or the immaterial world. There, human beings were in a perfect moral state and pledged themselves to two covenants in front of God. The first is the covenant of attestation (*mithāq al-ishhād*). Under this covenant, human beings attested to the lordship of God at the time when God manifested (*tajallā*) Himself with His most beautiful names. The second is the covenant of trusteeship (*mithāq al-iʿtimān*), when human beings entrusted themselves to preserve the moral values embodied in the aforementioned names of God. After entering the physical world, human beings not only departed from their perfect natural state but also persistently acted against the covenant. This is especially true of 'contemporary human beings', who changed from a 'state of trusteeship' (*ḥālat al-iʿtimāniyya*) to a 'state of betrayal' (*ḥālat al-khiyāna*). Thus, it is clear that TA reverses the narrative of social contract theory. Human beings did not progress from the most abhorrent condition to

57 See Taha Abderrahman, *Dīn al-ḥayāʾ: Min al-fiqh al-iʿtimārī ilā l-fiqh al-intimāʾī* (1) – *Uṣūl al-dīn al-iʿtimārī* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Fikr wa-l-Ibdāʾ, 2017), 13f.

58 Ibid., 1/15f. TA does not mention any names, but it is obvious that he has thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes in mind.

59 Ibid., 1/16f.

the most desirable one; rather, the reverse occurred. TA does not refer to Q 7:172, which surely forms the background of his elaborations on the covenant between God and His creation. This verse reads as follows: ‘And when your Lord summoned the descendants of Adam from their loins, and made them testify about themselves. “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we testify”. So that you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, “We have been unaware of this”’.

TA further explains that social contract theory focuses on the relationship among human beings themselves and is thus concerned with issues such as the regulation of rights of possession. Conversely, the ‘theory of the covenant’ constantly seeks to reinvigorate the idea of trusteeship. Therefore it does not regulate ownership rights in the same way as the social contract theory; rather, it reminds human beings of the fact that the real owner of all things is God, thereby leading them from a state of betrayal to a state of trusteeship.⁶⁰

‘Contemporary human beings’ desperately need to implement the Islamic commandments in their lives as per the trusteeship paradigm. TA refers to this as *al-fiqh al-ʾitimānī*, which he contrasts to *al-fiqh al-ʾitimārī* (*ʾitimār* here means the [formal] execution [of orders]). The latter focuses on humans’ religious accountability (*taklīf*); consequently, it looks primarily towards the outward formalities of the religious commandments and their proper execution. Yet, the *fiqh* of trusteeship is foremost concerned with the moral values inherent in these religious commandments. Interestingly, when TA speaks against the superficiality of *al-fiqh al-ʾitimārī* and its proponents, he is not referring to marginal groups such as extreme scripturalists or fundamentalists; rather, he is referring to the mainstream tradition of Islamic law, including the four dominant Sunni schools of *fiqh*. However, the question arises, who then are the partisans of trusteeship-*fiqh*? Unsurprisingly the answer is the Sufis. In one of the very rare instances when TA elaborates on historical developments in the Islamic world, he claims that the greatest separation concerning the practical application of Islam (*al-faṣl al-sulūkī al-akbar*) took place in the eighth century. This happened when the proponents of law (*ahl al-fiqh*) won over the proponents of self-purification (*ahl al-tazkiya*) and successfully downgraded religious commandments to sheer law (*qānūn*), stripping them of their moral importance. Many of those who did not follow that superficial reading of Islamic law fell victim to the *ahl al-fiqh*, who attacked their theological and juristic stances, or criticised them harshly for using symbolic and allegoric language. The victims included al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), and Jalāl al-Dīn

al-Rūmī (d. 1273).⁶¹ In *Dīn al-ḥayāʾ*, TA summarises the most important points regarding the nature of the trusteeship-*fiqh* and contrasts it to *al-fiqh al-ʾitimārī* as follows:

- *ʾItimārī*-reasoning is a term that denotes pondering of general principles upon which religious practical laws have been built. These [principles] include, for example, divine authority (*āmīriyya ilāhiyya*), the authority of the law (*āmīriyyat al-aḥkām*), and obedience to the commandments (*samʿiyyat al-awāmīr*).
- *ʾItimānī*-reasoning is a term that denotes pondering of general principles upon which moral values, which provide the basis for the existence of religious practical law, have been built. These [principles] include, for example, divine observance and witnessing (*al-shāhidīyya al-ilāhiyya*), the trusteeship of moral values (*ʾitimānīyyat al-qiyam*), and the approval of the ordainer (*shuhūdīyyat al-āmīr*).⁶²
- *Al-fiqh al-ʾitimārī* refers to the knowledge concerned with the deduction (*istinbāt*) of religious norms from evidence found in the revelatory sources: the Quran and prophetic tradition. It opens up the possibility for others to act accordingly.
- *Al-fiqh al-ʾitimānī* refers to the knowledge concerned with the extraction (*istikhrāj*) of moral values from religious law. Acting upon the outward formalities of the law leads to an assumption of the law's underlying moral traits.
- Jurists, despite being followers of *ʾitimār* or *ʾitimān*, have knowledge and act according to it.
- Jurists (*faqīh*) of the *ʾitimār*-type do not observe or instruct others on how to act according to the inner [moral] dimension of the law in relation to issues that they know about.⁶³
- Jurists of the *ʾitimān*-type do observe and instruct others on how to act according to the inner [moral] dimension of the law in relation to issues that they know about.
- The other (*al-ghayr*) has no alternative but to choose one of two options. He can either observe and instruct himself in accordance with the outward legal dimensions of the religious commandments, which equates to the

⁶¹ See Abderrahman, *Rūḥ al-dīn*, 406.

⁶² To my knowledge, TA does not explain what he means by the expression *shuhūdīyyat al-āmīr*. It seems that it refers to what TA termed as *taklīf al-shuhūdī*. TA defines this as the human acknowledgement that the system of divine commandments consistently serves a higher purpose and is free of arbitrariness. See *ibid.*, 471.

⁶³ In relation to the translation of the technical term *istiʾmāl*, see the definition given by TA in *ibid.*, 22f.

formalities of worship; or, the jurists of the *i'timān*-type observe or instruct him in accordance with the inner moral dimension of these commandments, which equates to moral behaviour (*qiyam sulūkīyya*).

- The purpose of observing and instructing others, as done by jurists of the *i'timān*-type, should not seek to make them (i.e., others) enter the world of assuming moral traits (*‘ālam al-takhalluq*), but rather should equip them with a moral faculty (*malaka khuluqīyya*), so that their actions stem from it just as their thoughts stem from the faculty of reason or their fantasies stem from the faculty of imagination. Thus, they are capable of adjusting their morals to outer circumstances, regardless of how much they change or deteriorate.⁶⁴

To be revived, therefore, ‘contemporary human beings’ must attach themselves to the *faqīh* of the *i'timānī*-type. Of course, this neologism should not detract from the fact that TA simply means the Sufi *murabbī* or the spiritual educator.⁶⁵ As TA states in many places, Moroccan Sufism (and one may specify it further as ‘Budshishi’) produces the most skilful and noblest spiritual educators in the Islamic world.⁶⁶

c *The Concept of the ‘Discursive Field’ (al-majāl al-tadāwulī) and the Struggle for Philosophical Independence*

As stated in the introduction, TA vehemently accuses several Arab thinkers of blindly following Western thought, and he seeks the establishment of a genuine Islamic philosophy. In this context, he considers a concept that he calls *al-majāl al-tadāwulī*, which is similar in meaning to the term ‘discursive field’.⁶⁷ TA introduced this concept in his *Tajdīd al-manhaj fī taqwīm al-turāth*, defining it as ‘the *locus* of interrelationship and interaction of those who construct the [intellectual and cultural] heritage (*maḥall al-tawāṣul wa-l-tafāʿul bayna ṣāniʿi al-turāth*)’.⁶⁸ The discursive field includes language, ideological (or religious) convictions, and elements of the body of knowledge held by certain sections of society. Anything that belongs to the discursive field is part of culture, but not the other way round. Thus, the discursive field is more specific than culture. Anything that comprise the discursive field bears four characteristics, but this is not necessarily true of the elements that form part of culture. The

64 Abderrahman, *Dīn al-ḥayāʾ*, 1/26 (hyphen bullet points in the original).

65 In some instances, TA uses the word *murabbī* synonymously with *faqīh i'timānī*; see, e.g., *ibid.*, 1/272.

66 See, e.g., Taha Abderrahman, *Suʿāl al-akhlāq: Musāhama fī l-naqd al-akhlāqī li-l-ḥadātha al-gharbīyya* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2000), 200ff.

67 This translation follows Kigar, “Arguing the Archive”, 26.

68 Abderrahman, *Tajdīd al-manhaj fī taqwīm al-turāth*, 244.

four characteristics are: (1) it has practical repercussions, (2) it evolved gradually, (3) it is deeply grounded in the history of its particular society, and (4) it is a source of philosophical ingenuity.⁶⁹

Based on this concept, TA examines two commonly held assumptions: first, that philosophy constitutes a universal body of knowledge that is consequently not dependent on culture and language; and second, that the intellectual tradition of *falsafa* is original and does not merely follow others blindly.

According to TA, the first assumption is built on the belief that philosophy is a rational pursuit that comprises only abstract ideas, definitions based on the quiddity of the definiendum, and proofs that follow the laws of formal logic.⁷⁰ He disproves this belief, arguing that there is more than one form of reasoning, and that definitions and proofs are informed by culture and language. He concludes that the universality of philosophy is abstract (*mujarrad*), but that it is of a specific identity (*mushakkhkhaṣ*) and thus is inseparable from *al-majāl al-tadāwulī* in which it evolved.⁷¹

In relation to the second assumption, TA does not deny that the tradition of *falsafa* comprises original elements, but contends that the Muslim philosophers stayed within the limits of the discursive field of Greek philosophy. Thus, he describes it as a truncated ingenuity (*ibdāʿ mafṣūl*) that ultimately amounts to no more than blind imitation (*taqlīd*). Conversely, he contends that while a genuine Islamic philosophy may borrow ideas from non-Islamic sources, if it does so, it transfers them to its own discursive field and thus achieves what he calls 'cohesive ingenuity' (*ibdāʿ mawṣūl*).⁷²

TA then turns his focus to the components of an independent, genuine Islamic philosophy. He emphasises that his pledge for intellectual independence does not mean that he wishes to establish a philosophy that strives to be completely different from all other philosophies. Nor does he believe that Islamic philosophy alone has access to the truth or that it does not engage with other systems of thought. Rather, he contends that an independent philosophy is one that has 'the power to preserve its respective specific proactivity with regard to the production of philosophical outputs, both in terms of problematisation and way of arguing'.⁷³

TA further argues that the independence of philosophy rests on two conditions, philosophical proactivity (*mubādara falsafīyya*) and being in line with the specificity of its discursive field (*khusūṣiyya tadāwulīyya*). To observe the

69 See Abderrahman, *Suʾāl al-ʿamal*, 39f.

70 Ibid., 40f.

71 Ibid., 44f.

72 Ibid., 48f.

73 Ibid., 49.

first condition, Muslim philosophers must first establish a tight connection with their own discursive field. This will provide them with their very own theological, linguistic and intellectual values. Having accomplished this, Muslim philosophers not only will stay within the frame of their discursive field but also will use its inherent values as criteria to judge the validity of philosophies that are foreign to that field. By doing so, they will be able to adapt foreign ideas without becoming infected by an inferiority complex. Once Muslim philosophers are able to engage with imported intellectual elements in accordance with their own philosophical bases, they will be proactive in three different ways. First, they will be able to add to their own philosophical bases or to issues that spring from new findings which are inspired by what they have taken from foreign philosophies. Second, they will raise questions that did not come up within the discursive field of that particular foreign philosophy. Finally, they will uncover new philosophical insights that are in line with their discursive field by bringing together their own already established findings and the imported findings of others.⁷⁴

In relation to the second condition, which is being in line with the *khusūsiyya tadāwuliyya*, TA notes that four elements of the discursive field need to be preserved. The first concerns the theological frame of the discursive field. According to him, Muslim philosophers must always be aware that the religion of Islam addresses the whole of humanity at all times of human history. Without elaborating, he states that philosophers may deduce from this unprecedented issues, proofs, judgments, and insights that offer new perspectives on human beings' realities, perfections, and their roles in history.

The second element refers to the preservation of the body of transmitted reports (*hiḏ al-ḥaqīqa al-khabariyya*). The Muslim philosopher not only should use reasoning to gain new insights but also should draw on 'messages that come to his ears' (*khabar masmū'*). In this instance, TA is likely referring to the Quran and the prophetic tradition.

The third element is concerned with the preservation of the practical dimension of a genuine Islamic philosophy. This means that any statement made by philosophers must be intentional and lead to some sort of action. For example, thoughts about God do not constitute an end in and of itself, but rather provide a means by which individuals can increase their faith.

The fourth element is concerned with the preservation of the linguistic dimension of Islamic philosophy. According to TA, the language of the Quran is unlike any other human language, as it is characterised by a specific universality (*kawniyya khāṣṣa*). This is established by the fact that God has spoken in

74 Ibid., 50.

this language in the immaterial world and that human beings use it to worship Him. TA goes on to say:

So it is obligatory on the Muslim philosopher, regardless of whether he is an Arab or a non-Arab, to ponder on this specificity of the Quranic language, which makes it a language of two types of universality: a universality of both the material and immaterial world. Hence, he will be able to utilise it in uncovering problems and arguments that ascend from the rank of speculative knowledge to the rank of divine wisdom by virtue of using philosophical language.⁷⁵

According to TA, considering one's own discursive field is of great significance not only when it comes to formulating philosophical ideas but also with regard to translating philosophical works into Arabic. Here, he differentiates between three types of translations, the literal translation, which he refers to as *tarjama taḥṣīliyya*; the rough translation (*tarjama tawṣīliyya*), which seeks to convey the meaning of the original text and is not a word-by-word translation; and finally, and most importantly, the *tarjama ta'ṣīliyya* (the [re-]grounding translation), which seeks to adjust the original text to the discursive field or the *majāl tadāwulī* of the target language, even if this requires an alteration of the original wording or meaning.⁷⁶ He views all three types of translations as valid; however, he contends that only the third type allows Arab philosophers to engage with translated philosophical texts in an ingenious manner that suits the intellectual, religious, and cultural specificities of their own discursive field.

The most famous example of a [re-]grounding translation in TA's works is his rendering of René Descartes' (d. 1650) infamous claim *cogito ergo sum*,⁷⁷ which has commonly been translated as 'I think, therefore I am'.⁷⁸ However, TA translates it as *unẓur tajīd* ('Look! Then you will find').⁷⁹ He contends that this wording preserves the conciseness of the original statement but also

75 Ibid., 52.

76 Ibid., 195.

77 A possible earlier equivalent to that statement may be Avicenna's 'floating-man' thought experiment. See Giuseppe Furlani, "Avicenna e il Cogito, ergo sum di Cartesio," *Islamica* 3 (1927), 53–72; and Lenn Evan Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 155–163.

78 TA deals with the issue of how to translate this statement in several of his works, most notably in Taha Abderrahman, *Fiqh al-falsafa: al-falsafa wa-l-tarjama* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 1995), 409–506, esp. 437–506.

79 It should be noted that *unẓur* also means "Ponder!" TA explicitly states that he is aware of this other meaning; however, he is of the view that *unẓur* should refer to an immediate and instantaneous experience. Thus, he prefers to speak of looking at one's own thoughts rather than pondering them, as the latter usually involves a longer process and is less immediate.

adapts the statement to the peculiar modes of expression particular to Arabs. As written in pre-Islamic poetry, Arabs usually address an imagined counterpart or companion and not themselves.

To further substantiate his proposed translation, TA cites a verse of poetry by Ibn 'Ajība (d. 1809), which he says he discovered by coincidence:

O you, who strayed in the desert seeking His secret,
Look! Then you will find (*unẓur tajīd*) in yourself existence in its entirety.⁸⁰

TA continues:

This might be an old Sufi verse; nevertheless, I was stunned by it, due to the fact that, in my opinion, it provides strong evidence that I have been right in how I translated the *cogito* for two reasons. First, I have chosen a terminology that is grounded in the discursive field [of Arab thought]. This is backed up by the fact that someone else has used the same wording, which happened neither on purpose nor by virtue of prior agreement. Second, this statement (i.e., *unẓur tajīd*) opens up new possibilities for ingenuity that supersede the original version in Latin or French. The originator of the *cogito* (i.e., Descartes) basically wanted to use it as a proof of the existence of the self. In the next step, he took this proof as the basis from which he went on to infer the existence of God and the world. Conversely, the counterpart that I suggested, which is *unẓur tajīd*, paves the way to prove the existences of all three at once. This is because we say, 'Look! Then you will find yourself' and 'Look! Then you will find Allah' and 'Look! Then you will find the world'. Thus, from this expression, we can deduce all three known proofs of Descartes in an equal manner. In addition, the philosopher has the choice of how to arrange the order of these proofs due to further considerations. For the philosopher might choose to put the proof for the existence of Allah first, as it is the basis on which the other two (proofs) stem from and so on and so forth.⁸¹

It is clear that TA believes Muslim philosophers can benefit significantly from non-Islamic philosophical traditions. However, he is also of the view not only that foreign ideas should be translated into Arabic literally but also that [re-]grounding translations are required. Muslim philosophers, both past and present, are stuck in a trap of blind imitation, as they fail to translate Greek or

80 Taha Abderrahman, *al-Ḥiwār ufuqan li-l-fikr* (Beirut: al-Shabaka al-'Arabiyya li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 2013), 78.

81 Ibid., 78.

Western philosophical works in a way that suits the Arabic-Islamic discursive field. Consequently, TA's conception of the discursive field may be regarded as a contribution to a post-colonial philosophy that strives to emancipate itself from the Western intellectual hegemony, and a contribution to the decade-old and still ongoing debate of how Islamic thought can be adapted to the challenges of the modern world without losing *aṣāla* (i.e., authenticity or rootedness in one's own tradition or heritage).⁸² TA is greatly concerned with this issue and has written about it extensively, including in his monographs *al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī fī l-ikhtilāf al-fikrī* (2005) and *al-Ḥaqq al-ʿarabī fī l-ikhtilāf al-falsafī* (2002).

TA's views on politics in general and on democracy in particular will now be considered. This issue is especially relevant within the context of Moroccan thought.

d *Politics and Democracy*

According to TA, politics (*siyāsa*) essentially means dominion over creation, and religion (*dīn*) is tantamount to worshipping the only true God.⁸³ TA views religion and politics as mutually exclusive; this does not imply that he advocates for secularism or even laicism. Quite the opposite, he spends considerable time in *Rūḥ al-dīn* refuting these two ideologies. He is also very critical of the Muslim groups that seek to combine politics and religion, whether they be from the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafiyya, or the Shiites in Iran.

For human beings, actively engaging in politics has the opposite effect of engaging in spiritual purification (*tazkiya*). Individuals who constantly purify themselves spiritually remind themselves that there is no sustainer, ruler, or provider other than God. Conversely, individuals who engage in politics feed their desire for worldly power and become proud of their achievements, so that they gradually forget the aforementioned attributes of God, while they might still believe in Him. Consequently, TA goes so far as to move politically active Muslim groups into the vicinity of polytheists.⁸⁴ What, then, does he suggest as an alternative? In *Suʿāl al-akhlāq* (2006), there is a passage that expresses his position in a nutshell:

The campaign of vilification and oppression targets the Islamic renewal movement through two common aspects that have always represented a bone of contention over which mankind has constantly fought, namely

⁸² For more on the debate see Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), see index, s.v. "Authenticity (asala)".

⁸³ Abderrahman, *Rūḥ al-dīn*, 447.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 464.

‘erecting the worldly edifice’ and ‘*engaging in political sensitisation*’. This being the case, should not the movement, in its quest to achieve renewal and revive Islamic productivity, rise in its actions above the low worldly level to the sublime and divine one, and from the narrow political plane to the vast humanistic one? The truth is, rising to the sublime divine level, which renews man’s rapport with God, can only come about if the soul is purified and refined, and elevation to the broad humanistic level can only occur through ‘*developing thought*’.⁸⁵

Politics belongs to the ‘low worldly level’, and one should abstain from it completely. Thus, ‘political sensitisation’ is a threat to society. All that happens in the realm of politics is no more than a sideshow in the main storyline of human history, which consists of God’s covenant with His creation and the trusteeship taken over by human beings. The purification of the self becomes the only instrument to advance the plot towards its desired end. Those who engage in politics demote themselves to background actors. Thus, one should not be surprised that while TA engages with many different political persuasions and ideologies, his proposed alternative always boils down to *tazkiya*.

Having outlined TA’s general stance on politics, the focus will now turn to his critique of specific political orientations. The following survey will be confined to his views on democracy, which are particularly interesting given the political situation in Morocco.

TA is of the view that the forms of government that existed in pre-modern Europe were unjust and oppressive. This led many to perceive the modern form of democracy as ‘light and mercy in midst of darkness and wrath’.⁸⁶ However, proponents for democracy have gone so far as to worship it as an idol and to force it on others on the basis of its alleged universal value. TA not only rejects the claim of universality but also has a low opinion of democracy. According to him, democracy necessarily leads to the transgression of naturally defined boundaries (*ḥudūd ṭabīʿiyya*) and the degeneration of morals.

In relation to the former, TA writes that democratic societies have not prevented sexual relations outside marriage, and have also vindicated homosexuality (e.g., by legalising same-sex marriage). He argues that the disrespect of biological boundaries is even more evident in the way in which democratic societies understand the issue of gender. According to this understanding, gender is a social construction. Thus, there is nothing detestable in sex reassignments by surgery. One should not be surprised, TA continues, that these

85 Abderrahman, *Suʿāl al-akhlāq*, 194. Slightly adapted translation taken from Abderrahman, “Renewing Religious Thought in Islam”, 95 (emphasis original).

86 Abderrahman, *Dīn al-ḥayāʾ*, 1/213.

societies even invented a third sex that is neither male nor female. Death is another biological constraint on the human species that members of democratic societies seek to overcome. TA writes that even if democrats have not yet gone so far as to claim the eternal life of gods, they nevertheless expend much effort engaging in research to increase life expectancy (e.g., in research on organ transplantation, cryonics and cloning).⁸⁷

In relation to the latter, which reflects a degeneration of morals, TA argues that a democratic state derives its laws not from religion but from the will of its people. Thus, such a state must be secular and, as a consequence, relegates religion to the private realm of individual faith at best. The dynamics inherent to democracy constantly broaden the realm of human rights, which originate from baser human instincts and desires. This is why the fostering of immoral behaviour (*istifhāsh*) governs the three pillars of democracy, which he identifies as (free) speech, voting, and protest. He states:

[Free] speech permits immoral behaviour (*ifhāsh*), as those in a democracy, regardless of whether they are regular civilians or members of parliament, do not plead for something that fosters shamelessness except to garner more votes and a larger share in representing [the people]. Further, protests lead to immorality (*tafaḥḥush*), as protesters exhibit foul speech, display protest signs and act publicly. Finally, the act of voting permits an immoral act, as the outcome of voting leads to the acknowledgement that the [execution of an] immoral act is a legal right.⁸⁸

He then considers whether it is possible for Muslims, once they have obtained the majority of the votes within a democratic state, to turn the political system from its 'state of betrayal' (*ḥālat al-khiyāna*) into a 'state of trusteeship' (*ḥālat al-ʾitimāniyya*) by reform.⁸⁹ He argues that for Muslim political groups (*ʾitimāriyyūn*; see the explanation of this term above), the answer may be yes. However, for followers of the trusteeship paradigm (*ʾitimāniyyūn*), this question must be answered in the negative. He explains this by elaborating on four presuppositions. First, democracy is not a mere tool of government but comes with a set of intrinsic moral values. Second, some values – such as freedom, equality, and justice – are goals themselves, while others are mere means to establish other values. Thus, by exporting democracy to non-European countries, two types of values are introduced (both of which are not fixed and can be altered). Third, moral values are not a human production; rather, they are

87 Ibid., 1/215.

88 Ibid., 1/216.

89 For an explanation of the differentiation between these two states, see above.

engrained in human nature and actually derive from God's most beautiful names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). To strengthen them, one has to turn to God; however, if one denies God or forgets Him, one consequently weakens his engrained values. Fourth, democracy stands on secular values; thus, there is an inherent separation between religion and politics. Consequently, God does not manifest Himself in creation through His names so that humans might attain the moral values inherent to these names; rather, any democratic system produces its own values without attaching to them any spiritual dimension and without basing them on what was described above as the core value in TA's ethical system (i.e., *ḥayā'*).⁹⁰

From these four presuppositions, TA contends that it follows that to transfer democracy from its (European) secular context to a religious (*īmānī*) context, one has to set aside the detachment of values from religion. He contends that there are two ways to establish a connection with religion, *ʾitimāriyya* and *ʾitimāniyya*.⁹¹ The former tries to build all acts on knowledge of God's commands with the mental concept of God as the Commander in mind. Thus, the *ʾitimāri*-act stems from the elucidation (*bayān*) of normative source texts. The latter also tries to build all acts on the knowledge of God's commands; however, it must be accompanied by an ecstatic sensation (*shu'ūr wijdānī*) of the divine Commander, as it is this sensation that testifies to the act. Thus, the acts stem not from elucidation (as *ʾitimāri*-acts do) but from observation (*ʾiḳān*).⁹²

TA illuminates this further by juxtaposing how the democratic value of freedom is approached within the paradigm of *ʾitimāriyya* and *ʾitimāniyya*. He notes that an advocate of *ʾitimāriyya* would hasten to the source text to prove that Islam has not only preceded, but also superseded, Western democratic societies in securing freedom rights. Such advocates (and their readerships), even if they do not believe what they say, may enter a discourse that complies with the rules set up by the secularists because they feel obliged to defend their traditions. In such circumstances, they cannot but fail their fellow citizens in the secular camp, as their fellow Western campaigners have supplied them with all sorts of arguments.⁹³

TA then explains how a follower of *ʾitimāniyya* would approach the subject:

The advocate of the trusteeship paradigm, however, goes to his Lord in the same way the advocate of *ʾitimār* goes to the revealed texts. He is fully confident that, in case freedom is something desirable, then God's most

90 See Abderrahman, *Dīn al-ḥayā'*, 1/218f.

91 These two terms have been explained above; see section 3(b).

92 See Abderrahman, *Dīn al-ḥayā'*, 1/219.

93 Ibid., 1/222.

beautiful names must have manifested themselves through it and their manifestation must have been without restrictions. Thereafter, it becomes evident that freedom in its perfect form has manifested itself in God's unrestricted will. His unrestricted will obligates to worship Him in each and every aspect. This does not mean merely observing some of Islamic rituals [...], but rather *being constantly present in front of God and ecstatically perceiving His existence*. As soon as the advocate of the trusteeship paradigm is caught up completely in this existential form of worship, freedom comes to him from all sides, insofar as he finds himself freed from all things, incipiently from himself. Then, the filthy political freedom (*al-ḥurriyya al-siyāsiyya al-mulawwatha*), which humans created, will not appear to him except like a muddy water bubble in the midst of a tumultuous sea. He will spend all efforts to remove the filth from it, so that he restores its purity and original form, thereby bringing back the gloss [of the virtue] of shame that it had lost. It is not the main concern of the follower of the trusteeship paradigm to what degree freedom is established in this or that specific society. He rather cares about to what degree *humankind as a whole has understood (adraka) the value of freedom*, insofar as he cares about fostering the perception (*idrāk*) of freedom in democratic societies as much as he cares about his own society to become capable of establishing freedom. It [i.e., freedom] is already established through perception, while perception is achieved through [the] causes that lie in his hands, insofar as [his] religion is the last and concluding one. Hence, the engagement of the advocate of the trusteeship paradigm with freedom by way of worshipping his Lord enriches all societies, be they religious or secular.⁹⁴

This passage provides telling insights into the methodology and philosophical stance of TA. The concluding section, which provides a critical assessment of TA's views presented earlier in this article, will address more about his positions.

4 Critical Assessment and Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this paper does not seek to provide a comprehensive survey of TA's philosophical works. Yet, while selective, the above passages should be considered as wholly representative of quite a large corpus of his writings.

94 Ibid. (emphasis original).

In general, it turns out that TA's critical engagement with Western thought and modernity is both superficial and simplistic. This is especially evident in his arguments against democracy, which are so inaccurate that it is difficult to engage with them on any level. Theodor Adorno, Zygmunt Bauman, Alasdair MacIntyre, and many others have levelled substantive criticisms against Western forms of enlightenment and modernity. TA might have strengthened his position had he drawn on the existing body of critical arguments available in their works. Further, his reading and understanding of the works of Western philosophers are often far-fetched or absurd. For example, he elaborates on Nietzsche's famous passage in which God is declared dead. Opinions differ as to the correct interpretation of this passage. That aside, TA certainly fails to grasp the idea behind it when he accuses Nietzsche of anthropomorphism and rhetorically asks how he could not have known that God, by definition, cannot be subject to death.⁹⁵ If TA had understood Nietzsche's intention, he might have used this passage to shed light on the maladies related to the Western type of modernity and thus found support for his own position. Further, he renders his ideas more complicated than they are by using numerous neologisms and setting up seemingly endless numbers of categories, subcategories, and principles. If he had done otherwise, his works might have counted as edifying literature written for a wider readership.

Besides democracy, TA discusses secularism, liberalism, republicanism, Islamism and many other -isms in his works. His engagement with these ideologies is ahistorical and far from the social realities in which they evolved. Additionally, his only proposed alternative to them is the purification of the self (*tazkiya*). Furthermore, he engages in lengthy discussions of various political systems, showing a very unfavourable attitude towards them; however, to my knowledge, he does not elaborate on monarchism in any of his works. Given the Moroccan political context and the stance of the Budshishiyya order within it, this is no surprise.

One may ask why TA does not propose solutions for local and global evils other than *tazkiya*. It seems that he implicitly divides human history into two realms, a metaphysical realm and a physical realm. By this, he draws near to a traditional kind of Sufism. His interest is confined solely to the metaphysical level, which is framed by the story of *mīthāq*. The main actors in that story are the Sufis, its key element is the purification of the self (*tazkiya*) and its end is annihilation (*fanā'*). Traditionally, annihilation was thought to be achieved through the gnosis that God alone is true reality. However, TA shifts the focus from gnosis to emphasise the moral dimension of annihilation, completely in line with Sidi Hamza's view on how Sufism has to adapt to the needs of time.

95 Abderrahman, *Bu's al-dahrāniyya*, 85.

By purifying the self, the human being (read: Sufi) strives to assume the moral traits of the divine. Everything in creation and the divine commandments points to these traits, which can be easily deciphered by using the highest form of reasoning, *al-ʿaql al-muʿayyad*.

Conversely, TA is not at all concerned with the physical realm of history. Indeed, nowhere does he appear to discuss political or social history, or the power dynamics that govern these histories. His ideal Sufi transcends this realm of extraneous generation and corruption, in which dynasties and civilisations rise and perish, and in which those who are still dominated by their worldly aspirations (i.e., the non-Sufis⁹⁶), fight for power and possession. The Sufi looks commiseratively upon them, well aware that they are only background actors in the story of *mīthāq*. Bouasria recounts the following event, which provides insight into this Sufi attitude:

One of the famous oral ‘tropes’ of the Boutchichi disciples is the fact that paranormal gifts allowed [Sufi master] Haj al-Mokhtar to leave his [French] prison cell for ablutions and prayer, only to return voluntarily to abide by God’s decree. In other words, if the French colonizer could tame the Sufi master Mokhtar by putting him in jail, God gave him freedom by granting him some supernatural powers such as the ability to walk out through closed gates.⁹⁷

Bouasria is correct when he interprets this trope in terms of a tension inherent in Sufi thought regarding the concept of divine power over creation, and abiding to the divine commandments and will. However, one has to add that this story also reflects the Sufi’s self-perception of standing above all that happens in the material world. Thus, whether the French keep him imprisoned has no relevance in furnishing the Sufi’s relation to the divine within the framework of *mīthāq*. Further, this explains why, as can be seen in the passage quoted at the end of section 3(d), TA understands freedom exclusively in terms of being fully conscious of the fact that the only sovereign is God, and why he considers worldly political freedom, for which democracy advocates, a deception and thus ‘filthy’.

Even if TA starkly rejects secular thought, he unconsciously draws very near to it by dividing human history into these two realms. On the one hand, the Moroccan king would be well advised to continue to support this kind of

96 Including all Muslims who engage in politics, such as Abdessalam Yassine or those who belong to the Salafiyya.

97 Bouasria, *Sufism and politics in Morocco*, 69.

thought, as there can be little doubt that it serves his interests.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Bouasria's assessment of the order's relationship to politics seems plausible. The type of Sufism advocated there has indeed subversive elements, insofar as the Sufis who take part in the metaphysical plot of *mīthāq* rank higher than those (including the Moroccan king) who act in the material realm of history. Interestingly, although TA consistently remains silent on Moroccan politics, he does not hesitate to criticise the politico-religious system in Iran and, regarding the Mideast conflict, he declares involvement in militant actions against Israel to be an indication for having attained the most complete form of moral perfection, which he calls *futuwwa*.⁹⁹

This admittedly quite harsh assessment should not obscure the stronger points of TA's philosophical output. TA makes a plausible claim when he states that the increasing obsession of scholars of Islamic law (or, more accurately, *fiqh*) with the outward formalities of religious commandments has caused them to miss the related moral content. His insistence that morality is not only the essential trait of human beings but also equates to religion may be a fruitful starting point for setting up a new understanding of Islamic ethics that fits the context of modernity. Such an understanding may be further substantiated by key elements put forward by TA, such as *amāna* (from which freedom and responsibility may be derived) and the way in which the relationship between 'the self' and 'the other' (regardless of whether it is living or inorganic) is conceptualised through the relationship between the Creator and His creatures, as expressed in the covenant (*mīthāq*). Finally, TA kept his promise to formulate an Islamic philosophical point of view that builds upon indigenous traditions rather than merely importing foreign ideas. Thus, he can safely be considered an Arab philosopher who has contributed to the struggle for intellectual emancipation from the West.¹⁰⁰

98 In relation to this, see Mark Sedgwick, "Sufis as 'Good Muslims': Sufism in the Battle against Jihadi Salafism", in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Lloyd V.J. Ridgeon (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 105–17.

99 As shown above, the political dimension of TA's concept of *futuwwa* cannot be considered, however, a common ground within the Budshishiyya order.

100 This paper was compiled and published within the framework of the AIWG-Longterm Research Group "Normativität des Korans im Zeichen gesellschaftlichen Wandels". This is a research project conducted jointly by the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, the Eberhard Karls University Tübingen and The Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) at the Goethe University Frankfurt.