

IV



MUḤAMMAD 'ABDUH AND NATURAL LAW

Having outlined in the past two chapters some of the fundamental elements in the idealist tradition of Muslim legal and constitutional theory, and having tried to show that these elements were outgrowths of a conservative theology, we now turn our attention to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to consider the manner in which this tradition was reformulated by two representative reformist intellectuals, Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. Of these two, the former is much the more important historical figure, although we shall have less to say about him of direct relevance to matters of law and government. So much has been written about 'Abduh by both orientalist and Muslims that it may seem redundant to say anything more.¹ Nonetheless we shall do so, if only to emphasize a certain perspective. For it was 'Abduh's reformist theology that Rashīd Riḍā took as the basis for his reformist theories of jurisprudence and constitutionalism. The shakiness of this basis underlay the incoherence of Riḍā's ideology, and thus appears to have contributed something to its failure as a political program. While this would not matter very much

¹ The most extensive record of information on 'Abduh's life and work remains Rashīd Riḍā's three-volume *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām ash-Shaikh Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo, 1931). Volume I is an 1100-page biography, Volume II is an anthology of 'Abduh's articles, and Volume III reproduces the texts of eulogies and appreciations of 'Abduh in the press and by friends and official personages after his death. A number of Egyptian scholars have championed 'Abduh's ideas in western-language studies, most notably Moustapha Abdel Razik (Muṣṭafā 'Abd ar-Rāziq) and Osman Amin ('Uthmān Amīn); these works are cited in the bibliography. Among western scholars the leading studies of 'Abduh are by Max Horten, I. Goldziher, C. C. Adams, J. Jomier, R. Caspar, and A. H. Hourani, also listed in the bibliography. Shorter studies of note are in the cited works of P. J. Vatikiotis, J. M. Ahmed, and N. Safran, and in L. Binder, *The Ideological Revolution in the Middle East* (New York, 1964).

if Riḍā were only an isolated figure, the fact is that his theories have been substantially shared by a large number of educated Muslims, at one ideological level or another, up to the present day.

'Abduh's life and career have been described at length in many works. He was born in 1849 in a village in the Nile Delta, into a family of modest means. As a boy he attended the mosque school in the city of Ṭanṭā; he then moved on to Al-Azhar University in Cairo where in 1877 he received the degree of *'ālim*. For two years he taught at the Azhar and at the new college of Dār al-'Ulūm. During his period at the Azhar he came under the influence of Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, the legendary Afghan then visiting Cairo who traveled up and down the Muslim world and Europe preaching his revolutionary message of religious revival and pan-Islamic political activism. When Afghānī was expelled from Egypt in 1879 'Abduh, as his disciple, was sent back to his village, only to be recalled to Cairo a year later to become editor of the official gazette, *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya* ("Egyptian Events"), in which he published a number of articles calling for various political, religious, and social reforms. For a time he became involved with 'Arābī and his group of nationalist army officers who resisted the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, and for this was sentenced to three years of exile from the country. After a short stay in Beirut he rejoined his old mentor Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī in Paris, helping him produce the famous journal *Al-'Urwa 'l-Wuthqā* ("The Firmest Bond") until it expired after 18 issues in 1884. After another sojourn in Beirut, where he taught in an Islamic school, 'Abduh returned to Cairo in 1888 and soon was appointed a judge in the "native courts" (*al-mahakim al-ahliyya*) created to apply the newly established (and essentially non-Islamic) codes of law enacted by the Khedive. In 1895 he became a member of the newly formed administrative council of Al-Azhar University, and in 1899 the Khedive appointed him Grand Muftī of Egypt and a member of the Legislative Council, an advisory quasi-parliamentary body. As Muftī he was responsible for supervision of the system of religious courts—into which he managed to introduce some reforms—as well as giving formal advisory opinions to the Government on matters involving Islamic law. In addition to this, he revived a moribund practice of granting opinions to private individuals on their problems of personal belief and practice, and in this regard he issued a number of controversial *fatwās*. He died in 1905.

In our perspective in the following pages the degree of consistency, clarity, depth, and sustained intellectual commitment in 'Abduh's

thought assumes an importance not always conceded by his commentators. All of them duly record the fact that these were not the qualities for which 'Abduh was noted, and many of them see this as a virtue, as of course in a way it was. In seeking to reconcile Islamic belief to the scientific age, they point out, 'Abduh was prudent and pragmatic, avoiding sharp breaks with traditional dogmatic formulas and elaborating what was novel in his thought only to the extent demanded by clear and present needs. By doing this he made his message more palatable to the orthodox and established a common ground of discourse between them and the products of modern secular education. Alternatively, it has been possible simply to note on how wide a front 'Abduh departed at least a little from tradition, even if he did not do so in a systematically thought-out way, and consequently to credit him with being, in his own indirect manner, a kind of radical. For example, as one very able study shows clearly, his theological departures amounted implicitly to a revival of Mu'tazilism, the systematically rationalist theological school of the early centuries of Islam, even though it is pointed out in the study that 'Abduh carefully avoided calling himself a Mu'tazilite and refrained from pursuing the implications in question to their logical conclusions.²

Both these observations are valid. 'Abduh was a conservative by language and manner and a radical by the implication of many of his teachings. For a reformer to be doctrinaire or systematic is not always a virtue, and one can admire the humane, tolerant, practical, conciliatory spirit that prevented 'Abduh from so being. It is not surprising that both 'Abduh's own generation and later ones have revered him as a great teacher.

Nonetheless, the limitations of his theology are historically no less important than the nobility of his character. While it would be unjust to speak of his failure, it needs to be recognized that his ideas provided a better basis for apologetics and polemics than for social reform and cultural rebirth.³ Yet his theology, with all its limitations, was ac-

² Robert Caspar, "Le Renouveau du mo'tazilisme," Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire, *Mélanges* IV (1957), 57-72.

³ Three of the most recent studies of 'Abduh both establish this point convincingly. It is emphasized most strongly by Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 62-75. See also Binder, *The Ideological Revolution*, pp. 60-72, 95-106. Albert Hourani, in describing 'Abduh's debates with Gabriel Hanotaux and Farah Antūn, writes: "But polemics have their danger: in defending oneself, one may draw closer to one's adversary than one thinks. It is significant that both his con-

cepted as a starting point where a more solid one might not have been. No one has dared, or seen the need, or enjoyed the necessary prestige, to improve on it.

The legal and constitutional doctrines of the classic Islamic tradition, exhumed and reformulated by Riḍā and other modernists, had been solidly grounded in an Ash'arite theology whose relevant characteristic in our concerns was its emphasis on divine voluntarism and rejection of naturalist concepts of authority and justice. Among modernists typified by Riḍā, an essential assumption has been that the "true" Islamic system of law and government of the age of the Founding Fathers, properly understood, was really based on natural principles, such as would seem to be required by the modern age. The rigid formalism and quietism commonly associated with the traditional dogmas must be the results of ignorance and error. Muḥammad 'Abduh's theology, and his occasional ventures into political and legal questions, encouraged this path of explanation but failed to provide a satisfactory intellectual framework that might enable it to succeed. In the first place the effort required a certain amount of historical distortion; in the second place one may wonder whether either 'Abduh or Riḍā really believed in all they said, or appreciated what it must mean. It was the reservations with which 'Abduh surrounded his own innovations that gave Riḍā reason in the first place to choose such unpromising models of traditional doctrine for modern revival, and in the second place to revive them in such an ambiguous and confused way that they could not possibly be given practical effect if taken at face value. It was possible for Riḍā to insist in abstract principle on the naturalism of Islamic legal and constitutional doctrines, without consistently interpreting their processes in the ways that naturalism would demand, because the theology introduced by 'Abduh to which Riḍā

troversies were concerned, not with the truth or falsity of Islam, but with its being compatible with the supposed requirements of the modern mind; and in the process, it may be that 'Abduh's view of Islam was itself affected by his view of what the modern mind needs. . . . It was, of course, easy in this way to distort if not destroy the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts, to lose that which distinguished Islam from other religions and even from non-religious humanism. . . . Once the traditional interpretation of Islam was abandoned, and the way open to private judgment, it was difficult if not impossible to say what was in accordance with Islam and what was not. . . . It was not an accident that, as we shall see, one group of his disciples were later to carry his doctrines in the direction of complete secularism" (*Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* [London, 1962], pp. 144-145).

subscribed was not so thoroughly naturalist as it purported to be. It was only intermittently and incidentally naturalist on certain salient points while still marked with traditional nominalism on others. The naturalist elements are thus the impetus to reinterpretation in Islamic legal and constitutional doctrine, and for this reason need to be identified; likewise, their limits became the limits of the reinterpretation.

In searching for a religious and social doctrine in keeping with their efforts to lift Islamic society out of its tradition-bound inertia, Muslim reformers could consider the merits of two alternative natural law conceptions. The first would be to assign separate spheres of competence to reason and revelation, along lines roughly similar to the Thomist tradition in Catholicism. According to this view, God's creation of the world of nature, including human nature, in keeping with an Eternal Law, provides human reason with the necessary basis for determining the principles of social morality, while revelation addresses itself to spiritual questions of personal devotion and redemption.

Islamic thought has not inclined in this direction because of its own primary image of God as ever-present, ever-willing, and ever-creating. God is "wholly other" than His creation, but He cannot have withdrawn or detached Himself from it.

The second possibility is to recognize the parallel competence of both reason and revelation within the same sphere, denying that there is either a separation or a conflict between them. Specific divine commands may exist in matters immediately concerning ordinary social life, without the competence of reason thereby being devalued. Similarly, reason may be capable of reaching certain conclusions regarding the nature of the Deity or of the after-life. There are gaps, to be sure, but only random ones, in the subject matter of each kind of knowledge. Thus reason can discover the existence of God and identify His most important qualities, but can not determine the correct forms of worship; revelation prescribes all the details of the law of inheritance, but omits mention of the details of governmental organization. It was this approach, in which reason and revelation form an integrated combination, and which is more congenial to the Islamic religious outlook, that Muḥammad 'Abduh and many other modernists adopted.⁴

⁴ An admirable statement of this position is given by Khalifa Abdul Hakim, "The Natural Law in the Muslim Tradition," University of Notre Dame Institute of Natural Law, *Proceedings*, V (1951), 29-65.

This type of naturalism departs from the long-established Ash'arite tradition by its promotion of the potential of human faculties beyond the secondary role of merely elaborating the circumstantial applications of revealed commands. It adopts the position central to all natural law theories—that sound reason is capable of identifying right and wrong in their true forms, not merely as distorted images. Where Christianity saw original sin, Islam saw original inadequacy. Now this is changed. If reason falls short, it is only because it has been hampered by some other influence.

'Abduh himself described the main objects of his career as follows:

I spoke out on behalf of two great causes. The first of these was the liberation of thought from the chains of imitation and the understanding of religious faith as the members of the early Community understood it before dissension arose, and the return of religious learning to its original sources, and consideration of religion in the scales of human intelligence that God created to repel the excesses of faith and diminish its errors and stumblings, so that the human social order prescribed by God in His wisdom may be attained. In this way religion may be counted the true friend of science, a stimulus for inquiry into the secrets of the universe, and an appeal to respect established truths and rely upon them in cultivating our spirits and reforming our actions. All this I have considered to be a single matter. In appealing on its behalf I found myself in opposition to the views of the two great groups of which the Community is composed: the devotees of the religious sciences and others of their type, and the devotees of modern techniques and their partisans.

The second cause I adopted was the reform of the Arabic language. . . .

I also made an appeal on behalf of another reform that people ignored and whose importance they did not seem to understand; nevertheless this reform is at the very basis of social life, and the Egyptians have fallen into decadence and have been humiliated by their neighbors only because they neglected it. This consisted of drawing the distinction between the government's right to the obedience of the people and the people's right to justice on the part of the government. I was among those persons who called upon the Egyptian population to recognize their right over their ruler—a notion which had not occurred to them for over twenty centuries. We preached the belief that the ruler, although he must be obeyed, is only a human being,

subject to error and prey to his passions, and that he can be deterred from these errors and passions only by the counsel that the Community gives him in word and deed.

But I later abandoned this question of political authority for fate to determine and for the hand of God to settle, for I realized that in such matters nations reap the fruits of what has been planted and cultivated over a long period of years, and that it is this planting with which we must now concern ourselves, with God's help.⁶

A. General Attitude toward Reason and Revelation

One of 'Abduh's most constantly stressed themes in his theological and apologetic writings is the essential harmony of reason, revelation, and individual moral temperament. When properly expressed and understood, there can be no conflict between them, although the fact that men often understand them in distorted form leads them to suppose that there are contradictions.

'Abduh's two leading works in this field of thought are the *Risālat al-Tauḥīd*,⁶ which is a concise expression of his theology, and *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya ma' al-'Ilm wa 'l-Madaniyya*,⁷ which is a defense of Islam's attitude to reason and science as compared to that of Christianity. In the latter work he argues that certain problems in Muslim history, particularly the rigidity (*jumūd*) of the various sciences after the first four or five centuries of Islam, have been due to the accumulated crust of custom and habit superimposed on "true" human moral instinct (*al-wijdān aṣ-ṣādiq*), artificially making the latter appear to be in conflict with reason. There is no fundamental antagonism between the two so long as moral instinct is freely expressed and reason stays within its proper bounds (which are defined elsewhere). Each has its proper function. That of reason is to examine means and ends; that of temperament (heart, disposition, emotion) is to ascertain pain, pleasure, and other feelings. The two are the "eyes" of the human spirit: one for distant objects, the other for close ones; both are essential and are mutually supporting. "Complete religion is both knowledge and taste, heart and mind, evidence and acknowledgment, thought and

⁶ Riḍā, *Tārikh*, I, 11-12.

⁶ The edition used is that of Cairo, 1351 H.; French translation by B. Michel and M. Abdel Razik, *Rissalat al-Tawhid; exposé de la religion musulmane* (Paris, 1925). Page citations below are to translation/original.

⁷ Cairo, n.d.

temperament." Whenever there appears to be conflict between reason and temperament it is only because what is thought to be one or the other is really something else.⁸

This is a convenient loophole by which any contradiction of 'Abduh's thesis can be explained away. The same sort of relationship, often with the same loophole, is conceived for reason and revelation.

Reason and revelation are different paths to truth and fulfill differing functions, but cannot contradict each other. "The Muslims are agreed," says 'Abduh, "that if religion can reveal certain things to us that exceed our comprehension, it cannot teach us anything that is in contradiction with our reason."⁹ If there appears to be a contradiction one or the other has been incorrectly understood. According to Rashīd Riḍā, 'Abduh explained that the conclusions of both reason and revelation may be either decisive (*qaṭ'i*) or suppositional (*zannī*), with the decisive conclusion always taking precedence. What is decisive cannot be false, and therefore all decisive conclusions, whether revealed or rational, must always be in agreement; but most of the indications from both sources are of the suppositional kind, and therefore are subject to interpretation (*ta'wīl*).¹⁰ It is reason, continues 'Abduh, that confirms the validity and coherence of religious doctrine. Logical inconsistencies need not be accepted at face value. Still, when further rational investigation fails to reconcile the contradiction, the matter should be "committed to God in His omniscience"¹¹—that is, a rational explanation exists although man has not discovered it.

The limits to the use of reason as conceived by 'Abduh appear to fall within two categories. Sometimes they are inherent in the subject matter. At other times they are imposed not on the validity of reason itself but on the ability of individuals to make sufficient use of reason, so that rational conclusions must be guided or confirmed. The latter category applies to value judgments, and will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter. The first category includes such questions as free will and predestination, God's essence, and certain of His attributes.¹²

⁸ *Al-Islām wa'n-Naṣrāniyya*, 142-144.

⁹ *Risāla*, 6-7/8.

¹⁰ Shakhī Arslān, *As-Sayyid Rashīd Riḍā wa Iḥdā' Arb'īm Sana* (Damascus, 1937), p. 690.

¹¹ *Risāla*, 88-89/129-130.

¹² He cites the ḥadīth, "Reflect on what God has created, but not on His essence, or you will perish." They are "rational" attributes which are part of the "Necessary Be-

'Abduh's position on free will is of interest not only because of his conclusion but also because of the process of reasoning by which he arrives at it. The process is a pragmatic one, in which conflicting rational arguments are weighed on the scale of utility. 'Abduh's main concern in the free-will puzzle is on a psychological level, with the individual's consciousness of his ability or inability to determine his own actions and their consequences, rather than with a complete and systematic philosophy of causality. He finds it desirable to promote an assumption of free will, and had he wished to do so he could have adopted the full Mu'tazilite rationale in support of this assumption. But this would have violated his essential conservatism, by which he remained faithful to certain fundamental Ash'arite formulas: in this case, God's transcendent and unique role as Creator of all things. The term *khālq* (creation), or *khāliq* (creator), belongs to God alone. Some Mu'tazilites had scrupulously avoided applying these terms to men's actions for fear of being charged with the blasphemy of *shirk* (derogation of the uniqueness of God), and instead used the term *mukhlari'* (producer, inventor); but most Mu'tazilites did speak of men as *khāliq*, explaining that men create their actions by a power implanted in them by God.¹³ 'Abduh appears to accept the spirit of the Mu'tazilite rationale but carefully eschews Mu'tazilite terminology, using neither *khāliq* nor *mukhlari'* and speaking only of *kasb*. *Kasb* was a term used by some of the more cautious Mu'tazilites to denote acquisition of the power of transitive action, but in 'Abduh's own time it was a hoary symbol of Ash'arite conservatism, denoting acquisition of no more than an illusion of authorship of acts for which the individual is nonetheless morally responsible. 'Abduh interprets *kasb* in substantially the Mu'tazilite way, but the term is inevitably ambiguous, and connotes a link with orthodoxy which he has not entirely broken. He neither invokes the name of the Mu'tazilites nor acknowledges that his position is at variance with that of Ash'arī, Ghazālī, and the other great masters of the Sunnī tradition.

In the *Risāla* 'Abduh partially clears the ground for a free-will theory by carefully distinguishing between natural forces that are

ing" and are discernible through a type of first-cause reasoning; other attributes, notably the fact that God addresses Himself to man through prophets, are nonrational. But even knowledge gained through revelation is limited to the external forms. (*Risāla*, 32-37/44-52.)

¹³ L. Gardet, *La Mesure de notre liberté* (Tunis, 1946), p. 21; Caspar, "Le Renouveau du mu'tazilisme, *op. cit.*, 168.

beyond men's control and limit their options, and men's own voluntary acts of choice. Limitations on freedom of action are not limitations on the will itself.¹⁴ To claim free will for men is not to commit the heresy of *shirk*. *Shirk* would be implicit only in the attribution to anyone but God of freedom of action unrestrained by natural forces.¹⁵ Here we find 'Abduh adopting (but not acknowledging) the Mu'tazilite concept of "engendered" (*mutawallid*) acts, which are the unintended results of previous acts; these were distinguished by the Mu'tazilites from acts of volition, which enjoy the status of immediate causes (*asbāb*) and cannot be "engendered" because they can be modified by the will of the actor.¹⁶

Again, he draws a distinction between God's omniscience and the idea of predestination:

God's omniscience encompasses what man accomplishes by his will. He knows that at such-and-such a moment man will perform an action that will be good and for which he will be rewarded, or some other action that will be evil and for which he will be punished. In all cases the actions follow from human effort and free choice, and nothing in God's omniscience prevents man from choosing to make the effort. The fact, on the other hand, that what God knows will happen inevitably does happen, is only because what is known to God is none other than reality, and reality does not change.¹⁷

But these considerations are no proof in themselves, and 'Abduh admits that no firm proof is possible. There are, first of all, conflicting considerations:

Consciousness and the senses testify that certain acts of a man are his own. . . . The Qur'ān also speaks of "what ye do," and "what your hands have acquired." . . . All the requirements of the Divine Law are based on the principle that a man is responsible for what he does. There would be no justice in holding a man responsible for something not within his power nor his will. . . . At the same time, there is no question that all things

¹⁴ *Risāla*, 42-43/59-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43/61.

¹⁶ Albert Nader, *Le Système philosophique des Mu'tazila* (Beirut, 1956), p. 198.

¹⁷ *Risāla*, 45/64. The term "human effort" (*effort humain*) is used by Michel and Abdel Razik as a free translation of 'Abduh's Arabic word *hasb*—a rendering justified in the context of 'Abduh's meaning. Cf. the observation on this point by Osman Amin, *Muhammad Abduh: Essai sur ses idées philosophiques et religieuses* (Cairo, 1944), p. 82.

originate with God and are attributable to Him. This is practically an instinctive recognition. . . . His power is also unquestionable. If He wished, He could rob us of the ability and will which He has given us. . . .¹⁸

Elsewhere he writes that

Belief in predestination is supported by decisive arguments; indeed, man's natural disposition leads him to it. . . . The human will is but one of the links of the chain [of causality]. Will itself is an effect of perception, which stems from sensory feelings; ultimately all is to be traced back to the Supreme Being.¹⁹

But how to reconcile the conflicting possibilities is a problem that 'Abduh is content to leave unsolved. To seek an ultimate explanation would be "to seek to penetrate the secrets of Destiny, and it is forbidden to us to plunge into this abyss and occupy ourselves with what reason is virtually incapable of attaining."²⁰ Discussion of the free will issue has always proved fruitless in Christianity and Islam alike, and the alternative arguments only lead to "destruction of the Shari'a, obliteration of obligations, and invalidation of that unpremeditated rational judgment which is fundamental to religious faith."²¹

Therefore 'Abduh arrives at his belief in free will by other means than examining the arguments for and against it on their own rational merits. This other method is to consider the question pragmatically in relation to other articles of belief, choosing the alternative most compatible with them. The belief that is evidently uppermost in his mind in this regard is faith in the destiny of the true Muslim Community.

¹⁸ *Manār*, VI, 589–590, from 'Abduh's commentary on Sūra ciii of the Qur'ān ("Al-Aṣr"). This translation is that of C. C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London, 1933), p. 154.

¹⁹ "Al-Qadā' wa 'l-qadar," in 'Abduh and Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, *Al-'Urwā 'l-Wuthqā* (Cairo, 1927), p. 107. In much of the *'Urwā* [as it will hereafter be cited] it is fruitless to try to separate the ideas of 'Abduh from those of Jamāl ad-Dīn. We are told that 'Abduh's function was to supply the language for his master's thought (Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, I, 289; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 110). The language, however, is crucial to the expression of the ideas that concern us here; they are substantially similar to those found in 'Abduh's own *Risālat at-Tauhīd*, and in this instance there is no reason to abstain from associating 'Abduh fully with them. On certain other occasions the case is somewhat different (see below, pp. 138–141).

²⁰ *Risāla*, 43/61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, This maintenance of contradictory positions without seeking final solutions is characteristic of Māturīdite theology. (See D. B. Macdonald, "Al-Māturīdī," *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* [SEI], p. 383.)

He comes to the conclusion that this faith in destiny cannot be effectively maintained, and indeed scarcely makes sense, unless accompanied by an assumption of free will.

This faith in destiny is a salient attitude in traditional Sunnī Islam. The Sharī'a is designed by God to bring worldly as well as spiritual success to man. Its social prescriptions are assumed to assure the best and most prosperous of earthly communities, provided that they are properly observed.²² The demands of Sunnī apologetics against Shī'ite criticisms in Abbasid times made it fashionable for juristic writers to try to prove that the main body of Muslims had indeed observed the Sharī'a. This was done by systematically justifying, through legal fictions and otherwise, the political record of the Sunnī Caliphate to date. What this amounted to was an implicit defense of *ijmā'*. But at that time it could still be believed that Islam was enjoying the prosperous place in history that true belief was supposed to bring. Hence it was plausible to argue that the Community had in fact followed the correct path, even if it did require a rather tortured and artificial interpretation of certain procedures and events.

By the time of Muḥammad 'Abduh the historical picture is very different on two counts. First, the cleavage between Sunnism and Shī'ism on matters of political doctrine has long since lost its practical importance, so that the question of *ijmā'* is no longer a burning issue between them. Secondly, the social and political fortunes of the Community are in an evident state of decline, so that it is no longer plausible to suppose that the Community is enjoying the material rewards of righteousness. Either one must cease to believe that upright belief and conduct are rewarded in history or he must change his view of *ijmā'* according to which the Community as a whole is divinely protected from error. Between these alternatives it is clearly less painful and radical to suppress or revise the principle of *ijmā'*, imperceptibly at least, since this would not strike at the heart of the concept of God's justice, as the first alternative would do.

'Abduh, who wholeheartedly believed in the promise of worldly success for the righteous,²³ could only conclude that conditions in

²² The virtual fatalism with which Ibn Khaldūn describes the rise and fall of empires has been ascribed to a belief on his part that human sin and pride and failure to follow the true path of faith as dictated by the Sharī'a are what condemn man to continuance of the cycle. (H. A. R. Gibb, "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, VII [1933], 31.)

²³ See *Risāla*, 100/144, where it is stated that the Qur'ān established laws for man's

society that are evidently good or bad must stem from correct or incorrect religious belief and practice.²⁴ There is, then, an empirical or pragmatic check on doctrines drawn by purely deductive reasoning from the primary sources of revelation: if history has not rewarded the Muslims, somehow in their beliefs they must have gone astray.²⁵

But it would be a distortion of this position to suppose that this pragmatic check can be built up into a direct source of doctrine in its own right, to the point where a particular religious belief (e.g., on the question of free will) is determined inductively by deciding what theoretical position will produce the best results. For then belief ceases to be a matter of faith and becomes only a working hypothesis or simply a mere device. Faith in destiny does not mean submitting individual beliefs to the test of their immediate results. Rather, it involves trust that over a long period of time, the natural forces by which God limits human freedom of action will help devout men achieve their worldly purposes rather than frustrate them. The faith in question is religious faith, not faith in nature. An investigation of natural forces in order to calculate what course of action is most expedient to accomplish practical goals is one thing; such an investigation in order to decide what religious belief is most expedient is quite another.

It would be a suspect approach, therefore, to assume that since belief in predestination of the individual's will seems to have an undesirable social effect, the belief must be discarded, regardless of the logical arguments for or against it. On the other hand, 'Abduh found the arguments themselves inconclusive on both sides. What appears to have led him to an espousal of free will was not simple utilitarianism but the consideration that religious belief was itself undermined by the idea of predestination.

interest which bring prosperity and justice when followed, and calamities when ignored.

²⁴ For a detailed study of the influence of the Muslim faith in historical destiny on Egyptian modernists, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957), chap. i: "Islam and History," and chap. iii: "The Arabs: Islamic Crisis."

²⁵ Religious beliefs, write 'Abduh and Afghānī in *Al-'Urwa 'l-Wuthqā*, determine actions; therefore bad actions can only be the result of false beliefs. If doctrines are improperly transmitted or grasped, the result will be an unwitting deviation by the believer from the true principles of the faith, and eventually religion itself will be discredited and innovations and corruption will appear. This, they say, is what has happened in the case of the doctrine of free will and predestination. (*'Urwa*, pp. 102-103).

This connection is spelled out in one of 'Abduh's earlier writings on predestination—an article in the journal *Al-'Urwa 'l-Wuthqā*—in which the implication is clear that the true meaning of the phrase *al-qadā' wa' l-qadar* is not predestination but destiny. Faith in this concept, he says, has been the impulse in Muslim history to courage and action. He who trusts in God has the sense of observing God's will without fear of the consequences of possible failure. This is the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse, "Those who, when they were told, 'The people are gathered against you,' were only increased in faith and replied, 'God is sufficient for us, and most excellent is He in whom we trust!'"²⁶

This faith, the article continues, is the antithesis of the doctrine of the Jabriyya ("compulsionists") of early Islam that "there is no difference between an individual moving his jaw to eat and its being moved by shivering from cold."²⁷ It is the Jabriyya doctrine that has a weakening psychological influence and leads men to accept tyranny and lack social conscience.²⁸ Eventually, it is suggested, false belief can only lead to the discredit of religion itself.²⁹

The apparent implication is that it is not sheer material utility that is at stake but the religious attitude and religious ethics, with which faith in destiny is associated. 'Abduh and Afghānī have judged the doctrine of predestination not in the light of its apparent material effects but in the light of the religious attitudes that must accompany or follow from it.

A full rationalization of free will in relation to God's omnipotence remains absent, and this is unavoidable; but the way is clear in 'Abduh's mind for a wholehearted presumption in its favor. In his commentary on the Sūrat al-'Aṣr he concludes:

It is therefore the duty of every Muslim to believe that God is the Creator of everything, in the manner He knows; and to acknowledge that his own deeds are to be attributed to himself, as his own instinct tells him; and to act . . . [righteously] by exercising that power of choice which he finds within himself. And beyond that, he is not required to lift up his vision to what lies beyond all this.³⁰

²⁶ Q. iii:173, quoted in *'Urwa*, p. 109.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105, 107–109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103 (cited above).

³⁰ *Manār*, VI, 589–590; trans. Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 154.

In the sense that he has chosen between two equally plausible doctrinal positions, his procedure might be called a theological version of *istiḥsān*. In the sense that his choice of doctrine is made on grounds of promoting an already established desideratum, it is comparable to the type of *istiṣlāḥ* known in legal terminology as *dhari'a*.

These methods, signifying a mild and cautious pragmatism in the domain of jurisprudence, might appear to constitute a more striking innovation when applied to theology. Insofar as Islamic theological schools—including both the Ash'arite and the Mu'tazilite—had been characterized by the systematic elaboration of dogma, tempered by the mysticism of the Ṣūfīs on the one side and the "illumination" (*ishrāq*) of the philosophers on the other, rather than by any tradition of pragmatism, this appearance is borne out. In another sense, however, what passes here for pragmatism is simply 'Abduh's distaste for pure speculation and his reluctance to probe the roots of fundamental theological problems when their direct relevance to the needs of the individual believer is not established.³¹ This is a conservative position not unlike that of those medieval theologians (e.g., Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Ash'arī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taimiyya) who had inveighed against the speculations of the philosophers. As 'Abduh enjoined Muslims "to believe that God is the Creator of everything, in the manner He knows," and "not lift up their vision to what lies beyond," so al-Ash'arī had insisted, almost nine centuries earlier, on enumerating God's attributes *bilā kaif*, that is, without seeking explanation.

It is characteristic of 'Abduh's concern for the social effects of religious belief that he takes pains to show that Islam gives due regard to man's material needs. "In Islam, life takes precedence over religion," he writes. Islam does not impose physical hardships on men by requiring asceticism or abstinence. In the rules governing prayer, fasting, and the like, exceptions are always made when necessitated by consideration for the individual's welfare. "The health of bodies takes precedence over the health of religions." Various Qur'ānic verses are cited to show that God created the Earth for man's use.³²

³¹ Caspar notes 'Abduh's practice of "covering his most audacious positions with names as venerated as those of Ash'ari and Ghazali. . . . He systematically avoided taking a position in controversies involving ideas that had no direct influence on the reforms he propounded; he repeated in these cases that one must avoid scrutinizing these problems—an attitude that caused him to be accused of agnosticism" (Caspar, "Le Renouveau du mu'tazilisme," *op. cit.*, p. 161).

³² *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, pp. 74–76.

Furthermore, according to 'Abduh, Islam forbids excess of religious zeal (*al-ghulūw fī 'd-dīn*). Man should not be overly concerned with the afterlife to the detriment of this one. "God reminds us that the Hereafter can be achieved while enjoying God's blessings in this world." The Muslim's best way to show gratitude to God, then, is to use his mind in quest of material progress.³³

It is interesting to compare this presentation with the following passage by al-Ghāzālī, whom 'Abduh generally considered one of his sources of inspiration:

We say that the right ordering of religion is only accomplished by the right ordering of the mundane world. . . . If it should be said, "Why do you say this? . . . Nay, it is accomplished only by the ruin of this world, for the religious and the mundane are mutually antagonistic, and working to cultivate the one is to ruin the other"—we should reply, "These are the words of one who fails to understand. What do you mean by 'the world'? It is an expression of several meanings. In one sense it may refer to an excess of easy living and pleasure, and more than what is necessary and essential; in another sense it may refer to all that one needs before his death. One of these meanings is contrary to religion and the other is of prime importance to it." Thus he errs who fails to distinguish between the various meanings of ambiguous expressions. When we speak of the right ordering of religion we mean that state of knowledge and piety which are only attained with a healthy body, preservation of life, and assurance of the necessities of life, such as clothing, shelter, food, and security. . . . In truth, he who is secure in his heart, is sound in body, and has his daily bread, may as well have the whole world given to him. . . . The Faith could not be firmly established without the attainment of security in these essential necessities.³⁴

There is a marked difference in emphasis between the two writers. 'Abduh describes material well-being as having an importance of its own which even "takes precedence" over acts or expressions of devotion. What he seeks to show is that religion is no impediment to worldly prosperity. For Ghazālī, the need is to show that worldly prosperity is no impediment to religion, and is in fact necessary for it as a means to an end; and the end is faith.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

³⁴ *Al-Iqtisād fī 'l-I'tiqād* (Cairo, 1320 H.), p. 105.

B. *The Elements of a Natural Law Theory*

It was observed in chapter ii that Ash'arite theology, with its assumption that the workings of nature were the result not of a regular system of physical laws but rather God's custom, was not well suited to a concept of natural law. It was also observed that the Ash'arites did, however, assume that God's custom was unchanging and dependable. If that assumption should be strongly enough emphasized, the difference between God's custom and physical laws would be of less significance and in many minds might virtually disappear. This appears to have been the case with 'Abduh: he seized upon the notion of *sunnat Allāh* and, disdaining to split hairs, went on practically to equate it with an ordered system of nature. The shift from Ash'arism was for 'Abduh not one of doctrine but of emphasis and attitude. He continues to use traditional terminology, and one feels at times that he has arrived at new conclusions without quite coming to grips with some questions that should be fundamental to the subject.

This seems to be the case in his attitude on miracles. He takes pains to show that Islam rejects the idea of miracles, and that it is Christianity that has been so unscientific and credulous as to make them an article of faith.³⁵

A miracle, in 'Abduh's writings as well as in traditional terminology, is called *khāriq al-'āda*: literally, the infringement of what is usual or customary. The expression is better suited to the Ash'arites than to 'Abduh, for what it suggests is that what God habitually causes to happen (*sunnat Allāh*) does not happen on a particular occasion. The Ash'arites taught that God customarily causes the sun to rise in the morning and set in the evening, and therefore could appropriately apply the words *khāriq al-'āda* to irregularities, with no more than the outward meaning of the words implied. But the natural-law theorist, while he might refer to physical laws as God's customs, necessarily means much more, and miracles for him are much more than unusual events: they are outright contradictions of established, fixed principles, and therefore irrational. 'Abduh's reason rebels against miracles in this way, and so he denies that they have any place in Islam, and yet he continues to use the expressions *sunnat Allāh* and *khāriq al-'āda*,³⁶ and apparently does so not simply as a matter of respecting

³⁵ See especially *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, pp. 19-20, 52-53, 58.

³⁶ Instead of coining more appropriate expressions such as *aḥkām al-khalīqa* and *khāriq al-ma'qūl* respectively.

traditional usage but because he has not entirely discarded the idea of the immediate presence of God's will in natural events.³⁷ But he refuses to see any issue implied in the words themselves:

The *sunan* are those well-established paths along which all things take their course and in accordance with which effect follows cause; they are what are also called *sharā'i* or *nawāmis*, and some people call them *qawānīn*. But what difference does it make to us, in view of the variety of expressions in which the Qur'ān declares that the order of human society, whatever may happen in it, is a single order, unaltered and unchanging, and that whoever seeks happiness in this society must look to the sources of the order . . . ?³⁸

'Abduh's position here is not fundamentally different from that of the Ash'arites, although there is an important shift in emphasis. God adheres to His custom without change, not out of physical necessity but out of moral necessity implicit in His essence: it is unthinkable that He would engage in imperfection after willing what is perfect (i.e., the laws of nature). 'Abduh writes: "Islam has shown that the great phenomena of the universe follow a custom which God has fixed in His eternal knowledge and which no accident can modify."³⁹ God's custom, then, as 'Abduh conceives it, is equivalent from the practical point of view to the physical laws of nature. But this is true only from the practical point of view; by *sunnat Allāh* 'Abduh literally means custom and nothing more.

'Abduh admits one exceptional miracle recognized by Islam: the Qur'ān. The miracle of the Qur'ān was necessary to establish proof of the prophecy of Muḥammad. Significantly, the miraculous element according to 'Abduh was not in logical contravention to the processes of nature, but only lay in the fact that the Qur'ān is superhuman in eloquence and spiritual insight. Hence the customary term for "miracle" in this instance is *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* ("the surpassingness of the Qur'ān"), although 'Abduh also uses the term *khāriq al-'āda*, which in this case is equally appropriate from the Ash'arite and naturalist points of view.⁴⁰

Despite the limitations in 'Abduh's naturalism in the subject of

³⁷ E.g., *Risāla*, 43/61: The sin of *shirk* is defined as ascribing to anyone but God freedom unconstrained by natural forces, above the level of apparent causes.

³⁸ *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, p. 58.

³⁹ *Risāla*, 118/175. Cf. Michel and Razik, *Risālat*, pp. lxii-lxiii.

⁴⁰ For 'Abduh's position see *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, pp. 53-55.

miracles, there is no doubt of his intention: to render Muslim religious doctrine harmonious with the modern scientific spirit by denying any contradiction between the two. Recognizing that 'Abduh was a reformer and apologist rather than a metaphysician, one can only accept his rejection of miracles as a first step toward a general position of natural law, and proceed to examine his particular views on the normative and epistemological issues set forth in the preceding chapter.⁴¹

His treatment of these questions follows one course for individuals and another for groups. For the individual the starting point of 'Abduh's thinking is man's ability to distinguish for himself between good and evil—to determine the norm of right behavior—through a combination of esthetic instinct and rational calculation of utility. The obligatory character of the norm is then supplied by religious consciousness, which informs him that it is God's will that the norm be adhered to on pain of punishment in the afterlife. The norm, in other words, is inherent in what man perceives in his environment and is determined by proper use of natural human faculties, while the sanction is beyond nature and rational perception.

For the group, the starting point is perception not of the norm but of the sanction, from which the norm can be inferred. The sanction in the case of the group is material and worldly, and can therefore be rationally perceived, whereas for the individual this is not the case. Groups are rewarded and punished on earth for their deeds and misdeeds. By taking heed of the fate of other groups—that is, by the study of history and sociology—they are led to seek the patterns of conduct that will bring them success. These they then discover through collective reason.

The norm prescribed for the individual, then, is natural in the sense that his natural faculties discover it from natural data. But his adherence to it is an act of religious faith, since he has no assurance of material reward for his adherence, and the utility of his actions is not necessarily utility in his own interest. The group's norm is natural in all senses, but primarily in the sanction. It is discovered by natural human faculties (though only in their collective form), with the aid of the natural data of the sanction. The group's adherence, unlike the individual's, is motivated not by religion but by material self-interest. Therefore it does not really matter whether the group determines the norm inductively by studying past history or deductively by calculat-

⁴¹ See above, pp. 57–58.

ing the long-term expediency of alternative future courses of behavior, except that perhaps the first is more reliable since it is empirical.⁴² There is of course a certain overlap with the natural ethic of individuals, in that articulate individual members of society possessing a strong moral sense may succeed in bringing the group as a whole to accept the religious imperative in certain situations; but this is not 'Abduh's dominant note.⁴³ For if societies and individuals bear moral obligations that are ultimately similar in substance, the modes of perception and implementation are different. We need see nothing esoteric, or even peculiarly Islamic, in 'Abduh's view of the matter. As every politician and social thinker knows, large groups tend to respond most readily to considerations of collective self-interest rather than collective moral duty, and the surest path to public acceptance of the latter is through appeals to the former.

Religion is thus logically essential to 'Abduh's conception of natural law in relation to individuals but not to groups. The distinction was not altogether new in Islamic thought, though 'Abduh came to it in his own way and for his own purposes. The point was later to be reiterated by 'Abduh's disciple Rashīd Riḍā, who asserted that a nation that behaves justly receives its reward in history whether its people are Muslims or unbelievers,⁴⁴ while individuals are recompensed on the Day of Judgment not simply for outward behavior but in accordance with the sincerity of their devotion. Furthermore, 'Abduh held that the role of prophecy and religion differs in relation to individuals and groups. To individuals, prophets bring religious awareness and knowl-

⁴² Possibly 'Abduh speaks only in terms of the first method because it is susceptible to religious overtones: the record of nations of the past is referred to as *sunan Allāh fi 'l-umam* ("God's customs toward nations")—a good classical expression which it was natural for 'Abduh to use, whatever his intent, but which suggests the immanence of divine will in a manner convenient to 'Abduh's theological interest.

⁴³ See, for instance, *Risāla* 85–86/125–127.

⁴⁴ *Manār*, IX, 56, citing Q.iii:117: "And whatever good they do, they will not be denied the meed thereof." This indicates "that God will not destroy a nation on account of its idolatry, if otherwise it does justice and observes the rules of progress," according to Riḍā (see Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 141). Ibn Taimiyya, of whom Riḍā was an enthusiastic student, wrote that "God supports the just state even if it be non-believing but does not support the unjust state even if it be Muslim" (*Al-Hisba fi 'l-Islām* [Medina, n.d.], 82). Nizām al-Mulk cites the ḥadīth, "A government may subsist with impiety, but it cannot last with oppression and tyranny" (C. Schefer, tr., *Siassat Nameh* [Paris, 1893], pp. 9–10). Ghazālī cites the same in the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (see Ann K. S. Lambton, "The Theory of Kingship in the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* of Ghazālī," *Islamic Quarterly*, I [1954], 54).

edge of the spiritual sanction; to groups, they bring not knowledge so much as the religious spirit of love and brotherhood, without which no group succeeds in practicing justice.

We come now to a more detailed examination of 'Abduh's treatment of individuals and groups respectively.

1. *Individual natural law*

'Abduh's theory of the good is expressed concisely in a few pages of the *Risāla*.⁴⁶ An admirable résumé of the essential ideas in the light of classical theology and philosophy is given by Osman Amin,⁴⁶ whose analysis seems to suggest that 'Abduh's liberalism here, as elsewhere, finds its antecedents in Mu'tazilite doctrine, resurrected to fit certain contemporary needs.

In the *Risāla* 'Abduh uses the terms *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* to describe good and bad not only in the moral sense but also in the sense of esthetic or intellectual perfection or imperfection, and in the sense of utility or harmfulness. This ambiguity is inherent in the usage of the Arabic terms. While 'Abduh is careful to make the necessary distinctions, he is apparently quite content that the ambiguity should exist and that concepts of esthetic beauty, utility, and moral desirability should all be expressed by the single word *ḥasan* and be discussed as distinct but inseparable parts of the same whole.⁴⁷

'Abduh first discusses esthetics. Material objects are judged beautiful or ugly according to their completeness, harmony of color and form, and so on, and while individual tastes may vary, they do so only in degree. Everyone finds certain flowers beautiful, or certain mutilations of natural forms repulsive. "So although tastes may differ, things are beautiful or ugly in themselves."⁴⁸

The same is true of ideas: all men tend to be attracted to ideas of a certain quality, involving concepts of completeness, perfection, moral elevation, or strength of character. The only difference here is that the

⁴⁶ *Risāla*, 46–50/66–73. A summary without critique is found in Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, pp. 165–166.

⁴⁶ Osman Amin, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, pp. 92–99.

⁴⁷ Osman Amin, who also refers to the ambiguity of the term *ḥasan* (*ibid.*, p. 92), notes that the three categories in which 'Abduh uses the term are familiar in medieval speculation: perfection, suitability, and praiseworthiness or meritoriousness (*ibid.*, p. 95). The last of these categories, which signifies moral or religious virtue, becomes known only through revelation, as we shall see presently.

⁴⁸ *Risāla*, 47/67.

medium of perception is intellectual rather than sensory; we are still dealing with esthetics.⁴⁰

Third, human actions have a certain esthetic value commonly attached to them, just as objects and ideas do. Examples are found in athletic coordination and musical virtuosity.⁴¹

These types of esthetic value constitute what 'Abduh calls things that are "good in themselves." A second category includes those things that are good or beautiful not in themselves but by virtue of their effects and consequences. This may be true of material objects—for example, bitter medicine—or, more important, of voluntary human actions. (Nothing is said for the moment of the consequences of ideas.) An action is beautiful or ugly according to its direct consequences of pain or pleasure, or, more subtly, according to its more indirect utility or harmfulness.

The harm, in this case, proceeds from the brevity of the pleasure compared with the duration of the sufferings that follow . . . and from the disproportion between the intensity of the pleasure and the force of the pain.⁴²

Such a lack of proportion between immediate pleasure and ultimate utility leads us to regard with distaste such actions as robbery and manslaughter, no matter how unpopular the victim, because "these acts carry the germ of a general insecurity that extends even to the person committing the violence."⁴³

It is apparent that this second class of actions—those that are good or bad according to their effects rather than in themselves—is not entirely removed from the field of esthetics, although it is clear that it depends on intelligence rather than mere sensitivity for its value determination. The esthetic appreciation is only transferred by one step: from the thing itself to the thing it leads to. We weigh—esthetically—the action or the object together with its effect and compare the two. When we picture to ourselves something that is distasteful in itself but whose effects are clearly desirable, these effects "change our psychological condition, and the beauty (*jamāl*) of the effect casts the rays of its splendor on the subject" (which produced the effect).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 48/68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49/70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50/71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48/68.

Utility and esthetic beauty, then, are inseparable, and what is useful is determined by man's intelligence in accordance with the dictates of his apparently instinctive esthetic appreciation. 'Abduh continues:

The human mind has known these things [i.e., consequences] for a long time. It has divided them into harmful and useful, and has called the former bad actions and the latter good actions. It is on this division that the distinction rests between virtue and vice [*ṣaḍila wa radhila*]. Human thought has defined them more or less precisely according to the degree of intelligence of the thinker, and has made dependent on them the happiness or misery of man in this life . . . although those persons who have been able to do so with any degree of correctness have been few in number.

Voluntary actions are beautiful or ugly [*ḥasan wa qabih*] either in themselves, or by their particular or general consequences. Man's reason, together with his senses, can distinguish beautiful actions from ugly ones, according to the different significations we ascribed to them above, without need to find support in revelation [*sim'*: lit., what he hears, i.e., what he is told by God].⁶⁴

But the fact that reason and esthetic instinct are suitable to determine what is naturally good (beautiful) or bad (ugly) does not mean that they always succeed in doing so. Very few persons, according to 'Abduh, are able to use their reason with complete success in determining the utility or esthetic perfection of actions or in reaching essential ethical truths. The great mass of men are held back by imbalance in their psychological makeup, by false hopes and desires, by distorted perceptions, by a sense of rivalry, and so forth. Consequently, few persons reach by rational means an understanding of the true principles of utility in this life, not to mention the principles of preparation for the hereafter.⁶⁵

This explains one function of revelation: the Divine Law makes up for the deficiencies in human nature. It confirms reason and lends certainty to its conclusions when reason is right, and corrects and supplements it where it has been misguided. It also enumerates certain special duties which cannot be determined by reason, such as ritual exercises. Only revelation can give man any certainty as to the substance of his beliefs and principles.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50/71-72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-54/73-77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-57/80-82.

But revelation has another function that is still more important. If human faculties need confirmation from revelation in determining what the true ethical norms are, they need still more help in providing man with a decisive impulsion to follow these norms. For this impulsion must be primarily religious, coming from consideration of the prospects of the afterlife. If it were true, says 'Abduh, that reason could discern these prospects, revelation would again be only supplementary:

If then a thinker succeeds in demonstrating the existence of God and His rational attributes by the sole force of his reason, without benefit of revelation, as has been the case for certain peoples; if after that he deduces, in a correct or incorrect manner, that the survival of the human soul after death involves felicity or hellfire; if he establishes that this felicity after death is obtained from acknowledgment of God and the practice of virtues, and that the soul is given over to hellfire when it ignores God and indulges in vice; if, finally, he concludes that among actions there are those that are useful for the soul to gain felicity after death, and others which are harmful to it and expose it to hellfire—if he can deduce all this, what rational or dogmatic impediment can forbid him to say, relying only on reason, that acknowledgment of God, the virtues, and all the acts that follow from this acknowledgment are obligatory for us, while vice and all that it entails are forbidden to us? Who is to prevent him from setting forth the rules that he judges good and calling other men to share his beliefs and to act as he does? All this is permissible, so long as there is no provision in the revealed Law to contradict it.⁵⁷

Knowledge of the existence of God and His major attributes can indeed be deduced by reason, as 'Abduh has explained earlier in the *Risāla*.⁵⁸ But all the rest, involving rational discovery of the afterlife, is pure hypothesis, and 'Abduh goes on to indicate that he does not believe that it is possible.⁵⁹ What the above passage does make clear is that the norms of religious virtue and the norms of utility and esthetics are the same in substance. The possibilities of hellfire and salvation are not norms but sanctions, which lend the character of obligation (as

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51/73.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 34/48 f.

⁵⁹ Osman Amin is apparently mistaken in citing this passage as evidence of the wide extent of 'Abduh's rationalism and assuming that 'Abduh does think it conceivable for reason to detect the nature of the afterlife. (*Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 96.)

distinct from mere desirability) to the norms. The Māturīdite school of medieval theology taught that good and evil could be known by right reason, but that the obligatory character of virtue could only be known from revelation. This is 'Abduh's position as well:

The obligation to perform actions that are commanded or simply recommended, and to avoid or disapprove actions that are forbidden, in the manner prescribed by the Sharī'a, which determines the appropriate rewards and penalties—all this reason cannot attain to by itself. The only way to know, then, is by revelation. This is not to deny that what is commanded is already good, in the sense that it leads to worldly or other-worldly benefit. . . .⁶⁰

Revelation, then, does not endow actions with the quality of good or evil, but only defines the obligation. What is commanded is "already good" (*ḥasan fī dhātih*) for reasons man can understand; the basis of value is not in God's will but in the essence of His creation. This is good Mu'tazilite doctrine; the Māturīdite element lies in the revelatory nature of the obligation.⁶¹

This Māturīdite qualification by 'Abduh is crucial to his whole discussion of ethics. It means that reason can tell men *what* they should or should not do,⁶² and revelation tells them the most compelling reason *why* they should or should not do it.⁶³

But since reason is often obscured or distorted in its operation by other human qualities, it seldom proves adequate even for its own primary role, and therefore most men need the confirmation of revelation to help them decide *what* they should or should not do. And furthermore, although reason, together with the senses, can provide limited, practical, instinctive reasons why one should behave a certain way in a certain situation, these reasons lack psychologically compelling force, and therefore the religious imperative becomes neces-

⁶⁰ *Risāla* 56-57/82.

⁶¹ Cf. J. N. D. Anderson, "Reflections on Law: Natural, Divine, and Positive," *Proceedings of the 940th Ordinary General Meeting of the Victoria Institute* (December, 1956), p. 15. D. B. Macdonald writes that 'Abduh in the *Risāla* "showed himself a Māturīdite with no mention of Māturīdī" (article "Al-Māturīdī," *SEI*, p. 363).

⁶² With certain exceptions such as ritual duties.

⁶³ Elsewhere 'Abduh maintains that human nature is naturally attracted by good rather than evil, so that revelation only recalls man to his own inclinations. (*Taṣṣir Juss' 'Ammā* [Cairo, 1922], pp. 17-18, 90; cited by Amin, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 109.) But these human inclinations are not the same as obligations, and they are less effective because they are subject to misguidance.

sary. Very few men, observes 'Abduh, have any understanding of Plato or Aristotle, and were they given a simple explanation of their philosophies, most men still would not be led to improve their character or conduct. The only effective way to impress the need for virtuous conduct on them is by appealing to their sense of religious awe and mystery.

When have we ever heard that a class of people have made the good triumph in their actions solely on the grounds of the utility that this good offered for the masses or the elite, or that it prevented evil simply because it would have led to corruption and ruin? This has never occurred in human history and is not in accord with human nature. The foundation of good habits rests only in dogmas and tradition, and these things themselves have no other basis than religion. Therefore . . . religion's power over men's minds is greater than the power of reason that is peculiar to them.⁶⁴

But this, of course, is only a psychological argument, and does not mean that reason has no role in examining the truth of religious doctrines.⁶⁵ While religious and rational experience differ from each other, representing respectively the knowledge of the philosopher and that of the believer, the substance is the same. "The Sacred Law came only to indicate what [already] exists, and does not itself create goodness."⁶⁶ And prophecy only makes obligatory duties that are rationally comprehensible to all.⁶⁷

It is consistent with this point of view for 'Abduh to remark, in his commentary on the Qur'ān, that what is good is called *ma'rūf* (lit., "recognized" or "known") and what is bad is called *munkar* (lit., "denied") in the classical phrase *al-amr bi 'l-ma'rūf wa 'n-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding good and forbidding evil) because good and evil are "recognized" or "denied" by rational judgment. God orders virtue because it is naturally good; it does not become good only with

⁶⁴ *Risāla*, 85–86/125–127. It should be noted that for 'Abduh, revelation is a type of intuition, and therefore—since here he speaks of the specifically religious intuition of personal conscience—there is no need in this case to distinguish between the substance of the two. (See *Risāla*, 73–76/108–111: Revelation [*al-wahy*] is "knowledge that a man finds within himself, with the certainty that it comes from God. . . ." It is received by prophets and passed on to others. Intuition [*al-ihām*], by contrast, is a general feeling whose origin is not clearly sensed.)

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89/130.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 56/80. See also Amin, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 97.

⁶⁷ *Risāla*, 55/80; Amin, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 98.

His command.⁶⁸ "God has sent down two books: one created, which is nature, and one revealed, which is the Qur'ān. The latter leads us to investigate the former by means of the intelligence which was given us."⁶⁹ And still more explicitly: "The Qur'ān itself is too elevated in character to be in opposition to science."⁷⁰

This means that for 'Abduh, though intuition or revelation may be the most effective path to spiritual devotion,⁷¹ the claims of reason as regards the substance of its attainments are fully recognized: rational knowledge is as full a representation of Truth as intuitive or revelatory knowledge in practical matters. Accordingly, in the practical field of social ethics and politics, as well as in science, reason must be granted a wide role, and needs to be guided by revelation or intuition only in its general moral orientation. This becomes apparent in 'Abduh's writings on political and social questions.

2. *Group natural law as an approach to politics*

"The Qur'ān speaks of creation," writes 'Abduh, "in such manner as to stimulate men's minds to follow the course natural to them and discover the original character of things and the rules that regulate them. . . . In many verses the Qur'ān calls us to take heed of the signs of God in nature."⁷²

Elsewhere he writes:

The universe has laws [*sunan*] in the composition of precious stones and the rocks, in the growing of plants, in the life of animals, in the assembling of bodies and their scattering, in their composition and dissolution. This is what we designate as the secondary origin.⁷³

More important than the physical laws governing things, however,

⁶⁸ 'Abduh, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-'Aṣr* (Cairo, 1926), p. 19; cited in Amin, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 99.

⁶⁹ *Manār*, VII, 292, cited in Adams *Islam and Modernism*, p. 136; see also Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden, 1920), pp. 352-353, for fuller quotation.

⁷⁰ *Manār*, IX, 334-335, cited in Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 138; Goldziher, *Koranauslegung*, pp. 356 ff.

⁷¹ Abdel Razik and Michel, in the introduction to their translation of the *Risāla*, remark that in this respect 'Abduh is closer to such modern philosophers and theologians as Harnack and William James than to the Mu'tazilites, but that in practical questions he is unquestionably rationalist. (*Risālat al-Tawhīd*, p. xlix.)

⁷² *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, pp. 49-50.

⁷³ Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 140 (no source given).

are the laws governing the destinies of human groups. Although more often than not these laws are expressed by 'Abduh in religious terms that refer to God's punishment, reward, warning and so forth, what we have in effect is an acknowledgment of historical and sociological principles that might have been phrased in nonreligious terms without destroying the content.

There is, for example, an effort on 'Abduh's part to read the Darwinian theory of evolution into interpretation of the Qur'ān.⁷⁴ The pertinent verse is Q. ii:251: "Had God not repelled some of the people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted." This, says 'Abduh in his Commentary, is a general custom of God and is today commonly referred to as the struggle for survival (*tanāzu' al-baqā'*).

Some intruders into the science of God's custom with societies suppose that the struggle for survival is only an effect of the materialism of the present age and that it is the materialists who instituted and pronounced this idea, which is contrary to the teaching of the Faith. But if those who say this understood the meaning of human nature or understood themselves, they would not say what they do.⁷⁵

The verse confirms God's custom known today among sociologists and biologists as "natural selection" (*al-intikhāb at-ṭabī'ī*) or "survival of the fittest" (*baqā' al-amthāl*), explains 'Abduh; the earth would have been corrupted were it not for this process of elimination.⁷⁶

Given 'Abduh's purpose of stimulating a spirit of moral responsibility in Muslim society, it is natural that he should repeatedly cite the Qur'ānic verse (xiii:11): "God will not change the state of a people until they change what is in their hearts. . . ." These words taken alone are easily misinterpreted, for in their full context they refer not to change for the better but for the worse. It has been alleged that 'Abduh's failure to cite the remainder of the verse (" . . . and if God willeth misfortune for a people there is none who can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him") represents a deliberate evasion by him of its deterministic implications.⁷⁷ The surrounding passages in the

⁷⁴ 'Abduh was an acquaintance and an admirer of the social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, whose work on education he translated into Arabic from the French version, but did not publish.

⁷⁵ *Manār*, VIII, 929-930.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ P. J. Vatikiotis, "Muhammad 'Abduh and the Quest for a Muslim Humanism," *Islamic Culture*, XXXI (1957), 115.

Sūra make it clear, however, that the verse in question emphasises not divine capriciousness but the inexorability with which the retribution of history is visited upon those societies that deserve it. This theme is amplified as follows:

Nations have not fallen from their greatness, nor have their names been wiped off the slate of existence, except after they have departed from those laws which God prescribed with supreme wisdom. God will not change the state of a people from might and power and wealth and peace, until that people change their own state of intellectual knowledge and correctness of thinking and perception, and consideration for the works of God toward previous nations who went astray from the path of God and therefore perished. Ruin overtook them because they turned aside from the law of justice and the path of insight and wisdom . . . and chose to live in falsehood rather than die in the aid of truth.⁷⁸

There are two ideas in this passage that can, each in its own sense, be called "law." First there is the moral law prescribed in revelation which mankind is warned to follow. Second, there is the inexorable law of history, which decrees that ruin shall overtake those groups who do not follow the moral law. The moral law, being in keeping with sound human judgments and instincts and being dictated by considerations of long-range advantage for the group, is comparable to the Western concept of natural law. The law of history—God's custom, or *sunnat Allāh*—belongs in a class with the physical laws of nature. It is not a moral code in itself but only its sanction. It is misleading, therefore, to equate *sunnat Allāh* with natural law, as some writers have done.⁷⁹ Natural law is the moral code prescribed by the Sharī'a and by sound human faculties; God's custom constitutes the promise and threat of the historical process, of which men are advised to take account.

'Abduh has relatively little to say about the norm itself. Knowledge of it is apparently more or less presupposed, derived from other indications applying to individuals (the group then being a collection of individuals), or vague reference is made to the imperative of "justice," or—more extensively—to the conclusions of the nation's representa-

⁷⁸ "Sunan Allāh fi 'l-Umam," in *'Urwa*, pp. 222–223; also published in Rashīd Riḍā's compilation of 'Abduh's writings in the second volume of *Tārīkh*, pp. 323–324. Translation here is that of Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 141.

⁷⁹ E.g., Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 140; Michel and Rāzīk, *Rissalat*, *op. cit.*, p. lxii.

tives in consultation.⁸⁰ We find considerably more references to the lessons of history and sociology, including both an exposition of group patterns of behavior and identification of the factors influencing group success or failure; of the latter the most important is religion. Since it is on this earth that societies reap their punishments and rewards, this course of study enables those who follow it to profit from the trials and errors of past generations and thereby learn the path to the good life. The norm, in other words, is learned from the sanction.

A detailed account of some of these sociological principles is given in one of 'Abduh's early articles, "*Ash-Shūrā wa 'l-Qānūn*" (consultation and statutory law), written in 1881.⁸¹

The social structure of a nation, in the beginning, has no motivating force except chance or other compelling causes such as misfortunes which overtake man and drive him to seek a refuge. . . . Once the society is set in order and its members feel secure . . . they fall to rivalry and disputation of all kinds imaginable . . . so that though they live together in one place they become separated in their purposes . . . unwilling to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of others. . . . Finally the one with the strongest support among them seizes power over the rest . . . without controls or restraints. At such a time no two men will share common opinions or related goals . . . For the causes of their troubles have led each of them to restrict his attention to his own immediate concerns, and never to think of the rights of the society and the kinship of its ties. . . .

But if with the succession of events they learn something of the conduct of other nations they will recall that they once had rights as a group which would lead them to a prosperous life. . . . Then they will resolve to redress their society in accordance with those principles that its nature demands. They will be held back by their acquired qualities of character, but as their social impulses grow in strength they will become increasingly impatient of delay, and they will set to work to clear away the dross of their corrupted qualities. Their impulses to activity grow and their intentions come to be directed toward a single goal, namely, the maintenance of the society They have not learned this at the feet of a teacher, for it is necessity that is the master whose teachings are remembered and unailing.⁸²

⁸⁰ See "*Ash-Shūrā wa 'l-Qānūn*," *Tārīkh*, II, 213–218 (from *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, Dec. 25, 1881).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Tārīkh*, II, 213–215.

'Abduh continues by suggesting that once this natural spirit is regained it is the collective intelligence in the form of public opinion (*ar-ra'y al-'āmm*) that determines the proper norms of behavior. This enlightened public opinion is the "focal point on which all types of diverse ideas converge and by which personal aims are erased, since in truth they are not personal aims, though they may appear as such; rather they are varying paths to the same end. . . . [This is] the most expeditious and natural course."⁸³ In these words 'Abduh refuses to admit the existence of any real conflict of interests within society, not only between subjects but presumably also between subjects and rulers. An enlightened public will

. . . only be satisfied by a just law worthy of their condition, in accordance with their character and habits. . . . [But] they are unwilling to confide the task of instituting this law to a single one of their number, since a single individual is unable to interpret the [seemingly] divergent interests of all.⁸⁴

Then follows a plea for representative government,⁸⁵ which we may by now suppose is "naturally" the best form once the population is enlightened.⁸⁶

The particular content of the laws should vary with the circumstances. What is important is to establish a unity of concern and outlook within the society.

It is enough for individuals to set themselves to aspire to the truth and to seek to arrange their interests in a way compatible with those of the country and the circumstances of people. And let it not be imagined that the just law based on liberty is that which is modeled entirely on the civil principles and political foundations of other countries. . . . Many a law is suited to the interests of one people but not to those of others. . . .⁸⁷

In this article 'Abduh has arrived at his conclusions without refer-

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 215-216. But this does not mean democracy: "There is no harm in some of the population being uninformed, such as the lowest class and the workers, even if they are large in number, for they perform the function of deaf instruments, limited to bodily activities alone" (*ibid.*, 216).

⁸⁶ "From what we have said, it is clear that the best and most beneficial of laws is that emanating from public opinion." (*Ibid.*).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

ence to religious teachings. It is by virtue of the *nature of human society* that men are well advised to apply their collective intelligence to the circumstances in which they find themselves, and this fact they can discover simply by examining the record of other nations. On purely rational grounds he seeks to establish that laws should be based on the interests of the group and that collective reason, when freed from the "dross of [acquired] corrupt qualities," finds individual and group interests to be one and the same. Collective intelligence corrects the errors of individual reasoning. For the individual cannot rise above the desires, ambitions, and personal inclinations with which he is surrounded, even should he have the will to do so, except through cooperation with others. This is true for ruler and subject alike.⁸⁸

This assumption of the community of the interests of all enables Muḥammad 'Abduh to view the principle of consultation (*shūrā*) as a genuine restriction on the ruler's power.⁸⁹ The Western political theorist, accustomed to drawing a sharp distinction between benevolent dictatorship and formally limited authority, can only be skeptical of the enthusiasm with which modern Muslim apologists have so often claimed that the *shūrā* represents an indigenous principle of representative or constitutional government in Islam. As long as the ruler appears free to accept or reject the advice he receives, the Western student refuses to see any real limitation of authority at all.

But this skepticism ignores a vital assumption in 'Abduh's case: that in the light of right reason conflicts of interest simply dissolve away. Since consultation supplies a check on the ruler's reason and rectifies any apparent divergence in his interests from the nation's, consultation becomes in practice a check on his exercise of authority, and thus the virtual equivalent of a check on his authority itself. What for the Western thinker is perhaps the assumption of original sin, according to which politics is the process of adjustment of inevitably selfish and conflicting interests, is for Muḥammad 'Abduh no more than the handicap of the isolated individual intelligence, naturally surmountable by consultation. *Shūrā* is thus to be contrasted not simply to isolated judgment but even to unilateral decision. The sincere desire on the ruler's part to benefit from the wisdom of his counsellors is implicit. It is a time-honored assumption in traditional

⁸⁸ See the article "Ash-Shūrā," *Tārīkh*, II, 210-213 (from *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, Dec. 24, 1881).

⁸⁹ See "Ash-Shūrā wa 'l-Istibdād," *Tārīkh*, II, 203-210 (from *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, Dec. 12, 1881).

Islamic political literature that wide knowledge of the Law and consultation with the 'ulamā' by the ruler would serve to assure just rule.⁹⁰ What 'Abduh gives us is essentially a modern version of this assumption.

All this, however, presupposes that the nation has reached a mature stage of intellectual development, and until it has done so the quality of government cannot rise above that permitted by the attitudes of society.

The ruling power is dependent on that of its subjects, and takes no steps unless on the latter's part there is some directing impulse to do so. We do not deny that the ruling power must be depended on to take the actual steps and compel or persuade the subjects to accept them; but only insofar as the subjects will tolerate it. The diversity of forms of governments and changes in their laws are dependent on the dictates of the national spirit, which means, in reality, the condition of the subjects. . . .⁹¹

This means that the changes in social outlook must precede sweeping reforms. 'Abduh continues:

In sum, the form of civil order in a society is only the image of the substance of the characteristics its members have acquired through the habits and customs that have grown in them, whether praiseworthy or reprehensible. The different laws they have had in their periods of rise and decline cannot be detached from these characteristics, no matter how much those laws may have changed in form or subject matter. This has been recognized by those wise persons who have striven first of all to change people's characteristics and manners, whenever they wanted to establish a well-defined order in the society. They therefore gave priority to good education. . . .⁹²

It is therefore not surprising that, together with his pleas for representative government, 'Abduh could equally assert that "only a just dictator can cause the East to progress." Fifteen years under such a

⁹⁰ See Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyaaset Nameh* (French trans.), 82–83, 124–126. This idea appears closely related to what Leonard Binder calls the "pious Sultan theory" according to which government receives religious sanction from the justice of its performance rather than the legitimacy of its origins (*Religion and Politics in Pakistan* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961], pp. 35–38).

⁹¹ "Ikhtilāf al-Qawānīn bi 'khtilāf Ahwāl al-Umam." *Tārīkh*, II, 171–172 (from *Al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyya*, June 19, 1881).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 172.

ruler, he estimated, would enable the Muslim East to prepare itself for the first steps in representative government.⁹³

The concept of historical development is further spelled out by 'Abduh and Afghānī in the *'Urwa*, in psychological terms:

Intellectual concepts, religious beliefs, and other spiritual phenomena and perceptions, although the inspiration of actual behavior . . . are in turn confirmed, strengthened, and imprinted in men's minds by such behavior. . . .

To be sure, man is man by virtue of his thought and belief, although those of his perceptions that are reflected in his mind have the strongest effect upon him. Every perception occasions a thought, every thought gives rise to an impulse, and out of every impulse arises an action; then the process reverts in turn from action to thought. And so thought and action continuously act and react on each other as long as the spirit remains in the body, each side reinforcing the other.⁹⁴

This psychological principle of reinforcement serves to explain Muslim political lethargy: long accustomed to quietism and acceptance of tradition, the Muslims are naturally the slower to accept active reform, for the higher ideals of Muslim brotherhood and political supremacy are mere mental images not reinforced by action.⁹⁵

If any of them realizes the truth and perceives what would bring honor to his nation and return its past glory to it, this will be considered foolishness and delirium. Or it is supposed that should he respond to an appeal to his conscience, this would only bring down destruction and catastrophe upon him. . . .⁹⁶

Thus the individual is overwhelmed by his environment.

The theme of unity of spirit and outlook in society is brought out in 'Abduh's earlier writings, especially those composed under Afghānī's inspiration in the *'Urwa*, again and again. This message is carried in God's custom (i.e., the lessons of history). God punishes man only with just cause—for his failure to use his God-given ability to distinguish between right and wrong by collective judgment and to follow the course he recognizes as best for his material and spiritual interests.⁹⁷

⁹³ "Innamā yanhaḍ bi 'sh-sharq mustabidd 'ādil," *Tārīkh*, II, 450–451 (from first issue of *Al-Jāmi'a 'l-'Uthmāniyya*; no date given).

⁹⁴ "Inḥitāt al-Muslimīn wa Sukūnuhum wa Sabab Dhālik," *'Urwa*, pp. 74–75.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–79.

⁹⁶ "Maḍī 'l-Umma wa Ḥādiruhā wa 'Ilāj 'Ilalihā," *'Urwa*, p. 46.

⁹⁷ "Asbāb Ḥifz al-Mulk," *'Urwa*, pp. 202–203.

Although reason alone indicates the evils of social disunity, the Qur'ān itself adds further warnings; for example: "Do not quarrel, else you shall fail and your strength shall leave you."⁹⁸

Cooperation is necessary because the isolated individual is weak and shortsighted even in discerning his own best interests, let alone those of the group. Thus the extent of consultation necessary is commensurate with one's responsibilities and authority.⁹⁹ "No king is overthrown, no throne overturned, except because of division and controversy [within the society]," or because of exclusive use of one's own judgment, misplaced confidence, or allowing the intrusion of foreign elements.¹⁰⁰

The influence of Ibn Khaldūn,¹⁰¹ as well as that of Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, strongly suggests itself in a statement in the *'Urwa* that unity and political supremacy are mutually interdependent. No nation, the reader is told, can prosper without a cohesive and aggressive spirit. "This is God's custom with human societies. Their lot in history depends on the extent of their share of unity, and their measure of greatness is in accordance with their perseverance in aggressive competition (*al-ghalba*)."¹⁰² A united spirit is only to be achieved through the selflessness of individuals in the interests of the group.¹⁰³

The potential strength of such unity must be directed to the advantage of Islam. The decline of Muslim political fortunes from their glorious past has been due chiefly to "rivalry of the seekers of power among themselves," which has led to dependence on foreign sponsors and consequently the loss of Muslim independence in certain territories.¹⁰⁴

This united and aggressive spirit is reminiscent of Ibn Khaldūn's repeated reference to "group solidarity" (*aṣabiyya*) as the indispensable source of political success for society. In the *'Urwa* the terms *aṣabiyya* and *ta'aṣṣub* are used as synonymous and attention is called to the relatedness of their respective usual meanings of "group solidarity" and "fanaticism" or "zealotry": the distinction is only one of

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 203 (Q. viii:46).

⁹⁹ "Asbāb Ḥifẓ al-Mulk," *'Urwa*, pp. 205–206.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁰¹ 'Abduh delivered a course of lectures on Ibn Khaldūn at the Dar al-'Ulūm college in Cairo in 1878. Although prepared in book form under the title *Falsafat al-Ijtimā' wa 'l-Tārīkh* ("Philosophy of Society and History"), they were never published (see Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, pp. 41, 121).

¹⁰² "Al-Waḥda wa 's-Siyāda," *'Urwa*, p. 142.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

¹⁰⁴ "Al-Waḥda 'l-Islāmiyya," *'Urwa*, pp. 134–135.

degree, regardless of which term is used. In the former (more moderate) sense, it is a desirable quality, for much the same reasons as those adduced by Ibn Khaldūn:

If *'aṣabiyya* is weakened in a people, God casts failure upon them, and they become heedless of one another. The result of such heedlessness is severance of the bonds between them, and dispersion follows, which facilitates infiltration among them by foreigners. Thereafter they will never rise again until God once more causes the spirit of *ta'aṣṣub* to descend upon them.¹⁰⁵

But it also has its excesses, in which case it becomes a curse rather than a blessing, leading to the abandonment of justice in the community. It was in this sense that the Prophet said, "He who appeals to *'aṣabiyya* is not one of us" (i.e., is not one of the Community of believers).¹⁰⁶

The *'Urwa* article goes on to declare that although it is fashionable in the modern age to blame religious *ta'aṣṣub* (in the sense of fanaticism) for the ills of ignorance, lack of social conscience, and backwardness, the truth is that the *ta'aṣṣub* of believers (in the sense of unity in purpose and action) is the greatest of blessings when tempered with the spirit of moderation and tolerance.¹⁰⁷

There is a sharp distinction to be drawn, however, between religious and secular-nationalist *ta'aṣṣub*. The former is "purer, more sacred, and of more general benefit;"¹⁰⁸ the "foreigners" have encouraged suspicion of religious solidarity because they know that it is the Muslims' strength, while by vaunting secular nationalism they create divisions among the Muslims. "All intelligent persons know that the Muslims know no [true] nationality other than their religion and belief."¹⁰⁹

In this article the predominant voice appears to be that of Jamāl

¹⁰⁵ "At-Ta'aṣṣub," *'Urwa*, pp. 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 96. Ibn Khaldūn's treatment differs on this point. While affirming that religion is the only sound and lasting basis of empire (chap iii, sec. 4–6), he maintains that *'aṣabiyya* in the sense of clan solidarity is also necessary. "A religious appeal without solidarity will not succeed" (chap. iii, sec. 6; Rosenthal, p. 322.). He cites the ḥadīth, "God never sends a prophet except with protectors from among his people" (*ibid.*). Religious kinship in Ibn Khaldūn's terminology is not treated as a type of *'aṣabiyya*, though its effectiveness is not denied. But it would be stretching a point to equate Ibn Khaldūn's *'aṣabiyya* with modern nationalism.

ad-Dīn al-Afghānī rather than Muḥammad 'Abduh's. This applies even more to another article in the *'Urwa* on "Nationality and the Islamic Faith," which declares that a proper religious attitude removes the psychological origins of nationalism (*ta'aṣṣub al-jinsiyya*) which lie in the necessity of self-protection amidst the conflicts caused by competing material interests. A nationality is an evolved group dedicated to the defense of common interests. But "we cannot say that nationalism is natural [i.e., inborn], although it may be a characteristic common to all mankind, inscribed in their souls by the force of necessity. . . . Were the need for this type of group spirit to cease, the spirit would also cease. . . ." ¹¹⁰

In this article we see nationalism conceived as a divisive rather than a unifying spirit—a cover, in fact, for tyranny and injustice. With the substitution of religious for nationalist loyalties, say the authors, there would no longer be a need to endure tyrannical government, for the ruler would join the people in submission to the "highest ruler" (God), whose law he would enforce, and would thereby win the people's confidence. "They would dispense with national spirit for lack of need for it, and its traces would be erased from men's souls."¹¹¹ But if the ruler fails in his duty to rule according to the Shari'a without selfishness or discrimination, the people will inevitably fall back on *'aṣabiyya* and nationalism, and the ruler's power will be reduced as a result.¹¹² On the other hand, a ruler who does rule according to the dictates of Islam is assured of success without the need to spend large sums, maintain a large army, and so forth. "He can dispense with all this by following the path of the Rāshidūn caliphs and returning to the primary sources of the righteous Islamic faith."¹¹³

All this suggests something very different from the general line of 'Abduh's thought as we have traced it in the preceding pages. This article from the *'Urwa* announces, in effect, that the general principles of social behavior which we usually suppose to be "natural"—not only grouping together for self-protection in the struggle for survival, but the struggle itself—dissolve into nothing when men have been given a taste of Shari'a rule by their leaders. The religious kinship will then be

¹¹⁰ "Al-Jinsiyya wa 'd-Diyāna 'l-Islāmiyya," *'Urwa*, pp. 38–39.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43. This is another facet of the "pious Sultan" tradition: virtue in the ruler assures the virtue and welfare of society.

accepted by man as the basis for government without need of constraint, and hence can be said to be ultimately more "natural."

What, then, does Islam prescribe in the way of political relationships? The authors of the article give us only a general answer:

The foundations of the Islamic religion are not limited to calling mankind to the truth and to the realization that the nature of their souls is spiritual, summoned away from this base world; rather, it ensures this by setting forth the limits of transactions among men and clarifying their rights, in both a general and a particular way, and by setting limits to the enforcing authority that undertakes to give effect to the revealed laws, apply the prescribed penalties, and define their circumstances of application.

This ensures that government will be neither tyrannical, hereditary, nor based on power, privilege, or wealth. "Rather it will derive only from dependence on the ordinances of the Shari'a, the necessary power to enforce it, and the satisfaction of the Community."¹¹⁴

It is, then, the revealed Law that defines the correct relationships in society, "in both a general and a particular way." Yet since application of this Law finds a ready and willing response among men, it is apparently "natural" in the sense of being in harmony with human nature and human needs.

By contrast, in the previously cited writings authored by 'Abduh alone¹¹⁵ and even in a number of other pieces in the *'Urwa* penned by 'Abduh even if inspired to a greater or lesser extent by Afghānī, the moral is pointed in another direction: revealed law either goes unmentioned altogether or assumes no central importance, and the suggestion is made that the remedy for social and political ills could be found through the process of consultation, and that in fact societies are normally impelled to this by the study of history (i.e., "God's custom").

The conclusions are not contradictory, but the paths leading to them are strikingly different: one pragmatic and rational, the other religious and messianic. 'Abduh's instinctive preference for the pragmatic and rational path of argument, which emerges in so much of his writing, even early in his career when he wrote for *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya*, did not preclude his readiness to express in *Al-'Urwa*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ See especially "Ash-Shūrā wa 'l-Qānūn," *Tārīkh*, II, 213-218.

'*l-Wuthqā* the messianic notions of his mentor Jamāl ad-Dīn. For it was characteristic of his thought that the revealed principles of Islam should be seen as corroborating those of rational observation and consultation. In both cases similar formulas emerge: protection of individual rights, limitation of the executive power, and abolition of privilege. We might expect to find an acknowledgment of this mutual corroboration somewhere in the '*Urwa*, but in fact we do not, and the presumption that here 'Abduh was speaking more for Jamāl ad-Dīn than for himself seems particularly strong. Much later, in his theological work *Risālat al-Tauḥīd*, 'Abduh was to explain the point implicitly, by saying (in another context) that "prophets play the same role in relation to peoples that intelligence does in relation to individuals."¹¹⁶

Nonetheless, the two paths of rational observation and consultation on the one hand, and revelation on the other, are less susceptible of harmonious interpretation than might at first appear. The general burden of most of 'Abduh's writings on social, political, and historical matters—including his contributions to the '*Urwa*—is in his acceptance of the idea of evolution, development, and variation in society.¹¹⁷ By this is meant not the straight-line evolution spoken of in the Qur'ān—according to which mankind received a series of prophecies culminating once and for all with the final and authoritative message of Muḥammad, so that the final stage of social progress became accessible to all the world almost overnight—but rather the notion of constant change and adaptation within society, in which progress is relative to circumstances of tradition and environment and is always to be measured in terms of human achievement rather than cataclysmic enlightenment. It was only in terms of those assumptions that he could argue that the Community can best regulate its interests by collectively counseling with itself to determine those interests, that systems of law and government vary from people to people in suitability, and that history rewards those groups who show a spirit of initiative in improving their lot. The idea of Muslim society becoming suddenly transformed by a new attitude of piety and enforcement of the detailed provisions of the Shari'a law by the ruler seems, in the

¹¹⁶ *Risāla* 81/118.

¹¹⁷ Vatikiotis, "Muhammad 'Abduh and the Quest for a Muslim Humanism," *op. cit.*, 125: "Throughout his active teaching and writing, Muhammad 'Abduh actually came very close to introducing into Islamic thought an evolutionary concept of historical development."

light of the bulk of 'Abduh's writings, as much an "infringement of custom" (*khāriq al-'āda*) as the miraculous contraventions of physical nature which he so adamantly rejected.

Further suggestions that 'Abduh did not consider revelation a sufficient path to knowledge in the social and political field are found in his chapters on prophecy in the *Risāla*. In establishing the second of his "proofs of the necessity of prophecy," 'Abduh argues that society needs as a binding tie not only a community of material interests but also love (*maḥabba*). Such love is purest when it does not depend on material interests but is self-sustained. Only men with unusual moral insight have a clear conception of this love in its pure form and are able to distinguish it from mere equity or justice (*'adl*), which depend only on widespread reasonableness, and to recognize that men too frequently are not guided by reason.¹¹⁸

The role of the prophet is to infuse the spirit of love into society by so using his moral qualities as to win the confidence of his fellow men and then enlighten them in the mysteries of God's nature, of which man is aware but whose substance only exceptional individuals can rationally understand. Thus by sending prophets, God compensates for the spiritual (rather than intellectual) deficiencies of human nature in society.¹¹⁹

Prophets play the same role in relation to groups as intelligence does in relation to individuals: to "purify the mind of the blemishes of passions that lead it astray, to discipline its faculties, and to instill in it what will bring it happiness in this world and the next."¹²⁰ This is a purely spiritual function. Prophets do not come to explain the practical details of material welfare but leave this to man's ingenuity, within the broad and tolerant limits of sound religious faith. The social rules enunciated by prophets are no more than the most general principles of fraternal love and mutual respect of rights, by which the common interests will be assured.¹²¹ But prophets are not bearers of practical or scientific knowledge. "All these are among the means of acquiring prosperity and reaching contentment, to which God has led man by the faculties with which He has endowed him. . . . But the laws of the prophets did generally encourage man to strive by his own

¹¹⁸ *Risāla*, 65-70/96-103.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-73/103-107.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81/118; see also *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ii, 287.

¹²¹ *Risāla*, 82/119-120.

efforts for the means to achieve that degree of perfection for which God prepared human nature."¹²²

Prophets and the revelation they bring, then, are conveyors in the social sphere not primarily of knowledge but rather of spirit and motivation, by which reason is guided in the right path.

Even in the *Risāla*, however, 'Abduh's break with the tradition of the millennial view of history and his espousal of evolution were incomplete and equivocal. Having in effect dismissed the legislative role of prophecy with one hand, he summoned it back on the stage with the other:

The Qur'ān established for men laws conforming to their interests; the utility of observing them and applying them has been proved. Justice is established by them and the whole social order has been organized by them as long as their limits are respected. But great harm resulted from neglect or avoidance of them and from men's estrangement from the spirit they promoted.¹²³

Is this again the revivalism of Jamāl ad-Dīn, still coexistent in 'Abduh's mind with the influence of Herbert Spencer? So it would seem. Here as elsewhere in the full range of his thought, 'Abduh hedged his espousal of secular notions and avoided a clear-cut rejection of orthodox conceptions, with ambiguous results.

Despite such survivals of traditional doctrine, on the whole it is the natural law approach that is dominant in 'Abduh's attitude. It is thus not surprising that the principle of *ijmā'* should represent a very different thing to him than to the orthodox jurists and theologians. The orthodox idea of *ijmā'* referred to the agreement of the Islamic Community on certain hitherto unresolved questions and in certain circumstances, as an infallible source of law and doctrine, in keeping with the ḥadīth "My Community will never agree upon an error." Since the limitations were severe—only unanimity on points of fact and interpretation, not subject to review by later generations, was recognized—it was possible to regard *ijmā'* as an indirect, inspired kind of revelation, and therefore much more than a mere aggregate of personal opinions; it enjoyed a value equal to Qur'ān and Sunna, or even superior to them according to some scholars.¹²⁴ It was in reaction to this

¹²² *Ibid.*, 83/122.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 100/144.

¹²⁴ See for instance the quotation from the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Qudāma (d. 1223) given

that Ibn Taimiyya had restricted the validity of *ijmā'* to the consensus of the very first generation of Muslims in matters concerning the implementation of statements and actions of the Prophet. Questions undecided by them, according to this conception, would be left not to later *ijmā'* but to individual or collective conscience.

For 'Abduh *ijmā'* appears to be a much more informal principle, being only the expression of collective rational judgment and conscience, not too different perhaps from what Ibn Taimiyya had in mind for the later Community but preferred not to call *ijmā'*. When the jurists are in voluntary agreement, says 'Abduh, with the interests of the Community in mind, they should be obeyed, "for it can be said that they are free of error in their consensus"; but this is so not as a matter of dogma but only of reasonable expectation.¹²⁵

Ijmā' defined in this way loses its revelatory infallibility and no longer poses the classic problem of how it can be institutionalized without corrupting its special character. It is no longer necessary to distinguish between reason and *ijmā'*, for the latter is now only the collective aspect of the former. This new approach, of course, has been made possible by the fact that 'Abduh has first of all raised the value of reason to a higher status than was traditionally assigned to it, so that any exercise of judgment, whether in the traditionally recognized form of *ijmā'* or otherwise, is valid and true, so long as it is indeed based on sound reason and not a distortion of it.¹²⁶ But since men are usually imperfect in their mastery of reason and do not submit exclusively to its dictates, their image of the truth—collectively or individually reached—is often distorted unless guided by revelation. Therefore it was only natural for 'Abduh to ignore certain traditional

in H. Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taḥī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimiyya* (Cairo, 1939), pp. 241–242, for a sweeping declaration of the supremacy and infallibility of *ijmā'* as a legal source.

¹²⁵ See J. Jomier, *Le Commentaire coranique du Mandr* (Paris, 1954), p. 193; Laoust, *Essai*, p. 551.

¹²⁶ Laoust writes that for 'Abduh, "reason is, after the Qur'ān, the essential source of doctrine, although its relation to revelation does not appear clearly in a doctrine ['Abduh's] that seems to have been so unconscious of contradictions. *Naṣṣ* and *'aql* were, for Ibn Taimiyya, different manifestations of the same reality. For Muḥammad 'Abduh religion . . . is a brake which God has given us to avoid the exaggerations of human reason and diminish its errors" (*Essai*, p. 551).

But there is nothing in Laoust's words here to show why—as he seems to imply—it should not be said that to 'Abduh, as well as to Ibn Taimiyya, revelation and reason are "different manifestations of the same reality."

dogmas, supposedly sanctified by *ijmā'*, in some of his pronouncements, since *ijmā'* as he conceived it was always subject to review.

Here once again, we find 'Abduh's manner of proceeding to be discreet and inexplicit. Among the handful of *fatwās* he issued to private petitioners as Mufti of Egypt, a number caused a considerable stir because they seemed to contravene the established conservative consensus. Yet in each case, 'Abduh managed to make his point in such a way as to avoid any overt confrontation of principle. The most famous of his *fatwās*, the so-called Transvaal *fatwā*, offers an illustration of this. A member of the small Muslim community in the Transvaal sought guidance on the following questions: (1) Is it permissible for a Muslim in a predominantly Christian country to wear a European-style hat? (2) Is it permissible for him to eat meat slaughtered by Christians according to their own manner, without assurance of conformity to the stipulations of the Qur'ān concerning the method of slaughtering? (3) Is it permissible for Ḥanafīs and Shāfi'īs to hold public prayer together, led by a single imam, despite the differences in ritual between the two schools?

'Abduh answered all three questions in the affirmative. Here we need concern ourselves only with the first two. In the first case the underlying issue was whether the adoption of European headdress constituted "conformity" (*tashabbuh*) and consequently a reprehensible sign of disloyalty to Islam, perhaps even making the wearer of the hat formally an unbeliever. 'Abduh avoided becoming involved in complexities by simply stating that as long as the intention was not to abandon Islam, the question of *tashabbuh* did not arise, and that as long as some consideration of social convenience was at stake, the act could not be considered reprehensible (*makrūh*). He could have overtly raised the question of *ijmā'* had he wished, and discussed the traditional view of such matters, even if only to reject it. Or he could have declared the whole issue meaningless, on the ground that the true Islamic religion leaves a man to follow his own judgment in such mundane situations; indeed, in making the individual's intention the decisive element, he may seem to have implied as much. But he did neither of these things, and in fact his friends among the Egyptian 'ulama' made haste to support his judgment by that most conservative of devices, an appeal to ḥadīth, in noting that the Prophet on several occasions had worn foreign garb as a matter of convenience.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ C. C. Adams, "Muhammad 'Abduh and the Transvaal Fatwā," *The Macdonald*

On the question of slaughtering meat, the essential conditions laid down for Muslims by the Qur'ān (verses ii:168, v:4, v:6) are that the victim should not die of itself or from a blow but by its throat being cut, and that the name of God should be pronounced over it at the time of slaughtering. There was doubt in the case at hand as to whether the Christians of the Transvaal met the first of these conditions: after striking the victim with an ax they cut its throat, but whether they did so before or after the extinction of life was unknown. Again, whether they met the second condition could not be known. Presumably they did not; but in any event the four orthodox rites of Sunni Islam differ over the necessity for Christians and Jews to do so in order to render the meat lawful to Muslims. Muḥammad 'Abduh declared both these issues of detail irrelevant to the case by invoking the verse v:7: "Lawful for you today are good things, and the food of those to whom the Book has been given is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them." Whatever Christians accepted as food for themselves, in other words, was acceptable for Muslims; and as assurance of this condition, 'Abduh stipulated that the Christian clergy, as well as the laity, should consider the meat lawful for themselves.

On this question, in short, 'Abduh was careful to respect the religious relevance of the problem put to him, and to base his permissive conclusion on a Qur'ānic verse, avoiding such questions as, for example, whether meat slaughtered by pagans would be lawful food for Muslims, or whether the Transvaal Christians did or did not conform to the stipulations of the preceding Qur'ānic verses. It is noteworthy that Rashīd Riḍā found it desirable to provide cover for his master by elaborating an affirmative answer of his own to the latter question.¹²⁸

C. 'Abduh as a Political Thinker

It would be fruitless to try to present 'Abduh's political ideas as a systematic structure. After taking much interest in politics in his early years he underwent a change in attitude and confined his writings to social, religious, and judicial matters. Even his early articles in *Al-'Urwa 'l-Wuthqā* and *Al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya* dealing with political

Presentation Volume (London, 1933), pp. 17–20. Many years later 'Alī 'Abd ar-Rāziq, a graduate of the Azhar, was to be castigated by Rashīd Riḍā for wearing a hat, in an article entitled "Monsieur 'Alī 'Abd ar-Rāziq Removes his Turban" (*Manār*, XXVII, 715–717; see below, p. 205).

¹²⁸ Adams, "Transvaal Fatwā," *op. cit.*, pp. 23–28; Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, I, 681–689.

topics consisted chiefly of appeals for moral reform and cultural advancement, or else discussions of the Eastern policies of the European powers, rather than attempts to resolve questions of the role of political authority in Islamic society. When he did express his views on constitutional questions he made little reference to the religious issues involved.

As for general questions of the role of society in history, the preceding pages of this chapter show that he had much to say. We know that he believed that social cohesion, or a spirit of solidarity, was essential to the order and prosperity of the group; that the group is called upon in its history to face religiously significant moral problems, and that it is the moral level of the group's conduct in the sight of God that determines its success or failure; that this standard of morality can only be dependably ascertained through the collective intelligence with the aid of revelation; and that human societies in their quest for a prosperous order of political relationships are subject to the natural historical laws of evolution, according to which a given stage of development or decline is always liable to change.

But these are only very general observations. When the more specific issues of constitutional organization and the source of political authority were at stake, 'Abduh's views were fragmentary and changing. Early in his career he wrote of the need for representative government and limited powers of the executive; later he declared that fifteen years under a benevolent dictator would be necessary before such institutions could succeed. Almost never did he make reference to the Caliphate or call for a constitutional system based on the classical doctrines. Rashīd Riḍā records remarks on the Ottoman Caliphate privately made by 'Abduh in 1897, in which 'Abduh declared that he gave no credence to Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's claim to the title of caliph because the claim was motivated only by his personal ambitions and desire to increase his prestige in European eyes. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, said 'Abduh, had no conception of the true meaning and function of the Caliphate; Islam no longer had any imam but the Qur'ān.¹²⁰

In reply to an inquiry from Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the English writer and partisan of the Egyptian cause, in 1904 'Abduh set forth his views on the form of constitution desirable for Egypt under the British

¹²⁰ *Tārīkh*, I, 913. But 'Abduh opposed the idea of an Arab attempt to withdraw from the Ottoman Empire, and wished the Empire political success, on the grounds that it represented the strongest existing Muslim power. Its dissolution, he feared, would only subject Muslim lands to further European penetration (*ibid.*, 911–915).

occupation. In substance he proposed a parliamentary system on the British model, with the Khedive reduced to a figurehead, legislative powers confided to a chamber of representatives, and the executive ministries answerable to the chamber. The only references to religious matters were the proposal that the prime minister should be a Muslim and that British supervisors and other officials be barred from authority in all matters touching on religion.¹²⁰

As Rashīd Riḍā remarks in discussing these proposals, they represented the best that 'Abduh hoped for under the occupation, and were not a final declaration on his part of the ideal political organization for Egypt.¹²¹ It is noteworthy, however, that 'Abduh proposed removing the effective authority of the Khedive, who was the viceroy of the Ottoman Sultan, and granting legislative authority to a parliament on the European model. It is a plea for Egyptian representative government, not for an Islamic state.

This at most can only corroborate indications in his other writings that political organization is not a matter specifically determined by Islamic doctrine but is rather to be determined from time to time according to circumstances, by general consultation within the Community.¹²² But occasionally he spoke of the Sharī'a as prescribing social laws both in general and in detail, and these laws he extended on occasion to constitutional questions in a manner reminiscent of the medieval jurists, specifically in terms of the institution of the Caliphate.

A noteworthy example of this is found in 'Abduh's apologetic work *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya ma' al-'Ilm wa 'l-Madaniyya*.¹²³ Here he seeks to prove that political powers in the Islamic constitutional

¹²⁰ The text of two letters containing these and other proposals is published in Blunt, *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (London, 1907), pp. 624-628 (but not in the 1922 edition). An Arabic retranslation of this English translation appears in *Tārīkh*, I, 899-902.

¹²¹ *Tārīkh* I, 903-907.

¹²² A noteworthy exception is found in a letter from 'Abduh in 1886, during his exile in Beirut, to the Shaikh al-Islām in Constantinople, in which he acknowledges that loyalty to the Ottoman State is the "third article of faith after belief in God and His messenger," since it was the chief bulwark of Islamic sovereignty. "Whoever thinks that the idea of the homeland, national welfare, and other such resounding phrases can replace religion in stirring up people's concern and lead them to the desired goals, is badly misguided" (*Tārīkh* I, 909). But these words must be evaluated in their proper context: first, that the letter was addressed to the Shaikh al-Islām, and second, that its subject was a plea for better religious education in Ottoman territories. In these circumstances the above quotations must be interpreted cautiously.

¹²³ Pp. 61-67.

organization are not "religious" or "theocratic" but purely civil. The distinction he draws is essentially that between theocracy and divine-law nomocracy:¹³⁴ the ruler and his subordinates exercise their authority within the confines of a law over which they have no exclusive power of interpretation, let alone formulation; as *mujtahids* they are on the same level as other *mujtahids* not holding office. The Caliphate must not be confused with what Europeans term "theocracy," which would signify that the caliph receives the Law directly from God and that he is

. . . entitled to obedience from the people not by virtue of the *bay'a*, with its requirement of justice and protection, but by virtue of religious faith, so that the believer can never oppose him even if he believes him to be an enemy of God's religion . . . for the deeds of a ruler with religious authority, in whatever manifestation, are religion and law.¹³⁵

There is in Islam "no obedience in sin," and if the ruler's actions are persistently contrary to the foundations of the Law, the Muslims must replace him as long as the public interest permits it. "It is the nation or its deputies that installs him in office, and the nation that possesses the right to supervise him. It deposes him when it considers this in its interest. Thus he is a civil ruler [*hākim madanī*] in all respects."¹³⁶

In reality, then, there is no such thing as religious power in Islam. The sultan or caliph, the *muftīs*, *qādis*, and other officials are only civil officials, though it is the religious law that confirms their powers and duties.¹³⁷

This passage is interesting in two respects. First there is the apologetic aspect: 'Abduh seeks to show—and does so convincingly—that the traditional constitutional theory of the Caliphate in Islam, in its positive manifestations as distinct from its religious origins, is as much a system of civil law as the Western secular type, and that if one confines his attention to one level at a time—in this case, the legal level—he must consider the subject of discussion on its own merits. Constitutional provisions must be distinguished from their religious or secular origins as long as matters of a specifically religious or spiritual nature are not dealt with by these provisions, and as long as political powers

¹³⁴ See Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, 1955), pp. 14–18, for the same distinction.

¹³⁵ *Al-Islām wa 'n-Naṣrāniyya*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

are not at the same time spiritual powers. By drawing this entirely valid distinction, 'Abduh manages to suggest that the Islamic system, being a civil one, is of the same general species as modern secular systems, and therefore presumably open to the same speculation, critical examination, and progressive development as the latter. Furthermore, by emphasizing that true Islamic government contains those virtues that are commonly recognized in the modern world—national sovereignty over the ruler, the conditional nature of authority, and regard for the public interest; virtues that are supposedly of proven and universal validity—he hints, almost imperceptibly, that the Islamic theory coincides with natural law.

This brings us to the second significance of the passage. Regardless of the validity of his distinction, and regardless of the "natural" worth of the classical theory of the Caliphate, the fact remains that 'Abduh is speaking of the theory as one dictated by revelation. It is not right reason or the lessons of history that lays down the rules; it is Islam. The system he describes is explicitly Islamic. We have therefore at most a coincidence of religious and rational dictates, and not a delegation by religion to reason of the authority to make political judgments. This conception is similar to the one implicit in the references to *sun-nat Allāh*: God's hand remains present in human affairs, although it has always followed a recognizable and unchanging course.

Even 'Abduh's distinction between the religious and the civil appears to be only a tentative step in the light of other passages. In the same book he denies that there can really be any separation of religious and temporal powers, such as Christianity claims to maintain. The effectiveness of civil and temporal rule is always dependent on what religion will allow. Therefore it cannot be said, for example, that separation of religious and political authority provides an atmosphere of greater tolerance toward intellectual freedom:

This separation would facilitate tolerance if it were the case that the subjects could perform their bodily functions independently of the souls by which they live, and that the souls could similarly perform their spiritual functions without the bodies which provide their strength.¹³⁸

The separation of secular and religious powers in Europe, 'Abduh claims, has only resulted in a struggle for power between the ecclesias-

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

tical and temporal authorities, since their jurisdictions cannot entirely be separated.¹³⁹

He is not arguing, of course, in favor of placing political power in the hands of religious authorities, but of abolishing religious powers altogether, which is what Islam claims to do. But if it is true that religious and political matters are inseparable—that political freedom is nothing without religious freedom and vice versa—then is it not also true that any political authority tends to restrict religious freedom, since souls cannot “perform their spiritual functions without the bodies which provide their strength”? Both the classical theorists and 'Abduh could say quite rightly that religiously sanctioned political authority is not the same as authority in religious matters. But he implies that they are only one step removed.

The question is liable to considerable sophistry, and it would be pointless to project 'Abduh's remarks beyond the immediate point he seeks to make. He has not attempted a systematic analysis of the role of politics in Islam. At times, in fact, he shows a certain aversion to politics which helps to explain his lack of enthusiasm for comprehensive doctrines in that field. He speaks of politics as if of the inevitably distasteful manifestation of the weaknesses of human nature. Politics is apparently synonymous with partisanship, rivalry, self-seeking, and *'aṣabiyya* (in the strictly pejorative sense);¹⁴⁰ therefore there is no place for it in the structure of Islamic social ethics with which he is so concerned. In politics he seems to find the disunity and destructive competition that is opposed to his notion of the coincidence of revelation, moral temperament, and reason, and the natural cohesion and consistency of human activities and interests when rightly guided. He may be said to have a definable political ideal, namely a Muslim community bound together by a fraternal spirit and a sense of common fortunes, interests, and goals. But this ideal is not a theory or a program. It is only a hope, realizable after other reforms of a social and

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁰ See for example *ibid.*, pp. 111–112: “If you wish to say that politics persecutes thought or religion or knowledge, then I agree with you.” See also *ibid.*, p. 121: *Taqlid* (blind imitation) in earlier Islam reinforced partisanship and sectarianism; this was “the role of politics” (*daur as-siyāsa*) in Muslim history. See also *ibid.*, pp. 114–115; it was out of political considerations that medieval Muslim despots, uninfluenced by Islamic precepts of government, naturally tended to discourage free thought and inquiry, and distorted Islam into a religion of compliance.

educational nature have taken place. And it is in this light that his infrequent references to the "Islamic" structure of government must be understood: the structure did exist in the Golden Age of early Islam, and can exist again when Muslim society is again transformed, but it is this transformation and not the political system it will facilitate that is his real concern.



ISLAMIC REFORM

*The Political and Legal Theories
of
Muḥammad 'Abduh
and
Rashīd Rıdā*

by MALCOLM H. KERR

*University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles*

1966



*University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California*

*Cambridge University Press
London, England*

© 1966 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 65-24177

Printed in the United States of America