

Chapter 2

Adil Çiftçi: The Koran as Ethical Order

Adil Çiftçi was born in 1963 in Niksar (Province of Tokat, northeast of Ankara). He attended an *İmam Hatip* school and then studied at Ankara Üniversitesi's Theological Faculty, from which he graduated in 1985. In 1986, he took up further studies in the Sociology of Religion Department of the Theological Faculty at Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir. Between 1988 and 1990 he studied in London and, back to Turkey, was granted his doctorate in 1997. He is presently assistant lecturer in Sociology of Religion at Dokuz Eylül University.

Adil Çiftçi has worked extensively on, and translated several works by, Fazlur Rahman. In a recent study,²⁴⁶ Çiftçi presents Fazlur Rahman's method of interpreting the Koran and by applying it himself develops a new Islamic perspective. As this will lead us also to a deeper understanding of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics, a detailed discussion of Çiftçi is now in place.

Adil Çiftçi's paradigm is Interpretative Sociology.²⁴⁷ That is to say, he is trying to analyse Fazlur Rahman's life and work sociologically but with a special interest in "thought and mind" (*fikir ve zihin*). (p. 15) This leads Çiftçi to asking in his analysis not only "What does Fazlur Rahman say?", but also "What does he want to do, how and in which context?". (p. 18)²⁴⁸ Çiftçi builds his presentation of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics basically on three of Fazlur Rahman's books.²⁴⁹ Çiftçi betrays however, great familiarity with Fazlur Rahman's other writings, too. The starting point of Çiftçi's expositions is formed by Fazlur Rahman's view of present-day conditions. Today, Islam is in a crisis, Adil Çiftçi reports him to say, and the only salvation from it is "ethical thinking". (p. 19) Fazlur Rahman's method is intended as, and proves to be—in Çiftçi's eyes—a method of modernising Islam. (p. 117) Çiftçi, though not grouping them together in

²⁴⁶ "Rethinking Islam with Fazlur Rahman": Adil Çiftçi, *Fazlur Rahman ile İslam'ı Yeniden Düşünmek*, Ankara (Kitâbiyât) 2000. Page numbers in the following section will refer to that book.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Gibson Burrell, "Interpretative Sociology", IDEM and Gareth Morgan (eds.), *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, London 1979.

²⁴⁸ Adil Çiftçi seems to miss the point that, without using the term, Fazlur Rahman reads the Koran himself with a kind of Interpretative Sociology.

²⁴⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*; IDEM, *Islam & Modernity*; IDEM, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Minneapolis ²1989.

this way, seems to see Fazlur Rahman's importance in what might be called his two methodological axioms.

On the one hand, Çiftçi rightly reports Fazlur Rahman's emphasis on "what the Text says", (p. 83) in other words his Koranic orientation. Fazlur Rahman's arguments for it are:

- a. No other thing is considered as *divine* by Muslims as the Koran.
- b. The Koran contains *all* revelations, it is the "comprehensive guide".
- c. The Koran has always been regulating Muslims' *behaviour*.
- d. The Koran is not only about metaphysics and individual ethics, it can also answer all *social* questions. (p. 96)

On the other hand, he characterises Fazlur Rahman as a "rationalist ethicist" (*rasyonalist ahlakçı*), (p. 18) by which Çiftçi means that Fazlur Rahman wanted to

- a. draw from the Koran "a system of how to behave (*davranış sistemi*); (p. 18) and
- b. stress the necessity of using reason for the solution of problems.

Fazlur Rahman's view was that revelation and reason never collide; traditional and rational thinking however do. (p. 18) Islamic ethics is defined by Fazlur Rahman as "a religious ethics grounded in the thought of God's universal reign" (*Allah'ın evrene hakimiyeti fikrine dayanan dinî bir ahlak*). (p. 21)

Evaluation: Ethics in History

The first axiom brings the Muslim discussion about how to live Islam back to what is indisputably divine, Islamic, common ground. The second axiom however is a fresh approach to the old text. It presupposes the distinction between legal (i.e., containing concrete stipulations) and ethical (i.e., containing principles). And it amounts to rejecting the Muslim understanding of the Koran as *immediately legally* relevant. (p. 86) By seeing the Koran as an exemplary realisation of God's will for one situation in history, the legislative force of the text is reduced to the status of a model. What is to be realised during the generations is not that example of old, but the will, the intention, the ethics for which it was an example. This is how the Koran becomes ethically relevant.

So, according to Fazlur Rahman, the Koran is to be read not as a legal text to be obeyed slavishly but as an exemplary concretisation of a certain ethics. (pp. 86; 116) It would not suffice to state this bluntly. Two challenges could be raised against his view.

1. If the Koran is only an ethical, not also a legal book, why has no Muslim in the course of the tradition, nor the rightly guided *umma* throughout history dealt with the Koran in that way?
 2. Why, if the Koran is an ethical book, does it come across as a legal one?
- As if in response to the first challenge, Fazlur Rahman has tried to show that Muslims throughout the ages have in fact done exactly this: read the Koran as an ethical book.²⁵⁰ Çiftçi does not explore that question in detail. But he offers an elaborate account of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics, based on his concept of revelation. This should be understood as a reaction to the second objection.

Çiftçi: Redefining Revelation

What is the metaphysical context of revelation?

- a. God, on the one hand, is transcendent;
- b. human beings, on the other hand, are deficient as regards ethical knowledge and practice.

In this situation, God helps, and He does so through revelation, i.e., via prophecy. For a rational mind, the concept of revelation is not without problems. Çiftçi's analysis of Fazlur Rahman's view of what revelation is, can be summed up in five points. (p. 64)

1. Revelation is a spiritual (*ruhi*) experience—as opposed to a physical one.
2. It involves an expansion of the recipient's self.
3. It entails no locomotion—e.g., in Muhammad's *mi'rāğ* (ascension) experience.
4. Yet, the reality experienced in it is more-than-subjective (*özel hislerini aşan*).²⁵¹
5. The experience wraps itself in words.

Revelation is brought about by 'the Spirit' (*Ruh*). But what precisely is that to say? Fazlur Rahman's concept of 'the Spirit' is the key to his view of revelation. Three different descriptions must be held together for a full understanding of Fazlur Rahman's concept of the Spirit:

²⁵⁰ In fact, this is what Fazlur Rahman calls '*iğtibād*': to apply a rule to a new situation. That is at least how his slightly contorted five lines definition should probably be understood, IDEM, *Islam & Modernity*, p. 8: "the effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or precedent in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by a new solution". Cf. also, IDEM, *Islamic Methodology in History*, Karachi 1965.

²⁵¹ Lit.: going beyond his subjective feelings.

1. The Spirit is not a being outside of the prophet, not a third being coming between God and Muhammad. Considering the word 'angel' is helpful here. 'Revelation is mediated by an angel' is for Fazlur Rahman another way of saying: that which brings about revelation is neither separate from, nor plainly identical with God. (p. 65)
2. The Spirit is the content (*içerik, öz*) of revelation. (p. 67)
3. The Spirit is the Prophet's capacity to produce the appropriate verse in any situation. (p. 67)

Because of the ontological difference between prophets—human beings, i.e., creatures—and God, it is wrong to say that prophets are a part of God; they are the recipients of revelation, and God does not even speak with them directly. (p. 69) God's eternal word does not hit the prophet as if from outside. Thus, what people call 'inspiration' is in fact a fusion of horizons between God's Spirit and the prophet. (p. 72) Therefore, Fazlur Rahman was able to say—and it notoriously caused tumult in his home country—that the Koran as we have it is Muhammad's word. By this however Fazlur Rahman was not rejecting the Koran's divine status. The prophet is endowed with the ability to produce what is according to God's will. Put differently, the Koran is at the same time God's and Muhammad's word. (p. 72) Consequently, Fazlur Rahman rejects portraits of Muhammad's role as God's loudspeaker (*hoparlör*). (p. 75) It was the Spirit of revelation which gave Muhammad the unique mixture of idealism and realism that enabled him to withstand the massive resistance in his home milieu. (p. 78) This amounts to saying that the Spirit is Muhammad's 'Sendungsbewußtsein' (conviction of his mission; prophetic self-understanding).

Reconsidering the crisis of Islam which Fazlur Rahman diagnosed, and the therapy he prescribed—ethical thinking—what he envisaged is now much clearer: if Islam is not to be irrelevant today, what can be done? 'Apply the Koran!', is the stock answer to that. It is, according to Fazlur Rahman, too simple, because it would mean that

- a. we had to return to the Middle Ages,
- b. we had to rely on an historical, contingent, accidental²⁵² Islam, rather than on the Koran and the *Hadit*,

²⁵² The latter two words are neither Fazlur Rahman's nor Çiftçi's, but seem to capture the point both are trying to make. (On 'contingent' cf. below, footnote 370). Neither is the usage of 'Islam' with the indefinite article Fazlur Rahman's (he has "historical Islam" (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 147), and Çiftçi translates, of course, "*tarihi İslam*" (p. 94)). But this Turkish wording is open to the rendering "an ... Islam", which breaks up the monolithic image of Islam implied in the easy answers. The problem with "an ... Islam", on the other hand, is that it might suggest a splitting

c. nostalgically, an earlier Islam would have become “our God”. (p. 94)
This implies an important caveat. ‘Returning to the Koran’ is ambiguous. It can mean

1. submitting to the Koranic commands; or
2. trying to understand the ethical system which expresses itself in those commands (and submitting to that system).

This ambiguity is due to two differing possible views of what the Koran, what revelation actually is. Is it the text as we have it, or is it God’s will within that text? Fazlur Rahman, of course, holds the second position. Therefore, he finds himself cast into the middle of the questions of understanding, and he can write: approaching the Koran without method is to lose it. “It” is more precisely the Koran’s ethical and metaphysical world view. (p. 95)²⁵³

Discussing Fazlur Rahman Discussing Gadamer Discussing Betti

Even when handling problems of understanding, understanding itself is a problem. The locus classicus of hermeneutical reflection in the work of Fazlur Rahman is his introduction to *Islam & Modernity*.²⁵⁴ Çifçeti quotes from that passage intensely. He misses however to point out the problems, caused by misunderstanding, in that passage. In order to avoid further misunderstandings, the perspective has for a moment to be shifted. The original texts have to be revisited and the discussion with Fazlur Rahman has to be taken up directly.

Fazlur Rahman’s double movement/three steps approach²⁵⁵ is a method for the normative application of a certain text to a certain situation. It therefore implies, and quite expressly so, that—together with the present situation and the intervening tradition—the meaning of a text “can be sufficiently objectively known”. (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 8) Fazlur Rahman seems to feel the boldness of his claim, especially in the face of Hans-Georg Gadamer.²⁵⁶ He considers Gadamer’s view as “radically opposed”,

of that unity of the religious community, which, if not understood as uniformity, actually allows for various *forms of living* (the one) Islam without hereticising otherness QUA otherness.

²⁵³ This point will be taken up as (D) *How Necessary Is Method?*, below, p. 129.

²⁵⁴ Esp. pp. 8–11.

²⁵⁵ Cf. above, footnote 140.

²⁵⁶ Fazlur Rahman has apparently studied Hans-Georg Gadamer’s 1960 work, *Wahrheit und Methode*, in an English translation (*Truth and Method*, New York 1975). Unfortunately, he makes reference only to that translation’s pagination, which makes it difficult to check citations. The authoritative—though not always the best (cf. below,

indeed destructive, to his own view, and agrees with a characterisation of Gadamer as “hopelessly subjective”. (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 9) This accusation makes yet another shift of perspective necessary. An eye has to be cast on Gadamer’s own writing. Gadamer himself develops his hermeneutical ideas by contrasting them over against the hermeneutics of Emilio Betti.²⁵⁷ Since Fazlur Rahman uses much of Betti’s language, and explicitly sides with him,²⁵⁸ a brief schematisation of the latter’s model can serve as our starting point here. For Betti, this is how understanding works:

1. Someone produces something, e.g., a text. This production can be described thus. An inner reality casts its shape onto the outer world. In Betti’s (Hegelian) words: a mind creates forms of its objectivations (reifications); these forms of the mind’s objectivations separate themselves from the mind.
2. Someone else understands this, e.g., reads the text. In Betti’s words: a mind brings those forms back into such an inner whole which also created them and from which they separated themselves—back to a mind.
3. This mind (the interpreter) is not identical with the first mind (the creator). But since the two minds, being both human, are relatives, the re-assembly of the forms works.
4. Creation and interpretation can be seen as movements: mind-to-objectivation; objectivation-to-mind. Interpretation is, consequently, the *inversion* of creation.

What has Fazlur Rahman made of this model? He thinks along Betti’s lines, in that

- a. his “first movement” of the interpretative process is backward (even the “movements” language is likely to be inspired by Betti’s trains of thought);
- b. he thinks of the creative mind which produced the text as the key to accurate understanding: getting into that mind—seeing its intentions—is vital.

But Fazlur Rahman has modified Betti’s model in two aspects.

footnote 275)—edition of the text is: IDEM, *Wahrheit und Methode*, vols. 1–2, Tübingen 1990–93.

²⁵⁷ On p. 393 of his 1961 article “Hermeneutik und Historismus”, IDEM, *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 2, pp. 387–424, which he appended to *Wahrheit und Methode* in 1965, Gadamer quotes from a German article by Emilio Betti of 1954: “Zur Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Auslegungslehre”. Emilio Betti is an Italian historian of jurisprudence; his OPUS MAGNUM is *Teoria generale dell’ Interpretazione*, vols. 1–2, Milano 1955.

²⁵⁸ Fazlur Rahman (seems to know and) quotes Betti only as quoted by Gadamer and refers precisely to the passage schematised in four points here.

- a. He considers not the mind in isolation but the mind as confronted with a certain situation to be the producer of the relevant forms.
- b. He adds to the description of interpretation his “second movement” as a constituent part of any hermeneutical process: returning to today’s situation with an application.

Both modifications are valid points. But let us see what Hans-Georg Gadamer has to say against Betti. Gadamer criticises Betti’s model as “strict psychologism of Romantic character”.²⁵⁹ This goes especially against what has been marked here as Betti’s third point. In order to over-state Gadamer’s problem:

1. Betti’s objectivations—contrary to what their name implies—speak only within a subject, have no objective lives by themselves. They have not cut their umbilical cords, have not gained autarky. Therefore, Betti is stuck in reproductive interpretation and cannot see that a fresh view at an old object can very well produce a new *but faithful* interpretation of it.
2. The fact that the producing mind and the understanding mind are relatives is a weak basis for the interpretation to work. Being relatives does not mean having exactly the same structure. If understanding is seen as re-arranging the objectivations as they were in the producing mind, who guarantees that the two relatives are not different in precisely that point which would have been essential for the correct re-arrangement?

These are certainly serious criticisms. In the light of that, it does no longer seem fair to characterise Gadamer as “hopelessly subjective”. Why does Fazlur Rahman still insist on that characterisation? This should become clear when we answer the question which alternative methodology of understanding Gadamer offers.

He offers—no method at all,²⁶⁰ although the title of his book might imply he does.²⁶¹ Rather, he only describes—transcendentally, in the Kantian sense of exposing the conditions of the possibility of knowledge—how ‘Geisteswissenschaften’ (the humanities) and thus human self-understanding actually operate. What are Gadamer’s hermeneutical core points?

²⁵⁹ *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 2, p. 393.

²⁶⁰ E.g., *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 2, p. 394. But already in the corpus of the text, e.g., *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 300 (part 2, ii.1.b.β).

²⁶¹ Gadamer said, the idea to title his book “*Wahrheit und Methode*” only came to his mind when the editor remarked he couldn’t figure out what “*Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*” meant, which consequently was degraded to the book’s subtitle. (*Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 2, p. 493)

1. The starting point of understanding. Ontological hermeneutics sees that when setting out to read a text you are not a *tabula rasa*. You have already got ideas and questions. But they need not come in the way of your understanding. Rather, they are a part of the understanding process. Therefore, Gadamer, following Martin Heidegger, describes understanding as a circular process, which is however not a vicious circle, in which one would end up from where one started. One constantly re-develops the intention, attention, tentative comprehension (*Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff*)²⁶² which one already had, in dialogue with the matter (*Sache*)²⁶³. Therefore, "understanding is to be considered, not so much as an act of the subjectivity, but as an entering into a process of tradition."²⁶⁴
2. The target of understanding. Gadamer sets a motto over the second part of his *Wahrheit und Methode*, upon which he never comments explicitly but which captures the point of his criticism against psychological hermeneutics. The motto is from the table talks of—Martin Luther: "QUI NON INTELLIGIT RES, NON POTEST EX VERBIS SENSUM ELICERE.—If you do not understand the matter, you cannot make sense of the words."²⁶⁵ Rather than romantically considering a text merely as an expression of life, understanding means to take seriously the text's truth claim.²⁶⁶
3. The understandings of understanding. One can juxtapose the former two points plus Gadamer's alternatives, and his division of the history of hermeneutics into three epochs: the historical, the psychological, and the ontological. Historical hermeneutics has a problem with the starting point of understanding, psychological hermeneutics with its target. Of course, Gadamer considers himself, together with his teacher Martin Heidegger, to be the final phase's pioneer.

²⁶² *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 1, p. 271 (part 2, ii.1.a.α). At the same time, *Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff* can, on a more literal level, be heard as meaning: preliminary possession, preliminary view and preliminary grasp.

²⁶³ *Sache* includes both 'object' (the text) and 'subject' (reality; what the text is about).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 295 (part 2, ii.1.b.β).

²⁶⁵ Lit.: "if you don't understand the matter, you cannot make sense of the words."

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

Interpreting an ancient text *historically*²⁶⁷ (,historisch') means trying to remove out of one's sight everything that happened after the text was written. One wants to see the text in its 'then-setting'.²⁶⁸ The aim is interpreting the text "out of itself".²⁶⁹—Gadamer's comment on this type of hermeneutics is the following: all that happened between the composition of the text and now has an influence on one's ways of understanding. If one does not notice that influence, it runs out of control.²⁷⁰

Romanticism, in the wake of the historical method, wanted to liberate the author's creative individual mind in its otherness from the grips of dogmatic interests in what is to be believed. It therefore wanted to interpret the text psychologically. This entails transposing oneself into the author's inner situation, and, from that divinised position, trying to create again the author's creation. The text is treated as a work of art. Whether or not it corresponds with reality is unimportant. Understanding a text is, then, understanding the author's (possibly unconscious) intention.—Gadamer's comment on this type of hermeneutics is the following: although it has the advantage of seeing the individual text undogmatically, in its strangeness, as an expression of an individual life, it has the drawback of putting the authority of texts over the authority of truth.²⁷¹

Ontological hermeneutics does not offer another method that promises to lead one to unprejudiced understanding; only after understanding, one will be able to tell the helpful from the hindering prejudices.²⁷² Rather, it starts from the observation that understanding is a 'typically human life factor' (,Existenzial'). Therefore, it must be seen within the interaction of the other typically human life factors, e.g., human beings' developing in history. Thus, the temporal distance between text and interpreter is discovered as hermeneutically productive.²⁷³ Gadamer's call can be rendered thus: Don't try to transpose yourself—historically—into the text's 'then-situation', or—romantically—into the author's inner situation. Rather, bring the text's horizon into your horizon (everything you can see from

²⁶⁷ Here, "historically" renders ,historisch', rather than ,geschichtlich', which would mean the exact opposite. Paçacı's call for an "historical" understanding of the Koran, e.g., (above, p. 77) clearly means ,geschichtlich', because he takes post-textual conditions productively into account. But there is no established terminology for this distinction in Turkish.

²⁶⁸ This is not Gadamer's formulation.

²⁶⁹ *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 1, p. 180 (part 2, i.1.a.α).

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 305 (part 2, ii.1.d).

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 201 (part 2, i.b).

²⁷² Ibid., p. 301 (part 2, ii.1.d).

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 302 (part 2, ii.1.d), with reference to Martin Heidegger.

your own point of view), i.e., understand the text's discoveries from your 'now-situation'!²⁷⁴

Has Fazlur Rahman understood Gadamer correctly?²⁷⁵

Fazlur Rahman had to rely on an English translation of *Wahrheit und Methode*. From there he got the translation "quality of being determined by effective-history" (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 9) for Gadamer's 'wirkungs-geschichtliche Bestimmtheit'. 'Quality of being -ed' is a correct rendering of the suffix '-heit' added to a past participle. But the word 'bestimmen', from which 'Bestimmtheit' is formed, means 'characterise, orient, destine, determine'. Fazlur Rahman's talk of "preconditioning" (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 9) and "predetermination" (ibid.) betrays that what he understood Gadamer to say was this: history has not only a strong influence on the interpreter but decides the outcome of any interpretation with necessity. Against this view, which he thinks is Gadamer's, Fazlur Rahman has to adduce the fact "that there have been changes in history, sometimes radical". (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 10) That is an superfluous argument because it is not Gadamer's point to say that the power of tradition vitiates all historical changes. There is a certain conservative—tradition treasuring—inclination in Gadamer's philosophy.²⁷⁶ But historical changes are well in his sight.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 307–11 (part 2, ii.1.d). 'Now-situation' is not Gadamer's but the present author's choice of words.

²⁷⁵ At first glimpse, there is a striking example of misunderstanding. Fazlur Rahman quotes Gadamer as saying "the contrast between historical and dogmatic method has no absolute validity" (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 10), where the text of Gadamer's collected works reads: „Der Gegensatz von historischer und dogmatischer Methode hat [...] eine schlechthinnige Geltung" (vol. 2, p. 443), which is the exact opposite. However, the problem is solved when checking the second edition of *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen 1965). The passage in question is taken from its preface (p. xix). There, we find „hat [...] keine schlechthinnige Geltung", which means precisely "has no absolute validity". Which version is correct? The 1965 text has the LECTIO POTIOR, because one page down (p. 444) even the 1993 has „Denn erst im Scheitern des naiven Historismus des historischen Jahrhunderts wird sichtbar, daß der Gegensatz von unhistorisch-dogmatisch und historisch [...] kein schlechthinniger ist", which renders "the contrast [...] has no absolute validity". So, what appears to be an instance of Fazlur Rahman's misreading proves to be a misreading in the new German edition of Gadamer's collected works.

²⁷⁶ E.g., in his plea for "authority and tradition" (part 2, ii.1.b.α) and for "the classical" (part 2, ii.1.b.β).

²⁷⁷ (a.) When Gadamer writes a history of hermeneutics, it certainly contains massive changes, indeed a „Wesenswandel—changing essence" (part 2, i.1.a)—and he introduces his own suggestion as another essential change in that history (part 3: „Ontologische Wendung"). (b.) His observation that temporal distance is productive (p. 302: part 2, ii.1.c) implies that he sees tradition not as an unchangeable heritage. (c.) Gadamer calls for an awareness of the effects of history. Rather than only making us see our fetters it can liberate our retrieval of tradition; cf. below, p. 119 on the punch line of effective-history.

What should be made of this flood of theories and counter-theories?

In claiming to propose *no method* because you see what works only when you have understood, Gadamer cannot be completely serious. On the one hand, that would deprive him of any criteria of correct understanding and thus of understanding altogether. On the other hand, his own philosophy does have methodological implications, and in fact most elucidatory ones. This will become obvious when we bring Hans-Georg Gadamer into a fresh dialogue with Fazlur Rahman:

The criticism Gadamer advances against *historical hermeneutics* is valid: the less you see what is influencing your sight, the more it influences you. Fazlur Rahman comes to the Koran with a preconceived question. How should we act? His whole hermeneutical reflection is a method of how to obtain an ethics—in fact, a new ethics—out of the Koran. This may look extremely modern, because ethics is an ‘in’ subject, which you can discuss with all sorts of people without a clash of world views, and because you get modern answers. Gadamer however points out that even your type of questioning may be influenced by the effects of your history and therefore—that is the not-so-conservative punch line of “effective-history”—that type of questioning need not be the only possible one. Only when you notice you are being controlled, can you start dealing with that control. Only when Fazlur Rahman notices how traditional it is to go to the Koran and ask ‘How should we act?’, and even how traditional it is to come back from the Koran and say ‘I got a new answer from it’, only then can he start wondering whether there are other types of questions one might ask. To illustrate this point in but one example, one might well go to the Koran and ask: ‘What is it, in the light of God’s future, to be a human being?’

The criticism Gadamer advances against *psychological hermeneutics* is also valid: if you think that understanding is only ‘thinking yourself into’ the other’s otherness, you lose your interest in, and contact with, what you have already discovered to be true. Betti, who claims you have to return to the creative mind for understanding, is an exponent of this psychological approach. And so is Fazlur Rahman: the second step of his first movement is doing exactly this, viz., reconstructing the author’s intention. In Fazlur Rahman’s formula: distilling God’s ethical norms. Now, Gadamer points out that the psychological interpreter misses the text’s truth claim. Understanding does, then, not mean one agrees because one sees what is said there to be true, but one accepts it, be it as strange as it may, because that is what the author says. Thus, Gadamerian philosophy unmasks Fazlur Rahman as a ‘revelation-positivist’, whose final argument must be ‘because

God wants it'. A rational support structure for this is neither necessary nor indeed possible.

Thirdly, the criticism Gadamer advanced against the possibility of ever understanding either a text or your own situation fully, and in that sense objectively, is valid, too. Our ability to know and understand things and ourselves grows. But that position does not make Gadamer "hopelessly subjective", (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 9) nor indeed does it follow that if Gadamer is right, the double movement theory has "no meaning at all" as Fazlur Rahman believes. (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 9) If you see that you will be able to see better in the future, that does not make you subjective. And it does not destroy a model which starts from the view you have so far. It only means that you must be prepared to correct your model again and again with the improvement of knowledge about the past and about the present and thus about history and values. If anything, it is that attitude which deserves the name 'objectivity'. Fazlur Rahman seems to miss the point of our constantly evolving state of information when he says "the objective ascertaining of the past (—which Gadamer does not allow) is possible in principle provided requisite evidence is available". (*Islam & Modernity*, p. 10)

Admittedly, the present study of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics has focused on a short "Introduction" to one of his books only. Adil Çiftçi has done the same. It would not be fair to say that this is all there is to say about Fazlur Rahman's methodology. It is only that he is nowhere else more explicit about hermeneutics. In all this, one should not forget that the "Introduction" is to a book which is not about the Koran, but about one particular challenge to Islam: *Islam & Modernity*. The limitations of Fazlur Rahman's model, as presented here, should be seen as partly due to Fazlur Rahman's deliberate restriction of hermeneutics to the particular subject of the book.

Why is Fazlur Rahman's reaction to Gadamer so allergic?

When describing the world(s) of contemporary Muslims, Fazlur Rahman likes to draw a scenario of radical transformations. In a world of fast changes, Fazlur Rahman grasps for something to hold on to. Gadamer seems to uproot the last hold on an 'objectively ascertained past', (cf. *Islam & Modernity*, p. 10) to which Fazlur Rahman wanted to fasten his method.

On the other hand, it may not only be Fazlur Rahman's own safety needs but also his way of advertising a new methodology to his Muslim brothers and sisters, that made him so obsessed with stability. If Fazlur Rahman thought many of his fellow Muslims would reject anything soft-sounding, he might have overstated the solidity of the ground even though he himself knew better.

Another, fundamental, factor seems to be at work here. Interestingly, it demonstrates how different hermeneutics depend on different theologies. What is revelation? Where does a (proposedly) revealed text point? Fazlur Rahman and Hans-Georg Gadamer are likely to give opposed answers to these questions. Fazlur Rahman implies that a revealed text points at God's otherwise hidden will-to-be-done. In listening to revelation, one learns about the kind of life God wants us to lead. That seems to be a Koranic concept of revelation.²⁷⁸ And it is quite in line with Betti's view and with psychological hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer's view, on the other hand, squares so well with a Biblical—Christian, but also Jewish—concept of revelation that the Bible may in fact have been the starting point of his reflections. That concept considers the text to point at reality around us. It makes a truth-claim to be followed up in the world. Therefore the reader's own experience ("horizon") is fundamental. The text opens one's eyes to the things going on around oneself.²⁷⁹ And it is the *events* which are in fact God's self-revelation. Now, this fundamental difference in the concept of revelation has a twofold consequence on the hermeneutical position one favours. Firstly, Fazlur Rahman's view is directed from the text to the proposed author (because that is where revelation takes place), whereas a Gadamerian, non-psychologist view is directed from the text to the world. Secondly, Fazlur Rahman's view tries to skip tradition and get a tradition-free sight on the revelatory intention 'back there' (which is impossible, cf. above, p. 115). For him, tradition is stain on my glasses. A Gadamerian, non-historicist view has a positive relation to tradition, during which human understanding has grown. Tradition is part of reality, and therefore—although Gadamer is nowhere theologically explicit—part of the locus of God's revelatory action.

²⁷⁸ How important is the Koranic view of revelation, viz., the theology of signs, *āyāt*? Do they serve only as props, proofs of the authority of the imperatives? Do they not reveal God's care? Is God's care for creation not a message in its own right? Of course, one can deduce also ethical insights from God's care. But should God's care for creation not be appreciated as a message that has more consequences than only ethical ones? On "signs" cf. also below, page 164 at note 366.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatische Thesen zur Lehre von der Offenbarung", IDEM (ed.), *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, Göttingen 1961, pp. 91–114, p. 91.

We are now returning to Adil Çiftçi.²⁸⁰ He observes, without adducing a reference, that several Turkish authors criticise Fazlur Rahman for having a Romantic hermeneutics. Fazlur Rahman's frequent formulation "understanding the Koran better" is taken as a proof for that. (p. 101) Çiftçi defends Fazlur Rahman with a counterquote: Fazlur Rahman himself considered the attempt of "understanding God better than He understood Himself—*Allah'ı, Allah'tan daha iyi anlama*" to be naïve. (p. 102) Through this quote, Adil Çiftçi believes, he has disproved the accusation of Fazlur Rahman's Romanticism.²⁸¹

According to Çiftçi's Gadamer, the temporal distance between 'subject and subject' (*konu-özne*), that is, between matter and reader makes objective understanding possible. (p. 102)²⁸² From that distance, the reader can enter into a real dialogical encounter with the text, °an I-thou relation (*ben-sen ilişkisi*). The text's claim (*dedik*) can be heard. (p. 102) "In this dialogue, the interpreter encounters the text as having a different 'horizon' of understanding, as being a different 'world'. This encounter and conversation brings about a meeting of horizons: the text's horizon with the interpreter's horizon—that is objective understanding!" (p. 103)²⁸³

Çiftçi: Confronting Gadamer and Fazlur Rahman

Çiftçi accounts for Fazlur Rahman's claim that if "Gadamer is correct, then the double-movement theory I have put forward has no meaning at all" with two arguments. Both follow from what Çiftçi calls Gadamer's relativism. (p. 109) Gadamer cannot explain the Koran's superiority and divine status. And Gadamer vitiates the critical confrontation of tradition or of our thinking with the Koran. We would be stuck in the all-powerful tradition. A Koran disempowered by Gadamer could not pull us out. Çiftçi then refutes this "relativity" with Fazlur Rahman's argument. Tradition cannot be all that powerful since great minds have turned its course. (p. 110)²⁸⁴ Adil Çiftçi then sums up his confrontation of Gadamer and Fazlur Rahman. The main point of dissent, and the source of all differ-

²⁸⁰ Page numbers in the text refer to his *Fazlur Rahman ile İslam'ı Yeniden Düşünmek* again.

²⁸¹ Çiftçi's argument will be taken up under (E) *Being a Romantic*, below, p. 129.

²⁸² "Objective understanding" will be taken up under (B), below, p. 127.

²⁸³ This understanding of the meeting and fusing of horizons will be reconsidered under (C) *One World, Many Horizons*, below, p. 128.

²⁸⁴ This will be reconsidered under (A) *The Power of Tradition*, below, p. 126.

ences between the two authors is, for him, the fact that Gadamer considers the process of understanding-interpreting-applying to be one inseparable, indistinguishable action whereas Fazlur Rahman explicitly splits up the two actions of "objective ascertaining the past" and the response (the latter being influenced by values and the present situation). The objective, normative meanings (*anlamlar*) are being interpreted in, or according to, our own historicity (*tarihsellik*). (p. 111)²⁸⁵

Adil Çiftçi declares that things will become clearer once we have understood what kind of a book the Koran really is according to Fazlur Rahman. "The Koran is not °a single 'book' (*tek bir 'kitap'*), because no one sat down and wrote it. It is [rather] the concretised state of revelation, which took up the problems and questions the Prophet encountered within more than twenty years." (p. 113) Two insights follow from that. Firstly, the Koran is "a living text connected with history". In its interpretation, the 'occasions of revelation' are to be taken into account even though they can, as Çiftçi admits, not be established in a verse-by-verse manner. (p. 114) Secondly, the Koran is not about God. It is not God's autobiography (p. 115) but "*budan li-n-nās*, a guidance for human beings". (2:2)²⁸⁶ Therefore, the Koran provides a consistent and comprehensive view of life and world, at least in the shape of a framework. (p. 116) Only because this is so, can the Koran be understood. Understanding is attributing the parts to the whole. The implicit link is clearly this: each individual Koranic command can be seen as having its place within the Koranic world view. Fazlur Rahman's Koranic world view is however not a fixed one. Here, just as is the case with individual norms, one has to find the intention behind the formulation and re-express it in accordance with today's state of human thinking.²⁸⁷ Islam must be understood out of the Koran and brought into dialogue with the modern world. (p. 117) The danger of charging the Koran with un-Koranic contemporary thought can be evaded through the application of two control mechanisms. The first one is: one must always work with an °integral, complete (*bütüncül*) understanding of the Koranic message. The second is, using the correct method. (p. 117) The correct method however consists primarily in understanding the Koran as one whole. (p. 129) Fazlur Rahman criticises the traditional method of °analogical conclusion (*qiyās*) as inflexible, (p. 117) oriented towards individual verses rather than the inner whole of the Koran, (p. 118) and as drawing legal

²⁸⁵ This remark will be discussed under (F) *Two Historicalities?*, below, p. 130

²⁸⁶ This Koranic expression will be revisited under (G) *A Guidance*, below, p. 130.

²⁸⁷ This will be discussed under (H) *Mental Reconstruction and the Applicability Dogma*, below, p. 131.

conclusions from non-legal verses. The alternative method offered by Fazlur Rahman is his double movement approach, whose first movement consists of the two steps: understanding a given Koranic statement's import in the light of its contemporary macro-situation; and distilling the statement's general objective out of it. Here, neither Fazlur Rahman nor Adil Çiftçi are particularly clear as to which role the Koran as a whole plays in this first movement. Fazlur Rahman writes (and Çiftçi simply translates it (p. 131)), "The first step of the first movement, then, consists of understanding the meaning of the Qur'ân as a whole as well as in terms of the specific tenets that constitute responses to specific situations."²⁸⁸ This vague wording seems to conceal (and betray) the fact that Fazlur Rahman himself was not altogether clear about the role of the Koran as a whole. It is not obvious which role, according to his model, e.g., the doctrine of later revealed verses abrogating earlier ones should play. What is the Koran as a whole? Is it the Koran including the verses considered to be abrogated; or including the chronology and affirmation of abrogation? What to do with conflicting stipulations? Should one distil from them a common denominator, wide enough to encompass the differences (e.g., 'God's will to create justice'), or should one regulation be used to relativise another?

Adil Çiftçi describes Fazlur Rahman's method as a hermeneutic circle, although Fazlur Rahman, as Çiftçi notices, does not term his own method thus. (p. 133) For a correct understanding of the Koran, it is not enough to know Arabic well. What is needed is an historical approach. The Koran's intention must be understood as the answer to a question which was in the air when the Koran was proclaimed. Through that historical approach, the Koran can be authorised to interfere today. Using the circle which Çiftçi saw at work in Fazlur Rahman's method we could describe the process thus. The Koranic question-and-answer structure can itself be described as a circular process. People in the questioning situation require and get a response and are thus brought into a new situation, possibly needing new answers. This is the inner-Koranic circle. By reconstructing the questioning situation and discovering the similarity of present day situations, the circle is detached from its original situation. So, we can today mount the same circle and thus be brought to the response the Koran gives us. Çiftçi perceptibly remarks that the response is possibly a correction of the question. (p. 133) Explicitly dissociating himself from Gadamer's (and thus, implicitly, from Heidegger's) usage, Çiftçi introduces a concept "*ön anlama*—preliminary understanding", which should be seen as an exclusively passive

²⁸⁸ *Islam & Modernity*, p. 6.

habitus of the understanding mind: the, so to speak, shy state which humbly accepts correction or approval by the text. The value of this newly introduced concept is not obvious.

“On which criteria does he [viz., Fazlur Rahman] rely to be certain that, when drawing general ethical, religious and social ideas from the Koran, they have been drawn correctly?” (p. 134) Çiftçi answers his own question in a fourfold way, the four answers apparently being Çiftçi’s own products. (p. 134)

1. What the Koran says about itself is contradiction-free.
2. In taking the Koran seriously, you achieve a contradiction-free world view.
3. The Koran speaks for its own (7th century) context.
4. An understanding/interpreting/applying relation between today’s addressees and the Koran exists.²⁸⁹

Fazlur Rahman’s approach is “*bütünsel ve tarihsel*—comprehensive and historical” in that it takes into account the inner structure of the Koran and its milieu. (p. 135) He arrives at his approach in four stages.

- a. What kind of a book is the Koran?—It is “*Tevhide dayalı bir ahlak düzeni*—an ethical order [ORDO] based on monotheism.”
- b. In order to avoid subjective interpretation, we have to “*Metnin ortamına gitmek*—[mentally] go to the Text’s [originally addressed] milieu.”
- c. In the light of both that °broad-range milieu (*geniş ortam*) and (each verse’s) individual milieu, we are to understand the verses’ intentions one by one.
- d. Those intentions must be divided into °the general idea (*genel fikir*—intellectual background?) and the ethical objectives.

What Çiftçi provides here is in fact a more detailed reconstruction of Fazlur Rahman’s first movement. Çiftçi then makes the observation that the first movement is inductive (*tümevarımsal*), the second deductive (*tümdengelimsel*). This is in Çiftçi’s eyes the reason why Fazlur Rahman was able to call his approach “scientific/scholarly—*bilimsel*”. (p. 135) According to Fazlur Rahman, for that second step to be applied correctly today it is necessary “to know and understand the present situation and all its components”. (p. 136)²⁹⁰

Çiftçi now connects theological theology and ethics. Monotheism is not only a theological principle, it is at the same time an ethical principle, because from the idea of ‘one God’ one has to proceed necessarily to ‘one humanity’. (p. 140) From this, Çiftçi deduces a pertinent point. The inter-

²⁸⁹ This list will be discussed under (I) *Criteria and Presuppositions*, below, p. 132.

²⁹⁰ We will return to this under (J) *Careful Study*, below, p. 132.

relatedness of the theological and the ethical is the reason for Fazlur Rahman's particular juxtaposition of object and subject. Rather than having the interpreting subject influence the subject matter, he sees the Koran's historicity as influencing the reader's historicity. (p. 140) That is to say, the Koran, though speaking in a different historical context, wants to change the world as it is today. Adil Çiftçi sees two reasons for Fazlur Rahman's juxtaposition, in other words, for his anti-Gadamerism. Firstly, the Koran is God's word; "*onun muradını bilmek için kendimizi ona yüklemek değil, onu 'dinlemek' zorundayız*—in order to know what it wants, we must, rather than impose ourselves, *listen* to it." (p. 140)²⁹¹ Secondly, Fazlur Rahman recalls that throughout the Islamic tradition "wild" interpretations have imported private prejudices into the text, and that happened not under the label of "application" but already on the level of [alleged] "understanding". Fazlur Rahman would, according to Çiftçi, not be in conflict with Gadamer as far as openness towards "all influences of one's own historicity" is concerned in application. But Fazlur Rahman sees no objective basis for such an application, if there is not, before the application, an objective grasp of what the Text means. (p. 140)

Discussion: Applying Mathematics, Laws, and Ethics

Among the studies to be presented here, Adil Çiftçi's is the most specialised in hermeneutics and methodology. Discussion will consequently also focus on hermeneutic questions. Firstly, we have to revisit Çiftçi's presentation of Gadamer, (A)–(B), then his discussion—and defence—of Fazlur Rahman, (C)–(J).

(A) The Power of Tradition

(Cf. above, at note 284 on p. 122.) Like Fazlur Rahman, Çiftçi refutes an allegedly Gadamerian position which Gadamer actually never held. (Cf. above, p. 118 on historical determinism.) Gadamer stresses that tradition is powerful, but he does not make it all-powerful. Çiftçi has in the course of his discussion silently introduced an interesting distinction which Gadamer would not have made. He strictly distinguishes text and tradition. Both are powerful factors for him. But while tradition is for him a retaining power, the text has, in his eyes, a reforming power. The advantage

²⁹¹ What is translated in this quote by "it" and thus taken to mean the Koran may also be referring to God.

of this view is that it describes well what happens ideally when one is rethinking. After all, his book is called “Rethinking Islam ...”. The fresh look at the old text sets free a great power. Thus empowered, the text can change something today, because it is stronger than long held lore, which can thus be discovered to be false, illegitimately appealing to the text, and not binding. But Çiftçi did not consider these problems of his distinction, or separation, of text and tradition:

- a. Does not the belief that one has immediate access to the text under evasion of tradition make you blind, and therefore helpless, towards the influence of tradition?
- b. Should not any text—at least in its form—be seen as being itself the product of a tradition? Does that not render invalid the distinction between an ever fresh source point, the text, and the sticky tenacious stream of tradition?
- c. Is it not our consideration of tradition—especially when we find it to have misunderstood the text—that makes us cautious about our present attempt to understand the text: it will also be discovered imperfect sooner or later.

(B) Objective Understanding

(Cf. above, at note 282 on p. 122.) Çiftçi’s Gadamer justifies objective understanding because of the distance between subject matter and the reader. This is not Gadamer’s own view, however. For him, the mere concept of ‘objective understanding’ betrays epistemological and hermeneutical unawareness. Objectivity is precisely the static ideal which Gadamer wants to overcome through his emphasis on the hermeneutical productivity of historical distance.²⁹² Possibly, but confusingly, Adil Çiftçi uses “objective” to mean ‘with greater clarity’. This is probably due to the fact that in the Eng-

²⁹² Cf. the whole chapter: part 2, ii.1.c, where Gadamer says that it is the distance of “times” which provides safe criteria for interpretation: „Hier ist es nicht zuviel, von einer echten Produktivität des Geschehens zu sprechen. Jedermann kennt die eigentümliche Ohnmacht unseres Urteils dort, wo uns nicht der Abstand der Zeiten sichere Maßstäbe anvertraut hat.“ (p. 302) In 1985, Gadamer widened his concept of distance, in an “Attempt at Self-Correction”, to mean not only temporal distance but also the distancing from oneself that takes place, e.g., in the conscious search for the common ground in a conversation: „Es muß sich nicht immer um einen geschichtlichen Abstand handeln, und es ist durchaus nicht immer der Zeitenabstand als solcher, der imstande ist, falsche Überresonanzen und verzerrende Applikationen zu überwinden. Der Abstand erweist sich sehr wohl auch in Gleichzeitigkeit als ein hermeneutisches Moment, z.B. in der Begegnung zwischen Personen, die im Gespräch erst den gemeinsamen Grund suchen [...]“. (*Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 2, p. 9)

lish expression 'objective understanding' the word 'objective' has a rather adverbial function (understanding objectively) and seems to mean: 'in striving to overcome one's false prejudice' (cf. 'sachlich') whereas German philosophers—even though they may well accept that the human mind can have access to reality—have an allergic reaction to the expression because it sounds dogmatic to them: understanding the object as it is. Such a claim may imply one is missing that every access to reality is from a certain perspective.

(C) *One World, Many Horizons*

(Cf. above, at note 283 on p. 122.) It is not obvious that Çiftçi understood what Gadamer was describing in creating the image of the fused horizons. Gadamer's point was, here, not the otherness of the text's world (*alternatif bir 'dünya'*)²⁹³ but—while certainly admitting for the difference of perspectives—the discovery that one starts understanding a text when one sees that it is in fact talking about *the same things* which oneself has been wondering about: text and interpreter have a *common* area of experience!²⁹⁴

Gadamer's description of understanding-agreement ('Verständigung')²⁹⁵ can be systematised as working in two steps. First, one should try to place oneself, as much as possible, into the other's *other* horizon.²⁹⁶ But going there is only necessary to avoid *semantic* misunderstanding. It does not make for a real dialogue yet. Understanding takes place only when you return to your point of view and then no longer look at your partner's horizon but at *the objects* you are discussing.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ „Solche Anerkennung der Andersheit des anderen, die dieselbe zum Gegenstande objektiver Erkenntnis macht, ist insofern eine grundsätzliche Suspension seines Anspruchs.“ (*Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 1, p. 309)

²⁹⁴ „Es gibt so wenig einen Gegenwartshorizont für sich, wie es historische Horizonte gibt, die man zu gewinnen hätte. *Vielmehr ist Verstehen immer der Vorgang der Verschmelzung solcher vermeintlich für sich seiender Horizonte.*“ (Ibid., vol. 1, p. 311, Gadamer's italics)

²⁹⁵ In the translators' preface (p. xvi) of the revised translation of *Wahrheit und Methode* (cf. above, footnote 142), 'Verständigung' is explained as: *coming to an understanding/agreement with someone.*

²⁹⁶ „Wer es unterläßt, derart sich in den historischen Horizont zu versetzen, aus dem die Überlieferung spricht, wird die Bedeutung der Überlieferungsinhalte mißverstehen.“ (*Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 1, p. 308)

²⁹⁷ „Insofern scheint es eine berechtigte hermeneutische Forderung, daß man sich in den andern versetzen muß, um ihn zu verstehen. Indessen fragt es sich, ob eine solche Parole nicht gerade das Verständnis schuldig bleibt, das von einem verlangt wird. Es ist genauso wie im Gespräch, das wir mit jemandem nur zu dem Zwecke führen, um ihn besser kennenzulernen, d.h. um seinen Standort und seinen Hori-

(D) How Necessary Is Method?

(Cf. above, at note 253 on p. 113.) If we do not approach the Koran with method, we will lose the Koran, says Fazlur Rahman. But has he really argued convincingly for the necessity of method-in-reading? His argument depends on his shift of revelatory authority from the command to the intention. One needs a method to find the intention. This is prone to raise objections from right and left, so to speak.

Once one starts speculating about an ethical substructure of the Koranic commands, one risks losing the Koran altogether. One builds that substructure, and for that, one has to build a methodological scaffolding first. Why, instead of constructing rules for oneself, does one not simply apply the rules we already have: the Koran?

The above position supposes that one needs a method only if one wants to get beneath the surface commands. And in fact Fazlur Rahman seems to believe exactly this, since his call for methodology arises only out of his need to find out the ethics underneath. That however is what could be termed the fallacy of mathematical hermeneutics. When only completely artificial, abstract entities are involved, it may be clear which rule applies. In real life however, there are no unambiguous cases. Any rule is *PER DEFINITIONEM* an abstraction and generalisation. Why is it precisely this rule that applies now? What does it mean in this case? Which other rules come in? You cannot find (i.) a one-for-all-cases rule that would decide which rule applies for which situation and what that rule means in that situation, because you need rules for that one-for-all-cases rule's application, *AD INFINITUM*; nor can you (ii.) state individual rules for each case, because that would again mean that you would have to state rules *AD INFINITUM*. So, the hermeneutical problems do not start only when dealing with the Koran as a book of ethics (to use Fazlur Rahman's formulation); similar problems occur when seeing it as a law book.

(E) Being a Romantic

(Cf. above, at note 281 on p. 122.) Çiftçi wants to defend Fazlur Rahman against the accusation of being a Romantic. Çiftçi therefore quotes Fazlur Rahman as arguing against the attempt to understand God better than God understands Himself. That—is Çiftçi's implicit argument—would really be Romantic. But by saying that, Çiftçi only refutes one part of the

zont zu ermassen. Das ist kein wahres Gespräch, d.h. es wird darin nicht die Verständigung über eine Sache gesucht." (Ibid.)

accusation. Admittedly, that bit of Romantic hermeneutics (understanding the authors better than they understood themselves) does not apply precisely to what Fazlur Rahman does. But that is not only so because we have an omniscient author here, but also because God's authorship of the Koran is, according to Fazlur Rahman, far more indirect than in the case of human authors. And certainly Fazlur Rahman would agree with the formula 'understanding the Koran better than Muhammad understood it'. Fazlur Rahman has no awareness of effective-history, and does not want to have any. He operates in what is commonly called the Romantic pattern, and Adil Çiftçi has not disproved that claim. He might have discussed

- a. whether the (pejorative) label 'Romantic' is useful in general, and
- b. whether in the case of a text like the Koran, with Muhammad probably not at his everyday consciousness when proclaiming it, one can apply the same criteria as for a normal text, i.e., one composed consciously by an undisputedly human author.

(F) Two Historicalities?

(Cf. above, at note 285 on p. 123.) Nowhere in the text does Çiftçi criticise Fazlur Rahman's problematic view that one can objectively produce today the normative meaning of the past, i.e., in this case, of an ancient text. Çiftçi calls our contemporary conditions, which "influence" only the translation of those fixed meanings for today, "historicality". If those contemporary conditions can be seen objectively and, again, do not actively shape our view of any other period within history, it is an unnecessary and indeed confusing complication to call them "historicality". Talk of "historicality" (*Geschichtlichkeit*) implies that one is aware of the effects of history on one's own perception of it. Simply setting Gadamer's view besides Fazlur Rahman's contrary view, and even using the key anti-objectivism concept of Gadamer (and his predecessors) in the presentation, without bringing the two views into an argument is not taking philosophy seriously.

(G) A Guidance

(Cf. above, at note 286 on p. 123.) Fazlur Rahman has a strong case when he says the Koran is a book of ethics because it is "a guidance for human beings". He can adduce a Koranic self-definition. Still, three questions remain:

- a. Is "a guidance for human beings" really a complete definition, which excludes the Koran's functioning in any other way; e.g., as a (strictly monotheistic) theology?
- b. Does "guidance" mean what Fazlur Rahman wants it to mean: ethical doctrine? It may, clearly. But apart from the alternative option 'law book', which Fazlur Rahman sees, other possible ways of understanding 'hudā' (guidance) should not be overlooked: 'The book which has come down as a guidance' need not refer to the *content* of the Koran but can refer, e.g., to the *historical fact* that Muhammad was preaching in God's name. Or, the guidance is not meant as stipulating by norms but by *predictions*: God controls all human behaviour and now tells people what He is going to ordain.
- c. Is not a different kind of questioning that verse, and the Koran, also true to the text? E.g., what does the fact that God wants to guide human beings say about God and human beings? Cf. the discussion of an anthropology of obedience (above, p. 81) and the creativity of being guided (below, p. 189 (b.) and (c.)).

(H) *Mental Reconstruction and the Applicability Dogma*

(Cf. above, at note 287 on p. 123.) Çiftçi says, with Fazlur Rahman, that understanding the Koran is allocating a place for each Koranic command within the whole of the Koranic world-view; this world-view has to be re-expressed in every time according to each time's particular intellectual situation. Çiftçi has not pointed out the problems involved.

- a. To understand understanding as giving to the individual phenomenon a place within the whole is a plausible, and indeed classical²⁹⁸ view. However, if the whole is identified with the system the Koran constructs, that is a restricted form of understanding,²⁹⁹ which should be termed mental reconstruction.
- b. How can the dialogue between a contemporary world view and the Koranic intention work in an honest way? Would not benevolent modern readers impute to the Koran an intention which they find acceptable? The Koran could not defend itself, even if it actually intended to criticise an element of a modern world view. On the other hand, those modern readers will never criticise a Koranic intention, because the

²⁹⁸ Cf., e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey, quoted by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, vol. 1, p. 202.

²⁹⁹ At least if the Koran does not contain all the knowable truth about everything; Fazlur Rahman would not claim that either.

whole task of their reading is to re-formulate the Koran in a manner acceptable today. This goes back to what should be called Fazlur Rahman's applicability dogma. This is to say, he claims that "if the results of understanding fail in application now, then either there has been a failure to assess the present situation correctly or a failure in understanding the Qur'ān".³⁰⁰ The third possibility, viz., that it is the Koranic intention which is wrong, is not even mentioned, because Fazlur Rahman presupposes that the Koran is God's will, and therefore infallible. Would it not be much more convincing to *establish* the Koran's ethical superiority rather than starting from it as an axiom unchallenged?

(I) *Criteria and Presuppositions*

(Cf. above, at note 289 on p. 125.) When asking himself on which criteria Fazlur Rahman relies for correctly drawing ethical principles from the Koranic legislation, Çiftçi produces a list of four points. It is an important list, the result of a considerable effort of abstraction. However, it does not provide criteria for correct understanding, but is a list of (some of) Fazlur Rahman's silent presuppositions. As such it is useful. It demonstrates that Fazlur Rahman's method depends on claims he never bothered establishing.

(J) *Careful Study*

(Cf. above, at note 290 on p. 125.) Çiftçi states that Fazlur Rahman's two methodological steps have an inductive and deductive character respectively. This is a correct observation. Then Çiftçi says that according to Fazlur Rahman, knowledge of today's conditions is necessary for an apt application of the norms found.³⁰¹ Fazlur Rahman writes: the application

³⁰⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*, p. 7. Çiftçi quotes that passage on his p. 137. What is termed here Fazlur Rahman's applicability dogma seems to be his replacement for the classical dogma of the Koran's inerrancy, which is based on what the Koran says about itself. Cf., e.g., 2:2; 4:82; 16:102; 22:54; 39:28; 43:4. Fazlur Rahman's thought can be formalised as follows: (1) The Koran has been applied successfully in earlier times. (2) Therefore, it can be applied successfully today, (3) if only understood correctly. The problems within this train of thought are: a. Where do we get the criteria for "successful" application? b. (2) does not follow logically from (3). c. Or everything depends on (3) which however does not offer a criterion for "correct" understanding other than possibly 'what makes for successful application of the Koran today', in which case the whole train of thought is circular, a PETITIO PRINCIPII and of no argumentative value.

³⁰¹ The reference Çiftçi adduces for that is *Islam & Modernity*, p. 6, where no such claim is made. It is supposed here that he is referring to the passage quoted in the text which is to be found *ibid.*, p. 7.

of the general norms today “requires the careful study of the present situation and the analysis of its various component elements so that we can assess the current situation [...]”. Fazlur Rahman’s own words contain a key to criticise or develop his approach. In his formulation (“careful study [...] assess”, rather than ‘know and understand’) he demonstrates his awareness of the difficulties involved in such an assessment, which will within history never be complete ‘knowledge and understanding’. Now, if Fazlur Rahman is able to see that difficulty about objectively seeing our own situation, he could have been brought to a similar insight concerning the past. Neither the 7th century Arabian milieu nor the intention of the text will ever be understood conclusively as long as human history goes on. But since Çiftçi converted his Fazlur Rahman into an objectivist about the present, he deprived himself of the instruments which could have demonstrated, from Fazlur Rahman’s own insights, the problems with an objectivism about the past.

Conclusion

Adil Çiftçi has produced a high level study on Fazlur Rahman. It does not restrict itself to translation and repetition but brings in other strands of scholarship. Thus Adil Çiftçi has made Fazlur Rahman’s approach clearer. However, many of the problems with that approach which Fazlur Rahman did not see have not been tackled by Çiftçi either. In merely reconstructing the author’s intention rather than also discussing in a new light problems which arise, Çiftçi’s dealing with Fazlur Rahman is in fact similar to what Fazlur Rahman does with the Koran. But the achievement Adil Çiftçi has to contribute to Muslim theology should not be seen so much in a refinement of methodology, where he has left many questions open, but in his application of Fazlur Rahman’s approach and thus his revisiting of Islam’s core tenets as a modern thinker. Çiftçi’s observations such as the ethical relevance of monotheism as uniting humanity (cf. above, p. 125) are important insights. But they are in danger of remaining hidden within a multitude of methodological musings.

Felix Körner

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Rethinking Islam

ERGON VERLAG

MISK

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herausgegeben

von

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