

Fazlur Rahman: Revelation Historicised

This chapter aims to examine the relationship between Fazlur Rahman's theory of revelation and his Qur'ānic hermeneutics. The question of whether Rahman's Qur'ānic hermeneutics have their roots in his theory of revelation should be divided from the very outset into two questions, one theoretical and the other practical. On the theoretical level, the question concerns how Rahman uses his theory of revelation to develop certain hermeneutical theories when approaching the Qur'ān. On the practical level, the question concerns how Rahman uses his hermeneutical theories in his interpretation of certain texts or themes of the Qur'ān. To address these questions, this chapter first presents the key ideas and principles associated with Rahman's theory of revelation. This involves Rahman's idea about the nature of revelation and Muhammad's role in the process of revelation, including his own role in shaping the precise wording of his revelatory experiences. Then, it examines the extent to which Rahman's account of revelation has been influenced by theories of revelation presented by specific medieval Muslim philosophers. Among Muslim philosophers, I focus mainly on al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, and occasionally on Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Kindi (d. 259/873). The remainder of the chapter will address the two aforementioned questions in two separate sections. I explore Rahman's hermeneutical theories and their connections to various features of his theory of revelation. Then, I choose certain examples that are crucial for understanding Rahman's methods of interpreting the Qur'ān. As examples of how his interpretive method functions in practice, I look at how it is applied to the themes of gender issues and the Qur'ānic institution of *shūrā* (consultation).

Rahman's account of revelation

The nature of revelation and the Prophet's role in it

Rahman's theory of revelation begins with the question of what shaped Muhammad's revelatory experiences. Did the revelations that Muhammad received consist of words or images, or a mixture of both? Rahman is not satisfied with the traditional view that revelation was given to the Prophet in a mere verbal form. He rejects the idea that Muhammad heard some words in 'an ordinary human sense' during the event of revelation.¹ Rahman rejects the idea that the Prophet heard God's message in the same way that his addressees heard Muhammad's words. For him, revelation included 'an actual mental sound, not a physical sound'.² Drawing

on a number of Qur'ānic verses (such as Q 42:51–2; 12:108; 75:16–19; and 20:114), Rahman argues that what the Prophet received in the process of revelation was an 'idea-word, not a physically acoustic word'.³ Some scholars have interpreted Rahman's notion of 'idea-words' to mean that what the Prophet received were messages in the form of images, symbols and visions.⁴ In Rahman's account, revelation also consisted of 'feelings' created in the Prophet's heart; indeed, God's message came to Muhammad in this way.⁵ This means that 'ideas and feelings float about in revelation', and that the Prophet's feelings, expectations and anxieties are parts of the revelations he received, as the Qur'ān states (Q 80:1–3).⁶ Therefore, what shaped the revelation was the mixture or combination of feelings, ideas and non-acoustic words, and thus they were all born in the heart and mind of the Prophet during the process of revelation.⁷

Central to Rahman's theory is the idea that the Prophet was not a passive recipient of revelation. There are three main elements in Rahman's argument that are closely associated with the notion that the Prophet played an active role as participant in the act of revelation: (1) Muhammad's personality, his life experience and his moral-spiritual consciousness played a key role in the content of the revelation; (2) the Prophet's mind was actively involved in the process of revelation; and (3) the Angel Gabriel was not a physical being (existing 'outside' of the Prophet) that mechanically delivered God's message to the Prophet.

The connection between the Prophet's personality and revelation

Rahman believes that Muhammad's personality and feelings played a key role in his revelatory experiences: 'whereas on the one hand, the Revelation emanated from God, on the other, it was also intimately connected with his deeper personality'.⁸ Rahman did not deny that revelation was of a transcendent origin, but argued that it was 'equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muhammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record'.⁹ This emphasis on the role of the Prophet's personality in somehow shaping the revelation is strongly related to the idea that although Muhammad did not consciously seek out prophethood, he had to prepare and increase his potential to receive divine revelations from God. Indeed, revelation could not have taken place 'in a vacuum' since the Prophet, having been an orphan himself, had an acute sensitivity towards the moral problems of his society, which made him think deeply about them. Rahman asserts:

The Prophet had certain problems on his mind that tormented him, that drove him to the cave of Hera to contemplate and pray to God for a solution, and that it is then that the *wahy*, the divine guidance, burst upon him. How can all this happen in a vacuum?¹⁰

That is, the Prophet's concerns about the moral problems of his society provided the broader context in which revelation came into being, and played a key role in determining the content of the divine revelations he received in the later stages of

his life. Muhammad had to possess some 'potentials' without which he could not have been able to receive revelation.¹¹ Muhammad's contemplation in the cave of Hera prepared his potential human intellect for the emanation of revelation from God. These potentials were acquired both by natural endowments given to him by God and by his own personal efforts, meaning that revelation had both human and divine aspects. While Muhammad did not consciously seek out prophethood, he nevertheless prepared himself for such a task,¹² since he had 'an intense, natural, inborn sensitivity for moral problems . . . [and] this sensitivity was increased by his having been orphaned so early in life'.¹³ As such, in Rahman's humanistic approach, *wahy* is the culmination of a long internal process and a deep contemplative mood, meaning that 'Muhammad's mind had to be in a receptive state in order to be illuminated through revelation'.¹⁴ Indeed, for Rahman, the revelation was somehow conditioned by the personality of Muhammad.

Rahman further asserts that Muhammad 'was not by temperament an aggressive or obtrusive man'.¹⁵ A close study of Muhammad's life shows that he was 'a naturally pensive, introverted, shy and withdrawn' person who 'had been impelled by an inner urge born of an acute perception of the existential human situation to enter the arena of historic action'.¹⁶ According to Rahman, this personality of the Prophet had an influence on the revelations that he received, especially in its early stages. Closely related to his deeper personality, the Prophet's early revelations were characterised by 'a staccato-like abruptness' and consisted of 'very short expressions like sudden volcanic outbursts or the passage of a huge river through a gorge'.¹⁷ That is, Rahman's theory implies that Muhammad's personality played a far greater role in the formation, content and style of revelation than is traditionally understood.

The role of the Prophet's heart and mind in revelation

Rahman's idea about Muhammad's role in revelation is closely related to his views on the nature of revelation. One of the main characteristics of prophets, according to Rahman, is that God's message 'fills' their heart.¹⁸ As noted in Chapter 1, the Qur'ān in a number of verses (Q 26:193; 2:97) states that God's message has not been brought down into the Prophet's ear, but has been brought upon the Prophet's heart (*qalb*). Drawing on these verses, Rahman suggests that God's message was not simply heard by the Prophet but was installed in his heart.¹⁹ Rahman reads the Qur'ānic verse 'if God so willed, He could seal up your heart' (Q 42:24) to mean that there will be no more revelation without the contribution of the Prophet's heart: 'the Prophet's consciousness was invaded from time to time, when the opportunity for it arose, by some force and this force definitely came from his heart'.²⁰ It is in light of Rahman's emphasis on the role of the Prophet's heart in revelation that his notion of 'feeling-idea-words' becomes clearer. The non-acoustic words that were born in the Prophet's mind had become intertwined with his feelings in the process of revelation. Muhammad received revelation as mental words ('idea-words')

that had become closely tied with his heart ('feeling'),²¹ meaning that revelation involved an internal process, integral to the heart and mind of the Prophet. Revelation, according to Rahman, 'pushed so forcefully through [the Prophet's] heart that immediately it got clothed in words'.²²

The role of the angelic figure in revelation

The idea that revelation was sent down to Muhammad's heart and that Muhammad heard words mentally is intimately connected to Rahman's rejection of the externality of the angelic figure vis-à-vis the Prophet. For Rahman, the agent of revelation was not an angel as traditionally understood; rather, it was the Spirit. This Spirit was not external in relation to the Prophet and did not have a physical nature, meaning that it was 'spiritual and internal' to Muhammad.²³ Rahman suggests that God 'infuses a Spirit in the Prophet's mind'²⁴ in the actual process of revelation when required. Rahman considers Spirit as 'the highest form of angelic nature and closest to God', rather than identifying it as a mediator between God and the Prophet, or the Angel Gabriel.²⁵ He asserts:

[Muslim orthodoxy] tried to portray the angel of revelation, the 'trusted spirit', as some kind of a being who came from the outside and gave to the Prophet messages from God, more or less in the same manner as the postman hands you over your mail. And . . . this mechanical sort of picture has done a lot of damage to a real understanding of the relationship between the person of the Prophet and the Qur'ān.²⁶

This view is in line with my discussions in the previous chapter. Traditional accounts highlighted Gabriel's role as the transmitter of revelation in order to preserve the transcendental features of the revelation, and thus to downplay Muhammad's role in revelation. For Rahman, the idea that the Prophet received revelation via the mediation of Gabriel was invented in the eighth or ninth century of the Common Era. Although angels (*malā'ika*) are mentioned in the Qur'ān, they are never referred to as the angels of revelation.²⁷ It is in this context that Rahman rejects the validity of those hadiths in which the angel is depicted as a physical figure conversing with Muhammad in the presence of his companions. Orthodoxy, according to Rahman, 'made the Revelation of the Prophet entirely through the ear and external to him and regarded the angel . . . an entirely external agent'.²⁸

God's role in revelation

Rahman sought to distinguish between the source of revelation and the process of revelation in his theory. Insofar as its source is concerned, the revelation was external to the Prophet, but it was internal to him in regard to its process. The words Muhammad heard in the revelation were mental, and the Spirit was internal to him, but the ultimate source of revelation was external to him: 'the divine messages broke

through the consciousness of the Prophet from an agency whose source is God',²⁹ and thus 'the true revealing subject always remains God'.³⁰ That is, 'the entire process occurs in [the Prophet's] mind . . . insofar as the psychological process [of revelation] is concerned, but is Revealed Word insofar as its source lies beyond his reach'.³¹ In addition, although the Prophet's mind had to go through various stages of development prior to receiving his first revelatory experiences, his extraordinary mind and personality were also God's endowment. That is, although the Prophet had to prepare himself for his prophetic career, he had 'a potential revelation in him' bestowed by God.³² Therefore, in both stages – in the Prophet's preparation for beginning his prophetic mission and in the actual process of revelation – God was the ultimate source.

Rahman compares revelation with other forms of inspiration, attempting to distinguish the former from the latter. Psychologically speaking, divine revelation is similar to poetic and mystic inspiration, and the relation between ideas, feelings and words is the same in each event.³³ However, the prophetic revelations were 'entirely *sui generis*' and should be differentiated from any other form of inspiration in the sense that 'divine revelation forms ascending degrees of the same phenomena of creative inspiration'.³⁴ Rahman notes that prophets are different from philosophers, mystics and poets because they have 'sensitive and impregnable personalities', enabling them to be recipients of divine messages.³⁵ They are recipients of some special power, gifted by God, which enables them to 'see and know things the way others are not able to'.³⁶

The Prophet's role in releasing God's Words: the Qur'ān's duality

The last key theme of Rahman's theory concerns how the Qur'ānic text emerged from the revelation. To explain this, Rahman attributes another role to the Prophet within the process of revelation. We recall that the Spirit is an agency in Rahman's theory which developed in the Prophet's heart and that the Prophet's heart represents an intermediate sphere in which God's Words were stored. The Prophet's role was then to release the Spirit as well as the mental words and visions, and to clothe them in acoustic words. For Rahman, the 'Qur'ān was first "brought down" to the lowest heaven (i.e. the Prophet's heart) . . . and then relevant verbal passages produced when needed'.³⁷ Drawing on Hocking's *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, Rahman argued that the Prophet had a powerful ability that enabled him to propel his feelings 'automatically into an idea, and the idea expresses itself automatically in words'.³⁸ In Rahman's account, the nature of the words the Prophet heard in revelation is different from the words he used for his audiences. The former consists of 'non-acoustic' words, while the latter includes words in an 'ordinary human sense'. The Prophet uses his own words (in acoustic forms) for his audiences but these words are in conformity with the mental words received in revelation.

Therefore, in addition to the role the Prophet played in revelation, Rahman suggests that Muhammad transformed mental Words (or what he identifies as 'idea-words') into acoustic words (or what he identifies as 'sound-words'). In this way, the Qur'ān becomes a part of Muhammad's speech: 'the Qur'ān is entirely the Word of God and, in an ordinary sense, also entirely the word of Muhammad'.³⁹ The Qur'ān, for Rahman, 'is entirely the Word of God insofar as it is infallible and absolutely free from falsehood, but, insofar as it comes to the Prophet's heart and then his tongue, it was entirely his word'.⁴⁰

This sense of the Qur'ān's dual nature, as both human and divine, is the result of the revelation being both external to, but also closely connected to, the Prophet's personality, including his feelings, reflections and life experiences. Rahman's theory of revelation, I suggest, justifies appropriately his view about the two-fold character of the Qur'ān – the idea which emphasises that the Qur'ān does not only have a divine nature, but also has a human aspect attached to it. In fact, Rahman utilises his theory of revelation in order to argue for this last point that opens up a flexible space for exegesis, which will be demonstrated later. The Qur'ān was not merely a product of the Prophet's subjective faculties, nor was it completely external to his personality. In Rahman's account, prophecy is considered a divine favour which cannot be acquired by sheer effort alone, but has also humanistic features since the Prophet's human faculties must be raised to their heights by his personal efforts prior to receiving the revelation.

The final issue that should be emphasised here is that although Rahman acknowledges the essential character of the Scripture as an 'Arabic Qur'ān', he does not discuss in detail how 'idea-words' received by the Prophet in the process of revelation are specifically transferred into the Arabic language. This is the main shortcoming of Rahman's theory. Rahman asserts that the Prophet had the power of transferring his revelatory experience into words, familiar for his immediate audiences, because Muhammad, like other prophets, had to do everything to 'get his message across'.⁴¹ This power, which was endowed by God, enabled Muhammad to propel his feeling into ideas and words, which is to say that there is 'an organic relationship between feelings, ideas and words'.⁴² However, it is not clear how much the Prophet was guided by God in transferring his experience into 'sound-words', or how much he himself contributed to the wording of the revelations.⁴³ It seems clear that Muhammad's role was more than that of a mere transmitter of 'idea-words' into the Arabic language in Rahman's theory, but the extent to which the Prophet himself contributes to this process remains somehow unclear.

The sources of Rahman's theory of revelation

As the account outlined in Chapter 2 made clear, Rahman's theory of revelation is unacceptable to those Muslim scholars who believe in what was there described as a traditional theory of revelation. Rahman's views challenge various aspects of the

traditional accounts of revelation, which assert that revelation occurred verbally and Muhammad had only to repeat what he had received from the Angel Gabriel. One could ask at this stage whether Rahman's theory of revelation is rooted in any medieval Islamic sources. By way of example, we might point to the influence of the Mu'tazili idea that the Qur'ān is not the eternal speech of God and was not a book given to the Prophet at one time. Rahman himself appreciated the Mu'tazili position on the temporal nature of revelation.⁴⁴ Similar to the Mu'tazilis, Rahman believed in the *createdness* of the Qur'ān, and thus like the Mu'tazilis held a position that might be said to involve 'the humanization of the Word of God', although the Mu'tazilis, as discussed in the previous chapter, did not often go so far as to state that the Prophet played a role in articulating his revelation, such that the Qur'ān might be viewed as the Prophet's own word.⁴⁵ In addition, Rahman, in a fashion not dissimilar to the Mu'tazilis, has stressed the Qur'ānic principle of *naskh* (abrogation) in his writings to defend the idea that the Qur'ān is created.⁴⁶ I shall demonstrate this in detail later.

In addition to the Mu'tazilis, Rahman has also been heavily influenced by a number of medieval Muslim philosophers' accounts of revelation.⁴⁷ The fact that Rahman wrote his PhD thesis on Avicenna's psychology at Oxford University gives some indication that he was interested in medieval philosophical teachings.⁴⁸ Further, Rahman's teaching career, which included lecturing in Islamic philosophy at Durham University from 1950 until 1958, reveals his interest in medieval philosophical ideas.⁴⁹ His interest in philosophy continued and he later wrote a book entitled *Prophecy in Islam* in which he explained the theories of revelation and prophecy developed by medieval Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.⁵⁰ In terms of the influence of Islamic philosophical teachings on his ideas, Rahman himself asserted that 'from the later forties to the mid-fifties I experienced an acute skepticism brought about by the study of philosophy. It shattered my traditional beliefs.'⁵¹ In addition, his interest in philosophical teachings is evident in the light of his reasoning about why philosophical rationalism was a necessary instrument of religion. Although philosophy had been effectively banned from the Islamic curriculum since the twelfth century of the Common Era, Rahman considered it a 'perennial intellectual need' and indispensable for instilling an analytical attitude in future generations of Muslim intellectuals.⁵² As a result, given that Rahman was interested in philosophy and wrote extensively on medieval Muslim philosophers, it is not unreasonable to assume that he developed his theory of revelation under the influence of Islamic philosophical thought. This section examines how some aspects of Rahman's theory of revelation have been influenced by the accounts of revelation proposed by medieval Muslim philosophers, focusing mainly on Farabi and Ibn Sina, and occasionally on al-Kindi. Here, I do not analyse the complete oeuvre of these philosophers, but only consider salient elements of their work insofar as they reflect Rahman's ideas about revelation. In other words, it is not claimed here that Rahman's ideas about revelation are totally influenced by the aforementioned philosophers, but rather that certain features of his ideas reflect the philosophers' influence.

Farabi's and Ibn Sina's projects

Both al-Farabi and Ibn Sina developed theories related to revelation and prophecy in their works. Al-Kindi's contribution to this field, however, is not as detailed as that of Farabi and Ibn Sina, since he only points to a few issues concerning revelation in his writings. His importance, as Frank Griffel notes, lies mainly in the fact that 'with him began the tradition of adopting concepts . . . in Greek philosophy to explain processes of prophecy and revelation'.⁵³ In Islamic Neoplatonic ideas developed by a number of philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, a descending series of ten immaterial Intellects emanates or flows from God (or the First Cause) until it reaches the last. From the tenth Intellect, which is the lowest of the Intellects and governs the terrestrial world, emanates the human souls and the four basic elements of life, namely fire, air, water and earth. Therefore, Islamic Neoplatonism in general rejects the traditional Islamic belief concerning creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing and in time).⁵⁴ The crucial element in this theory is the idea that the Active Intellect (*'aql al-fa'āl*), which is the ultimate source of knowledge and the cause of human intellection, is responsible for establishing a link between the spiritual realm and the physical world, and thus its function involves giving universal concepts to humans, enabling them to acquire knowledge.⁵⁵ The corollary of this idea, which is important to the theme of this chapter, is that the Active Intellect is considered to be the channel through which prophetic knowledge, or revelation, is sent to human beings. That is, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina believe that any form of knowledge, including the content of revelation, is brought about only through a process of emanation from the Active Intellect to human beings.

According to al-Farabi, prophets gain knowledge from the Active Intellect only through emanation, or the overflow of the divine.⁵⁶ Central to his account of prophecy is the notion that prior to the stage in which the prophet receives revelation his intellect must go through various stages of development. It is only at the end of this development that the prophet reaches the stage of conjunction with the Active Intellect (*ittiṣāl bil-'aql al-fa'āl*) and accordingly receives revelation. This is the highest stage of human perfection or the highest power of human intellection – or what al-Farabi calls the Acquired Intellect (*'aql al-mustafād*).⁵⁷ Al-Farabi further asserts that human beings, including prophets, also possess the faculty of imagination through which they receive abstract knowledge. This imaginative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) 'acts as a reservoir of sensible impressions after the disappearance of the objects of sensation' and 'combines sensible impressions to form a complex sensible image'.⁵⁸ This faculty must also be developed to its perfection in prophets in order to receive revelation: 'The man [viz. the prophet] who has that sight [when his imaginative faculty reaches its utmost perfection] comes to enjoy overwhelming and wonderful pleasure, and he sees wonderful things which can in no way whatever be found in other existents.'⁵⁹ Al-Farabi argues that the rational as well as the imaginative faculties are highly developed in prophets. He emphasises that this is a special ability gifted by God to His prophets, enabling them to receive abstract knowledge from the Active Intellect, and to transform this

knowledge into figurative images, by means of parables, examples or metaphors, that could be understood by most people.⁶⁰

Like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina believes that there are three faculties that are essential to prophetic activity, namely, the rational power (*al-quwwa al-'aqliyya*), the imaginative power (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) and the effective power (*al-quwwa al-muaththira*).⁶¹ These powers are not only limited to prophets, since all people possess them to some degree, but prophets require the utmost degree of all these powers to receive revelation from God. Ibn Sina and al-Farabi hold in common that prophetic revelation involves the reception of particular images through a process of emanation from the lowest of the celestial intellects aided by the Prophet's strong imaginative faculty. Unlike al-Farabi, however, Ibn Sina argues that the Prophet is also blessed with a strong capacity for intuition (*hads*), which is much stronger than that possessed by ordinary human beings.⁶² The Prophet's strong intuition enables him to attain instantaneous knowledge from the Active Intellect. Ibn Sina asserts:

[The prophet] will be receptive to the inspiration of the Active Intellect in all things, and the forms contained in the Active Intellect will be imprinted in him concerning all things, either all at once or nearly so. This imprinting will occur not by conforming to conversion but rather in an orderly manner that includes the middle terms . . . This is a kind of prophecy, or rather the highest of the prophetic faculties, and this faculty is most worthy of being called a 'holy faculty'. It ranks highest among the human faculties.⁶³

Prophetic revelation does not necessarily occur at the end of the various stages of intellectual actualisation. As Deborah Black has noted, for Ibn Sina, the prophet's intuition 'does not come in episodic flashes; rather, he receives *all* intelligibles from the agent intellect in a single instant'; that is, the prophet does not lack 'comprehension of the intelligible truths that he receives . . . since they are already rationally ordered and logically arranged insofar as they include the middle terms of the syllogisms that demonstrate their truth'.⁶⁴

Returning now to the initial question about how Islamic philosophical teachings, in particular those developed by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (and occasionally al-Kindi), have influenced Rahman's theory, I focus in the following section on five aspects of the theories of revelation presented by these philosophers and Rahman himself: (1) the nature of revelation; (2) the Prophet's preparation for receiving revelation; (3) the involvement of the Prophet and the angelic figure in the process of revelation; (4) the potentiality of the Prophet in receiving revelation; and (5) the Prophet's power of transmitting God's Word to his audiences.

The nature of revelation

As discussed, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina share the idea that knowledge is the product of a process of emanation from the Active Intellect to mankind. Prophets are no exceptions to this rule. They receive knowledge through a process of emanation from

the Active Intellect after the prophet's faculty of intellect has been prepared for its reception. Along similar lines, but in less detail, al-Kindi argues that the connection between God (the First Cause) and human beings is only established through the process of emanation. He asserts:

As the First Cause, Most High, is connected with us through His emanation and as we are not connected with Him in any way except through His emanation, it is, therefore, possible for the receiver of His emanation to apprehend Him only to the extent of the powers bestowed on him.⁶⁵

Like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, Rahman uses the term 'emanation' in his writings when speaking about revelation. Revelation, in Rahman's theory, emanates from God. God does not simply send His message to the Prophet as traditionally understood; instead, revelation emanates or flows from the ultimate source of all beings upon the Prophet's soul: 'God's prophets or human messengers are recipients of some special or extraordinary power which emanates from the ultimate source of all being.'⁶⁶ For Rahman, 'the Revelation emanated from God', on the one hand, and was 'intimately connected with his deeper personality' on the other hand.⁶⁷

Rahman's idea that revelation consists of non-physical and non-acoustic words is also rooted in the writings of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. From the theory of revelation proposed by them, we can conclude that revelation consists of images, symbols and visions which do not necessarily include words in acoustic form, meaning that the prophet did not simply receive a verbal revelation. The prophetic revelation involves the reception of particular images and mental sounds from the celestial souls by the prophet's imaginative faculty. For al-Farabi, the prophet receives 'an overflow of intelligibilities into his imagination, where they become subject to symbolic imitation'. These intelligibilities consist of 'symbols and images'.⁶⁸ As Muhsin Mahdi notes, in Farabi's theory, 'revelation means the reception of the theoretical intelligibles or forms' because 'the mediating human power in the contact with the active intellect . . . is the acquired intellect, and this is apparently a theoretical intellect'.⁶⁹ Similar to al-Farabi, Ibn Sina argues that 'the concepts and intellectual ideas become images and symbols of deeper reality' as well as 'creative insights' for the prophet.⁷⁰ Although Rahman does not explain what he understands to be the nature of revelation in as much detail as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, his idea that prophetic revelations include the reception of non-physical and non-acoustic words by the Prophet are found in the latter's writings.⁷¹

Prophet's preparation in receiving the revelation

Rahman's idea that the Prophet's mind should be in a receptive state and must improve its potential powers to become the recipient of revelation is rooted in al-Farabi's writings more than Ibn Sina's. As discussed, for Ibn Sina, prophets do

not need necessarily to go through various stages of actualisation before receiving knowledge from the Active Intellect, while al-Farabi argues that a human mind should prepare its potential intellect for the emanation of the Active Intellect. Indeed, Ibn Sina recognises the possibility of achieving instantaneous knowledge without necessarily following procedures for gaining this knowledge, whereas for al-Farabi prophethood is granted to a person after he has gone through a long process of intellectual comprehension. Along al-Farabi's line of thought, Rahman, as already pointed out, argues that although revelation emanates from the divine source, it is conditioned by a human's intellectual preparation.⁷² Indeed, what Rahman seems to have borrowed from al-Farabi is the idea that the contribution of the Prophet's mind and the preparation of his potential intellect are necessary preconditions for receiving divine revelation.

The involvement of the Prophet and the angel in the process of revelation

Both al-Farabi and Ibn Sina tended to explain the phenomenon of revelation within the discipline of philosophical psychology.⁷³ They share the idea that prophecy is an office that a prophet acquired through his faculty of intellect and his power of imagination. Accordingly, in addition to the prophet's involvement in the preparation of his potential intellect, his contribution to revelation also includes the involvement of his faculty of imagination and intellect within the process of revelation. Hence, another viewpoint that these philosophers and Rahman have in common has to do with the active participation or involvement of the prophet's human faculties and efforts in the process of gaining knowledge or prophetic revelations. Further, Rahman's view about the role of the angelic figure (in particular, the idea that the angel of revelation is the Spirit, not a physical being) is close to al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's ideas. Al-Farabi attempted to explain the nature of the agent of revelation with a reference to the Active Intellect and Spirit, rather than by relying on the traditional Islamic view that recognises him as Gabriel. At the beginning of his *Political Regime*, al-Farabi explicitly states that the agent of revelation ought to be identified with the 'Trusted Spirit' or the 'Holy Spirit'.⁷⁴ For him, revelation is the product of emanation and the conjunction between the Active Intellect and the prophet's soul, and thus the angel is nothing but the Active Intellect itself.⁷⁵ This understanding of the process of revelation does not leave any room for assuming that the angel had a physical nature. More importantly, neither Rahman nor the above philosophers read the Qur'ānic verse Q 2:97 (stating that the Angel Gabriel brings down revelation to the Prophet's heart) literally, and each reads this verse in a way that identifies the angel of revelation as the Spirit.⁷⁶ Like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina identifies the Active Intellect with the Spirit and the angel of revelation. The angel of revelation, for Ibn Sina, is an 'emanating power': 'Revelation is the emanation and the angel is the received emanating power that descends on the prophets as if it were an emanating continuous with the universal intellect.'⁷⁷ Indeed, Ibn Sina

considers the appearance of the angel and the hearing of his voice as an event that occurs in or through the imaginative faculty of the prophet, and thus regards it as a purely mental phenomenon.⁷⁸

The potentiality of the Prophet in receiving the revelation

In Rahman's account, prophets are identified as possessing extraordinary power, gifted by God, which enables them to receive divine messages. Although the Prophet had to improve his potential powers to receive divine revelations, Rahman argues, he had a 'potential revelation in him'.⁷⁹ Along similar lines, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina consistently emphasise in their writings that the prophet had 'potential powers' that he had to develop before he could receive the revelation. According to al-Farabi, the prophet has been endowed with an 'extraordinary intellectual gift', and his intellect develops with the aid of divine power. Ibn Sina similarly asserts that the prophet has an extraordinary power of imagination and intellectual capacities, both of which are endowed by God.⁸⁰

As discussed, Rahman likens the revelatory experiences of the Prophet to poetic or mystic inspiration insofar as their processes are concerned, but argues that the former is a unique phenomenon due to its divine origin. This idea is also rooted in the writings of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and al-Kindi, but with a minor modification. From al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's point of view, one can conclude that the prophetic experience can also be shared, though to a lesser degree, by other people, especially philosophers, in the sense that 'what the philosopher knows by reason, the prophet knows by revelation', as John Walbridge has argued.⁸¹ A true prophet, for these philosophers, is a philosopher too. Indeed, the theories presented by the philosophers in question tend to describe revelation and philosophy as different ways of reaching the same truth – an idea which sharply contrasts with the traditional Islamic view of revelation. According to al-Farabi, the main difference between philosophers and prophets is that the philosophers reach the level in which they are prepared enough to receive revelation through reflection and meditation and with the aid of external sources, whereas prophets arrive at it through their extraordinary power of imagination and intellect gifted by God and without the need of a human instructor.⁸² Ibn Sina also maintains that philosophers experience lesser degrees of intuitive ability than prophets, and thus are unable to receive the Active Intellect's emanation without the prior aid of a human teacher. Likewise, al-Kindi argues that philosophers must engage in long study, and may intend to answer the questions that are placed before them about 'true matters' with great effort and by delving into sciences such as logic and mathematics.⁸³ On the other hand, as al-Kindi suggests, 'God inspires him [the prophet] and enlightens his soul without resorting to the use of any first principles.'⁸⁴

The similarity between Rahman's and the philosophers' views about the relationship between revelation and mysticism (or poetry) and between revelation and philosophy is that revelation and prophecy are considered a natural rather than a

supernatural phenomenon. Just as Islamic philosophical tradition tends to liken revelation to philosophy, Rahman tends to liken it to poetry and mysticism. This implies that for the former the prophet is a kind of philosopher, and for the latter the prophet is a kind of mystic or poet. Indeed, in keeping with the philosophical teachings presented by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and al-Kindi, Rahman tends to explain revelation in terms of psychology, with the least possible reliance on supernatural assumptions. Insofar as their psychological processes are concerned, there is no distinction between prophecy, poetry, mystical inspirations and philosophy for both Rahman and the philosophers. Prophecy is described in the theories of revelation presented by Rahman and the philosophers in question more in terms of a natural psychological phenomenon in which human intellection reaches its culmination, since it requires appropriate effort and preparation on the prophet's part. The difference between prophecy, on the one hand, and poetry, mysticism and philosophy on the other hand, is related mainly to their ultimate sources of origination, since the prophet's mind necessarily develops by the aid of the divine power. Further, in both accounts – that developed by Rahman and those developed by the philosophers – stress has been placed on the uniqueness of the Prophet's talents and capacities, all of which have come together in his personality.

The Prophet's power of transmitting words

As discussed, for Rahman, the Prophet has the power of transforming his revelatory experience into words that are familiar for his immediate audiences. This is an essential characteristic of all prophets because they have to 'get their message across'.⁸⁵ Rahman goes on to state that 'this power determines them upon a course of action that changes the lives of whole peoples'.⁸⁶ Accordingly, prophets shook people's 'consciousness from a state of traditional placidity and hypomoral tension into one of alertness'.⁸⁷ For Rahman, one of the main characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad was that he was able to change the 'idea-words' into 'sound-words' through which the life and the worldview of people of Hijaz radically changed.

Such ideas have their roots partly in al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's writings. The discourse of the philosophers in question tends to involve the idea that prophets, unlike philosophers, are able to transfer the emanating knowledge received from the Active Intellect to other humans in clear, simple and succinct ways. In addition, a prophet must revolutionise his society with his dynamic personality and his effective power. Prophets were founders of political communities and did their best to get their message across. Ibn Sina asserts that the 'intellectual ideas become images and symbols of deeper personality and so gain strength to move people to act in a specified manner'.⁸⁸ For Farabi, 'the prophets' most important achievement is . . . their ability to cast theoretical knowledge in a figurative and metaphorical language that most people can understand', as Griffel argues.⁸⁹ Therefore, the philosophers in question believed that prophets should be able to formulate their

religious consciousness or their revelatory experience into a definite pattern of life for people to follow. This is the way through which prophets revolutionised their societies. As a result, what Rahman and the philosophers in question have in common is that (1) the prophet has the power of transferring the knowledge he has received in the process of revelation in a succinct way, and that (2) the words the prophet expresses are so effective that they change the lives of people.

What I have argued in this section centres on one idea: Rahman's humanistic approach to revelation is indebted to the philosophical Islamic discourse on revelation. Like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, Rahman believed that the Prophet was not a passive recipient of revelation, but had an active role in the process. It should be noted that the views of these philosophers about revelation have not, in general, been used by them to interpret the Qur'ān, because they were not Qur'ānic interpreters (*mufasssir*). Their ideas concerning revelation, however, have a number of consequences about approaches to the Qur'ān, some of which the philosophers themselves might not have considered, and may even go beyond what they themselves intended. For example, the immediate consequence of al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's theories of revelation is that the Qur'ān is to be understood as containing 'philosophical truths', and is replete with figurative language, metaphors, parables and even visual descriptions of past or future events. As Walbridge has noted, from such philosophical perspectives, the Qur'ān 'is essentially an imaginative rhetorical phenomenon . . . in which philosophical truths are cast in a form that will [even] be convincing to people without the ability to follow philosophical argument'.⁹⁰ Another consequence that results from the ideas of these philosophers about revelation is that any legal-oriented hermeneutic approach to the text put forward by theologians and religious jurists is subordinated to the rational philosophical-hermeneutical principles of philosophers. As such, 'the disciplines surrounding religious doctrine and law – *kalām* and *fiqh* – are subordinated to philosophy'.⁹¹ While Rahman shares many of the philosophical ideas about revelation developed by the aforementioned philosophers, he does not necessarily share some of their implications and ramifications.

The connection between revelation and Qur'ānic hermeneutics

My analysis of Rahman's theory of revelation in the first section now becomes relevant to a broader formulation of what elements an interpreter must take into account when approaching the Qur'ānic text. The aim of this section is to examine the impact of Rahman's theory of revelation on his interpretive discourses. I first argue that Rahman historicises the Prophet's revelatory experiences in his writings. Then, I discuss two hermeneutical approaches that could be found in Rahman's writings, arguing that they are intimately connected to his ideas about revelation.

Historicisation of revelation and the Qur'ān

Rahman's theory is characterised by an attempt to transfer the concept of revelation from a metaphysical and ahistorical phenomenon to a historical one. Revelation is described as a semi-mutual process in Rahman's writings – that is, it is not viewed as a one-sided relation of transmission from God to Muhammad, but rather a two-sided relation between God and Muhammad, since the latter is seen as an organic part of the revelation. For Rahman, although revelation originates from God, the locus of revelation, namely the Prophet's heart, is where it is vouchsafed in historical time. The idea that revelation must be understood within historical time is further affirmed when Rahman gives a less supernatural view of the agent of revelation. The Spirit 'which develops in the Prophet's heart . . . comes into actual revelatory operation when needed'.⁹² Indeed, Rahman suggests that the Prophet communicated revelation to his audience within an appropriate historical context. Other features of Rahman's account of revelation are to be approached as a set of principles whose goal is to historicise revelation. Rahman's account of the nature of revelation, his emphasis on the personality of the Prophet, and his idea that Muhammad's revelatory experiences required the preparation of his potential human intellect are several elements that support his historicised account of revelation. There is indeed an intimate connection between the Prophet's personality and his mission, his revelatory experiences and the text of the Qur'ān in Rahman's theory of revelation. He states:

When one reviews the performance of Muhammad . . . and studies the Qur'ān closely as the document of his revelatory experiences, one cannot fail to perceive that an inner unity and an unmistakable sense of direction are displayed in the Prophet's activity and the Qur'ānic guidance. I am, of course, talking not of the actual effect this teaching had upon Muhammad's early or late followers . . . but of the nature and the quality of this teaching, viewed in its setting, with reference to its historical context on the one hand and the personality of the Prophet on the other.⁹³

Rahman's theory sharply contrasts with the traditional view that the Qur'ān was inscribed in the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) as something written before the creation of mankind. The Qur'ān did not exist before the time when the Prophet experienced the moral problems of his society. This is why the Qur'ān is to be considered a product or document of the Prophet's revelatory experiences. According to Rahman, the failure of the majority of Muslim scholars to examine the close relationship between the Prophet's role in revelation and the genesis of the Qur'ān resulted in a failure to see the Qur'ān as the Word of God and also the word of Muhammad.⁹⁴ This resulted in their failure to implement appropriate hermeneutical approaches when interpreting the Qur'ān. Within classical Islam, insisting on the externality of the Qur'ān in relation to the personality of the Prophet Muhammad, his experiences and feelings often resulted in the task of interpretation of the Qur'ān becoming a mere linguistic exercise, or the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān.

Rahman's first hermeneutic

Strongly related to this historicisation of the Qur'ān is the idea that the Qur'ān took shape within a historical setting and was directly relevant to its immediate context. The intimate relationship between Muhammad's mind and the process of revelation in Rahman's argument involves a complete affirmation of the interconnectedness of the Qur'ān and its historical context. By drawing a close connection between the Prophet's mind and revelation, Rahman's thesis provides a strong basis for establishing a link between the Qur'ān and its immediate context. It is in this sense that the Qur'ān is, for Rahman, 'God's response through Muhammad's mind (this latter factor has been radically underplayed by the Islamic orthodoxy) to a historic situation (a factor likewise drastically restricted by the Islamic orthodoxy in a real understanding of the Qur'ān)'.⁹⁵ This implies that the Qur'ān was shaped within a specific context in a certain period of time, and thus is inevitably bound to the world of the Prophet – namely the conditions of the seventh-century Hijazi society: 'the Qur'ān and the genesis of the Islamic community occurred in the light of history and against a social-historical background'.⁹⁶

From this point, Rahman develops the view that in order to interpret the Qur'ān, one must be aware of the circumstances in which the text emerged. That is, the first key hermeneutic Rahman uses in his approach to the Qur'ān is that Qur'ānic verses must be interpreted within the broader context of their revelation, meaning that understanding the Qur'ān requires some knowledge of 'its proper context which is the struggle of the Prophet and the background of that struggle'.⁹⁷ Indeed, a proper interpretation of the Qur'ān should involve the recognition of the Prophet's *Sitz im Leben* – a term which stands for the alleged context in which a text has been created. Rahman goes so far as to state that recognition of the norms, values and practices of pre-Islamic Arabian society in which Islam came into being as a new religion should be taken into full consideration in any interpretation of the Qur'ān, since the political, economic and social problems encountered in Meccan and Medinan society provided the natural context for the messages contained in the text.⁹⁸

Rahman approaches the discipline of 'the occasions of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in a way different from what is traditionally understood. He states that 'although most Qur'ānic commentators were aware of the importance of these situational contexts', this was 'either because of their historical significance or for their aid in understanding the point of certain injunctions', concluding that most Qur'ānic commentators never realised the 'full import' of the discipline of occasions of revelation.⁹⁹ Although Muslim scholars traditionally were engaged in discovering occasions of revelation, there were no major discussions on the significance of context in approaching the Qur'ān. Unlike Rahman, one of the main goals of most Muslim scholars in engaging with the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature was to develop certain laws and injunctions. Rahman's emphasis on the notion of context is also related to his ideas about the discipline of *naskh* (abrogation). Abrogation, for Rahman, must be understood as supporting the notion of evolution of Qur'ānic

themes in a given context. Given that revelation took place in a historical context, both *nāsikh* (abrogating) and *mansūkh* (abrogated) verses came into being as responses to the circumstances that the Prophet and the nascent Muslim community confronted. Rahman indeed rejects one of the most widely acknowledged interpretive methods, according to which the most recently revealed verses provide the final verdict on a particular issue and should be taken to be the ultimate Word of God. For him, interpreters of the Qur'ān must consider all passages of the text – be they abrogating verses or abrogated verses – and understand them against the background of their historical context.¹⁰⁰

Rahman's second hermeneutic

Rahman's second hermeneutic is based on the idea that the Prophet's life experience and his deep moral-spiritual consciousness, which he developed from the earliest age, played a key role in his revelatory experiences. As discussed, according to Rahman, the appalling social and moral conditions that characterised seventh-century Meccan society, which included widespread socio-economic inequality, deeply affected the Prophet's own inner life.¹⁰¹ Indeed, 'What issued from his experience in the cave [of Hira] was not merely the demolishing of a plurality of gods, but [also] a sustained and determined effort to achieve socioeconomic justice.'¹⁰² Muhammad's concern for the social, economic and moral issues of his society continued after his prophetic mission began. His concern was so severe that 'when Muhammad's moral intuitive perception rose to its highest point and became identified with the moral law itself . . . the Word was given with the inspiration itself'.¹⁰³ That is, revelation was the culmination of an inner process through the Prophet's mind in response to the moral crisis of his society. Muhammad's prophetic career was inclined towards resolving this moral crisis and improving people in 'a concrete and communal sense, rather than [simply] toward the private and metaphysical'.¹⁰⁴

The implication of this idea is that Muhammad's mission was geared towards 'social reform in terms of strengthening the socio-economically weak and depressed classes', including orphans, slaves and women.¹⁰⁵ To emphasise the significance of the Prophet's concern with socio-moral issues in the context of his prophetic mission, Rahman focuses on the theme of *zakāt* (almsgiving) in his writings. According to Rahman, by imposing the *zakāt* tax, Muhammad attempted to improve the status of the poor and the weak. *Zakāt* was one of the ways by which the Islamic 'socio-moral order' was established.¹⁰⁶ The importance of the theme of social justice in Muhammad's mission is also evident from the attitude of his opponents in Mecca. The Meccans were threatened by the message of Islam not only because of its insistence on monotheism, but also because of Muhammad's emphasis on social justice through condemnation of usury and the Prophet's call for *zakāt*. They were indeed threatened by Islam's message that wealth should be shared equally, and thus feared losing sources of their income.¹⁰⁷

A key implication that follows from making such a connection between the revelation and the Prophet's personality, for Rahman, is that the Qur'ān is not only a divine response to the social conditions of Arabian society of the seventh century, but also a response to the moral issues encountered at the time. Thus, he writes, 'the Qur'ān is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia'.¹⁰⁸ In addition to monotheism, 'the basic *élan* of the Qur'ān is moral'.¹⁰⁹ In fact, an emphasis on the significance of the Prophet's moral concerns since an early age leads Rahman to conclude that the Qur'ān, at its core, is a text dealing with ethical values. In other words, there is an intimate relation between the Prophet's concern for establishing a moral order and the central message of the Qur'ān about ethical matters. The Qur'ān must be approached in a way that this 'unity [i.e. its emphasis on ethical matters] will emerge in its fullness'.¹¹⁰ For Rahman, 'the Qur'ān is a unity and not a jumble of isolated or mutually contradictory ideas'.¹¹¹ Expanding this idea to the social arena, Rahman argues that the aim of the Qur'ān is to emphasise socio-economic justice and human egalitarianism.¹¹² Therefore, a key element of Rahman's interpretive method is that themes of ethics and justice give the Qur'ān a certain unity, meaning that ethics must be included as an essential focus in any interpretation. That is, the main pivot of the Qur'ānic verses is an ethical one, especially when it comes to the socio-legal passages of the text. It is in this sense that Rahman argued that there was a general failure of Islamic thought in the course of history in identifying the underlying unity of the Qur'ān, namely themes of ethics and justice.¹¹³ This failure was mainly related to the approach of the majority of Muslim scholars who privileged the objectivity and verbal character of prophetic revelation and ignored the intimate relation between revelation and the inner reality of the Prophet's life.

Combination of the two hermeneutics: socio-legal passages of the Qur'ān

There are two implications that follow from Rahman's methodology. First, since the Prophet's mind was occupied with the moral crisis of his society, he became a moral reformer, and as such his mission was not primarily motivated or shaped by legislative issues. The Prophet, as Rahman himself points out, 'seldom resorted to general legislation as a means of furthering the Islamic cause'.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, in the Qur'ān 'general legislation forms a very tiny part of Islamic teaching'.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the Qur'ān should not be approached as a legal manuscript or document made up of specific rules and literal injunctions: 'The Qur'ān is primarily a book of religious and moral principles and exhortations, and is not a legal document'.¹¹⁶ This shows that Rahman invoked the challenge to the classical Muslim jurists and those contemporary Muslim scholars who gave an importance to the Qur'ān's legal precepts: 'The Qur'ān is not a . . . legal document that Muslim lawyers have made it to be'.¹¹⁷ That is, Rahman distanced himself from a legal-oriented hermeneutic – a method that aims to approach the Qur'ān from a legal perspective and to engage in

law-finding exercises when interpreting the text. This is what Rahman partly shared with philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.

The second implication of Rahman's hermeneutics is that those verses of the Qur'ān dealing with legal matters must be approached and understood as fulfilling a moral purpose relevant to the time and circumstances in which they were revealed. The Qur'ān contains some legal enunciations, but they should be viewed against the backdrop of the social and historical context of their revelation. The applications of legal provisions of the Qur'ān have to be first examined within the broader context of the time of the Prophet, and then examined in light of the moral ideal that stands behind them. In other words, Qur'ānic legislations should be viewed in terms of their 'socio-historical background' and the 'moral objectives and principles' behind them.¹¹⁸ What follows from this view is that the socio-legal passages of the Qur'ān should be approached in the light of the Qur'ān's overall movement towards greater social justice for human beings. Rahman indeed aimed to highlight in the Qur'ān a direction towards the progressive embodiment of the fundamental values of the text, such as justice and fairness. According to him, this 'moral ideal towards which the [early Islamic] society was expected to move'¹¹⁹ was neglected by the majority of *fuqahā* and jurists in the course of Islamic history.

This combination of the hermeneutical approaches proposed by Rahman is particularly important in determining the relevance of the Qur'ān's teachings for Muslims today, and also raises questions about the issue of the mutability and immutability of certain socio-legal passages of the text. Rahman's methodology enables interpreters of the Qur'ān to contextualise its message as a response to the historical setting of seventh-century Arabian society. In the light of the socio-historical background of the Qur'ān, it would only be possible to deduce certain underlying ethical or moral principles as universal teachings, which must then be transposed to the conditions of the present-day Muslim world.¹²⁰ Indeed, for Rahman, one should distinguish between 'legal enactments' and 'moral injunctions'; for while the former are mutable or historical, the latter are immutable or normative.¹²¹ This implies that the presumption that the message of Islam in relation to the social arena is somehow fixed and unchangeable is to be refuted because the legal provisions of the Qur'ān must be examined in light of the moral intentions or the *ratio legis* behind them: 'The implementation of the Qur'ān cannot be carried out literally in the context of today because this may result in thwarting the very purposes of the Qur'ān.'¹²² Rahman therefore argues that one should not create a system of commandments and prohibitions based on the literal reading of Qur'ānic legal statements: 'To insist on a *literal* implementation of the rules of the Qur'ān, shutting one's eyes to the social change that had occurred and that is so palpably occurring before our eyes, is tantamount to . . . defeating its moral-social purposes and objectives.'¹²³ Strongly related to his methodology is the idea that the theological or metaphysical teachings of the Qur'ān belong to the realm of immutable or normative principles: 'For the theological or metaphysical statements of the Qur'ān, the specific revelational background is not necessary, as it is for its social-legal pronouncements.'¹²⁴

As such, the immutable features of the Qur'ān that transcend the time and place of their revelation include its moral injunctions, the rationale or moral intentions that stand behind the socio-legal statements of the Qur'ān and the theological or metaphysical statements of the text (such as those related to the oneness of God and the theme of the afterlife). The mutable contents of the Qur'ān, on the other hand, denote principles that grew out of the specific socio-cultural milieu of their revelation, and thus should not be applied at all times and in all places. Rahman's distinction between normative and historical features of the Qur'ān, and in particular the distinction he draws between the socio-legal precepts of the Qur'ān and the ethical purposes that stand behind them, results from his views on revelation. This distinction opens the door to respond flexibly to the needs and circumstances of Muslims today. His methodology is indeed geared towards discovering how the intent of the Qur'ānic verses – especially those passages dealing with socio-legal issues – was laid down for the benefit of Muslims not only in the time of revelation, but also in the present. According to Rahman's thesis, it is only when the intention or the spirit behind Qur'ānic legal statements is taken into consideration that the revelation can maintain its relevance to a changing world. Moreover, in emphasising the mutability of the Qur'ānic legislations, Rahman's interpretive method stands in sharp contrast to the literalists' idea that the Qur'ān's legal stipulations should be applied at all times and in all places in the same way as they were applied to Muhammad's community or to the early Muslim communities.

Rahman's hermeneutics in practice

Before discussing how Rahman's hermeneutics are applied in practice, I compare his hermeneutics with Emilio Betti's (d. 1968) and Hans-Georg Gadamer's in order to situate Rahman's approach within a Western hermeneutic milieu. Some scholars of modern Islamic thought argue that Rahman has been influenced by Gadamer's hermeneutic approach,¹²⁵ while others believe that his interpretive method resonates more with Betti's 'Objectivity School' than with Gadamer's 'Subjectivity School'.¹²⁶ In Gadamer's hermeneutics, utmost emphasis is placed on the significant role of the interpreter's pre-knowledge in the process of understanding a given text. Leaning on the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (d. 1976) analysis of *Dasein* (the human way to be), Gadamer argued that 'understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself' and that 'the concept of understanding is no longer a methodological concept'.¹²⁷ For Gadamer, the readers of a given text are preconditioned by their socio-political and cultural milieus, which create a 'horizon' of understanding, and thus no interpretation is void of prejudice: 'The history of hermeneutics shows how the examination of the texts is determined by a very precise fore-understanding.'¹²⁸

Unlike Gadamer, Betti places some distance between the subject and object of interpretation since a given text, for him, retains its intimate relation with its author's intentions. Betti's objectivist hermeneutic is based on the idea that one

should seek to achieve the stable meaning of the text. Pursuing this line of thinking, Betti criticises Gadamer since the latter's approach 'inevitably leads to both subjectivism and relativism, with the consequence that hermeneutics is unable to adjudicate between correct and incorrect interpretations'.¹²⁹ Betti does not ignore the fact that any interpreter may understand the text from his/her own perspective, but he believes that every text has a determinate meaning attached to its author's intention that could be retrievable independently of the interpreter's subjectivity and historical context. For Betti:

While recognizing that the interpreter will understand things in terms of his or her own experiences, every effort must be made to control one's 'prejudices' and to subordinate one's experiences to the meaningfulness that the interpreted object seeks to communicate.¹³⁰

Returning to the initial question about how Rahman's interpretive method is related to Western hermeneutical milieu, I argue that his hermeneutics resonates more with Betti's objectivity school than with Gadamer's subjectivity school. Rahman's hermeneutics sharply contrasts with Gadamer's idea that interpreters are preconditioned by their prejudices during the process of understanding a text. For Rahman, Gadamer undermines the objectivity of the text by placing an utmost emphasis on the subjective conditions that play a role in the interpreter's approaches to it.¹³¹ Rahman's interpretive method echoes aspects of Betti's hermeneutics in that an interpreter is able to capture the original intent of the author of the text. In line with the task of objectively discovering the original meaning of the Qur'ān, Rahman, as shown, highlights the significance of the ethical message of the text, as well as the context in which it emerged. This hermeneutic method, as discussed, is the result of Rahman's belief about how revelation came into being. By highlighting the role of context in shaping the revelation, Rahman, unlike Betti, believes that the original meaning of the text 'cannot be attributed simply to [its] author', and that the situation to which the Qur'ān was responding should also be taken into consideration.¹³² That is, in the case of the Qur'ān, where God is considered the 'author', getting to the author's intentions is somehow problematic, and thus one is able to understand the original meaning behind the text from the context of the Qur'ān's emergence and the text's ethical message.

As such, in regard to Rahman's hermeneutics, little attention has been given to thinking about the role of the subjectivity of an interpreter in the act of interpretation. In fact, Rahman does not supply further amplification of his hermeneutic approach on a level that takes the roles of prejudices and pre-understandings of the interpreter into account. As such, his approach is unable to comprehend how the meaning of the text can also be produced based on the interests, expectations and the cultural episteme of the interpreter. In addition, his hermeneutic is not concerned with how classical Muslim scholars' interpretive discourses are, by and large, embedded in a pre-modern *Weltanschauung*, and shaped by the confines of the epistemological framework of their societies. Rahman's project is not oriented around the history of

the reception of the text, and thus ignores the fact that the socio-political context of the pre-modern period did not leave much room for commentators to appreciate the kinds of understanding that their counterparts in the modern era seem to attach to certain Qur'ānic themes.¹³³ I demonstrate this in the following section.

Rahman's approach to Qur'ānic legislations in practice

To recap Rahman's hermeneutics, interpreters must determine the ultimate reasons (or what he refers to as the *ratio legis*) for which a Qur'ānic injunction relating to the social arena came into being. This *ratio legis* is 'a general principle which is presented as the essence of the law . . . it is the moral value that the law seeks to embody and realize'.¹³⁴ For Rahman, the Qur'ān should be treated 'as a whole' and 'as a set of coherent [ethical] principles or values where the total teaching will converge'.¹³⁵ Strongly related to this approach is the idea that the ethical-moral foundations of Qur'ānic laws must be discovered, meaning that 'actual effective orientation and ethical engineering'¹³⁶ are of particular importance for approaching Qur'ānic legislative injunctions. Therefore, Qur'ānic legislation on a given subject must satisfy both the Qur'ān's unitary teaching and the ultimate purpose (or the *ratio legis*) that stands behind it.

To show how Rahman applies his hermeneutics in practice (especially in defence of the mutability of most Qur'ānic *aḥkām*), I give a brief overview of his views on issues such as slavery, *riba* (usury) and cutting a thief's hand. In terms of the prohibition of usury, Rahman links the Qur'ānic condemnation of *riba* to its moral-ethical aspects and the historical context of the seventh-century Arabian society. The Qur'ān denounces *riba* in the context of the economic injustice of Meccan society, where the unethical commercial practices were prevalent and exploitation of the poor and needy through interest on debt was widespread. That is, the spirit behind the prohibition of *riba* was to prevent injustice.¹³⁷ By highlighting the importance of the ethical purpose that sits behind the prohibition of *riba*, Rahman downplays the importance of its legal aspects. This mirrors his idea that the Qur'ān is not a legal document. Rahman further states that the Qur'ānic condemnation of *riba* does not mean that the Qur'ān prohibited bank interest in today's context. Indeed, the idea that all forms of interest must be banned stands in sharp contradiction to the spirit behind the condemnation of *riba* in its original place. Since moderate rates are one of the fundamental principles of today's economy, and since Muslims must participate in the global economy, prohibition of interest is not only 'foolish', but is also 'un-Islamic'.¹³⁸

Another example deals with the institution of slavery. According to Rahman, the Qur'ān permitted the pre-Islamic institution of slavery, but imposed a reformed set of regulations for slaves in a way that could eventually lead to a society in which slavery does not exist. The Qur'ān could not eliminate slavery in a short period of time, since it was 'ingrained in the structure of society' and its overnight disposal would have created problems.¹³⁹ Accordingly, the institution of slavery should

not be seen as an eternal injunction, but rather must be viewed as the progressive embodiment of an ethical-moral injunction which ultimately results in its eventual disappearance in light of evolving social conditions. This again mirrors Rahman's hermeneutic approach, which says that the interpreter should seek to understand the 'direction' towards which a particular Qur'ānic commandment was leading – in this case, improving the conditions of slaves.

Another example of how the Qur'ān legalises an existing practice is that of the amputation penalty for theft. For Rahman, cutting off a hand of a thief in the context of a nomadic society is quite reasonable because 'the right of possession is strongly associated with an accentuated sense of personal honor', and thus theft was not primarily considered an 'economic crime, but as a crime against values of personal honor and its inviolable sanctity'. In urbanised societies in which there are visible shifts in values, this law is not applicable.¹⁴⁰ In another example, on the question of murder, although the Qur'ān confirms the pre-Islamic Arab forms of settlement either by blood money or retaliation (*qīṣās*), Rahman refers to verse 5:32 in the Qur'ān ('if any saves one person, it is as though he has saved all humanity'), concluding that since murder is a crime against society rather than a private crime, *qīṣās* is not applicable and must be replaced by new legislation in specific contexts.¹⁴¹ Leaning on the significance of ethical-moral foundations of Qur'ānic legislations, the Qur'ān itself states that it is best to forgive.¹⁴²

The Qur'ān on women's issues and rights

The significance of advancing women's rights in the modern period lies not only in the fact that this half of the population must be given equal rights to men; it is also rooted in the idea that the development of civil society and democratic institutions is impossible without promoting gender equality. Scholars have often recognised the close relation between the democratisation process and promoting gender equality. Referring to the context of modern Iranian society, Jahanshahrad states that 'there is a direct relationship between gender equality and democratization . . . women's demands for equal rights can theoretically be recognized as part of the general demands of Iranians for democracy'.¹⁴³ In a similar vein, a number of Egyptian writers during the Arab Spring called for revolutionists' immediate action towards supporting women's rights, thus defying gender inequality, since they believed that Egyptian women were able to play a central role in developing civil society through bringing about substantial changes in the social and political spheres.¹⁴⁴ In what follows, I show how the contextualist approach proposed by Rahman provides a solid theoretical framework for advancing women's rights and gender equality.

On the issue of polygamy, Rahman rejects the idea of the majority of Muslim jurists who consider 'the polygamy permission clause as having legal force'.¹⁴⁵ Emphasising the social circumstances in which the Qur'ānic injunction of polygamy was revealed, Rahman states that 'neither monogamy nor polygamy can be regarded as the unique and divinely ordained order for every society in every season

and that either institution may apply according to social conditions prevailing'.¹⁴⁶ According to him, during pre-Islamic times, polygamy was accepted as a social norm among Arabs because of a disproportionate decrease in the number of men compared to women due to tribal wars.¹⁴⁷ Rahman's reading of the Qur'ānic passage 4:3 leads him to argue that polygamy with up to four wives within the historical context of its revelation is a legitimate form of matrimony, meaning that the ideal form of relationship between men and women within the Qur'ānic worldview is that of a monogamous matrimony. In other words, the Qur'ān's ultimate aim is not to maintain the institution of polygamy, but rather to eliminate it. Rahman applies his hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'ānic injunction of polygamy. Distinguishing between the legislations of the Qur'ān and the moral rationale behind them, he concludes, 'the sanctions put on polygamy were in the nature of a moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move, since it was not possible to remove polygamy legally at one stroke'.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, what must be taken into consideration concerning the Qur'ānic injunction of polygamy is the intention and guiding direction towards which Qur'ānic revelation was moving, which is to say that the Qur'ān permitted polygamy only as 'a legal solution of the situation', but regarded monogamy as 'the moral law for long-term achievement'.¹⁴⁹ It follows that 'the overall logical consequence of [Qur'ānic] pronouncements is a banning of polygamy under normal circumstances'.¹⁵⁰ In addition, in approaching the Qur'ānic verses concerning polygamy, what should be considered is the social objectives or moral principles – namely justice – implied in that legislation. Rahman states:

The Qur'ān is talking of polygamy in the context of treating orphaned girls who had come of age but to whom their guardians were unwilling to give back their properties. Instead, they would like to marry their wards, so that they could continue to use their properties . . . [Polygamy] is certainly in keeping with the purposes of the Qur'ān concerning social justice in general and with regard to women's justice in particular.¹⁵¹

According to Rahman, the Qur'ānic verses that seem to emphasise men's authority or superiority over women (Q 4:34; Q 2:228) must be reinterpreted when their appropriate social context is taken into account. The superiority that the Qur'ān speaks about in these verses is that of a 'functional' and 'not inherent superiority'.¹⁵² This is due to the fact that during the time when the Qur'ān was revealed, men were the 'primary socially operative factors' and were responsible for 'defraying household expenditure'.¹⁵³ In this sense, the notion of superiority or authority mentioned in the Qur'ān is not inherent in the nature of sexes, but rather based on certain qualities that men acquired within specific socio-economic contexts of Arabian society at the time of revelation: 'If a woman becomes economically sufficient . . . and contributes to the household expenditure, the male's superiority would to that extent be reduced.'¹⁵⁴ Rahman's conclusion is that since today's context has changed, its associated religious precepts concerning the superiority of men over women must change accordingly.

The Qur'ānic verse stating that a credit transaction should be written down either in the presence of two male witnesses, or one male and two female witnesses (Q 2:282), is also to be approached in its appropriate historical context. Rahman criticises the traditional law that the testimony of a woman is considered half of that of a man on the ground that 'women in those days were normally not used to dealing with credit' due to the social framework in which they lived.¹⁵⁵ He asks: 'how can one deduce from this a general law to the effect that under all circumstances and for all purposes, a woman's evidence is inferior to a man's?'¹⁵⁶ Given that today's context is different from that of the revelation era, this legislation is not applicable in the present context. In a similar vein, the Qur'ānic statement about women's inheritance is closely related to the economic roles assigned to men and women in tribal society. Inheritance reflects 'the function of their actual role in traditional society'.¹⁵⁷ Rahman reasons: 'With social change, however, changes in shares must follow, since in a detribalized society social functions undergo radical changes.'¹⁵⁸ This shows that Rahman is unconvinced of the logic of the 'dowry argument' presented by some contemporary Muslim scholars such as Muhammad Iqbal.

As such, much of the gender inequality found in the Qur'ān is rooted in the cultural norms and standards of the early Islamic society, but 'when the situation so changes that the law fails to reflect the *ratio*, the law must change'.¹⁵⁹ According to Rahman, the history of Muslim legal pronouncements concerning women's rights shows that jurists often ignored the fact that 'each legal or quasi-legal pronouncement is accompanied by a *ratio legis* explaining why a law is being enunciated'.¹⁶⁰ Instead of considering the fact that Islam lifted women's status and removed certain abuses to which women were subjected in pre-Islamic times,¹⁶¹ jurists have often 'freezed' Islamic regulations about women's issues due to their literal understanding of the text. Indeed, what jurists often ignored is the 'direction' in which the early Islamic community during the Prophet's time was moving.

As shown, Rahman manages to apply his hermeneutical approaches to the realm of women's issues and rights. However, we recall that in Rahman's hermeneutic there is not much emphasis on the particular context of the interpreter or the interpreter's *pretext* – conditioned by factors such as class, gender, religious orientation and ethnicity – in the practice of exegesis. Expanding this to women's issues, there is no discussion in Rahman's writings about why the views of most Muslim scholars of pre-modern times concerning women's rights lack the kinds of understanding of some commentators in the modern era. In fact, Rahman's hermeneutic does not appreciate how the interpretation of certain Qur'ānic verses about women in early Islamic history and in the modern period are closely related to the specific context or condition of their time. Hence, while Rahman's hermeneutic manages to reinterpret some Qur'ānic injunctions concerning women's issues in light of the modern context (due to his humanistic approach to revelation), it does not identify well enough the epistemic limits of pre-modern Qur'ānic commentators in interpreting such injunctions.

The application of Rahman's hermeneutics in the political arena

This section focuses on the implications of Rahman's hermeneutic in regard to the political arena, specifically when it is related to notions of democracy and *shūrā* (consultation). It is first of all important to provide a brief overview of the institution of *shūrā*. The practice of consultation by which a tribal chief (the sheikh) received advice from the most prominent members of his tribe was known to the Arabs during pre-Islamic times. The pre-Islamic institution of *shūrā* continued to be practised in the period in which the Prophet lived and the Qur'ān was revealed. The Qur'ān itself refers to *shūrā* in three verses: 'Consult with them about matters' (Q 3:159); '[For those] whose affairs are determined by mutual consultation' (Q 42:38); and 'If they desire to wean the child by mutual consent and consultation, there is no blame upon them' (Q 2:233). While the first two verses have a broader socio-political context, the last verse deals mainly with a more personal matter, namely the need for the parents' consultation in regard to the care of their children.

Most Muslim scholars in the contemporary era can be loosely grouped into one of three main categories when they discuss the relation between democracy and *shūrā*. The first group, often identified as 'liberal' Muslims, believes that democracy is inherently compatible with the fundamental teachings of Islam since the Qur'ān supports the concept of *shūrā* (consultation). From their viewpoint, democracy is equivalent to *shūrā*, and thus it has its roots in the Qur'ān itself.¹⁶² The second group, often recognised as fundamentalists, rejects the idea that the Qur'ānic teachings and democracy are harmonious or compatible, and thus maintains the corresponding argument that there is no need for Muslim societies to adopt a Western democratic method of governance.¹⁶³ Finally, certain Muslim scholars believe that democracy is an extra-religious matter, and thus argue that it is not derivable from the Qur'ān – an argument which inevitably leads them to conclude that democracy and *shūrā* are not necessarily equivalent – though they strongly support the idea that Muslims should incorporate modern democratic norms into their methods of governance in today's context.¹⁶⁴

Rahman's idea about democracy is consistent with the first category of scholars grouped above. Rahman criticises the Islamist scholar 'Abul A'la Mawdudi (d. 1979), who rejects democracy and equates it with *shirk*, arguing that democracy and a representative form of government are necessary for Muslims in today's context.¹⁶⁵ Although Rahman states that the 'concept of *shūrā-ijmā'* is not quite compatible with a multi-party system as it is practiced in modern democracies',¹⁶⁶ the weight of his argument manifested in his works tends towards equating democracy with *shūrā*, since he considers 'the principle of democracy as embodied as the Qur'ānic *shūrā*'.¹⁶⁷ Rahman himself states that his argument is in line with the 'modernist' scholars who 'have contended that the only valid Muslim rule is through *shūrā*, which in the world of today means a representative form of government'.¹⁶⁸ For Rahman, 'the democracy of Islam was expected to be based upon

the mutual discussion (*shūrā baynahum*) of the members of a community who had proper awareness of Islamic purposes'.¹⁶⁹ Rahman equates *shūrā* with democracy and thus maintains the corresponding argument that 'all human rights, universally recognized, are automatically vouchsafed and guaranteed by a Government based on *shūrā*'.¹⁷⁰ This implies that he considers the concept of *shūrā* as a sufficient basis for establishing a democratic structure in today's context.

From Rahman's argument, we can conclude that he considers democracy an appropriate mode of governance, but his main reason for the necessity of the implementation of democratic norms in today's context derives mainly from the Qur'ānic injunction that Muslims should conduct their affairs through the principle of *shūrā*.¹⁷¹ Rahman's method does not leave much room for acknowledging the importance of an extra-Qur'ānic grounding of democracy and does not take as much account of the significance of democracy beyond its religious justifications. Sam Shirazi identifies the importance of grounding democracy and human rights on extra-religious principles: 'Muslims should be able to determine the proper role of human rights [and by its extension, democracy] in their societies without having to rely solely on Islamic revelation.'¹⁷² He suggests that the notions of democracy and human rights 'should not be [only] valued because Islam mandates so, but just because they rationally make sense and because all human beings are entitled to them'.¹⁷³ Rahman, however, attempts to find theological justifications for supporting democratic norms. Although he believes that the Qur'ān is primarily a book of moral principles and is not a legal document,¹⁷⁴ since it does not provide its readers with 'many general principles',¹⁷⁵ he does not exclude the possibility of deriving modern democratic norms for governing today's society from the Qur'ānic injunctions of *shūrā*. As such, Rahman implicitly suggests that traditional Islamic teachings could be sufficient to formulate the laws for governing societies in today's context.¹⁷⁶

My criticism of Rahman's political ideas is not only that he sees the notion of *shūrā* as a sufficient basis for establishing a democratic structure; I also believe that Rahman's argument for equating democracy with *shūrā* weakens his proposal that the Qur'ān is a response through the Prophet's mind to the socio-ethical problems of seventh-century Arabia, and that the Qur'ānic themes dealing with socio-political matters should be approached within the constraints of the context of the Qur'ān's revelation and its 'epistemic schemes'.¹⁷⁷ In other words, equating *shūrā* with democracy goes against Rahman's thesis, which argues that Muhammad's mind is historically situated. Since the revelation occurred within a specific historical context and within the limits of the Prophet's worldview and that of his contemporaries – well before the development of modern notions of democracy – it is unconvincing to simply equate the latter with a concept prevalent in seventh-century Arabia, namely the institution of *shūrā*. While it is possible to offer some scriptural support for democratic ethics, the broader socio-historical context of Arabian society and the worldview of the immediate addressees of the Qur'ān did not allow for the rise of democratic norms in the modern sense of the word. Equating democracy with *shūrā*, therefore, would essentially divorce revelation from the prevailing epistemic

framework within and through which it emerged, and thus result in a way of viewing revelation as an event that stands outside the historical or the contextual framework of its emergence.

In sum, Rahman's commitment to democracy is not based on an extra-religious justification. Although Rahman recognises democracy as an appropriate form of governance, he does not apply his hermeneutic approach in the context of advancing such political arguments. The fact that the institution of *shūrā* is pointed out in the Qur'ān does not necessarily mean that the Qur'ān supports or rejects democracy, since the modern notions of democracy and human rights were inconceivable during the Prophet's time. Therefore, while Rahman's hermeneutic allows for flexibility in terms of a practical application of religious injunctions concerning women's issues and rights, his hermeneutic leans towards traditionalism, and so arguably stands in tension with his contextualist approach when applied to the political sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Rahman's understanding of the revelation and of the Qur'ān's nature, which are humanistic, and based on the theories of revelation presented by medieval Muslim philosophers (especially al-Farabi and Ibn Sina), has led him to develop two hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'ān. Rahman's first hermeneutic is based on the idea that the socio-political and cultural elements of Arabian society during the revelation era should play a key role in the process of interpretation of the Qur'ān. Rahman's second hermeneutic indicates that the Qur'ānic message was intimately bound up in Muhammad's personality and his concern for the creation of a moral order, meaning that the basic message of the Qur'ān is ethico-moral. This shows how Rahman's hermeneutics are related to the issue of the mutability and immutability of Qur'ānic rulings. Qur'ānic legislations can only be properly understood in light of their historical context, their *ratio legis* and by considering the ethical goals towards which the message of the Qur'ān is directed.

This chapter has also argued that Rahman's hermeneutic functions appropriately in practice when applied to the discourse of women's rights, and has the capability of promoting gender equality in the realms of testimony, inheritance and marriage. While I do not agree with those scholars who argue that Rahman 'has never really put his exegetical approach into practice',¹⁷⁸ I argue that his hermeneutic has not been well applied in his arguments concerning the political arena, especially when it is related to equating democracy with *shūrā*. Indeed, while Rahman understands revelation and the Qur'ān in a humanistic way – which places him in sharp contrast to other 'liberal' or 'modernist' Muslim scholars – his understanding of the term *shūrā* does not differ very much from that of the latter. Therefore, although Rahman's contributions are valuable in reformulating traditional theories of revelation and in identifying the human aspects of the Qur'ān, his hermeneutic, when applied in practice, is not wholly different or separable from the position of mainstream modernist Muslim scholars.

Notes

1. I borrowed the term 'ordinary sense' from Völker in her 'Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation', p. 273.
2. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 99.
3. Ibid.; among the verses mentioned, the most related verse is Q 12:108, which states: 'Say: This is my path – I call people to God on the basis of a clear perception.'
4. Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 54.
5. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', p. 10.
6. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 33.
7. Ibid.
8. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 100.
9. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 33.
10. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', p. 11.
11. Ibid.
12. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 91.
13. Ibid.
14. Völker, 'Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation', p. 275.
15. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 85.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 98.
19. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 97; another Qur'ānic verse that supports such an idea, according to Rahman, is Q 2:92.
20. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', p. 10.
21. Ibid., p.10. See also Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 54.
22. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', p. 10.
23. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 97.
24. Ibid., p. 99.
25. Ibid.
26. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', pp. 10–11.
27. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 95.
28. Rahman, *Islam*, pp. 31–2.
29. Rahman, 'Translating the Qur'an', p. 24.
30. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 99.
31. Rahman, 'Divine Revelation and the Prophet', p. 111.
32. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 101.
33. Rahman, 'Divine Revelation and the Prophet', p. 114.
34. Ibid.
35. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 80.
36. Ibid., p. 98.
37. Ibid., p. 97.
38. Rahman, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', p. 10. As Denny noted, this is one of the main characteristics of a genuine religious experience: 'a man who has a genuinely religious experience is automatically transformed by that experience' (Denny, 'Fazlur Rahman', p. 93).
39. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 31.
40. Fazlur Rahman, 'Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyub Khan Era', p. 299.
41. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 80.
42. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 33.
43. This is also noticed by Völker, 'The Qur'an and Reform', p. 54.
44. For details, see Martin, Woodward and Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, p. 77. See also Saeed, 'Fazlur Rahman', p. 42.
45. Martin, *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, p. 203.
46. For details of Rahman's view on *naskh*, see Sonn, 'Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism', pp. 128–9; Völker, 'The Qur'an and Reform', p. 135.

47. A number of scholars have acknowledged that Rahman has been influenced by some medieval Muslim philosophers in regard to his theory of revelation. Jahanbakhsh holds that Rahman's theory of revelation is 'more or less of the same nature that characterized medieval philosophical' debates over the nature of *kalam-e Bari* (Jahanbakhsh, 'Introduction', p. xxix). Völker has attempted to find some aspects of Rahman's theory of revelation in Ibn Sina's understanding of *imagination* or *intellectualisation* (Völker, 'The Qur'an and Reform', p. 57).
48. His thesis is published under the title *Avicenna's Psychology*.
49. Berry, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 43.
50. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*.
51. Rahman, 'My Belief-in-Action', pp. 154–5.
52. For details of Rahman's interest in philosophy, see Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, p. 71.
53. Griffel, 'Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation', p. 162.
54. For a general overview of Islamic form of Neoplatonism, see Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 3–5; Miyan Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, p. 458.
55. For detail of this idea, see al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, pp. 165–6.
56. al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 244; for a detailed discussion, see Mahdi, *al-Farabi*, pp. 153–6.
57. al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, pp. 244–5; al-Farabi, *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, pp. 79–80. For details, see Griffel, 'Muslim philosophers' rationalist explanation', p. 166. As noted by Mahdi, the Acquired Intellect is not 'identical with the divine mind. It is rather the upper limit of human intellection . . . Farabi never admits that the two [Acquired Intellect and divine mind] can be united. This would of course set him apart from such contemporary mystical figures as al-Hallaj'. Mahdi, *al-Farabi*, p. 154.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
59. al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 225.
60. al-Farabi, *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, p. 80; see also Griffel, 'Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation', pp. 166–8.
61. Ibn Sina, *al-Mabda' va al-Ma'ād* [The Origin and The Return], pp. 112–16; For details, see Okumus, 'The Influence of Ibn Sina', p. 400. For al-Farabi's ideas on human faculties, see al-Farabi, *Fuṣūl al-Madani* [Aphorisms of the Statesman], pp. 29–31.
62. Ibn Sina consistently refers to the intuitive power of the Prophet, as well as his rational and imaginative power, in his works. Even in his *Treatise on Psychology*, he refers to such powers possessed by the Prophet. See Ibn Sina, *Treatise on Psychology*, pp. 28–30; Griffel, 'Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation', pp. 171–2. There are also other differences between al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's theories of revelation. Ibn Sina, unlike al-Farabi, addresses the question of the miracles performed by prophets.
63. Ibn Sina, 'On the Soul', p. 32; see also Ibn Sina, *al-Mabda' va al-Ma'ād*, p. 116.
64. Black, 'Psychology', p. 320. See also Fakhri, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 164.
65. Cited in Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi*, p. 220.
66. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 98.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 100. In comparing the ideas of Fazlur Rahman with those of philosophers, I use 'prophet' or 'prophets' when referring to the philosophers' ideas as they often speak about prophet in general terms.
68. Black, 'Psychology', p. 313.
69. Mahdi, *al-Farabi*, p. 156.
70. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science*, p. 84.
71. Throughout his *Prophecy in Islam*, Rahman refers numerous times to the idea of Muslim philosophers that the Prophet did not receive verbal revelation (*Ibid.*, pp. 38, 72, 74).
72. See section 'The connection between Prophet's personality and revelation'.
73. I deliberately used the term 'philosophical psychology' since medieval philosophical writings were concerned mainly about the study of the soul and not only mental faculties, as is the focus of the modern discipline of psychology. The term is also used by John Walbridge, *God and Logic*, p. 72.
74. See Mahdi, *al-Farabi*, pp. 155–6.
75. Rahman himself explains al-Farabi's idea in his *Prophecy in Islam*, p. 34. For a primary source, see al-Farabi, *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya* [The Political Regime], p. 181.
76. For the philosophers' reading of Q 2:97, see Griffel, 'Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation', p. 167.
77. Avicenna, 'On the Proof of Prophecies', p. 115. See also Rahman and de Boer, 'Akl'.
78. This is what was attested by Rahman himself in *Prophecy in Islam*, p. 38.
79. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 101.

80. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science*, pp. 82–4.
81. Walbridge, *God and Logic*, p. 70.
82. For some discussions about this, see Ibid.; Qadir, *Philosophy and Science*, p. 83; Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, p. 151.
83. Adamson, 'al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy', p. 46.
84. Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi*, p. 99.
85. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 80.
86. Ibid., p. 98.
87. Ibid., p. 80.
88. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science*, p. 84.
89. Griffel, 'Muslim philosophers' rationalist explanation of Muhammad's Prophecy', p. 168. Likewise, al-Kindi asserts that prophets have the power of presenting their message to ordinary humans in a way that is briefer and clearer than that of philosophers. Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: The Philosopher of the Arabs*, p. 28.
90. Walbridge, *God and Logic*, p. 80. See also Griffel, 'Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation', p. 167.
91. Walbridge, *God and Logic*, p. 72.
92. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 97.
93. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 13.
94. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 31.
95. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 8.
96. Ibid., p. 5.
97. Rahman, 'Interpreting the Qur'an', p. 46.
98. Ibid., p. 45.
99. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 17.
100. For Rahman's ideas about *naskh*, see Sonn, 'Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism', pp. 128–9.
101. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 85; Rahman, *Islam*, p. 11.
102. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 15.
103. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 33.
104. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 2.
105. Rahman, 'Islam and Political Action', p. 153.
106. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 37; Rahman adds that *zakāt* is so important that even prayer is seldom mentioned in the Qur'ān without being associated with *zakāt* (Ibid.).
107. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 15; Rahman, 'Islam's Origin and Ideals', p. 12.
108. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 5.
109. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 33.
110. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 15.
111. Rahman, 'Law and Ethics in Islam', p. 13.
112. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 19; Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 37.
113. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 3.
114. Rahman, 'Concepts Sunnah, Ijtihad and Ijma in the Early Period', pp. 10–11.
115. Ibid., pp. 10–11.
116. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 37.
117. Rahman, 'Law and Ethics in Islam', p. 8.
118. Fazlur Rahman, 'Islam: Challenges and Opportunities', p. 326.
119. Rahman, *Major themes of the Qur'ān*, p. 48.
120. This is Rahman's 'double movement theory'. The 'double movement' theory involves moving from the present situation to the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān and then moving back to the contemporary circumstances. Indeed, this theory has its roots in Rahman's understanding of revelation. See Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 20; Fazlur Rahman, 'Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge', p. 415.
121. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 47; Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 141.
122. Fazlur Rahman, 'The Impact of Modernity on Islam', p. 127.
123. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 19.
124. Ibid., p. 154.

125. See for example, Waugh, 'The Legacies of Fazlur Rahman', pp. 31–2; Sonn, 'Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism', p. 126.
126. For example, see Moosa, 'Introduction', p. 19; Rahman, 'The Qur'ān in Egypt', p. 251.
127. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 250.
128. Ibid., p. 296.
129. Ormiston and Schrifft, *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, p. 19.
130. Ibid.
131. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 9.
132. Ibid., p. 8.
133. In this sense, I disagree with Sonn that 'Fazlur Rahman offered a comprehensive and systematic methodology for understanding revelation' (Sonn, 'Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology', p. 213).
134. Rahman, 'Law and Ethics in Islam', p. 9.
135. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 20.
136. Ibid., p. 7.
137. Rahman, 'Riba and Interest', p. 3.
138. Rahman, 'Islam: Challenges and Opportunities', p. 326. For a comprehensive discussion of Rahman's ideas on *riba*, see Sonn, 'Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism', p. 124.
139. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 38.
140. Rahman, 'Islamic Modernism', p. 330.
141. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 144.
142. Ibid.
143. Jahanshahrad, 'A Genuine Civil Society', p. 244.
144. For an examination of this issue, see Natour, 'The Role of Women in the Egyptian Revolution', pp. 80–1.
145. Rahman, 'The Status of Women in Islam', p. 301.
146. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 29.
147. Rahman, 'The Status of Women in Islam', p. 300.
148. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 48.
149. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 29.
150. Ibid., p. 38.
151. Rahman, 'The Status of Women in Islam', pp. 299–301.
152. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 49.
153. Rahman, 'The Status of Women in Islam', p. 294.
154. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 49.
155. Ibid., pp. 48–9.
156. Rahman, 'The Status of Women in Islam', p. 292.
157. Ibid., p. 297.
158. Ibid.
159. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 48.
160. Ibid.
161. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 38.
162. For instance, Jamal al-Dan Afghani maintains that the democratic-parliamentary system is similar to a modern version of *shūrā*. In a similar vein, Rashid Rida argues that *shūrā* contains the main element of Western-style democracy. See Soage, 'Shūra and Democracy: Two Sides of the Same Coin?', pp. 96–7.
163. Prominent among these thinkers has been the Pakistani scholar, Abul Ala Maududi. He states that 'the world has not been able to produce more just and equitable laws than those given 1400 years ago . . . it is saddening to realize that Muslims nonetheless often look for guidance to the West' (Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights*, p. 61).
164. As I demonstrate in the next chapters, Abdolkarim Soroush, Muhammad Mujtahed Shabestari and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd fall in this group.
165. Rahman, 'The Islamic Concept of State', p. 264.
166. Ibid., p. 262.
167. Rahman, 'Islam and Political Action', p. 157.
168. Rahman, 'Law and Ethics in Islam', p. 11.

169. Rahman, 'Non-Muslim Minorities', p. 19.
170. Rahman, 'The Islamic Concept of State', p. 265.
171. Rahman, 'Law and Ethics in Islam', p. 6.
172. Shirazi, 'Pineapples in Paradise', p. 25.
173. Cited in Shirazi, 'Pineapples in Paradise', p. 32.
174. Rahman, *Islam*, p. 37.
175. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 20.
176. Völker has also drawn the same conclusion from Rahman's writings. According to her, what can be deduced from Rahman's understanding of the Qur'ānic term *shūrā* is that it is 'a sufficient basis for a democratic structure' (Völker, 'Qur'an and Reform', p. 179).
177. The term 'epistemic scheme' is used by Dahlen in *Islamic Law, Epistemology and Modernity*, pp. 64–84.
178. Amirpur, 'The Expansion of Prophetic Experience', p. 436.

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