

FOUR

Recasting Reason

I

On more than one occasion in the last two chapters, we have seen Taha critique instrumental rationality, which has foregrounded the twentieth century in major calamities and devastations. The way to proceed in constructing what he calls the “second modernity” is to adopt a worldview constituted by morally grounded reason, a “thick” form of reason that is brought to bear upon the problems that have arisen in both the Western and, consequently, the Islamic contexts. This task he attempts to accomplish in *al-Amal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd al-‘Aql* (AD),¹ whose declared goal is to provide the philosophical foundations for modern Islam’s “religious awakening” (*al-yaqāza al-dīniyya*), equated with *al-yaqāza al-‘iqadiyya*, a credal and spiritual awakening. With all the vibrancy attending this awakening since the end of the nineteenth century, it nonetheless continues to lack a rigorous methodological framing, a productive theoretical apparatus, and proper philosophical foundations (AD, 9). In other words, this awakening needs a prior, or preparatory, stage of renewal, one that sets up the intellectual, methodological, and theoretical props of a project that has thus far been largely devoid of such foundations.

In order to accomplish this task, two general conditions must obtain. First, no comprehensive intellectual foundations can be constructed unless experience, especially spiritual-ethical experience, is both thoroughly expounded and understood for its deep, entrenched structures. Second, this

form of experience can never aspire to a proper grounding framework and intellectual ordering without the aid of a new powerful rational method, one that lays the grounds for the current awakening, but also one that continues to be *productive* of innovative ways to sustain engagement with a changing future.

Yet, at the same time, experience is the sole guarantee of a consistent and well-integrated state of awakening, bestowing on it a form of rationality that is precisely productive in the ways just described. As praxis and living, experience becomes as much a test of validity and legitimacy as rational consistency and rational power. Gone are the days, Taha seems to say, when rational argument, as it has been conventionally defined in modernity, may be allowed to stand as adequate or sufficient. “It is time to conduct an evaluation of those who discourse about matters of belief (*‘aqīda*), assessing the extent to which their (theoretical) argument corresponds to their (actual) behavior, as well as the extent to which they deserve to be a role model on the basis of what they preach” (*AD*, 10).

Clearly, Taha is preparing for a sustained intellectual offensive against the dissonance between speech and practice, between declared intents and formal positions, on the one hand, and actual engagements, or rather the lack thereof, with praxis and practical ethics, on the other. The target turns out to be not only his Arab and Muslim contemporaries, but also the Western traditions, particularly of the liberal variety.² Consistent with his tireless lamentation and rebuke of modern Muslims’ “blind following” of their Western counterparts, he regards the dualism of theory and practice, of speech and deed, as only derivatively Islamic, and originally a Western way of understanding and dealing with the world.

The interconnected and overlapping layers of practical experience and rationality find manifestations in the analytical identification of three forms of reason. None of these forms can be properly understood without apprehending its relationship to practice and experience, a relationship that determines the quality of rationality involved. Practice and experience, as well as their correlative praxis, must not be understood in their basic or generic meanings, but rather as complex forms of embodiment, where “technologies of the soul”³ permeate the totality of human conduct. This embodiment through iterative praxis constantly reinstates and reaffirms the psycho-epistemic communication between the human—who never forgets his or her createdness—and nature as a holistic system, a communication that

precludes the very possibility of man as the end of himself.⁴ Expectedly, the direction of discussion progresses from the weakest form of reason and rationality to the strongest form, which Taha deems superior and ethically most compelling (AD, 15). We recall that the latter standard is for him absolutely unsurpassable, since the ethical is not only “the central domain”⁵ but nothing less than the essence of humanity (SA, 147).⁶

II

The most inferior of the three forms of reason, denuded reason (al-‘aql al-mujarrad),⁷ represents “an act by which its owner conceives an aspect of a thing while believing this act to be true, basing his judgment (*taṣḍīq*)⁸ on a particular piece of evidence.”⁹ Noteworthy here is the characterization of reason as an act intended to circumvent, if not displace, the Aristotelian and Islamic conception of it as an essence, one that claims to qualitatively distinguish between man and animal.¹⁰ The “Greek conception” tends to objectify and overdivide the world, because the tendency toward objectification rigidifies the exercise of thought by way of casting it into a mode characterized by autonomy, differentiated space, identity, and individuation (*tashkhiṣ*).¹¹ It tends to be divisive also because it breaks up the otherwise integral experience of the rational subject into separate and autonomous domains. Characterizing reason as an essential attribute of “man” forces an artificial distinction that obviates the presence of other attributes that are equally, if not more, weighty in the constitution of the human subject, such as praxis, experience, and practical living. The argument for reason’s essence would thus require granting the same status to these and other attributes, thereby rendering this multiplicity reflective of the unity of human subject (AD, 18).¹²

The exercise of reason represents a type of behavior, an act, through which a person tries to understand herself or the surroundings that she inhabits. This is then akin to the faculty of sight, which cannot be claimed to constitute an autonomous essence, since it is an act brought into existence by the eye, just as reason is an act generated by a real attribute, termed *qalb* in the Islamic tradition.¹³ The relationship of reason to *qalb* is analogous to the relationship of vision to the eye. In the Islamic tradition, Taha argues, reason “as an act of *qalb*” took on various forms, chief among them (a) comprehending the relation between two knowable objects, (b) barring

the reasoning subject from falling to the whim of desires that lead to harm, and (c) retaining and holding on to that which has been procured in the *qalb*.¹⁴ Reason seems to play the role of the *qalb*'s keeper and guard (AD, 19).

The disqualification of reason as essence has to commend it the constant human practice of judging reason as good or bad, as beneficial or harmful or evil. Reason is praised when its sound epistemic methods lead to a good action, and condemned when they lead to harmful results, precisely as humans normally behave in their commission or omission of acts. The act of conduct (commissioning), Taha seems to say, is merely a consequent and continuation of the prior act of rational thinking and deliberation. Theft, for instance, follows on the heels of, and continues, the rational thinking of the thief, just as any good conduct is the result of a prior act of reflection. As acts, the former is judged bad, the latter good.

Reason also rests on the principle of transformation, just as any attribute or act does. "According to this principle, it is possible to direct and influence the *qalb* so that it may abandon one rational attribute in favor of another, one that is better and *more* rational, or, to the contrary, one that is less rational and thus more ignorant" (AD, 21). Reason, for Taha, thus appears to be a highly relative attribute, never devoid of a degree of "ignorance," however negligible. Ignorance and its resultant evil are not lack of reason, but reason that has gone awry. Needless to say, Taha's claim is proven by an entire century's worth of empirical evidence, the Nazi devastation wrought on the world being just one index among many. The Third Reich can hardly be accused of irrationality, if one adopts the perspective of an agent who seeks the most efficient methods to annihilate a large number of people. Reason in this case was sound, yet unethical and evil.

Furthermore, the description of reason as generating theoretical-scientific knowledge is not describing an essential attribute concomitant with the *qalb*. If the latter was taken as the embodiment of this reason, it was due to circumstantial and contingent situations that could have been otherwise and in fact entirely different, this being apparently a reference to the circumstantial and contingent forms of knowledge Europe produced given its own conditions. Such different circumstances could quite conceivably give rise to another distinguishable rational attribute that would in turn lead to a vastly different kind of scientific knowledge. And if this is the case, then it is equally conceivable and quite possible to invent a rational-scientific

method that is different from—and indeed no less rational and scientific than—what has thus far prevailed in modernity. This, for Taha, is a proposition that must be admitted as valid (AD, 21).

Taha is certainly critical of traditional Muslim philosophers and theologians nearly as much as he is of Western Enlightenment thought. In the context of his critique of denuded reason, he launches an attack on the very premises and arguments of Islamic philosophical and theological metaphysics, arguing that there is no certainty to be had in the entirety of such discourses on God and existence, surely not in the same sense in which one speaks of certainty with regard to mathematical and natural sciences. “Therefore,” he concludes, “the path of comprehending divine truths through denuded reason . . . is blocked or, at the very least, a narrow one” (AD, 39).¹⁵

Yet, there are wider and more fundamental limitations on the validity of denuded reason, and the examples cited here derive exclusively from the Western intellectual landscape. Taha identifies three types of limitation, the first of which relates to formal logic. Through the operation of denuded reason, the logician constructs sets of premises, axioms, formulas, rules, and symbols that allow the elaboration of endless proofs for theorems that almost seem to be a form of intellectual play, but that, in the final analysis, turn out to be inconclusive. If only a single unit of the sequence cannot be proven, then the theorem will remain inconclusive, if it does not collapse. “It is well known that some of the most famous sequences of logical proof lack the attribute of conclusiveness” (AD, 41). Furthermore, mathematics seems to be plagued with problems of incompleteness, as Gödel’s two Incompleteness Theorems show (AD, 42).¹⁶ In sum, Taha’s assault on sequences of logical proofs comes up with no more radical conclusion than that which Bertrand Russell reached:

Pure mathematics consists entirely of such asseverations as that, if such and such a proposition is true of anything, then such and such another proposition is true of that thing. . . . It’s essential not to discuss whether the proposition is really true, and not to mention what the anything is of which it is supposed to be true. . . . If our hypothesis is about anything and not about some one or more particular things, then our deductions constitute mathematics. Thus mathematics may be defined as the subject in which we never know what we are talking about, nor whether what we are saying is true.¹⁷

Second, it is widely believed that the laws of abstract reason, which logic makes as its field of investigation, have a single nature and are thus common to, and shared by, all rational persons. However, if we contemplate the history and reality of this discipline, we will find that this belief is unsupportable since logic has become occupied with countless theorems and axioms, and thus with endless modes of reasoning, including mechanical and computerized forms that have been developed as independent fields of investigation. The field of logical investigation has thus been carved up into specialized areas of knowledge, ranging from propositional to predicate logic, from relevance to paraconsistent logics, and passing through intuitionist and computational logics.

Although these divergent fields of knowledge purport to describe denuded reason and the laws and rules by which it works, they have ended up conflicting, if not contradicting, one another. These inconsistencies are exemplified in non-Euclidean geometry, and in the well-known irreconcilability of relativity theory with quantum mechanics (AD, 44). Such issues suffice to cast doubt about the existence of a scientific discourse—in the strict scientific meaning of the term—that can prove reason to be *one reality* that all people share or agree upon.

Inconsistency is not the worst part of the story. With all the perceived mathematical and mechanical accomplishments, modern man was led to the belief that *technique* (*tiqaniyya*)¹⁸ will lead to the happiness of all humanity, as these accomplishments of technique enable man to subdue nature in accordance with his needs and values. Upon reflection, however, these goals have been far from realized, since *technique* has permeated and overwhelmed all aspects of social life, forming along the way “a *technique* universe” that wholly engulfs and dominates humankind. Ironically, the inventions with which modern man has aimed to subdue nature turned out to be the end of his freedom, as he has become servile to them instead of acting as their master.

Technique takes on a life of its own, and develops its own logic that has become independent of human will, and its inner logic rests on two profoundly harmful principles: The first is the irrational principle that “everything is possible.” This principle removes any commitments, deterrents, or limitations, be they moral, ethical, natural, or otherwise. And once man adopts this mechanical-instrumental principle, technique overtakes all that lies within the scope of human endeavor, to the harmful consequences

that have been witnessed. The second is the nonmoral principle that “what is possible must be done” or “what can be done shall be done.” This principle entails absolving oneself of all moral restraint, the latter standing in the way of committing certain unethical acts, such as the destruction, or changing the nature, of creation, or the production of chemical, biological, and radiological weapons, among much else. The main point here is not just the destructive effects of technique, but the manner in which rationalism retracts into ignorance, where action loses its moral bearings. “It is as if the paradigm of denuded reason, in its applications and effects, carries its own seeds of destruction” (AD, 45; but also SA, 66).

These effects of technique, described as “enslavement” (*istirqāqiyya*), stand surely in the company of others, chaos (*fawḍawiyya*) being especially noteworthy. The prevailing belief is that knowledge is cumulative and that one layer of it fits on top of another, as if knowledge were like a flight of stairs, leading us toward the highest, if not perfect, stage of knowledge. This progressive cumulative perception of knowledge is in fact belied by the actual history of science. In reality, scientific theories do not always build on one another, and some cause serious ruptures more than continuities—this being an echo of the Kuhnian thesis. These theories can therefore hardly be said to complement or support previous paradigms. Some theories, furthermore, take off on their own to ask new questions, most of which cannot be answered within the bounds of that theory, questions that multiply and spread in every direction, so much so that they appear to exist in a state of chaos (*khabṭ*; AD, 46).

Third, and finally, are philosophical limitations. It is assumed that denuded reason is dissociated from material forms, as if it yields universal meanings entirely disconnected and separate from sensory matters whose relevance ceases beyond the point of being an aid for reason to reach abstracted forms. This, Taha insists, is far from the truth. There is a complementarity between the formal sciences—regarded as nonmaterialist—and extramental, experimental, and thus materialist sciences. The complementarity comes to view in the manner in which the formal sciences are used to shape the results of material sciences and to formalize (*ṣawrana*) their scientific theories. And this is explicable in terms of the nature of laws that render abstract all rational constructs, for reliance on such laws to understand things in the world rests on three operations, all of which bestow a materialist form on perceptibles (AD, 47).

These operations consist of the following: (1) Once the rational method is brought to bear upon an issue, the latter is converted into, or cast as, an analyzable and experimental phenomenon, causing an elision between the issue's real nature and the manner in which it was materialistically recast. This is tantamount to creating an identity between gold holdings and (the symbolic value of) actual currency, or to "bestowing a materialist appearance" (*tazhīr*) upon things that do not lend themselves to such a materializing act. (2) The process of *tazhīr* cannot be complete without extrapolating the object of analysis into a spatial and temporal existence (*tahyīz*), rendering it subject to the methods of calculation, quantification, division, and reconstruction. The effect of this process is to force measurability and calculability upon that which does not lend itself to such evaluations, just as no amount of medical-scientific-technological scanning can assess the nature, quantity, or quality of the emotion of humility (*khushūʿ*) in a worshiper's prayer. And (3) knowledge acquired by denuded reason does not result from a sudden spark of illumination, as if it were an incident of instantaneous inspiration; rather, it is the result of methods of thinking that rest on prior methods that in turn rest on yet prior methods, enough to control the field of understanding and subject it to constrained forms of calculable experiment and scrutiny. These intervening and mediating methods (*tawsīt*) are controlled by the following principles: (a) the more complex and subtle a thing is in its material form, the more numerous and complicated the methods needed to understand it; and (b) an inverse of the former principle, namely, the more extensive and corporeal the thing is, the fewer the methods that are needed to comprehend it.

From these principles one infers that materialist methods will inevitably be exhausted and consumed in the attempt to comprehend the complex and subtle matters of spirituality and transcendentalism. Through its three operations, denuded reason is thus closer to being a materializing entity than an abstract attribute, falsely presumed to be separate from material forms. Being engulfed in materialism, so-called denuded reason cannot think outside material considerations, and when it encounters nonmaterial realities, its materialistic limitations constitute obstacles that stand in the way of cognition.

Furthermore, denuded reason has had a checkered history that reveals, in its diachronic manifestations, its weakness. A close look at knowledge systems shows that, periodically, theories within a system, otherwise deemed

exemplary, at one point or another become suspect, and are thus discarded as erroneous or irrational. They are replaced by others, now deemed exemplary, when that status was in fact indisputably for a long time enjoyed by those that have just been superseded. But even at their best, Taha seems to say, logical theories and theories of denuded rationality have been unduly obsessed with laws of noncontradiction between and among them, when in fact this ideal need not be attained. As widely attested in the daily practices of humans everywhere, we live according to contradictory rules, without us being irrational in the least. Without such pliability, life would become impossible (AD, 48–49).

Finally, denuded reason is not necessary. It is widely held that denuded reason's province is to prove the unity or even universality of human rationality and that it has the exclusive authority to set the criteria for this rationality. These claims are refuted by the following two considerations: First, the modes of reason prevailing nowadays were inherited from a specific culture and a particular history, and none of them can be foisted upon other cultures as either inevitable or deterministic. History could have played out otherwise, and we (Muslims) could have, in another time and place, chanced upon other systems of thought. Or, we could have invented for ourselves another system of rationality altogether.¹⁹ Second, it is quite conceivable that in the future a "nation" (*umma*) or culture may abandon these familiar forms of rationality and invent for itself other rational forms of thought without being influenced by denuded reason (AD, 49). Taha's point seems to be that each society or culture develops its own internal logic, a system of living that attends to the rationalization of its values. And each society, governed thus by an internal logic of its own, develops a form of reason, but no form, qua form, can have a universal validity, for the internal logics, being always unique, consequently yield unique forms of rationality. The question for Taha, one would suspect, is not the form as form, and not rationality qua rationality—these are variable and in some strong sense means to an end. The end, the highest value in his project, is ethical formation, potentially achievable through a variety of forms. But none of these includes denuded reason, which is inherently incapable of such formation. On the other hand, the Islamic solution he is attempting to provide remains one among possible others drawn from within and without Islam. And it is in the layers of the next two forms of reason that the Islamic alternative distinguishes itself from Europe's denuded reason.

III

Taha goes to great lengths to articulate his conception of guided reason (*al-‘aql al-musaddad*).²⁰ Superior to denuded reason, guided reason is represented in acts through which an agent aims to bring about a benefit or to avoid a harm by means of performing works dictated by the Moral Law (*Shar‘*). The choice of the term *musaddad* is quite deliberate, since more common designations such as *‘aql ghayr mustaqill* or *‘aql muqayyad* (nonautonomous or limited reason) possess negative connotations, likely to engender the false impression that what we are speaking of is a sort of reason that is constricted and constrained, reason that is incapable of opening up new frontiers and horizons. To the contrary, guided reason is superior to denuded reason because it is empowered by its *shar‘ī* affiliation to stay the correct course in articulating knowledge that leads to benefit, this being embodied in praxis (*AD*, 67). This conception entails the understanding that the act must fulfill three necessary conditions:

First, the act must accord with the Moral Law. It is insufficient for an act to be merely intentional and “directed” (i.e., subject to *tawjīh*), for such an act may nonetheless remain unguided even in the presence of these two attributes. For despite all the intellectual efforts that the agent exercises in choosing the best act and in investigating its implications, the act may still be harmful to the agent herself, if not also to others. Only an act supported by the guiding principles of the Moral Law can permit the agent to avoid harm, always assuming she *intends* the act to bring benefit (*AD*, 58).²¹

Taha does not explain why the Moral Law, the *Shari‘a*, should be entrusted with such a charge. But his argument would make good sense if we realize, as I believe he does, that the *Shari‘a* historically did prove itself capable of forming subjectivities through what he calls guided reason. But it is also important to understand what it is in *Shari‘a*’s history and character that equips it with such a capacity, one that presupposes both the absence of arbitrariness and the presence of a spatiotemporal, diachronic-cum-synchronic, and communal conception of higher principles. Representing values that are seen to stand above the arbitrariness of ever-changing human predilections, the *Shari‘a* regulated the entire range of the social order, either directly through its jurists or by means of a fairly well-defined and limited delegation through the executive. It was constituted by the “legislative power” par excellence, and “legislation” was both a cumulative

and collective process, which is to say that “law,” in both the moral and the technical legal senses, was the result of *a corporate-like entity, a collectivity of juristic voices over time and space, and not subject to the will or whim of any single jurist, ruler, or even a contemporaneous group of jurists*. Thus, no one could claim ownership of the law. And since the source of all moral-legal authority was an anthropological-hermeneutical engagement with authorized texts by a formally undefinable body of men of piety across regions and centuries, the law not only was beyond political reach but also stood, as the embodiment of these higher principles, above all human institutions (notwithstanding its built-in structures of legal change).²²

The historical record, Taha argues, is replete with evidence to show that despite all the good intentions and best efforts to properly *direct* human acts through denuded reason, the actual results of these acts have often not been as positive as the original intentions themselves: as intimated earlier, the well-intended projects to unify human reason, to rationalize the world, to bring technique into human service, and to organize knowledge have all yielded destructive results, contrary and opposite to the original intent. In fact, they have resulted in the fragmentation of reason, an increase in irrationality, the enslavement of man by machines, and the dissipation and scattering of knowledge (*tashtīt*). “If man has indeed lost total control over those things that are closest and most familiar to him, then what will be his condition with regard to the hidden future and those matters most obscure and unfamiliar to him?” (AD, 59). Illusions of progress through reason have led modern man into a repetitious cycle of hope, promise, action, and failure, only to return, with the same method, to mend failure with another cycle of hope, promise, action, and failure. All this is the consequence of the inability to understand the absolute necessity of a Moral Law. Instead, this Law has become the locus of derision and criticism, as if it were the source of evil.

Second, according to the Moral Law, each act must bring about a benefit. This is also to say that it is insufficient, if not inadequate, to bring about the benefit through other means, since these are intrinsically defective, irrespective of the extent of rational scrutiny deployed in justification of the act. By contrast, acts generated by the Moral Law are safeguarded by three characteristics or considerations: (1) Nondivine, self-made law can never rise above material considerations of life. It will therefore always remain materialistic to the core, because it cannot adopt the ethical values that are

the natural lot of the Moral Law's follower. These values are so supreme that they subordinate material and materialistic considerations and rise above them, making them their subsidiaries. On the contrary, values issuing from nonmoral law remain—as they have in late modernity—bound by immediate, if not shortsighted, considerations, however lofty these might first appear; eventually, though, they become themselves subordinated to the dominant and dominating materialistic (if not hedonistic and base) values. The effects of the Moral Law are to control and mitigate the “thick” and heavy effects of materialist values by embedding them in, and managing them through, the moral domain. (2) Benefits accruing by means of nondivine law remain limited both in their desiderata and in the scope of the means by which these desiderata are defined and implemented. Thus, benefits reveal themselves to the agent applying this law only to the limited extent that these means permit. It is implied here that such means are not situated within a wider system of moral-spiritual values that connects these individual benefits to a system of benefits. The Moral Law escapes this narrow and superficial path (*saṭṭhiyya*), always providing depth and range for all human acts. And (3) benefits accruing within a system of nondivine moral law are subjective—in the sense that they are individualistic—however much they are based on a common standard and regulated by general principles and rules. Here, Taha is rather terse, leaving much unaccounted for. Regardless, his point seems to be that subjectivity (*dhātīyya*) in this particular context leads to self-centeredness and selfishness, among other unseemly qualities, because the law followed is not grounded in a cosmology that safeguards the interests of man while at the same time preserving the interests of all other forms of life. Subjectivity, in other words, seems to breed anthropocentrism, and this in turn breeds love for control and power. Divine law ensures the permanent presence of higher principles that both control and guide the subject in negotiating his subjectivity. In the Moral Law, benefits are set within a communal system in which the individual attempts to realize benefits for his own interest but with equal attention to the welfare of the community in which she lives. Seen from the perspective of his project as a whole, the “community” in Taha's conception is an ever-expanding circle that ranges from the family and immediate social community to the global community, situated within the physical world and within a particular cosmology. In this system, the realization of benefit for one is not distinguished from the realization of benefit for all (AD, 61).

Third, guided reason presupposes the agent's engagement in works (*ishtighāl*). Generally put, the concept of "works"—which involves habituated practice, "technologies of the soul," and psychoepistemic ethical cultivation—represents a venue from which to exit from the confines of theory (*naẓar*) toward an engagement with praxis (*ʿamal*), understood as an epistemically productive site. The relationship between theory and praxis in this sense has been the preoccupation of thinkers for centuries and millennia, but has nevertheless emerged in modernity with some intensity only to favor, on the whole, a reduced relationship of theory to activity and activism, productivity and production, application, *technique*, and certainly praxis. In keeping with this reconfiguration, *sharʿī* praxis as a distinct category has been expunged from these fields of action, since, the contention goes, it is not a tangible experience (*ghayr malmūs*). Yet, the materialists (*al-malmūsiyyūn*, proponents of the *malmūs*) agree that, for an act to be "tangible" and to possess quantifiable and measurable effects of recognizable benefit to the public interest (*al-ṣāliḥ al-ʿāmm*), they ought to admit that *sharʿī* praxis fulfills the conditions they have set forth, even exceeds them. Said praxis manages to accomplish this feat because it is concerned not with fanciful theorization or excessive theoretical explorations,²³ but rather with actual practice as producing actual moral effects within a social order. Nor is this all. As stated earlier, this type of act or praxis has the added virtue of constraining and controlling the materialism of acts performed on the basis of non-*sharʿī* prescriptions. Being deeply psychological, *sharʿī* acts also seep deeper into the agent's soul, creating profound psychological convictions, which in turn has the power of social transcendence, namely, the pervasive spreading of these acts, from one individual to the next, throughout society. With this characterization, Taha seems to consciously aim at excluding the state or any other hegemonic or sovereign entity from producing such effects (see chapter 6).

Essential to Taha's theory is the distinction between *naẓar* and *ʿamal*, or *ishtighāl*, a distinction so central that people can be classified according to it into *ahl al-naẓar* and *ahl al-ishtighāl* (the "people of theory" and "people of praxis"). Against the former, the latter hold the practicability and applicability of any science to be its mark of distinction: the more the science is applicable and involved in practice, the more useful and superior to other fields it is. Which is to say that in any ranking of importance and "degree of honor" (*tashrīf*), those sciences that attend to works and praxis will stand at

the top of the list, with the sciences that instruct in the art of living an ethical life at the head of these (AD, 62).²⁴

Praxis has the effect of removing external *and* internal impediments, or at least minimizing their control over and manipulation of the agent.²⁵ And the more the agent becomes free of such impediments, the more these works contribute to the refinement of his perceptions and moral knowledge, and vice versa. This process of praxis and enhancement, dialectical in nature, works to expand (*tawṣīʿ*) the moral horizons. Nevertheless, Taha argues that, in their more narrowly conceived understanding of praxis, the “proponents of tangible acts” (*al-malmūsiyyūn*) have erred in reducing praxis to sociopolitical praxis, as if there was no activity of greater or equal value. Fundamentally materialists, they have arrogated central importance to *this* practice, and bestowed on it expansive meanings that have culminated in its subordination to other spheres. Yet in doing so, they have forgotten that this practice remains constrained by multiple considerations that reflect higher values. This is to say that an adequate regard for these considerations will undermine the autonomous status they have assigned their preferred form of practice. Unlike sociopolitical practice, religious works (*ʿibāda*) expand the horizons of perception and “educate” the self in higher morals that in turn aid in ridding that self of unethical habits and beliefs. Once this is accomplished, the moral effects percolate into lower spheres of activity, whether political, social, or otherwise. In their loyalty to the sociopolitical, the materialists therefore have missed a crucial link in human behavior, one that is located between their kind of practice and the moral resources of the agent, themselves nothing other than religious works (AD, 64).

Furthermore, engaging works and praxis has a corrective effect on the performing agent, directing and redirecting her to avoid perverse and harmful behavior. Without designating them as such, Taha here is speaking of the technologies of the soul and the entire range of habituating techniques that, because of their repetitive acculturating effects on the body and mind, act as an exemplar in the agent’s conscience, always providing a benchmark that nags at the agent’s soul with incessant reminders of the necessity to hold on to moral conduct and to revert, at every turn, to the grand principles of ethical behavior that act as correctives (*taṣwīb*) to diversion. This he calls *taʿṣīl*, the harking back to the (relevant) “original principle” (*al-qāʿida al-aṣliyya*) of *sharʿī* conduct (AD, 65).

Guided reason thus amounts to denuded reason *thickened* by *sharʿī* works;²⁶ it does not lack autonomy (*istiqlāl*), as it is widely but wrongly held. Instead, it lifts denuded reason from its state of remission (*istiqāla*, lit. resignation), since this constrained form of reason has effectively abandoned divine command and prohibition. By embracing works and action as its *modus vivendi*, guided reason is not encumbered or rendered defective by its abstracted and theoretical nature. In other words, guided reason amounts to the *masmūʿ*, that form of rationality which seeks the company of particular *sharʿī* methods of action and works anchored in higher principles.

Despite the neologism introduced in the form of *masmūʿ*, there is virtually nothing new in this conception, since it was pervasive in *sharʿī* theory and practice throughout premodern Islam, with the jurists (*ʿulamāʾ*) explicitly named as referents.²⁷ “The *masmūʿ* is that which is sought by a rational act and which falls within the boundaries of that act” (AD, 68–69). The active agent of the *masmūʿ*, the *sāmiʿ*, is the one who directs his rational act toward a desideratum (*maṭlūb*), seeking proximity to it, in the sense not of epistemic control over it, but rather of action-based propinquity, where knowledge and action unite, or stand at least in a relationship of concomitance (*talāzum*). The meaning of concomitance here includes a dialectically fertilizing process, where virtues inhering in reason inform action, and virtues of praxis instruct and refine reason. Thus, the relationship between reason and praxis appears here as a psychospiritual one, amounting to a quest to cultivate a desire, a love, for the action to be committed and what it sets in motion.

Deriving it from the classical notion of *qurba* (closeness to God), Taha gives this quest the name of *samʿī-qurbānī*, an integral attribute of guided reason. The combined concept brings together the two necessary conditions of theoretical-epistemic attainment and practice-based propinquity, *the latter being clearly absent from denuded reason*. It is precisely here where guided reason acquires an edge over its denuded counterpart.

Yet, despite the full range of safeguards afforded by guided reason, it remains true that it is no more protected from the lurking dangers encountering denuded reason. It is, in fact, the very aspect of *sharʿī* praxis that is particularly vulnerable to at least two causes of corruption that can eviscerate it of its real meaning and function. Echoing an extensive tradition within quasi-legal writings in premodern Islam, including the notable *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* by Ghazālī,²⁸ Taha speaks of the corrupting elements of pretension (*taẓāhur*) and unthinking conformity (*taqlīd*). Pretension may encompass

a range of eviscerating and deleterious practices, including excessive performance without genuine dedication to the inner “soul” of action and praxis, this being a double infraction because it lacks sincerity and involves, in addition, an excess that amounts to lying. Feigned excess does not only presuppose deceitfulness but is also intended to attain social benefits, both of which amount to depriving the act of the required degree of sincerity. Absence of sincerity and socially interested but excessive praxis also lead the agent to overestimate her own piety and attitude and, at the same time, to underrate those of others. This self-righteousness is merely the beginning of an unhealthy attitude that culminates in judging others as less pious, even accusing them of disbelief, a move that runs counter to everything that religion prescribes (AD, 79–83).²⁹

The second cause of corruption is *taqlīd*, which has three forms, the first consisting in the commissioning of an act on the basis of someone else’s theoretical knowledge without a proof of the validity of this knowledge. A second form of *taqlīd* occurs when the theoretical (*naẓarī*) grounds of the principle of action are within the agent’s reach, but are bereft of the praxis-based grounds—a situation that places this *taqlīd* within the confines, and thus shortcomings, of denuded reason. Finally, the third form is what might be called ordinary *taqlīd* (*taqlīd ‘ādī*), a practice that ceases to be intentional and has thus no particular purpose, having been degraded into a ritualistic affair, performed as an ordinary custom (AD, 83–89).³⁰ This latter consideration amounts to a critique leveled at those who equate the religious works of the *‘ibādāt* with ritualistic, mechanical performance. By Taha’s measure these *‘ibādāt* are nothing when reduced to ritualistic performance.

IV

Enhanced reason (*al-‘aql al-mu‘ayyad*)³¹ represents acts whose owner seeks to know things in themselves, i.e., what makes them what they are, by delving into the entire range of *shar‘ī* praxis and works, including optional practices, in addition to performing those acts that are mandatory, in the most complete fashion (AD, 121). If there is any point to introducing a thicker meaning to *‘ibāda*, it is to militate, in the most systematic and psychoepistemic of ways, against any ritualistic practices routinely but erroneously attributed to the field of praxis.

Whereas denuded reason seeks to comprehend the apparent attributes of things, or their descriptions (*rusūm*),³² and whereas guided reason aims to comprehend phenomena insofar as their praxis and external actions are concerned,³³ enhanced reason seeks to attain all these descriptions and practices *in addition to the inner attributes and inner actions of things*, namely, their essences (*dhawāt*) or identity (*huwiyya*), defined as that which makes a thing what it is (*mā bi-hi yakūn al-shay' huwa huwa*). Neither reason alone nor praxis alone can be the proper means or venue to this comprehension, but rather by means of them both, together, combined with experience (*tajriba*). To understand the differences between and among the three types, consider a person who says: "I know from so-and-so about such-and-such, because I have heard this about him." This is theoretical knowledge of apparent qualities. But if that person says, "I deal with so-and-so because I benefit from him in regard to X matter," then this represents practical, experiential knowledge of external acts that are intended to bring benefit and avoid harm. On the other hand, if he says, "I like/love so-and-so because he feels the same about me," then this person experiences an internal, living knowledge (*ma'rifa ḥayya*) that can aid him in attaining cognition of external attributes and actions by means of *internal attributes and internal acts and states*.

Taha calls this third type "living practical knowledge" (*al-naẓar al-ʿamali al-ḥayy*) *al-mulābasa*, a term apparently derived from Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī's language in *al-I'lām bi-Manāqib al-Islām* (AD, 122).³⁴ For our purposes, and in the meantime, we will assume this term to be a mere acronym, standing for a combination of two elements, namely, (a) the practical bent of guided reason as it is, and (b) this practical bent as best united with living experience, the latter being an addition that moves *mulāmasa*, in a categorically psychoepistemic manner, into the realm of enhanced reason. The addition is not an arithmetical operation; rather, it is a progressive and reflective engagement that has an equivalent in the power of growth animating living things. The effects of this experience penetrate deep into the very processes and functions of praxis and action, that is, into the psychoepistemic self. Enhanced reason thus encompasses an inner psychological dimension, whereby the knowledge of attributes attained by abstracted reason and of acts attained by guided reason is augmented by a knowledge of essential qualities. This latter knowledge goes deep into the reality of things to engender an internal knowledge that emits its effects onto external attitudes and actions.

This brief account of enhanced reason suffices for us to draw the conclusion that Taha's tripartite typology of reason is intended to capture the differences (as well as incremental commonalities), respectively, between and among the modern conception of reason, the premodern *sharʿī* synthesis of reason and revelation, and the *ṣūfī* forms of knowledge. In other words, the typology corresponds to what are at present modern, traditional *sharʿī* and *ṣūfī* practices of rationality, assuming that the second and third can be categorized as necessarily differentiated fields (a point to be raised later).

However, Taha does not state the matter in these terms, although he does devote to the matter a substantial section in which he argues that, of all Islamic rational practices, enhanced reason acquires its most perfect form in the *ṣūfī* arena (AD, 146–56). Clearly associated with *Ṣūfism*, enhanced reason travels a considerable distance toward perfecting rational reality, since it cultivates in the individual a special capacity to avoid certain character faults, such as lack of humility, love of appearances, unthinking conformism, indulging in (useless) abstractions, engaging in politics (*tasyīs*), and love for domination and mastery.³⁵ Which is also to say that by developing this tripartite account of reason, Taha not only has leveled a trenchant critique of Jābrī's portrayal of the *bayānī* and *ʿirfānī* “epistemic regimes,” but can also be said to have cut down Jābrī's central claims.

Taha's feat, then, is achieved by anchoring reason in both these domains right in the midst of praxis, in habituation, embodiment, and a profound technology of the soul. All Jābrī seems to see in these two regimes is their outer and surface layers of reason, but cannot appreciate that these praxis-based technologies are powerful performatives of a subject fully grounded in robust conceptions of positive liberty. This, I think, is the final and highest measure against which an assessment of the two thinkers ought to rest.

The struggle between Taha and Jābrī is not so much about “forms of rationality” for their own sake. Rather, it is about the most profound and encompassing conception of reality, one that defines all of the structures, teleologies, and values of what I have been calling central domains. It is, at the end of the day, the crucial struggle over the two “concepts of liberty,” not just as defined in the Berlinian and liberal ways, but one that is engulfed—in the Tahan-Jābiriyyan debate—by the oceanic weight of twelve centuries of Islamic experience prior to colonialism, which has come down to us by the name of *turāth*. “Oceanic weight” because so-called positive liberty in this

experience transcends, as I will argue in the epilogue, even an amplified conception of its Berlinian counterpart.³⁶

Enhanced reason, embodying what I take to be the deeper thrusts of an Islamic conception of positive liberty, must fulfill, in Taha's thinking, three conditions in order to reach the higher stages of perfection. First, knowledge must be concomitant with praxis, whereby the maxim "knowledge is the founding principle of praxis and praxis is the perfected completion of knowledge" acquires the status of truth. No rational knowledge can reach perfection without moving, or transposing itself, from the level of abstraction to the level of ethical behavior. Praxis qua praxis possesses a generative epistemic and heuristic value. This is the case even in the linguistic, logical, or exact sciences, since, without the antidote of enhanced reason, these are liable to be placed, as they indeed were, in the service of unethical conduct (think of Nazism). Thus, it is imperative to undertake an evaluation of scholarship and writings on Islamic subjects with an eye to streamlining them according to this principle. *A work of scholarship would have no useful purpose, and thus must be rejected, if it does not establish itself as meaningfully relevant to practical ethics.*³⁷

Second, every intellectual project or field of inquiry, to be complete and mature, must seek a way toward knowing God as much as it is the desideratum of that project or inquiry to establish truths within the field in which it situates itself. This is because all objects of inquiry are, in the final analysis, integral to God's creation and an expression of his creative works. The advocates of denuded reason have shunned this connection, at the price of incurring upon themselves much harm and devastation. Taha does not explicitly specify this harm, but he must surely be thinking of the modern destruction of the natural habitat, the fragmentation of the social order, the depletion of meaning and the consequent harm to the psyche, genocide, hegemony, and much else.³⁸ Be that as it may, his point appears to amount to the following argument: the study of existence, which is what we in effect do and claim to be doing, must reckon with the fact that its object of inquiry represents a wholesome and integrated unity that we must treat with sacred respect. The ways of unraveling the workings of this ontological unity must constantly be aware of the integrity and sacredness of this object.

Third, rational practices of enhanced reason must always allow for epistemic expansion, since its ceaseless and penetrating inquiry (*ijtihad*) into

praxis ineluctably engenders an attachment to guiding values and instructive and constructive meanings that ultimately yield benefit and avoid harm, both of which are defined in ethical terms. Taha here is emphasizing that any searching inquiry in enhanced reason is nearly boundless within the domain of subjective moral rationality, which infuses into the amalgam of denuded and guided reason a deeply psychological ingredient and a committed practical ethics. He is perhaps taking his argument even further: liberal inquiries may well be horizontally varied and staggeringly expansive, but none of them entails the conclusion that they manage to fulfill this third condition, simply because they fail on account of the first two conditions.

These three conditions find their complete fulfillment in *ṣūfī* practices, representing the achievements of enhanced reason. In Taha's estimation, denuded and guided reasons remain, even aggregately, incomplete, and thus inadequate to the life of a Muslim (as it has been effectively defined and shaped by a millennium of actual experience and ways of living in the world). Of course this leaves open the question of what constitutes "*ṣūfī* practices" in his thought, a question he does not shy away from answering, albeit with relative brevity.

In the construction of moral character in accordance with enhanced reason, two principles must hold, being together an antidote to the morally objectionable phenomenon of politicization.³⁹ The first is the integrity of the link between the ethically exemplary figures of the past (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and contemporary moral engagement. This link, we recall, belongs to not linear but ethical time, in which causality and historiographical facts are irrelevant. The second principle, moral accomplishment (*taḥṣīl*), demands an ethical embodiment after the examples of these figures. In chapter 6, we will see that Taha launches a biting critique of the political Islamists, and goes to great lengths in pitting this kind of ethical *salafī* embodiment against their concepts of politics and "religion." He rejects the modern *salafī* incarnation as both textualist and given to politicization (*tasyīṣi*) rather than a genuinely ethical or ethicizing movement (*takhliqī*). As a general rule, modern Salafism focuses on the texts (and, one might even say, on the text without context), not their moral content, and rejects the exemplarity of past models by passing judgment on them (*yaḥkum 'alā al-rijāl*), instead of setting them up as moral exemplars, as expressions of ethical, rather than linear, time. Thus the difference is that modern Salafism navigates its way through the

written word (*‘ibāra*), whereas the *takhliq* of enhanced reason entirely relies on the moral semiotics (*ishāra*) of past exemplars (AD, 185). In order to distinguish ethical from the politicized Salafism, Taha gives it the name *tasalluf*, a kind of Salafism that peruses the texts with an eye to delving into praxis, so as to extract from the texts their moral content. He recognizes that the texts are removed from our lives by a long stretch of history and that, as a result, changes in the interim require us to provide new readings of the texts. Yet, the readings do not require a direct or close study of these texts, for these should be seen as guides to renewing the *mutasallif*’s education.⁴⁰

In his *Su’āl al-Akhlāq*, Taha takes stock of what should constitute a definition of rationality, irrespective of the intellectual position adopted. Any definition must include three criteria or standards (*ma’āyir*). The first of these is actionism (*fā’iliyya*). To be dissociated from earlier uses (Weber’s, Alain Touraine’s), this concept refers to the individual’s realization of herself through praxis, one that ranges over the entire spectrum of her life experience and that, in the process, defines the identity of her overall conduct as a human being. By necessity, then, these praxes must be varied, first, in their intentions and motives and, second, in their quality and methods of implementation. And third, they must perforce be subject to the vicissitudes of time and place (SA, 61–62). Hence, certain forms of actionism would be effective and successful, while others would be deficient (SA, 64).

The second criterion is *mi’yār al-taqwīm*, which may be translated as “valuative ennoblement,” the constant and never-ceasing search for higher values, a process whose goal is to attain the highest state of perfection possible. This is almost identical to what I have elsewhere called the “ethical benchmark.”⁴¹ The third criterion is the criterion of integral complementarity (*mi’yār al-takāmul*). The various parts and aspects of human behavior are not separable and fragmented entities, where one act may be assigned to a sphere unrelated to the other spheres in the life of the individual. To the contrary, every aspect or act is related to every other, for they all stem from one self or subjectivity (*dhāt wāḥida*), which combines attributes of weakness and strength, knowledge and practice, and emotional and cerebral knowledge.

With this cursory mapping of rationality, Taha wants to subject both the Aristotelian and the Cartesian conceptions of reason to critique. The former

exercised influence on premodern Muslim thinkers, whereas the latter has become paradigmatic in modern conceptions of rationality, in the West to be sure, but no less in today's Muslim world (SA, 62).

Aristotle regarded reason as the quiddity of humanity, an essential attribute that distinguishes man from animal. His definition then clearly does not meet the first and third standards (actionism and integral complementarity), although to a rather limited extent it does conform to the second. The definition of reason as essence makes it a sort of substitute for the self (*dhāt*), when in fact reason *is an act and a mode of conduct*.⁴² It is integral to all human actions: a person reasons through his sense perception of sight, as he does when he exercises the faculty of hearing. Reason can thus be judged as good or bad: it is good when it is put to good actions, and vice versa. Thus, it changes with the change of modes of conduct in which it is embedded, and may transform itself from one intellectual quality into another. The Aristotelian definition has the additional effect of dividing the human into distinct and autonomous components, since making rationality an essence of humanity leads to a fragmented view of the human subject who also possesses the essential attributes of action and experiential knowledge, among others. On the other hand, while the Aristotelian tradition attended to evaluative ennoblement, it did not take it in the right direction, because the values that it upheld as necessary for the perfection of man cannot be said to ensure that they will not be converted to their opposites, resulting in harm when they were intended to accomplish the good. "Evidence of this is their doctrine of the Ten Intellects, which were assigned the status of gods" (SA, 63, 65).⁴³

Cartesian rationality, on the other hand, sees itself as defined by the scientific method, especially the logical and mathematical. Yet, while this method makes a claim to universal scientific laws and a common form of rationality, it consists in reality of irreconcilable theories that differ in their fundamental assumptions and approaches, as attested, inter alia, in the theories of relativity and absolute space. The multiplicity and incompatible plurality of these scientific methods make it impossible to reach a coherent and unified rational method, leaving us with a bewildering relativism. This in turn makes it impossible to fulfill the criterion of valuative ennoblement, since an objective standard of what this consists of cannot be agreed on, making the search for and attainment of values of the good life altogether impossible.

Concomitant with relativism comes chaos (*fawḍawiyya*). Exhibiting contradiction in assumptions, methods, and theories, modern science does not build a unified vision of the world and good life, but represents a series of breaks, where one theory or paradigm contradicts or refutes the other, this being exemplified by the narrative of divine creation vs. evolutionism, rational mechanics vs. quantum mechanics, and the Einsteinian theory vs. the Newtonian one. Needless to say, all this is a tacit reference to the Kuhnian thesis of paradigm shifts, but for Taha the ethical implications of this commonly accepted thesis are far graver than what has been made of it. While for immediate practical and material living this intellectual chaos may not matter, it certainly has adverse effects on an ethical view of the world, in which truth, especially that of value, is relative and even confused. As important, the claim that scientific rationality leads to an ordered and holistic view of the world is groundless (SA, 66).

Cartesian scientific reason has furthermore developed in such intensely technical ways that it has ended up containing and controlling human life, in the process enslaving humanity under the guise of the rhetoric of freedom and liberation, desiderata that turned into their opposites. Here, Taha does not feel the need to belabor the point, for Weber, Ellul, and many others have forcefully expounded such themes in enduring critiques of their own. The human enslavement by autonomous logic and the operation of what Ellul called *technique* has led to the irrational principle that everything is possible, which in turn has resulted in the unethical precept that what can be done must be done. And since methods of technique tend to lift any and all constraints that ought to shape, direct, and control behavior, the mission of freeing humanity and leading it to happiness has failed to constitute itself as a real and practical goal (*maqṣad ḥaqīqī wa-fiʿlī*; SA, 66).

Scientific rationality is furthermore plagued by a number of adverse characteristics. First, it makes a pretense to objectivity by saturating its discourse with its penchant to purify its methods from subjective value and subjective meaning. It purports to limit itself to dispassionate observation and sense experience, where religious meaning and ethical values are regarded as obstacles standing in the way of pure objectivity. In truth, however, all this rational practice does is displace and substitute religious meanings with its own secular and nonethical notions, including the concept of objectivity itself. Second, scientific rationalism exhibits a stubborn insistence on exteriority (*al-jumūd ʿalā al-ẓāhir*), whereby a thing is made

equivalent to its representation and appearance. Yet, it is only through locating things in space and time that they can be transformed into phenomena, which is to say that modern scientific rationality neglects the inner truths of things (*al-ḥaqā'iq al-bāṭina*), which cannot be reduced to quantification, measurement, or experiential analysis. This partial view of the world surely cannot and does not guarantee the attainment of true benefit that leads to the good life, which explains why this rationality, while intending to improve the lot of humanity, ends up causing much harm in practice.

The third characteristic of scientific rationality is that of successive means. Since knowledge of things in the world is constructed through a series of analytical and argumentative intermediaries (*waṣā'it*) that successively build on one another, the more complex the phenomenon to be explained, the more numerous and extensive become the means to comprehend it. And since spiritual phenomena are complex and finely nuanced, materialist analytical means (the only kind that scientific rationality knows) are inevitably both insufficient and inadequate, thereby missing those crucial aspects of reality that lead to true benefit.

Since both Aristotelian and Cartesian rational methods are deficient in the articulation and application of reason's criteria, "we have good reason to regard them as standing at a lower grade of rationality that we have called 'denuded rationality'" (SA, 68). Denuded reason is precisely that which is devoid of certitude both in the theoretical benefit of the goals it articulates and in the actual means by which these goals can be achieved. Hence the tremendous harm that it has managed to cause!

Accordingly, an exit from denuded reason requires the introduction of what Taha calls praxis-values (*qiyam 'amaliyya*), since praxis enriches and fortifies what would otherwise remain limited to denuded rationality. Here, valuative ennoblement is key, due to the fact that it encompasses two characteristics. First, it abides by higher principles. If principles qua principles have any value, it is because they are not subject to whimsical or willful change. Second, representing the ultimate goals (*maqāṣid*), valuative ennoblement must be universal in the sense that it is not subject to individual variation or will. Rather, it is collective and communal, shared by social individuals as groups or as members of a group. Yet, the means to achieve valuative ennoblement—which go under the heading of actionism—tolerate a wide range of variation and particularity, for while the higher values and principles are fixed, the means to them may be countless and varied (SA,

69–71). Yet, an intimate relationship must always exist between varied means and higher principles, which is also to say that the latter must, at every turn, be brought to bear upon the former. In nondenuded rationality, theory and practice, speech and act, knowledge and action are woven together, one being coexistent and coextensive with the other. If the higher values and principles are ethical, and if the means to them, however varied, always connect back to them and strive to serve them and bolster their meanings in the soul, then the entire mode of existence would be grounded in enhanced rationality (*‘aqlāniyya mu’ayyada*), which religion, but not secularism, could offer. Unity between principles and praxis, between means and ends, between speech and act, and between theory and practice all are essential ingredients of this rationality, a type of rationality that avoids the fragmentation and shortcomings of its denuded counterpart.⁴⁴

4. RECASTING REASON

Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 176–77, 229–50. Here, Taha is drawing heavily on the extensive premodern Islamic concepts and practices of philanthropy.

58. A theme which Taha elaborates in *RH*, 92, paragraph 2.

59. *RH*, 95n10: “*Lā yaghību ‘an fiṭnat al-qāri’ annanā nanzur ilā al-ta’āruḥ hunā min jānib dalālatihi ‘alā al-tawāṣul bi-wāṣitat al-khiṭāb.*” See also Taha, *al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī fil-Ikhtilāf al-Fikrī* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2005), 129–30, 143–45.

4. Recasting Reason

1. Originally published in 1989. I here rely on the 4th edition, printed in 2006 in Casablanca by al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī.
2. See Taha, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī fil-Ikhtilāf al-Fikrī* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2005), 56–57, 99ff.
3. Technologies “of the soul” and not “of the self” because the self (*nafs*) in Taha’s conception is the seat of desire and self-attribution, and thus of human lordship over all else.
4. This is why Taha often highlights the etymological and conceptual connections between *khalq* (creation) and *khuluq* (ethics), both deriving from the Arabic root *Kh.L.Q.*
5. Taha does not frame the matter in these terms, nor does he employ a theory of central and peripheral domains, but, as we will see, his system of thought recognizes similar conceptions. For a succinct exposition of this theory, see Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6–12.
6. Taha, *Su’āl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fil-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2000).
7. *Mujarrad* may also be translated as “abstracted,” but this will not do justice to the narrower meanings that Taha wants to bestow on this type. So is the term *pure*, which can no longer, especially after Kant, be used without the excess meanings it has accumulated. “Denuded,” in the sense of something being stripped of all attachments, captures the Arabic meaning more adequately than any other.
8. On judgment (*taṣdīq*) as a predication of concepts (*taṣawwūrāt*) and as integral to definition (*ḥadd*) and quiddity (*māhiyya*), see Wael Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 4–5n4. See also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1961), 33–36; ‘Isā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Ghurra fil-Mantiq*, ed. Albīr Naṣrī Nādir (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1983), 112–13; Harry Wolfson, “The Terms *Taṣawwūr* and *Taṣdīq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents,” *Moslem World* 33 (1943): 114–28.
9. *AD*, 17: “*Al-‘aql al-mujarrad ‘ibāratun ‘an al-fi’li al-ladhī yaṭṭali‘u bi-hi sāhibuhu ‘alā wajhin min wujūhi shay’ in mā, mu‘taqidan fī ṣidqi ḥādhā al-fi’l, wa-mustanidan fī ḥādhā al-taṣdīq ilā dalīlin mu‘ayyan.*”

4. RECASTING REASON

10. I occasionally render the term *al-insān* as “man,” although the more precise rendering is “human” or “human being.” This rendering, forced by English idiom, imposes itself as a requirement of style.
11. The theory of essences was not accepted among Muslim intellectuals across the board. For example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya, perhaps the two most towering intellectuals of their times, rejected this Porphyrian and Aristotelian doctrine. See Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians*; Bilal Ibrahim, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Haytham, and Aristotelian Science: Essentialism Versus Phenomenalism in Post-Classical Islamic Thought,” *Oriens* 41 (2013): 379–431.
12. See also Taha, *Su’āl al-‘Amal: Baḥṭh ‘an al-Uṣūl al-‘Amaliyya fil-Fikr wal-‘Ilm* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2012), 59–60.
13. Literally, *qalb* connotes “heart.” Taha deems traditional Islamic scholars to have mostly, but unjustifiably, combined their own notion of reason as an act or a faculty (*quwwa*, *malaka*) with the Aristotelian concept of essence (*jawhar*, *dhāt*). See Taha, *Su’āl al-‘Amal*, 69–74.
14. AD, 19: “*Al-‘aql huwa imsāku al-qalb li-mā yaṣil ilayhi ḥattā lā yanfalit minhu.*”
15. He dedicates a short chapter to these themes in AD, 25–39.
16. Perhaps the simplest explanation of the Second Incompleteness Theorem is this:

First of all, when I say “proved,” what I will mean is “proved with the aid of the whole of math.” Now then: two plus two is four, as you well know. And, of course, *it can be proved* that two plus two is four (proved, that is, with the aid of the *whole* of math, as I said, though in the case of two plus two, of course we do not need the whole of math to prove that it is four). And, as may not be quite so clear, it can be proved that it can be proved that two plus two is four, as well. And it can be proved that it can be proved that it can be proved that two plus two is four. And so on. In fact, if a claim can be proved, then it can be proved that the claim can be proved. And *that* too can be proved.

Now, two plus two is not five. And it can be proved that two plus two is not five. And it can be proved that it can be proved that two plus two is not five, and so on.

Thus: it can be proved that two plus two is not five. Can it be proved as well that two plus two is five? It would be a real blow to math, to say the least, if it could. If it could be proved that two plus two is five, then it could be proved that five is not five, and then there would be no claim that could not be proved, and math would be a lot of bunk.

So, we now want to ask, can it be *proved* that it can’t be proved that two plus two is five? Here’s the shock: no, it can’t. Or, to hedge a bit: *if* it can be proved that it can’t be proved that two plus two is five, then it can be proved as well that two plus two is five, and math is a lot of bunk. In fact, if math is not a lot of bunk, then no claim of the form “claim X can’t be proved” can be proved.

So, if math is not a lot of bunk, then, though it can’t be proved that two plus two is five, it can’t be proved *that* it can’t be proved that two plus two is five.

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By the way, in case you'd like to know: yes, it can be proved that if it can be proved that it can't be proved that two plus two is five, then it can be proved that two plus two is five.

- George Boolos, "Godel's Second Incompleteness Theorem Explained in Words of One Syllable," *Mind* 103, no. 1 (January 1994): 1–3. All italics in original.
17. Bertrand Russell, "Mathematics and the Metaphysicians," in *Russell, Mysticism and Logic, and Other Essays* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2010), 91–116, at 92.
 18. Taha's use of *tiqaniyya* betrays, I think, an Ellulian influence. See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964). Note-worthy here is the original French title: *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*. On p. xxv, Ellul explains the concept of technique thus: "The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency . . . in every field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past." On pp. 3–4, he clarifies further: "Technique certainly began with the machine. It is quite true that without the machine the word technique would not exist. . . . [But:] Technique has now become almost completely independent of the machine, which has lagged far behind its offspring."
 19. As in fact Muslims did prior to the nineteenth century. Taha could of course have also marshaled the actual examples of Indian logic and mathematics. See, for example, Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
 20. For lexical definitions of *musaddad*, see notes 26 and 31.
 21. Although interest in the subject centers and frames Foucault's and Taha's projects in fundamental ways, Foucault (as well as Butler, as I read her) insists on the necessity of excluding from the purview of the critical, reasoning subject any "juridified" set of prescriptions. Needless to say, the analytical implications of this difference signify a paradigmatic irreconcilability between the two projects. See Judith Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (London: Blackwell, 2002), 212–26, at 216. For a useful comparison between Foucault and Taha, see Issam Eido, "Al-I'tirāf fil-Majāl al-ʿĀmm: Naqd l'timānī li-Mafhūm Fūkū 'al-I'tirāf wal-Sulṭa'" (unpublished ms.). I thank Issam Eido for sharing with me his manuscript before publication.
 22. Asifa Quraishi, "The Separation of Powers in the Tradition of Muslim Governments," in *Constitutionalism in Islamic Countries: Between Upheaval and Continuity*, ed. Rainer Grote and Tilmann J. Röder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63–73, at 65–68; Wael Hallaq, "From Regional to Personal Schools of Law? A Reevaluation," *Islamic Law and Society* 8, no. 1 (2001): 1–26; Wael Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Hallaq, *Impossible State*, chap. 4.
 23. On this theme, see Taha's critique in chapter 5, section 4.
 24. See also Taha, *Su'āl al-ʿAmal*, 227ff.

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25. Here, Taha comes close to maintaining that works and praxis have the effect of reducing, from the inside, the external (and internal) constraints that threaten negative liberty, not to mention their constructive role in the promotion of positive liberty.
26. AD, 67: “*Al-‘aql al-musaddad huwa al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-qad dakhlahu al-‘amal al-shar‘i*.” Notice here the significance of the processual implications of *wāw al-hāl*.
27. Here as elsewhere, Taha pits the jurists against the theologians (*Mutakallimūn*) insofar as denuded and guided reasons are concerned. To what extent this comparative critique might revise our scholarly approach to these two groups is a matter that deserves a separate investigation once the full range of his system of thought becomes clearer to us. Put differently, since his entire system of thought departs from what might be called, structurally and methodologically, “postmodern” foundations (where a fix for modernity’s problems refuses to operate by the logic and structural assumptions of modernity itself), it is quite possible that his vision of “Islamic studies” might offer—consistent with his thought—a qualitative correction to these studies as Orientalism has thus far conceived them.
28. Taha does not make an explicit reference to such writings, but it is clear that the themes of such a genre (together with the general critique leveled by contemporary Muslim liberals against the Islamists) are implicit in his narrative. For an example of these themes, which are internal to the tradition’s praxis and are far more intellectually sophisticated than the mere accusations of the modern Muslim liberals), see Hallaq, *Impossible State*, 120–22, 133–34, 217.
29. Of course, much more can be said of this issue (and Taha does offer a discussion in four dense pages), but for our purposes a brief outline here should suffice.
30. There is much to say of Taha’s classification of *taqlīd*, especially in the manner that it lacks gradation and qualitative association with *ijtihād*, at least among the premodern jurists, which he invokes (together with the *Mutakallimūn*) in this context. For a context in which to evaluate Taha’s arguments about *taqlīd* as a graded quality, see Wael Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–23.
31. While the meaning of *mujarrad* is clear enough (abstracted, denuded), the etymological derivations of *musaddad* and *mu‘ayyad* are less obvious. In Arabic lexical usage, the root S.D.D. connotes notions of “correctness” and “soundness.” “*Saddada al-shay‘, aṣlahahu wa-qawwamahu*.” “*Al-musaddad [huwa] al-muqawwam wal-mustaqīm*.” On the other hand, A.Y.D./A.A.D. connotes “strength” and “invincibility,” that which cannot be subverted, converted, or defeated. “*Al-mu‘ayyad [huwa] al-shadīd wal-qawīyy*.” “*Ayyadahu Allāh qawwāh*.” “*Āda, ishtadda wa-qawīya*.” As for *shadīd* and *shidda*, they signify “‘izz and mana‘a,” again connoting strength and invincibility. See Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1998), 266 (under *Āda*), 287 (under *Saddada*). For invincibility, see Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, ed. ‘Amir Aḥmad Ḥaydar and ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Ibrāhīm, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009), 13:225–26 (under *R.K.N.*).

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32. Taha must be using the term *rasm* (pl. *rusūm*) in the conventional sense known to Arabic logicians, which is a “definition” of a thing without identifying the qualities that make its quiddity (*māhiyya*). See Muḥammad Aḳā b. ‘Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 2:263–64. See also note 8.
33. See, nonetheless, chapter 5, note 3, where enhanced reason is strongly implied to be a derivative, or a subcategory, of guided reason, however much it is superior to the latter.
34. Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-‘Āmirī, *al-‘Ilām bi-Manāqib al-Islām*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ḥamid Ghurāb (Riyad: Dār al-Aṣṣālāh lil-Thaqāfa wal-Nashr wal-‘Ilām, 1988). I could not locate the term *mulāmasa* in this work, but see pp. 75, 101, 139.
35. For a definition of *tasyīs*, see AD, 184. *Tasyīs* is difficult to translate, and its rendering as “politicization” must be understood with qualifications. For Taha, *tasyīs* rests on two principles, both lying within denuded reason: (a) a historicist principle that insists on epochs and eras of the human past as producing phenomena different from, even contradictory to, one another, something that he labels as the theory of “historical dialectics” (*al-jadaliyya al-tārīkhiyya*), and (b) an exclusion, or rejection, of the past as grounds from which paradigmatic exemplars for the present can be constructed. *Tasyīs*, therefore, is the antonym of *takhliq*, leading life not through political behavior but rather through exemplary moral conduct.
36. See epilogue, section 1.
37. A conception consistent with my arguments in Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), chap. 5.
38. For an enumeration of these phenomena, see Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*, 232–33, but the phenomena are to be understood within the overall context of that book’s arguments.
39. For a (mostly negative) definition of politicization (*tasyīs*), see note 35.
40. AD, 189: “*Iḥtāja al-mutasallifu lā ilā al-ta’ammul fil-nuṣṣ mubāsharatan, bal ilā tajdīd tarbiyatihi.*”
41. Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*, 73–84: “Both Shari’a and Sufism, being constituted by an ethical and moral subject matter—down from their epistemological foundations and up to their social dispensations—strove toward the realization of moral ends. Being central paradigms and performative discourses, they may be characterized by what I call a persistent moral benchmark. Benchmarks do not always fully succeed in implementing their desiderata in the real world, but rather stand as reminders and standards against which reality is not only measured but pressured. A persistent benchmark is one whose pressure is greater than those possessed by other benchmarks, especially if its matrix and source of authority stem from a central domain. [For example], the Shari’a held itself short of developing any concept of limited liability. And it is easy to see why it did so. One of the central benchmarks of the Shari’a was the notion of *shar’i* subject, one constituted by moral technologies of the self, technologies in which

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ethical and moral liability of the *individual believer*, the subject, stood supreme. This benchmark was not only operative but performative; which is to say that it was not only applied without reticence, but in the process of its operation, it *produced* subjects. The premium value in this configuration was moral accountability, not profit. Money and wealth were of such secondary status (despite the great importance Islam and its Shari‘a placed on business, profit and material wealth) that they could hardly compete with the fundamental, if not constitutive, concept of ethical duty, moral responsibility, and general accountability of the private, individual person. There was no financial or material consideration in the world, however tempting and important, that could alter or mitigate the benchmark of individual and personal accountability, responsibility and liability. This type of accountability and responsibility was irreducible and constituted the most stubborn feature of the entire culture.”

42. SA, 63: “*Bayna-mā al-ṣawāb an yakūna al-‘aql fī‘lan min al-af‘āl wa-sulūkan min al-sulūkāt.*”
43. On the Intellects, see Dimitri Gutas, “Avicenna: The Metaphysics of the Rational Soul,” *Muslim World* 102 (July-October, 2012): 417–25. On the soul in the larger framework of Avicenna’s thought, see the eminently useful study of Robert Wisnowsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 82–97, 133–40, but also *passim* (see general index).
44. Cf. the similar arguments in Muḥammad Sa‘īd Rayyān, *al-‘Aql fīl-Islām: Ru‘ya Jadida* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-‘Arabiyya, 2012).

5. Religion, Secularism, Ethics

1. SA = *Su‘āl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fīl-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya* (Casa-blanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2000), 14: “*Fal-akhlāqīyya hiya al-aṣl al-ladhī tatafarra‘ ‘alayhi kull ṣifāt al-insān min ḥaythu huwa kadhālik.*” In line with Taha’s concept of the continuousness (*waṣl*) of tradition, it is tempting to think of his definition of humanity as wholly constituted by ethics in terms of the “act of genesis,” not in the simplistic sense of creation *ex nihilo*, but rather as one of linguistic ontology. In the Qur’ān, the premier authoritative and founding text for Taha and the entirety of Islamic traditions, the creative design of the world is unmistakably driven by, mapped out, and pervasively constructed as an act of justice. It is a design that structures the world, temporally and spatially, from beginning to end. It would seem to be the first and last will or (should one say) plan of God.

This intentionality of design begins with a narrative of origins where the entirety of creation is embedded, consciously and deliberately, within a plan of justice, this making creation a consequent of this plan and therefore predetermined by it. Which is to say, as many Muslim intellectuals said centuries ago, that God cannot be other than just (and that he would be acting against his own nature had he chosen to do otherwise), although one may recast the matter by

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