Islamic Political Thought

Nicholas Tampio

Islamic political thought is a tradition of conceptualizing human affairs that originates with the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE) in seventh-century Arabia. In his lifetime Muhammad recited the Qur'an and established a precedent (sunna) that Muslims ever since have taken as a guide for how to establish a just community. In the following centuries Muslims spread the Islamic way of life (din) across the Middle East, North Africa, southern Europe, Iran, Central Asia, and India, until today approximately one and half billion people, or one fifth of humanity, identifies as Muslim. Islamic political thought has consistency insofar as certain terms – such as community (umma), justice ('adl), and struggle (jihad) – recur throughout the Qur'an and Prophetic narratives (hadith) and subsequent political texts. Throughout its history, however, Islamic political thought has incorporated, as well as modified and challenged, Arab customs, Jewish law, Persian statecraft, Hellenistic philosophy, Christian theology, and European and American culture. Muslims are currently debating how to reconcile (or not) Islamic notions of community, justice, and struggle with concepts that first appeared in ancient Greece or medieval Christendom, such as democracy, liberty, and secularism. This entry provides a background to that debate by focusing on how leading Muslim thinkers address questions of sovereignty and law, or of who ought to govern according to which interpretation of Sharia (divine law).

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a famous Mediterranean scholar and Islamic judge (qadi), offers an account of Islam's political character in the Muqaddima, an introduction to a history of the world (Kitab al-'Ibar). According to Ibn Khaldun, Islam is colored by its origins in the desert. Only tribes held together by group feeling ('asabiyya) can survive the harsh climate and hostile enemies of bedouin life. One reason for the rise of Islam is that Muhammad succeeded in converting blood group feeling into religious group feeling. Ibn Khaldun instructs his readers that royal authority and dynastic power (dawla) presuppose strong group feeling and that civilization ('umran) must incorporate some qualities of desert life to survive. Ibn Khaldun counsels rule by one person, the political enforcement of Sharia, and the avoidance of pluralism, because contending allegiances tend to precipitate civil war. Like many medieval Muslims, Ibn Khaldun desires a caliphate where a Muslim leader enforces religious law in all affairs touching this world and the next.

For Euro-American scholars such as Bernard Lewis (b. 1916) and Patricia Crone (b. 1945), Ibn Khaldun encapsulates a worldview fundamentally at odds with western civilization. On this account, the modern West sustains a distinction between the secular and the religious, regnum and sacerdotum, that originates in Jesus's statement: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22: 21). This thesis needs to be qualified in at least three ways. Discursive traditions such as Islamic political thought have sustained many kinds of reasoning, including ones that differentiate religious and worldly power and that protect freedom of conscience (see Qur'an 2: 256: "there is no compulsion in religion"). Scholars must attend to the material circumstances that englobe any expression of ideas: Ibn Khaldun's sociology is not of Islam per se, but of Islam as lived in the fourteenth-century Maghreb. And the task facing global citizens today is to negotiate differences gracefully, to participate in what Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (r. 1997–2005) calls a dialogue among civilizations.

The Founding

The most important text for Islamic political thought is the Qur'an. Between 610 and 632, in rhyming verses that his companions memorized, wrote down, and codified in the decades after his death, Muhammad recited what Muslims consider to be the eternal word of God. In the early years of his prophecy, Muhammad espoused primarily cosmological themes such as the unity (*tawhid*) of God and the Day of Judgment. After the migration (*hijra*) to Medina in 622 – year one of the Muslim calendar – Muhammad recited verses about social and political affairs, including relations between the believers (*mu'minun*), Jews (*yahud*), Christians (*nasara*), People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*), and hypocrites (*munafiqun*). The Qur'an does not offer detailed instructions about who or what institutions ought to govern the Muslim community; instead it articulates concepts, themes, and narratives that are the building blocks of Islamic political thought. The Qur'an, for instance, states that God appoints Adam, rather than the angels, as a viceroy (*khalifa*) in the earth (Qur'an 2: 30) and that God makes David a viceroy (*khalifa*) to judge fairly between people (Qur'an 38: 26). From such materials – including the verse "Obey Allah, the Messenger and those in authority" (Qur'an 4: 59) – Muslims have debated the origin, nature, and limits of political authority.

The second most important body of work in Islamic political thought is the collected words and sayings (hadith) of Muhammad. The Islamic declaration of faith (*shahada*) is: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger." Muslims believe that, as God's Messenger, Muhammad disclosed the fundamental principles of prayer, economic transactions, family life, and legal punishment. In the early centuries of Islam, scholars such as Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875) assembled hadith collections that form the basis of Islamic jurisprudence. One such hadith is the principle of consensus: "God will never bring my community together on an error, so stay with the collective, for whoever strays from it strays into an error." Another is that "after me, there will be caliphs; and after the caliphs, amirs; and after the amirs, kings; and after the kings, tyrants …" Yet another states: "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!" Regardless of whether these hadith are authentic or disputed – the subject matter of its own Islamic science – these hadith encapsulate medieval Muslim conceptions of right and wrong governance.

A third significant document from the founding period is the Constitution of Medina (*sahifat al-Madina*). In an early biography of the Prophet (*Sirat Rasul Allah*), Ibn Ishaq (704–67) reports that, shortly after the migration from Mecca to Medina, Muhammad wrote a charter defining the relationships between the emigrants (*muhajirun*) from Mecca, the helpers (*ansar*) in Medina, the tribes within Medina (the Khazraj and the Aws), and the Jews. Although early Muslim jurists did not cite the Constitution as a normative precedent, some recent scholars argue that the Constitution may lay the foundation for an Islamic theory of public law committed to the ideal of religious pluralism.

Caliphates and Dynasties

Who would replace Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community? Shortly after the Prophet's death, Muslims in Medina appointed as leader Abu Bakr, an early convert to Islam and father of the Prophet's wife Aisha. Abu Bakr (r. 632–4) was followed by Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634–44), who called himself "Commander of the Faithful" (*amir al-mu'minin*) and conquered Syria, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. On his deathbed in 644, Umar instituted a method of election (*shura*) whereby leaders of the community – "those who loosen and bind" (*ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd*) – chose his successor: 'Uthman b. 'Affan (r. 644–56). In 656, delegates from Egypt and Iraq met with 'Uthman and killed him. Thereupon 'Ali b. Abi Talib (r. 656–61), Muhammad's cousin and

son-in-law, became leader of the Muslim community. A civil war (*fitna*) broke out between 'Ali and Mu'awiya (620–80), the governor of Syria and blood relative of 'Uthman. This war divided the early Muslim community into three constituencies. One group held that religious unity was more important than right governance; another held that Muslims ought to have fought for the right of 'Ali's family to rule; and a third asserted that "there is no rule but God's" and that 'Ali made a mistake by agreeing to arbitration with Mu'awiya. These groupings – now known as Sunnis, Shiis, and Kharijis – continue to divide the worldwide Muslim community. Sunnis compose the majority of the world's Muslims, Shiis predominate in Iran and other sections of the Middle East, and, although there are few Kharijis, revivalist movements share their aspiration to make God alone sovereign.

The Umayyad dynasty (661–750) and the Abbasid dynasty (750–1258) followed what Sunnis call the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-khulafa al-rashidun*). Mu'awiya moved the center of the Islamic Empire to Syria and his son, Yazid, killed Ali's son, Hussein, on the fields of Karbala – an event marked by Shiis as "the Day of Ashura." The leader of the Umayyads was called "the successor of God" (*khalifat Allah*) – in theory the best man of his age and in practice a blood relative of the reigning caliph. Most Muslim scholars look at the Umayyad dynasty as a temporary setback in the rise of Islamic civilization. The Abbasid dynasty (750–1258), on the contrary, is widely recognized as a golden age – a time when Muslims were at the forefront of science, medicine, art, architecture, maritime navigation, and trade. The Abbasids integrated non-Arab clients (*mawali*) into Islamic society and, at least initially, claimed a more modest authority for themselves as successors to the Messenger of God (*khalifat rasul Allah*). During the Abbasid dynasty at least three groups competed to define the terms of Islamic political thought: Persian administrators (*kuttab*), philosophers (*falasifa*), and scholars and jurists (ulama, *fuqaha*). A word about the leading figures in this debate:

Ibn al-Muqaffa' (ca. 720–56) was a Zoroastrian convert to Islam who translated into Arabic key Indo-Persian works on statecraft. In translating the piece sometimes known as *The Ordinance of Ardashir*, which was attributed to Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, or in the epic *Khoday Namah* – a late Sasanian chronicle that was to inspire Ferdowsi's famous *Epic of Kings* (*Shah Namah*) – Ibn al-Muqaffa' used indirect speech to import Persian ideals into Islamic political thought. According to him, a sacral king ought to govern with the aid of elite administrators over a docile political body. Ibn al-Muqaffa' advised the caliph to police thought by distributing handbooks of correct doctrine and by instituting cultural commissars to punish deviant opinion. If Ibn al-Muqaffa' had succeeded in convincing the rulers of his time, then political authorities rather than scholars and judges would have held the center of gravity in Islamic political thought. As it was, Ibn al-Muqaffa' died a gruesome death at the hands of a local governor whom he had crossed.

Abu Nasr Alfarabi (ca. 878–950) was born in Turkestan and, after moving to Baghdad, became a famed political philosopher. In treatises such as *The Political Regime* and *The Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi argued that a virtuous city promotes the flourishing of happiness. For this to be achieved, three things have to happen, familiar to any reader of Plato's *Republic*: philosophers should legislate on the basis of the superiority of their theoretical-rational faculty; the followers of philosophers should enforce this legislation; and the masses with little appreciation of philosophy should be told what to do and what to believe. Like the human body, the political body directs each organ to accomplish its end for the well-being of the whole, or, more precisely, for the flourishing of its philosophical element. The perfect man deserves to rule because of the superiority of his rational faculties, but he attains power by appealing to the imaginative faculties of his subjects. In an excellent city (*al-madina al-fadila*) the true king will be a philosopher-prophet-ruler; if he is no longer alive, then

jurists (*fuqaha*) and apologetic theologians (*mutakallim*) must implement and interpret his rulings. Certain Shiite rulers in Egypt and Syria tried to actualize Alfarabi's teachings, but Alfarabi's greatest influence was on Islamic philosophers such Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–98), on Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides (1135–1204), and on Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1225?–74).

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (ca. 1058–1111) was a jurist and professor at the Nizamiyya, an institute of higher learning in Baghdad. Known as "the Proof of Islam," Ghazali wrote a mirror for princes book, *The Counsel for Kings* (*Nasihat al-Muluk*), as well as a seminal text calling for a renewed spirituality in Islamic life, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*). After a 10-year hiatus from academia to practice Sufi asceticism, Ghazali criticized Islamic philosophy in his autobiography *The Deliverer from Error*. According to Ghazali, the Islamic philosophers hold numerous heterodox opinions, such as that men's bodies will not be assembled on the Last Day, that God only knows universals but not particulars, and that the world is eternal. The only reason why philosophers have any audience is that they mix Islamic sources with Greek dross. Just as authorities protect people from counterfeiters, they should also prevent the masses from reading the philosophers' books. Ghazali extolled the study of logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences, and philosophical themes coursed through the writings of subsequent theologians and logicians, particularly in Safavid Iran. And yet, for the next few centuries, jurists and scholars rather than administrators or philosophers would articulate the basic principles and concepts of Islamic political thought.

Sharia Society

The institution of the caliphate declined in the middle of the tenth century as strongmen exercised many of the executive functions in society. Shii Buyids (932–1075) and Sunni Seljuqs

(1075–1194) ruled over the Abbasid dynasty; the Fatimids (909–1171), an Ismaili Shii dynasty, ruled North Africa and Egypt; and the Almoravids (1056–1147) and Almohads (1130–1269) ruled Spain and Portugal (Andalusia). In a society defined by Sharia-oriented governance (*siyasa shar'iyya*), power tended to be divided between a military leader (sultan) or commander (amir) on one side and scholars and jurists on the other.

Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (974–1058) provides a classic description of the late medieval Islamic caliphate in *The Ordinances of Government and Religious Offices* (*al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya wa-l-Wilayat al-Diniyya*). Born in Basra, Mawardi became a chief judge (*aqda al-qudat*) for the Abbasids and wrote his treatise to inform the caliph of his rights and duties. Why is the imamate, or caliphate, obligatory on the community? Mawardi considers the thesis of the early Muslim philosophers, the Mu'tazilis, that the imamate is grounded in reason ('*aql*), to stop chaos from engulfing the state. Mawardi opts, however, for grounding authority in revelation, and he cites the Qur'anic verse 4: 59 as well as the hadith: "You will be ruled after me by some who are benign, and some who are depraved. Listen to them and obey them in all that is right." Mawardi describes the duties incumbent on the caliph – guarding the faith, enforcing the law, protecting the territory, managing the treasury, supervising officials, and fighting those who resist the supremacy of Islam after being invited to accept it. He details the conditions of eligibility for supreme leadership – justice, the capacity to exercise independent legal judgment (*ijtihad*), sound vision, prudence, courage, and descent from the Quraysh, Muhammad's tribe. After describing the appointment and responsibilities of the imamate, Mawardi specifies how the sovereign should appoint judges, redress wrongs, appoint prayer leaders, administer the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, collect the land tax, and punish crime. In a section on provincial governors, Mawardi advises the caliph to exercise prudence when dealing with rebellious provinces or with

"governorship by usurpation" (*imarat al-istila*). Recognizing the necessity (*darura*) of the situation, the caliph should grant governors control over their districts on condition that they recognize the caliph as the implementer of the dictates of religion. Basing his views both on Ash'ari deterministic theology and on the reality of Buyid rule, Mawardi articulated the compromise at the heart of Sharia society: scholars would grant legitimacy to the sultan on condition that he enforce and obey divine law.

Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi'i (767–820) has been called the master architect of Islamic legal thought. Born in Gaza and raised in Mecca, Shafi'i developed a way to organize the 600 or so legal verses in the Qur'an that apply to religious rituals (*ibadat*), social affairs (*mu'amalat*), and criminal punishments (*hudud*); hadith reports that sometimes conflict and are of varying authenticity; the personal authority of earlier jurists; and the local practices of cities such as Basra, Kufa, Mecca, and Medina. In *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, Shafi'i presents a guide to discover the meaning of Sharia. Shafi'i explains the intricacies of Arabic grammar, the modalities of legislative statements, when to abrogate verses of the Qur'an or hadith, how to resolve legal disagreement, and the permissible use of consensus ('*ijma*), analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), and legal interpretation (*ijtihad*) as sources of the law. Although the content of Sharia is eternal, transcendent, and true, the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of human judges is fallible. To the question "Who is entitled to engage in legal interpretation?" Shafi'i answers: scholars. In this way Shafi'i makes constitutional theory (*usul al-fiqh*) the site of profound debates within medieval Islamic political thought and *fiqh* – rather than positive law – the legal basis of Sharia society. The four major Sunni schools of law (*madhhab*s) are named after Shafi'i, Abu Hanifa (d. 767), Malik b. Anas (d. 795), and Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855). For hundreds of years, Islamic law was administered by judges (*qadi*s) and jurisconsults (*mufti*) trained in law colleges (*madrassa*s) who offered legal rulings (*fatawa*) in local contexts. As such, they played a vital role in the so-called Circle of Justice, whereby the ruling dynasty, the military, tax collectors, farmers, and jurists each performed roles for the well-being of the whole.

In the fifteenth century the Islamic world divided into three great empires: the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals. In 1453 the Turkish-speaking Ottomans conquered Constantinople and, over time, established a Sunni dynasty in Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and the Balkans. The Ottomans developed a *millet* system that made space for Christian and Jewish communities, as well as an institutional apparatus that promulgated civic ordinances (*kanun*). The Ottomans claimed the mantle of the caliphate and engaged in near constant warfare with European powers until the empire's official end in 1923, when Atatürk founded the state of Turkey. Led by Shah Isma'il (1487–1524), the Safavids conquered Iran in 1501, adopted Persian as their language, and imposed Twelver Shiism on the population. Safavid power was at its highest during the reign of Shah 'Abbas (r. 1587–1629) and ended with a rebellion of Sunni Afghans in Qandahar in 1722. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530) founded the Mughal Empire in India with a victory at Panipat in 1526. Mughal leaders – including Akbar (d. 1605), Jahangir (d. 1627), and Shah Jahan (d. 1666) – maintained power by supporting Sufi lodges, making military allegiances with Hindu Rajpats, facilitating trade with Europe, and instituting the *mansabdari* system, whereby local elites maintained some autonomy. The Mughal Empire ended in 1857, after an Indian revolt against the English East India Company. One lesson from the rise and fall of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires is that Islam becomes a political reality through the mediation of human beings, cultures, traditions, and events that could have gone otherwise.

Islamic Modernism

In 1798 Napoleon landed in Egypt. Though Muslims and Europeans had long been engaged in war, commerce, and intellectual exchange,

this event signaled a new development. Henceforth European power would prompt Muslim intellectuals to rethink their relationship with the modern world. What explained the rise and might of European imperialism? How could Muslims acquire the scientific, economic, and military might to compete? How should Muslims adapt their political ideals and practices, if at all, to new circumstances? Though thinkers and movements are complex, scholars differentiate two broad trends within Islamic political thought: modernism and revivalism.

One of the most important figures in Islamic modernism is Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97). Born and educated in Iran, al-Afghani changed his name to appeal to a Sunni audience and went on to become an activist in Istanbul, Cairo, Paris, London, India, Russia, and Iran. In the 1880s, al-Afghani and his student, Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), published the journal *The Strongest Link* (*al-'Urwa al-wuthqa*). In pamphlets, journals, an exchange with Ernest Renan, and a book on the Indian materialists, al-Afghani argued that Muslims needed to rediscover the spirit of philosophy (*falsafa*). The French and the English alone were not conquering Afghanistan and Tunisia, he asserted in his "Lecture on Teaching and Learning"; rather, science was conquering ignorance. The Sharia teaches the truth of right and wrong, but science teaches the causes of electricity, the steamboat, and railroads. The mother of the sciences, the spirit that infuses all of them, is philosophy. Islam is the religion that is closest to science and philosophy, and Muslims during the Abbasid dynasty were eager to translate Syriac, Persian, and Greek texts into Arabic. The worldwide Muslim community needs to rediscover its philosophic spirit if it is going to be a major player on the world stage again. Al-Afghani changed his political strategy to strengthen the worldwide Muslim community: before the 1880s he was sympathetic to secular, nationalist projects of reform; afterwards he appreciated the need of Islam to unify Muslims as a political force.

Al-Afghani's ambiguous legacy is illustrated by two men whom he influenced. Muhammad 'Abduh would advocate al-Afghani's message of intellectual reform in his book *The Theology of Unity* and would try to modernize the curriculum of al-Azhar university when he was its rector. 'Abduh maintained contact with European intellectuals, read Rousseau and Tolstoy, visited the British House of Commons in 1884, and argued that Islam had equivalents for European concepts such as utility (*maslaha*), parliamentary democracy (*shura*), and public opinion (*ijma'*). Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), on the contrary, popularized the idea that Muslims needed to reclaim the spirit and practices of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*). As editor of the Egyptian newspaper *al-Manar*, author of a commentary on the Qur'an, and political activist, Rida redeployed the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), criticized Sufism for heresy and for weakening Islam, endorsed the strict Hanbali school of law, accused Shiism of being full of fairy tales, supported the revival of Wahhabism in central Arabia, and called for the restoration of a genuine caliphate. Although both 'Abduh and Rida admired the earliest generations of Muslims, Rida took Salafism in a more conservative, traditionalist direction.

One of 'Abduh's students, 'Ali Abd al-Raziq (1877–1966), created a controversy with his 1925 book *Islam and the Principles of Governance (al-Islam wa-Usul al-Hukm)*. Writing in response to the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924, al-Raziq argued that the caliphate itself was an illegitimate institution, the creation of Abu Bakr rather than of the Prophet. Muhammad was a religious figure who communicated with souls and looked in upon hearts, not a sultan or a king who founded a state. Al-Raziq cites the Qur'anic verse:

> So follow what is revealed to you by your Lord, for homage is due to no one but God, and turn away from idolaters. Had He willed it, they would not have been idolaters. We have not appointed you their guardian, nor are you their pleader. (Qur'an 6: 106–7)

Al-Raziq also offers the hadith: "Be calm, for I am no king nor a subduer, for I am the son of Quraysh who used to eat dried meat in Mecca."

From such materials, al-Raziq differentiates the spheres of Islam and government. Islam is a religious call to God that may bond all people on the earth; government is a worldly matter and human beings, entrusted by God with reason, must determine for themselves how to structure it. Later thinkers – including the Egyptian intellectual Taha Hussein (1889–1973) and the Sudanese lawyer Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (b. 1946) – would take up al-Raziq's thesis and argue that Muslims should promote Islamic ethics within the framework of a secular state.

Another one of 'Abduh's protégés, Qasim Amin (1863–1908), ignited a debate about the status of women within Islam with his book *The Liberation of Women*. Amin argued that Muslims needed to distinguish Islam's egalitarian norms from Arabic customs such as the seclusion of women. Amin's position has been taken up by scholars such as the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi (b. 1940) and the American professor Amina Wadud (b. 1952), who herself stirred a controversy when she led Friday prayers (*salat*) at a mosque in Virginia.

Islamic Revivalism

From the first civil war (*fitna*) in the Islamic community, Muslims have asserted, with the Kharijites, that sovereignty belongs to God alone. For Muslim revivalists, the proper response to European imperialism is not to adopt European laws or philosophies but to revive the notions, practices, and spirit of the Prophet's companions. Revivalists advise Muslims to learn about western science and technology and they propose Islam as a cure for the ailments of the modern world. Sayyid Qutb and Ayatollah Khomeini are, respectively, leading Sunni and Shii revivalists of the twentieth century.

Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) was born in rural Egypt and began his career as a teacher and journalist. From 1948 to 1950 Qutb travelled in the United States; upon his return to Egypt he became an ideologue for the Muslim Brotherhood, a grassroots political organization founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906–49). In 1954, after a failed assassination attempt against Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70), the Muslim Brotherhood was banned and Qutb would spend most of the rest of his life in prison. While in prison, Qutb wrote *Milestones* (*Ma'alim fil-Tariq*), a manifesto for Islamic revivalism. Following the precedent of the Pakistani intellectual Abu al-A'la Mawdudi (1903–79), Qutb asserts that the modern world is steeped in *jahiliyya*. *Jahiliyya* is a Qur'anic term for Arabia before Islam; Qutb, like Mawdudi, uses it to denote a system in which humans, rather than God, create values and legislate rules of collective behavior. Human sovereignty, whether in the form of western democracy or eastern communism, has brought humanity to the edge of a precipice. The remedy for this situation is to grasp the meaning of the opening verse of the Islamic declaration of faith: "*La ilaha illa Allah*" ("There is no deity except God"). The pagan Arabs knew that this declaration threatened their authority and traditions. Similarly, people today ought to know that God is sovereign over every aspect of life and that Muslims will oppose anyone, near or far, who usurps God's sovereignty (*hakimiyyat Allah*). Qutb envisions a Muslim community whose manners, ideas, laws, and values derive from Islamic sources. What human beings will lead this community? Qutb distrusts the scholars and the jurists, who have rendered Islam weak before *jahiliyya*. He writes his book instead for a vanguard of people who will discover what they need to do in the course of action. *Milestones* influenced, among others, Osama bin Laden (1957–2011) and Ayman al-Zawahari (b. 1951), leaders of the militant Islamist group al-Qaeda.

Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89) was born to a clerical family in Iran and studied Islamic law, philosophy, and mysticism as a young man. Since the greater occultation of the twelfth imam (940), most Shii jurists had adopted a stance of political quietism. Breaking from this tradition, in the 1960s Khomeini publicly opposed the secularizing

efforts of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941–79) and the American presence in Iran. While in exile in Iraq, Khomeini delivered a series of lectures on Islamic government. Islamic government is the rule of divine law over men. The rulers of Islamic government are those who know the divine law the best: the jurists (*fuqaha*) – those for whom the Prophet prayed: "O God! Have mercy on my successors." According to reason, divine law, and the precedent of 'Ali, the supreme ruler ought to be the most learned jurist. Thus Khomeini lays the foundation for the doctrine of the guardianship of the jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*). Khomeini integrates some conception of popular sovereignty when he explains that Islamic government belongs to the (Muslim) people. He also permits scholars to exercise independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) when assessing the aspects and implications of a true ordinance of Islam. Nevertheless, when Khomeini became the leader (*rahbar*) of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, he had many of his political opponents killed, and he enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia, which required women to wear long coats and banned the drinking of alcohol or the playing of music.

Islamic revivalism is a broad category that encompasses differing views on the Sunni–Shii split, the role of the state, the interpretation of legal sources, the relationship between laypersons and scholars, the use of violence, and the role of women in a Muslim society. Still, Islamic revivalists agree that God alone is legislator and sovereign; that Islam is the natural religion that accords with the deepest metaphysical yearnings within human nature (*fitra*); that Muslims should be wary of Greek concepts such as reason; that secular societies such as the United States are the abode of war (*dar al-harb*); and that the entire world should enter the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), in which Muslims enforce divine law and religious minorities (*dhimmis*) pay a humiliating tax (*jizya*). Critics often point out that revivalists import or invent foreign notions into their supposedly pure Islamic discourse and that Islamic states such as Iran or Taliban Afghanistan oppress their people. Revivalists reply that Muslims need to intensify their efforts to emulate the Prophet's companions.

Contemporary Debates on Islam and Democracy

Is it possible or desirable to reconcile Islamic ideals and global political norms? That is to say, should Muslims strive for democracy or Sharia, pluralism or community, human or divine sovereignty, piety or autonomy, or a combination of these? In 2011 these questions became urgent across the Middle East and North Africa, as local populations deposed autocratic regimes. Egypt, for instance, could go in the direction of Turkey – where there are regular elections, the rule of law, and (imperfect) tolerance for religious minorities and dissenting viewpoints – or of Saudi Arabia – where rulers support clerics who follow the puritanical teachings of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92). Whatever transpires will depend upon the local balance of forces, foreign intervention, charismatic personalities, and surprising events. Yet the history of Islam shows that that ideas have power. This entry concludes by contrasting the perspectives of two prominent Muslim intellectuals on the question of Islam and democracy.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) is one of the most important Muslim scholars and public intellectuals in Sunni Islam. Born in Egypt and living in Qatar, al-Qaradawi earned a doctorate from al-Azhar university and reaches a wide audience with his publications and programs on the satellite television network Aljazeera. Al-Qaradawi is a leading theorist of "the centrist school" (*al-madrasa al-wasatiyya*), which holds that the purposes of Sharia (*maqasid al-sharia*) permit the selective appropriation of foreign concepts and practices if they advance Islamic ends. In the essay "Islamic Democracy," al-Qaradawi argues that the essence of democracy accords with the essence of Islam. Islam has established the principle of consultation (*shura*) between rulers and people, and Muslims are enjoined by the Qur'an

(e.g., 3: 104) to command the right and forbid the wrong. Democracy permits the people to advise the ruler and to depose him peacefully if he becomes a tyrant. Through the use of independent judgment (*ijtihad*), Muslims may freely adopt the mechanisms and procedures of western democracy, including regular elections. Yet there are limits to human sovereignty. In a Muslim society, Islam is the religion of the state and Sharia is the source of law. The constitution must forbid legislators to try to make the forbidden (*al-haram*) into the permissible (*al-halal*) or vice versa, or in general to write laws that violate Sharia. Islamic democracy is a regime where Muslims elect the best leaders to enforce Sharia. Qaradawi does not explain, however, the political status of religious minorities in an Islamic democracy, or what political responsibilities Muslims have when they are a minority in a secular state.

Khaled Abou El Fadl (b. 1963) shifts the balance between divine and human sovereignty in his book *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*. Born in Kuwait, educated in Islamic and American jurisprudence, and now a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, Abou El Fadl argues that Muslims should refrain from using the state to enforce Sharia and should embrace democracy even when they are the minority. The Qur'an exhorts social cooperation, a consultative mode of governance, and compassion in social interactions. Yet the Qur'an itself, according to a report of 'Ali, is but ink and paper: human beings must decide how to interpret it and give effect to it. The Qur'an assigns all human beings to be God's vicegerents on earth. Sunnis have long maintained that the ruler, or caliph, must make a contract ('*aqd*) with community leaders. Furthermore, the Islamic scholar maintains that human beings can only approximate Sharia through fallible jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The Islamic sources, in sum, express values but assign human beings – *all* human beings, including non-Muslims – to decide how to realize them. The political regime that best institutionalizes this process is constitutional democracy, a system that guarantees majority rule, individual liberty, and the protection of human rights. Where does this leave Sharia? Muslims should view Sharia as a divine ideal rather than as a collection of positive rules (*ahkam*), an end to be approached through debate and experimentation rather than a static blueprint. Muslims may work on behalf of Islamic objectives in a democracy, but they ought to recognize the crucial distinction between God's law (which is perfect) and state law (which may be flawed or unjust). If citizens turn away from God, they will account to God in the Hereafter. In today's world, however, Muslims should endorse the rules of constitutional democracy and stop yearning for a caliphate designed to implement God's law.

There are some Muslims around the world who wish to wage violent jihad against the west, just as there are some Muslims who embrace uncritically the political culture of Euro-American liberal democracies. These positions, however, are outliers: the main debate right now within Islamic political thought is how to combine Islamic law and democracy, divine and human sovereignty. Muslims and their allies eagerly await new contributions to this debate.

SEE ALSO: Alfarabi (870–950); Arab Political Thought; Averroes (Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd) (1126–98); Clash of Civilizations; Comparative Political Thought; Dhimmi; Feminism and Islam; Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406); Medieval Political Theory; Qutb, Sayyid (1906–66); Sharia; Umma

Further Reading

Abou El Fadl, K. (2004) *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

al-Mawardi. (1996) *The Ordinances of Government*. London: Garnet Publishing.

Arjomand, S. (2001) "Perso-Indian Statecraft, Greek Political Science and the Muslim Idea of Government," *International Sociology*, 16 (3), 455–73.

Arjomand, S. (2009) "The Constitution of Medina: A Sociolegal Interpretation of Muhammad's Acts of Foundation of the Umma," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41 (4), 555–75.

Asad, T. (1986) *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Böwering, G. (Ed.) (2013) *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Crone, P. (2005) *God's Rule: Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Darling, L. (2013) *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization*. New York: Routledge.

Euben, R. and Zaman, M. (2009) *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ghazali, A. (1994) *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Gibb, H. (1982) *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hallaq, W. (2009) *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hourani, A. (1983) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ibn Khaldun. (2005) *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Keddie, N. (1983) *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani."* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Khomeini, R. (1981) *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Berkeley: Mizan Press.

Kurzman, C. (Ed.) (2002) *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, B. (1988) *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

London, J. (2008) "How to Do Things with Fables: Ibn al-Muqaffaʻs Frank Speech in Stories from *Kalila Wa Dimna*," *History of Political Thought*, 29 (2), 189–212.

March, A. (2010) "Taking People as They Are: Islam as a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb," *American Political Science Review*, 104 (1), 9–77.

March, A. (2013) "Genealogies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Thought," *Social Research*, 80 (1), 293–320.

Mernissi, F. (1991) *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. New York: Basic Books.

Na'im, A. (2008) *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating The Future of Sharia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Parens, J. and Macfarland, J. (Eds.) (2011) *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Qutb, S. (1995) *Milestones*. Cedar Rapids, IO: Mother Mosque Foundation.

Shafiʻi, M. (2013) *The Epistle on Legal Theory*. New York: New York University Press.