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THE PHENOMENON OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO ABŪ AL-ḤASAN AL-‘ĀMIRĪ

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ABŪ AL-ḤASAN AL-‘ĀMİRĪ

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ABSTRACT

THE PHENOMENON OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO ABŪ AL-ḤASAN AL- ‘ĀMIRĪ (D. 381/ 992)

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The bulk of the research on the tenth century Muslim philosopher Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (d. 381/ 992) has focused mainly on his philosophical writings. Far less attention has been given to the study of the religious phenomenon as it has manifested in al-‘Āmirī's extant works. This dissertation has attempted to fill this gap by analyzing al-‘Āmirī's understanding of human nature as well as his method of comparing between religions. I will present how al-‘Āmirī's view of man as religious by nature is deeply interlinked with his determination of religion, namely Islam, to be the container of both truth and logical necessity. His rational defense of religion against the skeptics and pseudo-philosophers, who were seeking to undermine its core role, will be examined. I will also attempt to demonstrate how al-‘Āmirī's rational discourse had been developed while the Muslim community suffered fragmentation due to its internal political disintegration and religious separatism. The thesis, furthermore, will focus on the classification of science and the superiority of religious knowledge over all other types of knowledge according to al-‘Āmirī. It will explain how al-‘Āmirī, despite his acceptance of religious diversity, believed that only Islam, among the religions, is moderate, rational, and suitable for man. He comes to this conclusion based on the use of comparative method throughout his book *Kitāb al-i‘lām bi-manāqib al-Islām*. By using such method to analyze religion, al-Amiri provides an early and unprecedented perspective to the study of comparative religion.

Keywords: Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī, phenomenon of religion, comparative religion, human nature, tenth century.

ÖZ

Ebu Hasan el-Amiri’de Din Olgusu

El Moursi, Mohamed

Medeniyetler İttifakı Yüksek Lisans Programı

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10.yy İslam filozofu Ebu Hasan el-Amiri (ö. 381/992) üzerine yapılmış araştırmaların çoğu filozofun felsefi eserlerine yoğunlaşmıştır. El-Amiri’nin diğer eserlerinde ortaya çıkan din olgusu meselesine çok daha az bir ilgi gösterilmiştir. Bu tez, el-Amiri’nin insan doğası anlayışıyla birlikte dinleri karşılaştırma metodunu inceleyerek bu boşluğu doldurmaya çalışmıştır. Bu çalışmada, El-Amiri’nin insanı doğası gereği dindar görmesinin, onun dinin, yani İslam’ın, hem doğruyu hem de mantıksal gerekliliği taşıdığına yönelik tespitiyle nasıl derinden ilişkili olduğu gösterilecektir. Dinin en temel rolünü sarsmaya çalışan şüphecilere ve sözde filozoflara karşı el-Amiri’nin dini akılcı bir şekilde savunması incelenecektir. Müslüman ümmetin iç çözümler ve dini ayrılıkçılık nedeniyle parçalanma geçirdiği bir dönemde, el-Amiri’nin akılcı söyleminin nasıl geliştirildiğini de göstermeye çalışacağım. Tez, aynı zamanda da, el-Amiri’ye göre bilimin sınıflandırılması ve dini bilginin tüm diğer bilgi türlerinden üstün olması meselelerine de odaklanacaktır. Çalışma, dini farklılığı kabul etmesine rağmen, el-Amiri’nin nasıl diğer dinler arasında sadece İslam’ın ılımlı, akılcı ve insana uygun bir din olduğunu savunduğunu açıklayacaktır. Filozof bu sonuca *Kitāb el-i’lām bi-menākib el-İslām* kitabı boyunca kullandığı karşılaştırmalı metot yoluyla ulaşır. Dini incelerken böyle bir metot kullanarak, el-Amiri karşılaştırmalı din çalışmalarına eski ve daha önce örneği olmayan bir bakış açısı kazandırır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ebu Hasan el-Amiri, din olgusu, karşılaştırmalı din, insan doğası, 10. yy.

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INTRODUCTION

“...and he was from the itinerants who travel through the lands and look into the secrets of God among the servants.”

A description of al-‘Āmirī ¹

By the end of the twentieth century, religion came to the fore again; a global revival of religions and religious issues have taken place in several countries, which some tentavily called the ‘revenge of God’², that has made religion a major theme of intense discussion and dispute among political, sociological and anthropological scholars and philosophers. The increasing role of religion either in private or public domains, together with the end of the Cold War, has - in a sense - tended to reinforce the differences between religions as a ‘clash of civilizations.’³

This interest in religion, in essence, represents a distinctive feature that characterizes the human condition. As is well known, religion has played a major role in human lives, societies, as well as in the emergence of civilizations.⁴ Understanding world religions is therefore essential as a basis for a more informed understanding of human civilizations, as well as for comprehending the ambiguity of cultures perceived as ‘the other.’ In this context, serious study of world religions -in one way or another- requires a comparative and transdisciplinary approach that deeply engages both with the diversity among religions, and within the same religion. Such a model of inquiry

¹ Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān al-, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, ed. M. al-Ajami (Damascus, 2015), p.497.

² See for example: Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World* (Polity Press, 1994).

³ See for instance: Huntington, S., *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York, 1996), pp.64-65. Huntington also called the twenty-first century a “century of religion.” See: Huntington, S., *Who are We?* (New York, 2004), p.15.

⁴ It is generally assumed that agriculture was one main reason of the rise of civilizations. However, some new evidences suggest that religion or the urge to worship sparked civilization. See: Mann, Charles C. “The Birth of Religion: The World's First Temple.” *National Geographic Magazine* (June 2011), pp.35-59.

critically improves the awareness of a human towards his own faith as well as that of others. The comparative study of religions can enhance the awareness of differences and similarities of several belief systems, as well as inculcate the cultural sensitivities among the adherents of their religions. One main issue within the discipline is the relationship between truth and religion. The question of the truth of a religion and who possess the religious truth - whether within specific religion or among religions - has been vehemently discussed in theology and comparative study of religions.⁵

In Islamic civilization, Muslim scholars closely studied the history of religions, the essence of religious phenomena, and the similarities and differences among the various religious faiths. The comparative study of religions, as Franz Rosenthal had correctly observed, “has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to the intellectual progress of mankind.”⁶ It will be enough for our purpose here to generally mention that the expansion of Islam and other doctrinal and political factors enhanced Muslims' awareness of religions and religious sects. Such circumstances contributed to the emergence of issues such as the relation between Islam and other religions, and led to a period of intense intellectual debates between different religions within Islamic civilization. Around the second/eighth century, Muslim scholars became more open to world religions that enabled them to set out develop various methodologies for studying the various religious systems. However, the study of comparative religions in Islamic civilization gained its independence and began to take its significant place from the fourth/tenth century onwards. The methods of Muslim scholars during these centuries varied in their nature and object; ranging from the dialectical, comparative analytical, critical analytical to descriptive approaches.⁷

⁵ Many wrote similar statements. See for instance: Smart, Ninian, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.10-11.

⁶ Lawrence, B., *Shahrastānī on the Indian religions*, forward by Franz Rosenthal, p.2. Quoted in: Rafiabadi, Hamid Naseem “Islam, Christian, and the West” in *World Religions and Islam: A Critical Study*, Part 2, ed. By Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi (New Delhi, 2003), p. 149.

⁷ For further references see: al-Mājidī ,Khaz'al, *ʿIlm al-adyān* (Rabat & Beirut, 2016), pp.73-96.

By now, the mention in modern scholarship of Muslim contribution to the science of comparative religions has been drastically reduced to the popular works: al-Bīrūnī's *Tahqīq mā li-l-hind*, Shahrastānī's *Kitāp al-milal wa-al-niḥal*, and Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāp al-fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal*. Razali and his colleagues have rightly observed the need for categorization that gathers the neglected Muslim heritage in comparative religions. In order to do so, they classified the bulk of Muslim scholarship in comparative religion into two main categories: the purposiveness and the non-purposiveness. The first category refers mainly to the works that are intentionally devoted to studying other religions. These purposive treaties can be divided into three main categories: the descriptive (i.e. Shahrastānī's *Kitāp al-milal wa-al-niḥal*), the disputative (i.e. Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāp al-fiṣal*), and the analytical treatises (i.e. al-Faruqī's Christian ethics). The second group or the non-purposiveness refers to the scattered information on religions in other disciplines: Quranic exegeses, Hadiths commentaries, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic creed and sects, historical texts, Sufism, and travelogues. Although these treaties were intended to accomplish different goals, they certainly can enhance one's understanding of Muslim contribution in the field of comparative religion.⁸

In this regard, the contribution of the tenth century philosopher Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī (d. 381/ 992) could be located in both purposive and the non-purposive treatises. On the one hand, al-ʿĀmirī's *Kitāb al-I'lām bi manāqib al-Islām* (An Exposition on the Merits of Islam) provides a unique and early attempt of grounding comparative religions in Islamic civilization. On the other hand, his other writings - such as *Kitāb al-amad 'alā l-abad* (The Book on the Afterlife or The Scope of Eternity)- are philosophical writings, in which al-ʿĀmirī clearly demonstrate his interest in defending religion. In what follows, this study shall try to thoroughly examine the phenomenon of religion as al-ʿĀmirī handled it in his main works, namely *Kitāb al-I'lām* and *Kitāb al-amad*.

⁸ Razali, W. & Others "Muslim Heritage in Religionswissenschaft: A Preliminary Study on the Purposiveness and the Non-Purposiveness of Muslim Scholarship" *Al-'Abqari Journal*, Vol.4 (2014), pp.3-22.

0.1 Abū al-Ḥasan Al-‘Āmirī⁹

Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (d.414/1023), who has been rightly considered as one of the great littérateurs, described al-‘Āmirī as one of the most prominent scholars of his time.¹⁰ Al-‘Āmirī was born in Nīsābūr, the economic and intellectual center of Khurāsān, around the first quarter of the tenth century. The exact date or place of his birth are not known; neither are his life nor his works fully comprehensible. The information regarding al-‘Āmirī’s life is scarce and very little information exists in the extant literature and biographical sources. What we know for sure is that he was a student of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934), who was a student of Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 256/873). Therefore, some scholars, such as Peter Adamson and Sa’īd al-Ghānimī, have considered al-‘Āmirī to be the last representative of al-Kindī’s philosophical tradition. For them, the "Kindian tradition" is different from the Peripatetic school in several aspects: a) their understanding of theoretical philosophy as a composition of autonomous sciences insomuch as the different sciences are the exercises of different faculties of soul; b) their broader interest which included geography, foreign culture and religions; c) their using of philosophy in the serving of theology such as using the philosophical ideas to interpret the Quran; and d) their interest in the practical issues more than theoretical matters.¹¹

As far as we know, al-‘Āmirī spent most of his life in Khurāsān; but he spent some years in various journeys westwards especially to Baghdād and Rayy. His experience in Baghdād was not a pleasant phase in his life, due to the elegant manners of the

⁹ The aim here is not to provide a detailed portrait of al-‘Āmirī’s life. In fact, there are many who did that, therefore my aim here is limited to introducing him. For more about his life and works see: Khalīfāt, Saḥbaān, *Rasā’il Abī al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī wa-shadharātuhū al-falsafīyya* (‘Ammān,1988), pp. 63-215; Rowson, E.K., *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al- ‘Amirī’s Kitāb al-Amad ‘ala l-abad* (New Haven, 1988), pp.1-51; Wakelnig, Elvira “Al-Amirī” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), pp. 73-75.

¹⁰ Tawhīdī, Abū Hayyān al, *Al-Muqabasat*, ed. M.T. Husayn (Baghdad, 1970), p. 165. The rest of the paragraphs on al-‘Āmirī are based on the bibliography provided in note 8.

¹¹ Adamson, P. “The Kindian Tradition: The Structure of Philosophy in Arabic Neoplatonism,” in *Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. C. D’Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp.364-365; Ghānimī, Sa’īd al- "Introduction" in *Arba' rasa'il falsafīyya*, ed. Sa’īd al-Ghānimī (Beirut, 2015), pp.31-32.

people of Baghdadi. For him, the Baghdadians have elegant appearance and hypocritical underneath mingled with the disdainful of non-Baghdadi in general. In Rayy, where he spent his years there under the patronage of the Buyid wazir Abū l-Faḍl b. al-‘Amīd (d. 360/970) and his son Abu'l-Faḥ b. al-‘Amīd Dhū 'l-Kifāyatayn (d. 366/976), al-‘Āmirī had a better experience. Fortunately, we know that al-‘Āmirī died in Nīsābūr in 992, because on the same day a religious scholar (Abū Bakr al-Muqrī‘) passed away, and it was said that al-‘Āmirī “saved him from the hell by being his ransom.”¹²

Al-‘Āmirī listed his seventeen major works at the beginning of *Kitāb al-amad*, of which only six are extant today. His works clearly demonstrate his philosophical talents and broad interests. The topics of these books cover different themes ranging from logic, Qur’anic exegesis, theology, metaphysics, ethics, comparative religions, Sufism, intentions of Sharia to medicine, biology, and dreams. The study of religion was one main theme in al-‘Āmirī’s writings. In *Kitāb al-I’lām*, he provides a method for systematic comparison of Islam with the other world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Sabianism, Zoroastrianism, and polytheism. From a methodological point of view, al-‘Āmirī was not concerned merely with describing the different religions, but with the establishment of theoretical framework or methodological tool that is appropriate for attaining truth among different religious traditions. Such concern and his other writings are deeply interlinked so that each work cannot be fully understood on its own. This thesis, thus, aims primarily to study the phenomenon of religion according to al-‘Āmirī, while taking into consideration two main points: al-‘Āmirī’s philosophical writings, and the historical context of studying other religions within Islamic civilization.

0.2 Research Question(s) and Methodology

The main aim of this research is to study al-‘Āmirī’s methodology of comparative religions in the light of his philosophy. It aims particularly to answer the following questions: *what is the reason that propped al-‘Āmirī to define man as religious by nature? and How this understanding ended up favoring religious knowledge over*

¹² Hamawī, Yāqūt al-, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), vol.1, p.233.

other types of knowledge and building up a comparative method between religions?

In other words, the main purpose of this thesis is to evaluate al-‘Āmirī’s contribution in the study of religions, and more specifically his determination of certain religion to be discerned not only as a major religion but as representative of truth and necessity. Al-‘Āmirī comes to such conclusion based on a strong philosophical, logical, and comparative discourse throughout his book *Kitāb al-I’lām*. By using such method to analyze religion, al-‘Āmirī provides an early and unique perspective to the study of comparative religion. In this research, I would focus on analysis and charting the methodological tools within al-‘Āmirī’s philosophical discourse, as well as to explain whether the reality of religious diversity imposes a threat or even nullifies the religious truth. To do so, I shall try to connect his ideas on human nature and his ideas on other religions, in order to examine whether al-‘Āmirī is consistent in his analysis of the two fields or he had different approaches for each. Furthermore, the research will be conducted within the framework of the Muslims judgements on other religions as it appeared in the “medieval” literature. Within this framework, the study will also focus on the two types of judgments that Muslim scholars have regularly used: judgments regarding the essence of religion (i.e. doctrines and rituals), and judgments on religion as a social order, to examine how al-‘Āmirī used both types of judgments to prove the superiority of Islam to other religions. Drawing primarily on al-‘Āmirī’s *Kitāb al-I’lām and Kitāb al-amad*, this study seeks to answer these questions and other subordinate issues that appears along the way.

Before doing so, it should be mentioned that al-‘Āmirī was a philosopher for whom philosophical and religious discourse were the same or deeply intertwined to separate them. Furthermore, he was also an expert in different disciplines; just as the scholars of his day. Besides being a philosopher and theologian, he was, for instance, a scholar of comparative religions, great historiographer¹³, and possess a deep knowledge of geography.¹⁴

¹³ The second chapter in *K. al-amad* proves that. Rowson did a good job by comparing al-‘Āmirī’s unique report with al-Bīrūnī’s *al-Athār al-Bāqiya*. See his comments: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp.188-202.

¹⁴ Notice that al-‘Āmirī’s master, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, is known for us today as a geographer, although we did not receive any of his geographical works. Notice also that al-‘Āmirī probably gained his interest

Yet another important point is that tracing the impact of Greek philosophy on al-‘Āmirī is beyond the scope of this study. There are other scholars who wrote extensively on that. The writings of E. K. Rowson and Elvira Wakelnig, for instance, are in essence a form of this genre. One main concern for Rowson was the Greek sources of al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy, more than trying to understand him from within the framework of Islamic civilization.¹⁵ But their contributions did not bring anything special on the table. At the end, there is no free flow of knowledge. There was always a deep influence of political agendas on circulating specific kind of ideas; just as there has been societal flow of knowledge. Most importantly, the dominant model of each civilization plays a significant role in assimilating and reformulating alien ideas. In Islamic civilization, language and *Fīqh* (or in general the particular knowledge) plays an important role in shaping the scholars' mentality. Ignoring this while dealing with the Islamic heritage will lead to a false understanding of Islamic thought, even in dealing with so-called philosophers like Ibn Sīnā whose deeply religious mindset is generally ignored.¹⁶

0.3 Al-‘Āmirī in Literature

Previous contributions on al-‘Āmirī studies are either focused mainly on examining his philosophical writings or provided a descriptive analysis of his other books. Here, I will present some key studies that is essential to understand al-‘Āmirī.

Before doing so, however, it is worth mentioning that the Jewish Arabist Paul Kraus was the first to shed light on al-‘Āmirī’s writings, when he discovered his manuscript of *al-ibsar wal-mubsar* (vision and the visible) in 1937 at the Egyptian library.¹⁷ Franz

in comparative religion from al-Balkhī too. We know that al-Balkhī wrote a book entitled (*sharā’i’ al-adyan*), but again we did not receive it. See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.18.

¹⁵ Notice also that this does not mean to ignore their deep insights in some issues.

¹⁶ For more about circulating knowledge see for example: Östling, J. & Others “The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction” in *Circulation of Knowledge, Explorations in the History of Knowledge*, eds. J. Östling, & Others (Lund, 2018), pp. 9-33.

¹⁷ Rosenthal “State and Religion According to Abu I-Hasan al-‘Amiri” *Islamic Quarterly* 3, p. 43; Rowson, E.K., *A Muslim Philosopher*, p. 12.

Rosenthal, who was in contact with Kraus, too draw the attention to al-‘Āmirī’s *Kitāb al-i‘lām*. There were two main issues of concern to Rosenthal: al-‘Āmirī’s classification of science and the relationship between religion and political authority. The rest of *Kitāb al-i‘lām* and al-‘Āmirī’s other philosophical writings were not the primary concern to Rosenthal. Al-‘Āmirī gained more attention once the first edition of *Kitāb al-i‘lām* had been published by Ahmad ‘Abd al-Hamīd Ghurāb in Cairo 1967. Ghurāb’s edition contains a good introduction about al-‘Āmirī, with a detailed description and notes of the book, without, however, deep analysis of al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy.

Most of the studies have focused on the philosophical side. The main examples are: Everett K. Rowson, Saḥbaān Khalīfāt, Elvira Wakelnig, and Kasım Turhan. Rowson translated *Kitāb al-amad* into English as a doctoral dissertation at Yale University in 1982 under the supervision of Rosenthal. His work includes a detailed introduction of al-‘Āmirī’s life and work, a full translation of *Kitāb al-amad*, and very thorough commentary on each paragraph. However, the main concern of Rowson was the Greek sources of al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy. Herein lies the frailty. At the end, al-‘Āmirī is a Muslim philosopher, therefore it would be better to approach al-‘Āmirī from within the Islamic culture. Indeed, the impact of Greek philosophy is clearly seen in al-‘Āmirī’s writings, but this could be also said about the impact of Persian and Islamic culture on his philosophy. This to say that Rowson’s work is a typical orientalist approach that tries to reduce all Islamic philosophy to the Greek philosophical traditions.

The same line of approach was developed further by Khalīfāt, who collected the philosophical treatises of al-‘Āmirī. In his edition, Khalīfāt presents a broad range of the extent treatises and a fairly deep analysis of each treatises. He was quite aware of the Greek philosophical influences on al-‘Āmirī, but he did not go far to deny the other sources especially the Islamic culture. In general, Khalīfāt’s analysis were philosophical and did not cover the comparison between religions.

Based on the editions of Rowson and Khalīfāt, Wakelnig wrote a number of studies on various topics in al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy. These studies have mostly dealt with al-‘Āmirī’s writing as if he is a loose paraphrase of their Greek sources. Her main

attention was the reception of Neoplatonism in Arabic philosophy. Therefore, Wakelnig focused on al-‘Āmirī’s *Kitāb al-Fuṣūl fī l-Ma‘ālim al-ilāhīya* as a paraphrase of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*.

Turhan’s book is a comprehensive study of al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy. This study distinguishes itself from the above studies for its thoroughly scrutinization of both philosophical and religious issues. However, as a philosophical study, the historical side or the environment of the tenth century occupies a distinctly minor place in the study.

Apart from these philosophical studies, there are two main studies that have attempted to read al-‘Āmirī from the religious studies perspective. Paul L. Heck in his article (The Crisis of Knowledge in Islam (I): The Case of al-‘Āmirī) and his book (Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion) have tried to understand al-‘Āmirī as a Muslim philosopher who discussed religious issues and lived within the Islamic civilization. Despite minor exaggeration and errors in translation, Heck offers one of the best available accounts of reading al-‘Āmirī in English. He is very aware of the historical context in which al-‘Āmirī produced his ideas. But his reading is limited though. His main concern is al-‘Āmirī’s response to the skeptical problem during the tenth century, therefore he merely reviewed the other ideas especially those related to comparative religions.

Like Ghurāb, Hidayet Işık made another attempt to explain al-‘Āmirī’s methodology in comparative religions. His book “Amiri’ye Göre İslam ve Öteki Dinler” or “Islam and Other Religions according to al-‘Āmirī” could be counted as a Turkish translation and detailed comments on *Kitāb al-i‘lām*. The weakness of both Ghurāb and Işık attempts lies in the absences of deep linking of al-‘Āmirī’s definition of man being religious by nature and the superiority of religious knowledge with his comparative method between religions. Further, both of them failed to recognize the separation between the essence of religion (beliefs, rituals, morals, and punishments) and the tradition of religions (political, social, cultural, and civilizational) in al-‘Āmirī’s comparison. Hence, it could be claimed that both studies are descriptive in nature.

This study then aims to cover this gap between the aforementioned studies. It will

attempt to weave al-‘Āmirī’s era, thought and methodology of comparative religions into one framework. By doing so, we can present the original contribution of al-‘Āmirī in different way.

0.4 Organization of chapters

This study is divided into three major chapters:

The first chapter will explore different areas of cultural and intellectual life during the tenth century, focusing mainly on al-‘Āmirī’s thought. Specifically, the chapter attempts to weave together the themes of al-‘Āmirī with the issues of his day. To do so, the chapter will focus on three main issues: the uses of logic as a neutral tool for knowing and attaining the truth, the religious nature of man, and the religious community in al-‘Āmirī’s perspective. The three issues were dominant in his thought as same as in the discussions during the fourth/tenth century.

The second chapter will discuss the superiority of religious knowledge within the classification of sciences. This chapter will be devoted to al-‘Āmirī ‘s classification of knowledge with respect to the other classifications of the day. With this object in mind, the chapter will be divided into three subsections: al-‘Āmirī’s definition of knowledge and the inmate relation between knowledge and action, his integrative approach of taxonomy, and then why religious knowledge is superior over philosophical sciences.

Al-‘Āmirī’s thoughts flow along the following levels: man is religious by nature and religious knowledge holds a superior position, so which religion of the world religions then is the container of truth? In this regard, the third chapter will be dedicated to methodological tool for approaching comparative study of religion. Once we mention the selective religions under comparison, the chapter will revolve around three main themes: the objects and rules of comparison, the essence of religion, the religious tradition. The chapter will show also how al-‘Āmirī used Islam as the mean between the different religions.

CHAPTER ONE

Al-‘Āmirī and Man's Religious Nature

“... It has been said that Man is religious by nature.”

*Al-‘Āmirī*¹⁸

1.1 Introduction

In his *Kitab al-amad 'alā l-abad*, al-‘Āmirī disagrees with the people of his time who describe the one who reads Euclid’s book and study logic as a philosopher or sage, even if he lacks knowledge in religious sciences. He harshly criticizes his contemporaries who ascribe wisdom to Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 313/925) because of his proficiency in medicine in spite of his errors in theology like believing in the five eternal principles (the creator, the universal soul, the primeval matter, the absolute time and the absolute space). Al-‘Āmirī continues that even his sheikh Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, who was both an expert in various kinds of knowledge and a sincere believer, disapproves ascribing wisdom to him as if people have never heard the Qur’anic verse (2:269) “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.” Al-‘Āmirī concludes that this was also the case of al-Balkhī’s master, Ya‘qūb ibn ‘Ishāq al-Kindī.¹⁹

Such interesting statement represents a part of the debates over the nature of religion

¹⁸ Rowson, E.K., *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al- ‘Amiri’s Kitab al-Amad ‘ala l-abad* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1988), p.96 (Arabic), 97 (English). I relied mainly on Rowson's translation of *Kitab al-amad 'alā l-abad* which published on both Arabic and English. Henceforth I will refer to it as Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*.

¹⁹ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p. 74;76 (Arabic), 75;77 (English). Compare this critique with al-Rāzī description of his life as the authentic way of philosophy, his attack on prophecy, and the mutual contradictions of religions. See: Al-Razi, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya', *al-Sira al-falsafiyya (The Philosophical Life)*, ed. P. Kraus in *Rasa'il falsafiyya li-Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyya' al-Razi*, Cairo: Fouad I University Faculty of Letters, 1939; repr. Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, 1973, pp. 97-112; trans. A. Arberry, 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', in *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964, pp. 227-242.

and philosophy in the fourth/tenth century Islamic world. At first sight, a high level of tension and controversies have characterized the political, religious, socio-ethnic, and epistemological debates during the century. However, the instability and political fragmentation was associated with a high level of intellectual creativity and cultural dynamism. *This chapter aims to provide both a broad overview of the tenth century and to specifically use al-‘Āmirī as a case study.* The chapter, then, shall attempt to weave both the historical background and al-‘Āmirī’s ideas in a holistic construct, and, by doing so, it could shed light on the dynamics of ideas instead of reading it as merely some abstract notions. In order to do that, the chapter will focus on the following three main themes: the use of logic as a neutral tool, religion and philosophy including the religious nature of man, and the religious community. These three themes are, I argue, the most important in order to get a better understanding of the background that lies behind al-‘Āmirī’s *Kitāb al-Ilām*.

1.2 Logic as A Neutral Tool

By the tenth century, philosophy gained prominence and influence in shaping the intellectual character of scholars. It is, at this moment of history, that a distinct rational mode had actually emerged, in which philosophy was considered as an approach for salvation, or - to put it in a different way - as a path to happiness through achieving a high level of perfection. All Arabic philosophers shared the conception of *sa’āda* [happiness] as the soul's ascent from the sensible world to the spiritual world. Hence, philosophy was not a merely theoretical discipline, but also a spiritual path in which its practitioner seeks the human perfection and salvation to eternal life.²⁰

Such ascendance of philosophy implies that truth lays in the clear way of thinking and concepts rather than in the clear way of speaking.²¹ Hence, the importance of logic as a craft or a tool of attaining the truth has dominated the discourse of the era. Through

²⁰ Mattila, Janne, *Philosophy as a Path to Happiness: Attainment of Happiness in Arabic Peripatetic and Ismaili Philosophy*, PhD in University of Helsinki, Faculty of Arts, Department of World Cultures, Arabic and Islamic studies (2011), p.7. This thesis is a good comprehensive study in the concept of *sa’āda*.

²¹ Heck discussed this transition of the importance of language and philosophy during the ninth and tenth centuries. For more check the first and second chapter in: Heck, P. L., *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (Routledge, 2014).

logic one can grasp the truth beyond the words; it is the instrument that enables any scholar to get the real meaning of things. Without it, one's knowledge is at risk.²²

The increasing usage of logic was in a sense a consequence of the theological disputations, and the interaction with other religions particularly the Hellenistic-Christian theology. The Islamic theological arena by that time contained nearly seven main competing sects on the representation of Islam. The Mu'tazilite has entered a new stage around the beginning of the tenth century. Both Abū 'Alī l-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) have coherently formulated the doctrinal framework of Mu'tazilites and established what came to be known as the Basran and the Baghdadi schools. By 915, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935-6) ruptures with his old creed and replaced by another new doctrine. A step that provoked his opponents - Mu'tazilites and Ahl al-ḥadīth - to harshly criticize him. Many of al-Ash'arī's students were mainly from Nīsābūr, which means that the transmission of Ash'arism eastwards began in parallel to both: The Māturīdism's expansion and Al-Ka'bī's activities in Balkh. The theological arena then consisted of seven main groups: Ahl al-ḥadīth, Mu'tazilite, Ash'arīte, Māturīdite, Ismā'ilism or in general Shī'ism; Karrāmiya; and not to forget Zāhirite. It is impossible here to cover all the issues under dispute between these competing sects, but one should highlight two main points: firstly, the written works of the era cannot be truly understood without taking into account their polemic context. For example, the writings of the Ash'arīte imam Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 1015) cannot be fully understood and accurately comprehended apart from his polemical confrontations with al-Karrāmiya in Nīsābūr. Secondly, one main issue of disputations was whether theological truths can be captured by human reason or not.²³

It is also important to remember that *dār al-Islām* by that time was probably the most

²² Rosenthal translated many Muslims scholars' statements on logic. See for example: Rosenthal, F., *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 195; 203-208; Heck, P. L., *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (Routledge, 2014), pp. 66-69.

²³ For more see: Thiele, J. "Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash'arism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century)." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford, 2016), pp. 225-241; Rudolph, U. "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and

cosmopolitan societies of the day. This sense of universality that gathers different religions side by side have developed Muslim scholarship of other religions, which expanded in more systematic and coherent direction. Further, the polemics between competing Muslim sects are directly linked to the polemics against other religions. The heretical sects -i.e. Murji'ites- have always been accused of assimilating elements from other religions. During the tenth century, the nature of polemics started to change due to better knowledge of other biblical and nonbiblical religions. The issues of *naskh*, *tahrīf*, prophethood, and Aristotelian logic were the main topics under dispute with both Christianity and Judaism. The encounter with religious traditions, other than Christianity and Judaism, was different in a sense that some religions are only known through travelers. Little information is known about Buddhism, *Sumaniyya* as the Muslim authors named it, because direct contacts were scarce. According to the few scholars who know their doctrines, Buddhism was the ancient idolatrous religion of the Eastern people before the appearance of prophets. By contrast, much more information was available on the Indian religions due to many reasons like the traveler accounts and the expansion of Islam in northwest and north India. This led to a pretty detailed discussion which included: the doctrine of transmigration of souls, idol worship, the caste system, and other strange practices such as the practice of burning the dead man's wife. Mazdaism²⁴ or Zoroastrianism witnessed fairly noticeable growth during the ninth and during the beginning of the tenth centuries. In their debates with Mu'tazilites, the adherents of Mazdaism collected their religious literature and developed highly intellectual polemic discourse against Islam. However, the Mazdaism declined by the end of tenth century due to the rise of Sāmānids. Manicheism as well met a similar fate of gradual disappearance by the end of the century. Around the mid of the century, they left Mesopotamia seeking protection as refugees in Khurāsān. They settled mainly in Samarqand under the name of Sabeans

Māturīdism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford, 2016), pp. 280-296.

²⁴ Mazdaism, is also called Zoroastrianism, was founded by Zarathustra around 1000 B.C.E., and became the religion of Iranian Sassanid Empire. Manicheism was founded by Mani (216-276) who created a synthesis of all preceding religions with a gnostic interpretation of the truths within these religions. See: Waardenburg, Jacques “The Medieval Period: 650–1500” in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (New York: 1999), pp.35 and 37.

to protect themselves and their religion.²⁵

In this fluid period, and as a result of the theological and religious disputes, a group adapted the doctrine of *takāfu' al-adilla* or the equivalence of proofs. Each religion has its rational evidences, so how could one justify the superiority or authenticity of his doctrine? Accordingly, the proofs of any religion should be equally valid as those of the other competing religions. Polemic might appear to be supporting a specific religion over another in religious debates, but still “whatever is established through dialectics may be destroyed by dialectics.”²⁶ These claims were widespread among the intellectual elites and educational circles around the Islamic world. In Bagħdād and eastern parts, *takāfu' al-adilla* was mainly associated with the theologians and their futile debates. Throughout *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, al-Tawhīdī gives many examples where religion is highly questionable and illustrate how theologians' disputes could lead to ambiguity and confession. One example was where is the wisdom in God's request to unbelievers to obey his orders and He surely knows that they will not accept.²⁷ Al-‘Āmirī too wrote one of his treatise (*Inqādh al-bashar min al-jabr wa'l-qadar*) as a response to one scholar who has concluded that “both positions are equally true and that there is parity “*takāfu'*” in the two arguments for freewill and for pre-determinism.”²⁸

This doctrine is well-articulated by Ibn Ḥazm (d.456/1064). According to him, the adherents of this doctrine are divided into three main sub-groups. The first group applies the equivalence of proofs to any argument under dispute, and that all religions are neither true nor false. They neither affirmed nor denied the existence of God or prophecy; nor they would promote one religion over another. They merely believe that religious truth must exist somewhere in one of the competing opinions, but they are not precisely sure where exactly it lies. The second group applies the equivalence of proofs to any issue other than the existence of the Creator who is certainly beyond doubt. They neither affirmed nor denied the prophecy and all other religious matters.

²⁵ For More see: Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period*, pp. 18-69.

²⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal*, vol.5 (Beirut, 1996), pp.253-54.

²⁷ Al-Tawhīdī, Abū Ḥayyān, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, (Damascus, 2015), pp. 586-595.

²⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Inqādh al-bashar min al-jabr wa'l-qadar*, in *arba' rasa'il falsafiyya*, ed. Sa'id al-Ghanimi (Beirut, 2015), pp.59-60. The English translation in: Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 86-87.

They also believed in the existence of religious truth, but it was neither clear nor evident to anybody, and, hence, God has not made it obligatory for anyone. The third and last group applies the equivalence of proofs to any issue other than the existence of God and prophecy. They believed that God does exist, and the prophecy is a reality and that Muhammad was truly a messenger of God. Beyond that, they neither affirmed nor denied any sect of Islam since it is impossible to determine in which one the truth lies. This last group was subdivided into two main opinions. One group adheres to confusion that they did not affirm nor deny one reason or sect over another. It seems that such a group denies the moral and social utility of religion, and for that the vast majority of them are open to pleasures and sensuous desires. The other group claims that man is obliged by reason to adhere to a religion that would deter him from iniquity and evil. In contrast to the other group, they acknowledged the moral and social utility of religion. To them, those who are atheists should be killed to free the world of them, because “their danger is more harmful than the viper and the scorpion.” Yet, which religion should one choose? Here again they are divided into another two sentiments: one was saying that man should adhere to his religion of birth; the religion that God surely choose for him. The other attitude claiming that every man should accept which all the religions have agreed to consider right and commendable (i.e. do not kill or fornicate), and neither affirm or deny any disputed issue.²⁹

So how does one deal with the conflicting truth claims among these sects? Al-‘Āmirī was very conscious of the need for a natural tool that could evaluate and select among competing opinions. For him, logic would be the neutral tool of inquiry into all theological and philosophical matters. His book *al-Taqrīr li-awjuh al- taqdīr* beings with the status of disputation *majlis* on God's appreciation of temporal events, in which the participants did not go beyond the imitative views and vernacular-inspired suspicions. Al-‘Āmirī noticed that none of them gives a logical and persuasive arguments that supports his claim, and, for that, there is a necessity for a *Ḥakam*

²⁹ Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal*, vol.5 (Beirut, 1996), pp.253-270; An English Translation can be found here: Perlmann, M. "Ibn Hazm on the Equivalence of Proofs" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 40 (1950), pp. 279-290. See also: Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 74-75; Fierro, M. “Ibn Ḥazm and the Jewish *zindīq*” in *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba, The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker*, eds. Camilla Adang & Others (Brill, 2013), pp.500-503. Notice that Ibn Ḥazm mentions two Andalusī Jewish physicians as representatives of the first two groups.

“judge” among them.³⁰ For that, many works of al-‘Āmirī begins with the rational rules that he sees it govern the working of the human intellect. An approach that his contemporaries would not accept and would harshly criticized him for it.

His views on logic could be clearly seen in his book *al-I'lām bi manāqib al-Islām* and other writings. As we shall see in the second chapter, al-‘Āmirī considered logic as an instrument of the philosophical sciences (natural sciences, mathematics, and metaphysics). To him, logic is

“...an intellectual instrument, which alone properly enables the rational soul to *distinguish between truth and untruth* in speculative problems, and *between good and evil* in practical problems...it controls question and answer as well as contradiction, contrast, and fallacy. *It helps to resolve doubts*, expose misleading statements and support other ideas which may serve to verify claims that have been raised ...it provides a cheerful clam in matter of cognition to such an extent that the soul by itself becomes a propagandist for the acquisition of *ḥikma...in order to be blessed with the realization of truth and the joy of certainty.*”³¹ (emphasis added).

Two counter-arguments put forth by al-‘Āmirī’s opponents: if logic is a tool to know the truth, why then the works on logic are obscure? At least it should be one work spares us the task of searching for a mentor; and if the greatest benefit of logic is to be skilled in using the rules of inference from the known to the unknown, so why there is need for the formal study of logic? Whoever can reach to logical conclusions through his own insights is able to manage without studying logic. Both arguments are invalid or worthless for al-‘Āmirī. If the logical works are hard to capture, it does not mean that they are entirely useless. Anyone who admits the insufficient of his mind to grasp the logical meanings, his judgement on whether logic corresponds the truth is

³⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, al-Taqrīr li-awjuh al- taqdīr, in *arba' rasa'il falsafiyya*, ed. Sa'id al-Ghanimi (Beirut, 2015), pp.93-95.

³¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām bi manāqib al-Islām* (Riyadh, 1988), p. 91. The English translation is done by F. Rosenthal, and it can be found here: Al-‘Āmirī “Islam and the sciences” in Rosenthal, F., *The Classical Heritage of Islam* (Berkeley, 1973), p.69.

definitely rejected. It is necessary for him to understand the content of logic before judging its value. Indeed, one can draw correct logical conclusions, but still he will not be able to prove the validity of his own arguments unless he can appeal to the reliable balance of certainty or logic.³²

In fact, the integration of the Aristotelian logic was consistently a source of problems that it could not be ignored. One main issue was the universality of the Greek sciences and the merits of logic. This can be seen in the famous *munāzara* between the Christian logician Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus (d.940) and the grammarian Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfi (d.978) on the superiority of Greek logic or Arabic grammar. To Abū Bishr, logic was an instrument of speech “whereby the sound speech may be distinguished from the defective, the corrupt from the good.” It looks into “intentions graspable by the intellect; comprehensible meanings; ideas that come to mind; and thoughts that present themselves.” The universality of logic, then, lies in the comprehended ideas and notions beyond the words, which are the same for all men and nations. Al-Sīrāfi, on the contrary, restricted the scope of speech to the linguistic arena. For him, right speech is distinguished from wrong speech by the language’s recognizable grammar. In this regard, logic is the invention of a Greek man on the basis of his own language. Why then the other nations like Turks, Indians, Persians, and Arabs should attend to it and make it judge and jury between them? The thought must use the language as medium in which concepts can be articulated. The correct reasoning, therefore, is the outcome of following the correct rules of grammar. Thus, each nation has its own logic of language, which means there is no universal logic anymore.³³

³² Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-Iʿlām*, pp.89-90; for English see: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, pp.67-69. Notice that nearly a century later al-Ghazālī (d.1111) will describe logic as the straight or just balance [al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm].

³³ The full debate is recorded in al-Tawhīdī, *Kitāb al-Imtāʾ wal-Muʿānasa*, pp. 102-125. A full English translation can be found here: Margoliouth, D.S. “The Discussion between Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus and Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (Jan. 1905), pp. 79-129. For a good discussion of the debate see: Ouyang, Wen-chin “Literature and Thought: Re-reading al-Tawhidi's Transcription of the Debate between Logic and Grammar” in Pomerantz, Maurice A. and Shahin, Aram A., (eds.), *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies in Honor of Wadad Kadi* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp 444-460; Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 66-67; Kraemer, Joel L. "Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam, a Preliminary Study." *Journal of the American Oriental*

Another debate between al-‘Āmirī and al-Sīrāfī on the same topic took place in Abū l-Fath’s salons in Baghdād. It seems that al-‘Āmirī was aware of al-Sīrāfī’s restriction of logic to the linguistics sphere. Therefore, he started by asking about the nature of the *bi* in *basmala*, to which al-Sīrāfī responded by witty words on the superiority of silence to foolish talk.³⁴ However, it seems that al-‘Āmirī aimed to debate al-Sīrāfī in his main area of specialization (language), in order to prove the latter limited knowledge in his main field. Therefore, al-Sīrāfī admits to al-Tawḥīdī that his debate with al-‘Āmirī was more acrimonious than his previous debate with Abū Bishr.³⁵

1.3 Religion and Philosophy

There are various approaches towards the relationship between philosophy and religion in the tenth century. These different approaches emphasized some aspects of the relation between philosophy and religion in their investigations and relied on different methods. Al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) recognized philosophy as the head of science, in which one can find the theoretical perfection and the demonstrative certainty. Broadly speaking, al-Fārābī regarded religion as a branch of political philosophy or as an imitative form of philosophical truth; an idea that he attributes to the ancients. He defined religion as the “opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing it a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them.”³⁶ Turing the religious issue to be a political question meant, in a sense, that the truth or falsity of religion has been replaced by the sociopolitical utility of

Society, vol. 104 (1984), no. 1, pp. 150-151; Walbridge, J., *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.108.

³⁴ Al- Tawḥīdī, *Akhlaq al-Wazīrayn* (Beirut, 1992), pp.410-414; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp.5-6.

³⁵ Saḥbaān, *Khalīfāt, Rasā’il Abī al-Hasan al-‘Āmirī wa-shadharātuhū al-falsafiyya* (‘Ammān,1988), pp.85-88. Unfortunately, al- Tawḥīdī, who was in favor of al-Sīrāfī over Abū Bishr and al-‘Āmirī, did not record the full debate. Compare this also with al-Fārābī’s writings on logic and language in his books: *Kitāb al-Hurūf* and *Ihsa' al-'ulum*.

³⁶ Fārābī’s *Kitāb al- Milla wa-nuṣūṣ ukhrá*. I used the English translation: Siddiqi, A. A., *Politics, Religion, and Philosophy in Al-Farabi's Book of Religion*, MA thesis (The University of Texas at Austin, August 2014), p. 8.

religion. So that religion is subsumed within philosophy, and that the latter can grasp the meanings of religion's contents as well as grasping God in terms of intellect. To al-Fārābī, religion is mainly based on the imaginative faculty rather than the rational or intellectual faculty, which has a lack of demonstrable proof. Such imagery can only resemble the truths of existence, while the rational faculty can know it in a certain way. Prophecy as well was addressed in the same terms. Hence, the prophet is a sort of accomplished philosopher who can transfer the theoretical meanings into images and can lead others to accept and use it. Scripture too is an imaginative phenomenon that it can be understood as statement of philosophical truth. Common people can understand the scripture, but still the true meaning is available only to those who deal with it as philosophy. As a result, theologians and jurists are inferior to philosophers; the small group who could ground their beliefs on solid premises and can understand the universal that lies beyond the legislation. By and large, the gap between al-Fārābī's cosmology and the common traditional view can be easily preserved by noticing the Greek philosophical roots of his thoughts. The eternity of the world in al-Fārābī's cosmology and other theories such as ensoulment of the heavenly bodies are not compatible with the Qur'anic model.³⁷

Like al-Fārābī, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā (Brethren of Purity) is another attempt at synthesis between philosophy and religion. Here, again, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā constructed their thoughts on the harmonization between philosophy and religion, and that religion is a form of the ultimate philosophical truth. Their philosophical enterprise is based on various heterogeneous sources such as Ismā'īlīs doctrine, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, Iranian astrology, and biblical quotations. They considered man to be the microcosm of the whole universe, wherein both physical and metaphysical dimensions or earth and heaven are united. The physical side of man

³⁷ Providing a comprehensive analysis of al-Fārābī's complex ideas is beyond the scope of this essay. The aim here is to show how philosophical inquiry, not religion, was the suitable method to gain certainty. For more see: Siddiqi, A. A., *Politics, Religion, and Philosophy in Al-Farabi's Book of Religion*, MA thesis (The University of Texas at Austin, August 2014), pp. 8-10; Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam*, pp. 67-85; Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 91-92; Janos, D., *Method, Structure, and Development in al-Fārābī's Cosmology* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), pp.28-30; Walker, Paul E. "Philosophy of Religion in al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna, and Ibn Ṭufayl." In *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: 2005), pp. 88-94.

makes him an imperfect creature, but he still be able to transcend through the spiritual feature of his nature. This transcendence can be achieved through liberating soul from this material world. At the heart of the *Epistles*, then, is the purification of human soul through knowledge and actions before entering Paradise. Central to Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's understanding of religion was the distinction between *Zāhir* (the exoteric) and *Bāṭin* (the esoteric) dimensions of religion or the esoteric truth that lies behind revelation. For them, there are three categories in dealing with religious beliefs: the common people, the elite, and those who are between these two ranks. The common people are restricted to the exoteric level which promoting belief via performance of rituals such as fasting or recitation of the Quran. The middle group are associated with studying *Fiqh* and exegesis, and they are encouraged to discuss the various philosophical issues. The third class are those who can access to the hidden meanings beyond the exoteric level via contemplation and reflection. Consequently, it is then by means of the philosophical reflection that one can transcend to the constant esoteric truth beyond the exoteric actions and revelations.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā goes further into presenting the idea of philosophical worship. For them, rituals did have a purificatory function in the soul's ascent to the divinity. Such function lies in the ethical self-governance which separates the soul from physical realm. Yet this level is related to the religious-legal worship; the commands and prohibitions that brings one closer to God. A higher degree would be the philosophical-divine worship, which is based on attesting to the divine unity and limited only to those who achieve the Ikhwān's intellectual and moral requirements of philosopher. This level is accord with the ideal type of philosopher in contrast with the former exoteric level. Influenced by the Sābian religion of Harrān, the Ikhwān provide some examples of their philosophical worship that, as they claim, have inherited from the ancients. These rites include for instance nightly prayer which is practiced three times of each Greek month and four feasts during the year. Each of these philosophical rites has an equivalent Islamic rite together with going beyond it. For example, the philosophical *qurbān* on one side is similar to the Islamic worship during *Eid al-Adha*, while on the other side it goes beyond the religious sphere to the spiritual sacrifice which is the final

aim of the philosopher.³⁸

The Ismā'īlī preachers,³⁹ on the other hand, considered the intellect to be the first created being that is ruling the universe, and it does not conflict with divine truth or revelation. According to them, reason and religious law are not seen as two separate sources of truth, but rather they are in essence identical. The purpose of Prophecy therefore is to transmit the theoretical truth into the physical realm in order to achieve the collective salvation of human society. Scripture represents intellect and it is subordinated to it. The esoteric interpretation of the religious text in this way would be the most appropriate method to efficiently capture every nuance of the scripture's original message. These ideas are firstly introduced by the notorious preacher Muhammed al-Nasafī (d. 943) in nearly all of his writings especially his lost book *al-Mahsūl*, which gained a widespread acceptance within different Ismā'īlī cycles. For that and despite the many critics, al-Nasafī's thought system remained the standard for those who advocated the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Besides al-Nasafī, there are three other main preachers who were actively engaged in framing the philosophic-theological Ismā'īlī system: Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d.934), Abu Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. around 971), and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 1021). One of the important thing for us to notice here is that all of those preachers wrote mainly to explain and define Ismā'īlism, but in some treatises they discussed

³⁸ The two paragraphs on ikhwān al-ṣafā are based mainly on: *risālah al-Ārā' wa-al-diyānāt*, in *Rasā'il al-Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, vol.3 (Beirut: 2005), pp.328-440; Mohamed, Y. "The Cosmology of Ikhwan al-Safa', Miskawayh and al-Isfahani" in *Islamic Studies* 39:4 (2000), pp. 657-679; Mattila, J. "The philosophical worship of the ikhwān al-ṣafā" *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2015), pp. 1-23; Mattila, J. "The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' on Religious Diversity" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 28:2 (2017) pp. 178–192; Baffioni, Carmela "Encyclopedia of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā" in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), pp. 536-40.

³⁹ In the beginning of the tenth century, the Ismā'īlī's da'wa began to be spread in the eastern lands of the 'Abbāsids Caliphate, namely Khurāsān and North-Central Iran. There, a number of Ismā'īlī preachers had accepted the imamate of Muhammad b. Ismā'īl as the Mahdī and started reinterpreting their creed in a philosophical framework namely Neoplatonism. For more see for example: Stern, S., M. "The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania" *BSOAS*, 23 (1960), pp.56-90.

philosophical topics in technical language based mainly on the ancient texts.⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī is well-known for his famous debate with Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on prophecy, and for his disagreement of al-Nasafī's *Mahsūl*. In brief, al-Rāzī can be distinguished from the other philosophers in two main issues: time and soul. For him, both time and intellect are the same; an idea that his Ismā'īlī colleagues would not accept and would harshly criticize him for. The second is that he believes that human soul does not belong to the physical world, and hence al-Rāzī insists on the perfection of universal soul, refusing the direct link between the spiritual realm and the physical world. Al-Sijistānī for many is the main representative of early Ismā'īlī philosophy. Here, one cannot cover all his main ideas that al-Sijistānī made, but it is important to notice that his philosophy was more in the aid of al-Nasafī and against the thoughts of al-Rāzī, and thereafter the Fāṭimids preferred his doctrine over the other Ismā'īlī thinkers such as al-Kirmānī's attempt to reevaluate the Ismā'īlī thought. By contrast to the aforementioned philosophers, al-Kirmānī was more Aristotelian than Neoplatonist, and, as a result, his views were opposite to the other's. For instance, al-Kirmānī in his writings spoke about the active intellect rather than the universal intellect and had a little interest on the idea of universal soul.⁴¹

As a response to these thoughts, attempts had made to develop a rational defense of religion in various fields such as history and philosophy. The relevance between history, and theological and legal discussions is very explicit in the historical writings of the day as it appears in the works of Abu al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) and Al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 966). Enough for our purpose here is to mention that al-Maqdisī has made a unique - and neglected - endeavor to write the world history in which reports are evaluated under rigorous confirmation method. His well-

⁴⁰ This very important and curial issue. Saḥbaān Khalīfāt claimed that al-ʿĀmirī studied Neo-Platonism with al-Nasafī between 324 and 331 H. See: Khalīfāt, *Rasā'il Abī al-Hasan al-ʿĀmirī*, pp.63;74. If al-ʿĀmirī studied with al-Nasafī, it means that he studied his book al-Mahsūl. It means also that al-ʿĀmirī to some extent is Ismā'īlite. Khalīfāt's assumption runs counter to that harsh critique of al-ʿĀmirī to Bāṭiniyyah in his writings.

⁴¹ Walker, Paul E. "the Ismā'īlīs" in *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, eds. R. Taylor and P. Adamson (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 72-91; Stern, S., M. "The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania" *BSOAS*, 23 (1960), pp.56-90; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlī*, pp.152-155.

structured book *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-Ta'rīkh* begins with a long philosophical and theological introduction designed mainly to warn the authentic believers against atheists and those who deny human responsibility and pursue their desires. Many of these issues had discussed in an endeavor to improve the reader's ability to distinguish true and false reports. In order to do so, al-Maḡdisī maintained certain theological criteria of evidence which enable historian to either approve or deny the reports. A project that could be called "historical theology", in which the theological truth can be achieved through history. Al-Maḡdisī had also paid special attention to how disputants were actually spread the ambiguity about religion because they were not well educated in the rules of disputation.⁴²

Al-ʿĀmirī as well attempted to use his philosophical skills so as to define religion against those who were seeking to undermine its core role; just as al-Maḡdisī did through history. He belongs in the tradition of al-Kindī (d. 873), for whom, they aimed to harmonize religion and philosophy while admitting the limitation of human intellect. Such tendency can be seen more prominently in nearly all of al-ʿĀmirī's works, and he goes further to utilize philosophy to serve religion. Here firstly it is important to mention al-ʿĀmirī's critical dealing with philosophy. This critical dealing appears in two different types of manifestation: his treatment of philosophical texts, and in his critique of some philosophers especially those who raised skeptical arguments against religion. Al-ʿĀmirī was well grounded in philosophical discourse, and he was very aware of the classical terminology. However, he goes beyond the Greek philosophical texts by adding or omitting words or phrases. The most obvious example, as we will see later, is probably his unique statement that "man is religious by nature." This perhaps is the major reason why Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) harshly attacked al-ʿĀmirī. Once Ibn Sīnā refutes an opinion of al-ʿĀmirī, he described the latter as

⁴² Khalidi, Tarif "Mu'tazilite Historiography: Maḡdisī's *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-Ta'rīkh*," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1976): 1-12; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.114; 131 footnote n. 43. Al-Maḡdisī's book did not gain the required attention for such a unique work. Very little has been written about it in both Arabic and English. Camilla Adang, for instance, focused on al-Maḡdisī in her book *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Brill, 1996). In French, Heck has mentioned this study: Thami, Mahmoud, *L'Encyclopedisme musulman a l'age classique. Le livre de la creation et de l'histoire de Maḡdisi* (Paris, 1998). Yet, as far as I know, the relationship between the theological disputations and historical writing is not very well studied.

“one of the *akhbath* [Most Vile] of the Islamic philosophers at muddling philosophy, since he did not understand the intention of the ancients.”⁴³ Modern scholars have noticed the critical method of al-‘Āmirī, however they interpreted it differently. According to E. Wakeling, al-‘Āmirī “wanted to make a different point ...using an unusual set of expressions.”⁴⁴ The idea which occupied E. K. Rowson in his translation and commentary on *Kitab al-amad* was the Greek sources of al-‘Āmirī’s philosophy. This created many different types of puzzles which made him like the one who is lost in the desert and dying for a drip of water. In many comments, Rowson admits either al-‘Āmirī added something new or what al-‘Āmirī said has no parallel in Greek sources.⁴⁵

Al-‘Āmirī holds a different perspective of the relation between religion and philosophy. For him, the main purpose of the rational soul is to qualify a man to be God’s representative on the lower world. The goods of this world, whether they are absolute like wisdom or relative like wealth, are not sought for their own sake, but rather to help man to fulfil his purpose on earth as God’s representatives. The highest level of these goods can be attained only through divine law.⁴⁶ One must

“set right the rational soul by diligent application to the religious statutes, in order that he may thereby progress to the attainment of the truth, belief in the truth, practical adherence to the truth, and elucidation of the truth. And when he is beset by doubt about any aspect of (these statutes), he will turn for help against it to the crafts of logic, always applying close study to them, maintaining the (requisite) order and arrangement, and keeping to the straightway which is unmarred by any slackness or deviation.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-naǧāh*, published by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣabrī al-Kurdī (A-Qāhirah, 1357/1938), p.271; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.28.

⁴⁴ Wakelnig, Elvira “Philosophical Fragments of al-‘Āmirī preserved mainly in al-Tawḥīdī, Miskawayh and in the texts of the Siwan al-Ḥikma tradition” in *In the Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the 4th/10th Century*, ed. P. Adamson (London, 2008) p. 230.

⁴⁵ For instance: “...statement that people exploit the name of famous philosopher has no parallel in Greek sources known to me.” See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.184 and 186.

⁴⁶ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.138 (Arabic); 139 (English) and 118 (Arabic); 119 (English).

⁴⁷ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp.96 (Arabic); 97 (English).

Therefore, throughout his writings al-‘Āmirī was aware that philosophy would not only be compatible with religion but could be very dangerous because of pseudo-philosophers. Those who think of themselves as being accomplished in understanding and intelligence and may fool those who have rudimentary knowledge in philosophy. Exactly like the merchant who sells fraudulent goods to those who does not know much about it. In doing so, they may link themselves

“falsely with philosophy and claim fraudulently to be a follower of one of the famous philosophers ... for [their] certain that most of the philosophical books remain full of symbols and obscure... so [they] claim to be an expert on these books ...in order to derogate from religious learning and speak ill of the Muslim’s imams... [for that] the people of [our] religion is not safe from the evils attendant on this situation.”⁴⁸

The *zanādiqa* [heretics] of the day claimed that if religion is true, why then those philosophers with their abundant intelligence did not adopt or adhere to it? The dialecticians (the *mutakallimūn*) too by accusing those wise men of denying God’s attributes and heresy could attract people to be impressed by freethinking and could support the party of *al-dahrīya* [materialists].⁴⁹ According to al-‘Āmirī, anti-philosophical sentiments solely would not be sufficient remedies for this situation, because the widespread fame of philosophers among various people and the continuing esteem from the caliphs. The effective deal would summarize and investigate the philosophers’ opinions and claims. It is not a surprise that al-‘Āmirī begins a book on soul with a historical, biographical, and analytical surveys of philosophy, in which he proves the sages’ acknowledgement of the Creator.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 58;60 (Arabic), 59;61 (English). A similar concern can be seen in the opening words of al-Maqdisī’s *Kitāb al-Bad’ wa’l-Ta’rīkh* (Oran & Beriut, 2015), p.95.

⁴⁹ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 76;78 (Arabic), pp.77;79 (English).

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 182-183. Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm too argued that the famous Greek philosophers were monotheists. Interestingly, Ibn Ḥazm did that in his refutation of al- Kindī’s metaphysics and accused the later of his tendency towards *al-dahrīya*. Interestingly too that Ibn Ḥazm assumed that al- Kindī “read the books of ancients and his eyes are covered by the veil of the *mutakallimūn*.” See: Yafūt, Sālim, *Ibn Ḥazm wa’l-fikr al-falsafī bi-’l-Maghrib wa-’l-Andalus* (Casablanca, 1986), pp.306-307. Although

These surveys aimed primarily to salvage philosophy from pseudo-philosophers, and to ground the study of philosophy and logic in the Islamic environment. Let us here mention only one important issue in the biographical account in which al-‘Āmirī attributed *ḥikma* to Luqmān. In his original report, al-‘Āmirī traces the continuity and development of philosophy through highlighting the five Greek sages: Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The first figure, Empedocles, learned *ḥikma* under the guidance of Luqmān, who was a contemporary of the prophet David. By connecting Empedocles to Luqmān, al-‘Āmirī had two main aims in mind: to tie the Greek philosophy with the divine knowledge, and to prevent those who deny religion from linking themselves to philosophy. Moreover, this deep connection between philosophy and religion in al-‘Āmirī’s writings was not only to justify the study of philosophy in the Muslim milieu,⁵¹ but also to prove that one cannot be a sage without religious sciences. To al-‘Āmirī, the divine wisdom is

“too subtle to be found by anyone who has doubts about its informational content. For he who testifies against himself that he is in doubt whether the world is without temporal beginning or created in time, and whether the hereafter is real or not, and whether the soul is substance or an accident, occupies too humble a rank to be called a sage.”⁵²

This opinion stems from al-‘Āmirī’s attitude that philosophy is a contribution to and accumulation of mankind’s intelligence. Its foundation and branches are based on the pure reason and conformed with valid proofs. What pure reason proves should not contradict the demands of the true religion.⁵³ If there be any contradiction between them, then one will fall prey to logical fallacy: a truth contradicting a truth.

they had different backgrounds, it seems that both al-‘Āmirī and ibn Ḥazm had similar views regarding logic and philosophy.

⁵¹ As some scholars claimed. See for instance: Yaman, Hikmet “Greek Thought and Prophetic Tradition: Revelatory Background of Early Islamic Philosophy” in *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology*, eds. Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar and Bilal Baş (2013), p. 142.

⁵² Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 74 (Arabic), 75 (English). It seems that the example of al-‘Āmirī’s master Abū Zayd al-Balkhī has deeply shaped his intellectual development and persona life.

⁵³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.83; for English see: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64.

Yet some had actually claimed that there is no rational knowledge within religions. For them, religions are merely legal customs and conventional norms that each religious community has its own laws. If religion is true, then it would be reason-based pattern rather than social customs.⁵⁴ Al-‘Āmirī’s response is essentially twofold: religion is universal, and it is also a logical necessity. As we shall see in the third chapter, al-‘Āmirī’s reflection lead him to unprecedented understanding of religion. To him, the restriction of religion to the local level as merely social conventions is obviously based on a false premise, because all religions have a universal essence. Despite the differences between religions,

“The foundations of all the religions are classified into four sections: *i’tiqādāt* [beliefs], *‘ibādāt* [rituals], *mu’āmalāt* [morals], and *mazājir* [punishments].”⁵⁵

In addition, each religion too has political, social, cultural, and civilizational traditions. It could be wrong, but there was no precedent for such interesting classification. Interestingly, a strikingly similar understanding has characterized Western modern scholarship. For instance, I. M. Lewis considers the cornerstones of religion to be basically three: belief, ritual and spiritual experience.⁵⁶ Instead of giving a comprehensive definition, Ninian Smart offers an adequate seven-dimensional portrait of religions. According to him, the seven dimensions of religion are: the practical and ritual, the experiential and emotional, narrative or mythic, doctrinal and philosophical, ethical and legal, social and institutional, and the material dimensions. These aspects characterize the existence of religions in the world. The other worldviews will surely be linked to one or another of the aforementioned dimensions.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.97; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 97-98.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 98; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, pp. 99. Such classification represents the deep impact of religious sciences on al-‘Āmirī’s thought, which demolish the reductionist arguments that consider him as merely a paraphrase of Greek thought.

⁵⁶ Lewis, I. M., *Ecstatic Religion, A Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (New York, 1989), p. 1.

⁵⁷ Smart, Ninian, *The World’s Religions* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.11-22. See also how he applied these dimensions on nationalism and Marxism in pp.22-26. Anyway, we will return back to this issue in the third chapter.

Religion is also a logical necessity. Here al-‘Āmirī draws on the theologians’ argument that God does exist and on the limitation of human intellect.⁵⁸ If God exists, then how can the intellect accept a Creator without a command and prohibition, without accountability and responsibility, without a promise and threat, without enticement and intimidation? Even how would God with all His complete wisdom leave his servants neglected?⁵⁹ Based on his aforementioned foundations of religion, the intellect would not allow rational people to deny the worship of God (belief), or not being good with each other (morals), or to let evil people doing ill (punishment). If the intellect would not allow that, then it is necessary to establish what is plausible. To which criteria, then, can we practice the four cornerstones of religion? Al-‘Āmirī admits the limitation of intellect in such issues. Our minds are incapable of knowing the qualities and quantities of these foundations. Take, for example, the prayer. Can an intellect decide how prayers should be performed? In such cases, a higher authority above intellect is obviously required.⁶⁰ The intellect itself is a divine proof and exists to achieve two main functions: to know the truth and to act in conformity to the truth.⁶¹ As if al-‘Āmirī wanted to say: once one admits God’s existence, then he must accept religion with relying mainly on divine knowledge to know how to practice the four dimensions of religion. The role of intellect is in judging between different opinions,

⁵⁸ Al-‘Āmirī did not discuss it or even defend it at all. Paul Heck argues that al-‘Āmirī’s response was not aimed at dogmatic skepticism or those who denies any kind of knowledge, but rather it was a defense against attacks made on Islam. See: Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p. 106. His observation is generally right, but we should not forget that we received only six of al-‘Āmirī’s seventeen books. One of the lost books was on the rectification of religious belief, while another was on the causes of religion. Another important note is that: the nature of atheism in Islamic civilization is substantially different than the Western atheism. In Islamic civilization, the atheists’ attacks were mainly on the idea of prophecy and not on God’s existence. See: Badawī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Min tarikh al ilhād fi al islam* (Beirut, 1980), pp.5-6.

⁵⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.98; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, p.98. Please notice that the English translation (I mean the last paragraph) has totally corrupted the meaning. Al-‘Āmirī mentioned clearly the Creator, but Heck in his translation totally ignored that.

⁶⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.98-99; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, p.98. Again, the translation is not that accurate. The example of prayer is not in the text.

⁶¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p. 73; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, p.96; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 100(Arabic); 101 (English)

and of finding out Truth amid the chaos of ideas. Once the truth is known, then, the intellect should follow it.

The aforementioned ideas are part and parcel of al-‘Āmirī’s unique idea that man is a religious animal. One unparalleled and very striking statement that he made is *al-Insān dīnī bi'l-tab'* [Man is religious by nature].⁶² How did he reach that conclusion? According to al-‘Āmirī, human nature has two distinct facets: the external form or body which has an earthly origin and the soul which has celestial origin. In other words, body (the corporeal origin) and soul (the spiritual origin) are two separate domains that human nature ties. The latter, the human soul, has two faculties: rational and sensual. Each of them perceived by two sub-faculties: cognitive and practical. In the rational soul, the cognitive faculty leads to ‘*fīkr*’ reflection, while the practical faculty leads to ‘*rawīya*’ deliberation. In the sensual soul, the cognitive faculty leads to either ‘*wahm*’ imagination or ‘*hiss*’ sense, while the practical leads to ‘*shahwa*’ desire and ‘*ghadab*’ anger. Both corporeality and sensual soul are common between man and animal, but it is the rational soul that differentiate human form the other.⁶³ In this sense, the physical pleasures are obstacles that descend the intellect to the domains which animals share with us. It distracts the intellect and soul from their proper function. The solution lies in the separation of rational soul from the sensual or physical domain. How can one attain salvation then? According to al-‘Āmirī, salvation can be attained through religion. It is religion that support the rational soul to properly fulfil its duties, through the *Sharī‘ah*’s commands and prohibitions of all kinds of wrong desires. By doing so, the

“divine religion, with its legal precepts, occupies with regard to the rational soul the position of something which releases it from fetters and captivity.”⁶⁴

In other words, the rational soul is placed between two worlds: lower world and upper

⁶² Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, 96 (Arabic); 97 (English).

⁶³ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 92 (Arabic); 93 (English); and 264. Until here there is no new in such information. Our aim here is not to trace the Greek source of this classification.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 102 (Arabic); 103 (English). See also, Ibid, pp.268-269; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.93; Wakelnig, Elvira “Al-Amiri” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), p. 74.

world, and its main object is to make man God's representative on Earth. If the sensual soul distracted this purpose, the rational soul will be limited as if “its feathers are plucked, and its wings amputated.” Only through divine religion and real wisdom the soul’s wings can be strengthened.⁶⁵ For that, al-‘Āmirī considered religion as an essential quality of human nature. It is not surprising, then, that the true faith and intellective faculty are deeply linked in his thought. As was mentioned before, religion for al- Fārābī is based on imaginative faculty. By contrast, faith for al-‘Āmirī is a true certain belief that is mainly based on the intellective faculty. The imaginative power could lead to either false or even true beliefs, but still one should submit what he imagines to the intellective power in order to secure himself of falsity.⁶⁶

One can say here that al-‘Āmirī's view of man as a religious by nature is different from modern scholars who considered human as a religious being. For al-‘Āmirī, religious by nature means that religion is the path for perfection or soul's ascendant. But considering man as *Homines religiosi*, or animal metaphysicum as Schopenhauer (d.1860) described, means that human in itself is spiritual self-transcendence. For instance, when Schopenhauer argued that human is the “animal metaphysicum,” he meant that philosophy begins in wonder, but such astonishment is not a simple confrontation with an unknown world. Rather, it is grounded in human’s questioning of the distribution of suffering and death in the world, which arise man’s need for metaphysics.⁶⁷

1.4 The Religious Community

The fragmentation of the Muslim community during the Tenth Century posed real dangers to social peace and security, that, as a result, threatens to undermine religion. As is well known, there were three claimants of the caliphate: The ‘Abbāsids in

⁶⁵ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 138(Arabic); 139 (English).

⁶⁶ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 168;170(Arabic); 169;171 (English); Wakelnig, Elvira “Al-Amiri, p.74.

⁶⁷ Livingston, James C., *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), p.11; Cartwright, D. W., *Historical Dictionary of Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), pp. xlii- xliii.

Baghdad, The Fāṭimids in North Africa, and The Umayyads in Andalusia. The political map of the era was balanced between both Shi'ite (the Būyids, Fāṭimids, Ḥamdānids, and Qarāmiṭah), and Sunni powers (the Sāmānids, Ghaznavids, Qarakhanids, and al-Andalus). As for the 'Abbāsids, which is more relevant to this essay, the unstable political environment was associated with the rise of local dynasties within the caliphate's body, and -as a result- a new political order characterized by the dominance of military commanders appeared. The first half of Tenth Century was, in a sense, a painful transmission from the effective role of the caliphate to inter-state system. The eastern part of the 'Abbāsids, where al-'Āmirī spent his life, divided between two powers: The Būyids, who controlled the central administration in Baghdad since 945, and the Sāmānids, who ruled in Khurāsān and Transoxania.⁶⁸ Such decentralization of power was a boon to sciences and arts. It obviously provided patronage for talented scholars -from different ethnic and religious backgrounds- in various branches of knowledge, through semi-independent wazīrs who were associated with the caliphal court. A kind of reciprocal interpersonal relationship between rulers and scholars has existed within the plethora of courts. On one hand, the prestige of the rulers and wazīrs was to compete with each other in bringing the leading scholars of the day to their courts. On the other hand, it was custom among scholars as well to seek the patronage of wazīrs and dedicate their books to them. Al-'Āmirī, for instance, sought patronage between different courts in Nīshāpūr, Bukhārā, Rayy, and Baghdād, and he dedicated his book *Kitāb al-i'lām* to one wazīr called al-shaykh al-fādil Abū Naṣr.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ For more see: Bonner, M. "The waning of empire, 861–945" in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. I, ed. by C. Robinson (Cambridge: 2010), pp. 305-359; Kennedy, Hugh "The late Abbasid Pattern" in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. I, ed. by C. Robinson (Cambridge: 2010), pp. 360-93; Black, Anthony, *The History of Islamic Political Thought from the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp.50-51.

⁶⁹ Scholars are different here regarding the identity of Abū Naṣr. Some are saying he was Abū Naṣr al-'Utbī, the kinsman of the wazīr; while others suggesting that he was the prince Abū Naṣr al-Mīkālī. See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.7. For the issue of patronage see: Heck, P. L., *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (Routledge, 2014), p.68; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge in Islam* (I), p.114; Abouzeid, Ola Abdelaziz, *A Comparative Study between the Political Theories of al-Farabi and the Brethren of Purity* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1987), pp. 24-26. For more about the 'Abbāsids Courts and its significant role see for instance: Cheikh, Nadia Maria El "To Be a Prince in The Fourth/Tenth-Century Abbasid Court", in Duindam et al. (eds.), *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011), pp. 199-216.

It is not surprising, then, that the political or social sphere raised many important questions regarding the nature of rulership.⁷⁰ Throughout *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī provides a detailed discussion of the various political issues that shaped public opinion of the day. One issue, for example, was the ethical character of the ruler. Some voices were raised, claiming that as long as justice has been practiced and respected, the ruler can do just about anything he wishes like being indulged in excessive drinking. According to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d.1000), al-Tawhīdī's mentor, this claim is wrong since addiction involves an excessive drinking or addiction prevents the ruler from practicing his political profession and makes him object of the public's disdain and resistance.⁷¹

Still there were many other serious issues to be discussed, but it was guardianship of religion by rulers who did not enjoy a prophetic lineage that became the focus of intense. In this sense, many answers had given up to this point in order to legitimate the new type of rule. One of these answers is that both prophet and ruler are divinely sent. The only difference between them is that the prophet is more celebrated than the ruler who is more hidden.⁷²

Al-ʿĀmirī too was aware of the issue, although he was not clear on this point. How he would solve it? If we noticed, the four pillars of religion are in essence what shapes the communal way of life. The community in this prospective is not political but rather religious; just as human is religious too. In this sense, the relation between the ruler (who is a religious animal at the end) and the community (which is religious as well) should be based solely on the application of religious standards in politics together

⁷⁰ As we shall see in the third chapter, al-ʿĀmirī was aware of the corruption of the rulers. Therefore, he tried to defense Islam through separating between the rulers who follow the prophetic model and the tyrants. It will be good then to mention the issue and its importance here.

⁷¹ Tawhīdī, Abū Hayyān al-, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, ed. M. al-Ajami (Damascus, 2015), pp.243-245. Notice also that there were many discussions on the legitimacy of the rule especially between Sunni and Shi'is. Al-Tawhīdī himself wrote *Risālat al-Saqīfa* to support the Sunni view.

⁷² To justify his opinion, al-Tawhīdī used the verse 2:247 (God sent to you Saul as king). See: al-Tawhīdī, Abū Hayyān al-, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, p.252; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.110; 127 footnote n.13.

with the protection and care of religion. Hence, it comes as no surprise that religion, for al-‘Āmirī, is “the partner of the ruler in the governance of human beings.” If the rulers turn away from the traditionalists, theologians, and jurists, it would undermine a main foundation in their rule which will lead to corruption. The jurists in many cases -i.e. law and dispute, recording the documents, and applying the conditions- are “the equivalent of the affairs of doctors who prepare remedies beforehand for deadly diseases, to treat them when the case arises.”⁷³

The political fragmentation went hand-in-hand with religious separatism. Different religious sects were competing for a place in society and for adherents. Such an environment had a great impact on al-‘Āmirī’s thoughts, particularly in his holistic classification of science as we shall see in the second chapter. Therefore, it would be good to have a closer look on the religious situation and the interpretations of *Ḥadīth al-Iftirāq*.

At the beginning of the tenth century, the Ismā’īlī movement had apparently splintered into opposing factions; all drew on the same doctrine, but each strongly allied to different imams. On the one side, the Fāṭimids dynasty (909-1171) adopted and modified the early Ismā’īlī doctrine of imamate to make it suitable for themselves. Originally, the early Ismā’īlī doctrine recognizes only seven imams, and the last one of them is the hidden excepted imam Muhammad b. Ismā’īl, *al-Qa’im* and *nāṭiq* of the last era, on whose behalf the preachers claimed their message and teachings. In 899, ‘Abd Allāh publicly claimed the imamate giving the functions of the seventh imam to himself and his ancestors, and afterwards he appointed his son as a successor assigning him as *al-Qa’im*. On the other side, the Qarāmita, who were extremely strong in eastern Arabia and north Iraq, refused the claims of the Fāṭimids. They maintained the return of the hidden imam and had awaited his appearance as the Mahdī of the last era of human history. The Qarmaṭīs of Bahrain, for example, excepted the return of the hidden imam throughout their history, alongside with their hostile

⁷³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.115-116; for English see: Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.121-122. In *Kitāb al-amad*, al-‘Āmirī states that the virtuous policy can be virtuous only when it gathers four conditions: protection and care, equity and justice, examination and accountability, and reward and punishment. See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 170 (Arabic); 171 (English).

opinions and acts towards the Fāṭimids.⁷⁴ It is worth mentioning that the Ismā'īlī da'wa used different regional strategies. In southern Iraq, eastern Arabia (Bahrayn) and Yaman, the *da'is* did not conduct their missionary activities in the administrative centers, but rather in the nonurban nomadic society. While in Khurāsān and north-central Iran, the main target group of the missionaries were the ruling classes and the educated elite. Whatever the target, the da'wa was a personal event, or, in other words, the preacher had to consider the prospective initiates' intellectual abilities and to personally acquainted with them. One main technique of their *da'wa* was to sow doubts among Muslims in order to convince them that they need the infallible imam. Once the conversion is complete, the converts were gradually tutored in seven-stage process of initiation into Ismailism.⁷⁵

Too often, religious scholars and historians frequently find themselves coming across al-Karrāmiya during the Ninth to the Eleventh centuries. In the tenth century, the Karrāmī groups spread around the main cities of Islamic World such as Baghdād and al-Fuṣṭāṭ. But Nīsābūr, the economic and intellectual center of Khurāsān, remained their main area where they appeared as a major regional power with large popular followers and an organizational network. The *khānaqāhs* and main *madāris* remained until the end of the Tenth Century under the Karrāmiya's control, which represent their social and political significance. Asceticism and theology were the main two features that characterized the Karrāmī community. Moḥammad b. Karrām (d. 869), the founder of Karrāmiya, and his followers established their doctrine on the self-mortification and the prohibition of work for profit or commerce. This radical piety and passionate asceticism made al-Karrāmiya different from other sects and popular among the lower classes, which, in some way, can explain the hostility towards them between the ruling class and other *maḍhāhib*. The *khānaqāhs* of Karrāmiya were

⁷⁴ Daftary, F. "A Major Schism in the Early Ismā'īlī Movement" *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123-139; Daftary, F., *The Ismā'īlī, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 116-126.

⁷⁵ For more about the nature of Ismā'īlī da'wa see: Daftary, F. "The Ismaili Da'wa outside the Fatimid Dawla" in *L'Égypte Fatimide, son art et son histoire*, ed. M. Barrucand (Paris, 1999), pp. 29-43. The idea of using doubt between Muslims is mentioned by Paul L. Heck based on J. Van Ess's "Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought." Unfortunately, I cannot find Ess' article around or online. See: Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.113; 131 footnote n.40. It is also important to remember that al-Azhar was established in 970, and afterwards the mosque became the main center for many missionary activities.

missionary centers that allowed its inhabitants to completely devote themselves to worship and preaching, without engaging in any other daily issues. They are also well-known for their active engagement in converting a large number of people to Islam; whereas they were in reality responsible for many conversion cases in both rural and urban areas. Having established their own theology and legal system, the Karrāmiya represented itself as the Islam, and provided its own member a complete doctrine of life. In theology, they generally were anthropomorphists insisting, for instance, that: God has a body and is sitting on his throne, or in other words situating God in place and time. Additionally, they claimed that changes could take place in the very being of God; an idea that imam al-Juwayni (d. 1085) in his *Luma' al-adilla* attributed to the Zoroastrian religion. Therefore, All Sunni scholars who wrote on sects condemned them as heretics. In the legal sphere, ibn Karrām's legal maḍhab was very close to the Ḥanafī school, even some Karrāmi members were actually Ḥanafī. Accordingly, the Karrāmiya posed a threat to the social unity, and frequently and seriously threatened the presence of Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī especially in Nīshāpūr.⁷⁶

Such a situation significantly enriched and effectively developed *ilm al-firaq* or science of sects. The Tenth Century has seen a flurry of works on deviating sects. The aim of these writings has been to demonstrate the true Islam and to refute all false systems of beliefs which include Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This could be clearly seen in many representative works like *maqālāt* of al-Ash'arī or *al-farq bayn al-firaq* of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d.1037). One main question was, invariably, on the identity of the Muslim or who belongs to the Muslim community? Al-Baghdādī, as just one example, presents the different claims on whom the general name of Millat al-Islam is given. Some seem to have been considering that whoever affirms the prophecy of Muhammad and turns in the direction of the Ka'bah in prayer is a Muslim. Others claim that whoever enunciates Shahada is verily a true believer no matter whether he is sincere or insincere. For al-Baghdādī, this also could apply to the Jews of Eṣfahān, who accepted the prophecy and teaching of prophet Muhammed but

⁷⁶ Malamud, M. "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karramiya in Nishapur," *Iranian Studies* 27/1-4 (1994), pp. 37-51; Bosworth, C. E. "The Rise of Karāmiyyah in Khurasan," *Muslim World* 50 (1960), pp. 5-14; Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, *Luma' al-adilla fī qawā'id 'aqā'id ahl as-sunna* (Beirut, 1987), p.109; Zysow, Aron "Karrāmiya" *iranicaonline.org*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karramiya#pt5> (accessed February 2, 2018).

claimed it was only to Arabs and not to Banu Israel. Accordingly, the true Sunnite are only those who believes that the world is created, the unity of God, the denial of any anthropomorphic character of God, the prophecy of Muhammed and the universality and validity of his message, the Quran as the main legal source, the Ka'bah as the direction of prayer, and does not follow a heresy that might lead him to unbelief. Anyone who adds a hateful heresy such as claiming the divine character of their imams or believing in the incarnation of God or transmigration of souls, are do not certainly belong to Ummah. The others, like Mu'tazilite, Khārijites, Shi'ī, and Zaydī, are allowed to pray in the mosques and burial in Muslim graves, but still they are not fully integrated in Ummah since it is prohibited to marry from them or even to pray behind them.⁷⁷

In his other book *Uṣūl al-dīn*, Al-Baghdādī preliminary remarks the significance of *Mutawātir* report in acquiring knowledge and obligation for action against those who deny the creditability or convenience of the multiple transmission report. The re-examining of reports' status continues to be one of the most controversial issues during the period, especially when it comes to the desire of various sects - and religions - to gain the validity and historical continuity and justification. The authenticity of reports is necessary to vindicate moral and religious knowledge of any community. By the tenth century, the theological and legal disputes often used history to validate their arguments against other sects. It is clearly not a coincidence that the criteria of accepting or refuting reports has been evaluated in countless number of works. For instance, according to a treatise dated back to the tenth century, man must examine the reports either via how they first originated and developed or by consulting what is generally accepted among specialists in each science.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.112-113; Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, pp. 20-21; 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-farq bayn al-firaq* (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 29-31; for English translation see: Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, trans. Kate Chambers Seelye (New York, 1920), pp.27-30.

⁷⁸ Khalidi, Tarif, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994), p.142. As for al-Baghdādī see: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn* (Beirut, 2002), pp. 22-28. For more for further analysis see: Khalidi, Tarif, *Arabic Historical Thought*, pp. 140; 146-148. Link with the attempt of Al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī. Notice also that Abū Sulaimān al-Ḥaṭṭābī (d.998) wrote the first explanation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (*I'lām as-sunan fī šarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*), because the predominance of *ahl al Bid'ah*.

For al-‘Āmirī, the intellect should not dismiss the importance of received reports. There is a deep connection between the speech comprehension (done by the intellect) and the speech production and sequence language (done by the ears). This relationship is very obvious in many Qur’an verses such as 10:42 (But can you cause the deaf to hear, although they will not use reason?), and 22:46 (So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear?).⁷⁹ So, there is no contradiction between intellect and hearing, but rather the latter supports the reason. For the Muslim, the structure of religion is based on two main pillars: The Quran and the Sunnah. If one accepts the Quran as the conclusive argument to the people of the world, then he must submit to the Sunnah.⁸⁰

The fulcrum of discussions about sects remains the famous report of *Ḥadīth al-Iftirāq* or Hadīth of Division.⁸¹ Countless attempts were made to interpret and determine these 73 sects. Al-Baghdādī begins his *kitāp al-farq bayn al-firaq* with a chapter on discussion of the different versions of *Ḥadīth al-Iftirāq*. Thereafter, he uses theology, as mentioned before, to be the standard to determine the right sect among them.⁸² In fact, using theology to determine the right sect was a customary among the scholars of sects. In contrast, al-‘Āmirī provides a philosophical and no parallel interpretation of the Ḥadīth. According to him, people were classified into three classes according to their way of life: *mulūk* (rulers), *sūqa* (subjects), and *khula’ā’* (profligates). Each of these three classes is divided into four parties according to their objectives: either they are seeking pleasure, or wealth, or political leadership, or praise. Again, each of these twelve parties is divided into another three types according to their modes of procedures or how they achieve their goals: one uses trickery and deception, the second uses coercion and mastery, and the last uses the custom and traditional practice or sunna. All these thirty-six either declares its teaching openly or dissembles. The

⁷⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.107-108.

⁸⁰ According to the verse 4:80 (He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah). See: Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.107-108.

⁸¹ One version of the hadith is: “The Children of Israel split into seventy-one sects, and my nation will split into seventy-two, all of which will be in Hell apart from one, which is the main body.” *Sunan Ibn Majah* 3993

⁸² Al-Baghdādī, *al-farq bayn al-firaq* (Cairo, 2010), pp.23-30.

number of sects, then, arise to seventy-two, plus the saved sect or those whose sole intention is to seek virtue. This saved sect is very limited in numbers.⁸³

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the philosophical approach and logic gained substantial importance during the fourth/tenth century due to the theological disputations and the interaction with other religions particularly the Hellenistic-Christian theology. It also presented how the adherents of the equivalence of proofs posed continued and serious threats to the role and authenticity of religion. On such a situation logic would be a neutral tool of inquiry into all fundamental and conflicted issues. The application of logic, however, as a universal tool that would apply to everyone was a matter of intense debates. Some had considered logic as the invention of a Greek man on the basis of his own language, so that each nation has its own logic of language. Logic, for al-‘Āmirī as for many others, is an intellectual instrument that enables one to distinguish between truth and untruth. It works on the comprehended ideas and notions beyond the words, which are the same for all men and nations.

The chapter has also shown the different approaches in tying philosophy and religion together. Among the different approaches, al-‘Āmirī considered philosophy as an accumulation of mankind’s intelligence. For that, he tried to salvage philosophy from pseudo-philosophers in order to ground the philosophical approach in the Islamic environment. Both religion and philosophy are compatible since the proofs of pure reason can never be in contradiction to the demands of the true religion, because truth cannot contradict truth. He further disagrees with those who claim that philosophy is universal, and religion is merely legal and local customs. The essence of religion - beliefs, worships, morals, and punishments- is common feature among all religions despite its place and time. Moreover, man is religious by nature in which religion is the supporter of the rational soul to properly fulfil its duties.

Lastly, this chapter has presented the political and religious fragmentation of the Muslim community during the Tenth Century and how this situation posed serious

⁸³ See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 176 (Arabic); 177 (English).

questions over the nature of rulership and the interpretation of *Ḥadīth al-Ifṭirāq*. Al-‘Āmirī tried to provide a philosophical interpretation of both issues. Religion, for him, is the partner of the ruler in the governance of human beings. The relation between both, then, is based on the application of religious standards and the protection and care of religion. This what gives the legitimacy of ruler even if he did not enjoy a prophetic lineage. As for *Ḥadīth al-Ifṭirāq*, he tried to solve the internal disputations and contestation of norms within Muslim community by considering the saved sect in the *Ḥadīth* to be those whose sole intention is to seek virtue.



CHAPTER TWO

The Superiority of Religious Knowledge

“... religious science is the asās [foundation] upon which all other sciences are built.”

Al-‘Āmirī

2.1 Introduction

By the tenth century, Islamic sciences had nearly three centuries of accumulation behind them. Each discipline underwent a major development which led to systemization and encyclopedism. Scholars in various fields had become more critical and organized which featured the flurry of interesting writings during the century. It was the period of gathering the fruits of the accumulation of Islamic knowledge. This is clearly obvious in Ibn Mujāhid’s efforts in Qur’ānic studies, al-Ṭabarī’s chronicle of world and early Islamic history, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *Kitāb al-Badi*, Qudāmah ibn Ja‘far’s evaluation of poetry, Abu-l-Faraj a-Iṣfahānī’s *Kitāb al-aghānī* in literature, Ibn Ḥawqal’s endeavors in geography, Al-Ṣāhib Ibn ‘Abbād’s promoting literature and rational theology, al-Niffarī’s Sufi writings, and lastly, but not least, Ibn al-Nadīm’s encyclopedia and classification of knowledge.⁸⁴

Ibn al-Nadīm’s work is an example of a type of literature devoted to the classification of the sciences that began to flourish generally in the fourth/tenth century. Several attempts with different approaches were made to provide a classification of knowledge. Among the most notable examples of the era were al-Fārābī’s *Ihsā’ al-‘ulūm*, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, al-Khwārizmī’s *Mafātīḥ al-‘Ulūm*, Ibn Farīgūn’s *Jawāmi’ al-‘ulūm*, al-‘Āmirī, and al-Tawḥīdī’s *Risāla fī l-‘ulūm*.⁸⁵ This chapter is organized around al-‘Āmirī’s classification of knowledge in his *Kitāb al-I‘lām*. Therefore, the chapter will start first with the definition of knowledge and the relation between

⁸⁴ Jamīl, Sayyār, *al-Mujāyalah al-Tārīkhīyah* (Amman, 1999), pp.265-270.

⁸⁵ Heinrichs, Wolfhart “The Classification of the Sciences and the Consolidation of Philology in Classical Islam” in *Centers of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair a. Macdonald (Leiden, 1995), pp. 120-121.

knowledge and action according to al-‘Āmirī, then it will move forward with his integrative approach of taxonomy. The chapter will conclude by showing how religious knowledge has its special place in al-‘Āmirī’s classification.

2.2 Knowledge and Action

Numerous attempts have been made to define knowledge in the Islamic context. The first stage of appearance of these definitions can be dated back to the early ninth century.⁸⁶ By the time of al-‘Āmirī, the epistemological introductions had become an essential part of the *kalām* works. Almost every theological book begins with a discussion about the definition of *‘ilm*. This theological passionate sought to find an acceptable definition of *‘ilm* because it would apply to faith. On the contrary, it was not a focal point for philosophers, philologists, and mystics to explain what knowledge really meant.⁸⁷ Franz Rosenthal referred to the multiple meanings of the Arabic word *‘ilm*. He highlights twelve different groups of definitions according to their most essential elements. These definitions range from the *‘ilm* as a process of knowing, a cognition, a process of clarification, a remembrance, to *‘ilm* as a belief and motion. All of these definitions are generally based on the assumption that the subjective and objective grasp of data is sufficient for understanding the nature of knowledge.⁸⁸

Al-‘Āmirī was aware of the multiple definitions of *‘ilm* employed by scholars within and across disciplines. The common people, for instance, use the word *‘ilm* for any craft whatsoever, while empiricists use it for the empirical meanings. Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) when he spoke about the excellence of knowledge, he declared that by knowledge he meant jurisprudence. The word could also be paired with some reprehensible science like magic and alchemy.⁸⁹ Such definitions are different from the theological and philosophical meanings. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) defined *‘ilm* as “is the cognition of the object known as it is,” while knowledge for al-

⁸⁶ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 46-47.

⁸⁷ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 46-47; Rowson, *Muslim Philosopher*, p. 183.

⁸⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 51-69.

⁸⁹ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p.245; al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilām*, p.81; for English see: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, pp.63.

Kindī “is the finding of things in their realities.”⁹⁰ In that same line, al-‘Āmirī defines it as

“knowledge is the comprehension of the thing as it is without mistake and error.”⁹¹

One cannot grasp something as it is unless he knows it’s main principles and practice it. This implies the importance to make an in-depth study -either theoretical or practical- of any phenomenon before the legitimacy of talking about it. A musician would not be that unless he mixes the theoretical principles and practice. The definition implies also the necessity to study any phenomenon in its real context with avoiding mistakes. However, this does not negate the importance of error when it occurs during the research.⁹²

The human perception of knowledge, for many philosophers, is based on sense and intellect. Following Aristotle, al-Kindī distinguishes two kinds of human perception: “one of which is near to us and further from nature. This the perception of sense... The other is the nearer to nature and further from us, being the perception of intellect.”⁹³ In the same vein, al-‘Āmirī divides people’s perception of knowledge into four groups. The first group are those who admit only sensory knowledge and deny theoretical knowledge. Sumaniyya, as al-Baghdādī refers, accepted only the knowledge based on the five senses and rejected all the theoretical knowledge.⁹⁴ The second group accepts the opposite. They do admit the intellectual concepts and deny the sensually perceptible. The third group are those who deny both sensory and theoretical knowledge or al-Sūfistā’ iyyūn. According to al-Baghdādī, this group is divided into three schools: “those who deny the existence of reality or knowledge; those who doubt

⁹⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.81; for English see: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.63.

⁹¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.80; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp.53;57.

⁹² Al-Tawhīdī, *Kitāb al-Imtā’ wal-Mu’ānasa*, pp.301-302; Al-Amiri, S. “Qirā’ah fī Tamaththulāt al-Zāhirah al-dīniyah ‘inda al-Muslimīn” kalema.net <http://www.kalema.net/v1/?rpt=937&art> (accessed March 9, 2018). Ḥusayn, M. “ta’rīf al-‘ilm ‘inda al-‘Āmirī” iasj.net. <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=116674> (accessed March 9, 2018), pp.1-2.

⁹³ Booth, Anthony Robert, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan,2017), P.61.

⁹⁴ See: al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, p.21. Epicurus or atomism accepted too the knowledge based on senses only. See: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.185.

everything; and those who identify individual belief with reality.”⁹⁵ The last group are those who affirm the truth of both kinds together.⁹⁶

For al-‘Āmirī, the last group or those who acknowledge both sensory and theoretical knowledge is the true or authentic among these groups. He addresses his critique of the other three groups based on the dualism of human nature. If we could perceive the sensual entities by pure intellects, then the sensual powers would be superfluous or unneeded. The same goes for the intellectual entities. If we can apprehend it through sensual powers, then intellects would be unneeded too. Accordingly, the denial of both sensory and theoretical knowledge means that both senses and intellects are useless and futile.⁹⁷

Such skeptical claims or knowledge denial poses a serious threat to faith and Muslim community since knowledge is closely associated with action. Knowledge is not an aim in itself, but rather a way to render action in accordance with virtue. This is an idea that became widely addressed and investigated among the scholars. The relation between *'ilm* and *'amal* is very clear in many prophetic tradition. Besides, Aristotelians often cites “knowledge was the beginning of action, and action the entelechy of knowledge.”⁹⁸ To al-Tawhīdī, the action is what makes knowledge, as a virtue, perfect. The main purpose of knowledge is action, while the main aim of action is salvation.⁹⁹ His contemporary, the Ismā’īlī dā’ī Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, regarded the wise man as the one who combines both knowledge and action. Al-‘Āmirī too maintained knowledge

⁹⁵ Rowson, *ibid.*, p.186; al- Baghdādī, *ibid.*, pp.16-17. In theological works, the sophists are always classified into: al-‘inādīya or those who deny the real essence of things and maintain that they are fancies and vain imaginations, al-‘indīya or those who deny the real existence of essences, maintaining that essences only follow from what one happens to believe, and al-lā-adrīya or agnostics. See: al-Taftazani, Sa’ad al-Din, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), pp.12-13.

⁹⁶ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 56 (Arabic); 57 (English). Compare with the theologians’ three causes of knowledge: the sound senses, true narrative, and Reason. See: al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*, p.14; Abū Zayd, Muná Aḥmad, *Al-insān fī al-falsafah al-Islāmīyah* (Beirut, 1994), p.70.

⁹⁷ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 56 (Arabic); 57 (English).

⁹⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 66-67.

⁹⁹ Al-Sha’ar, Nuha A., *Ethics in Islam, Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawhīdī and his contemporaries* (Routledge, 2015), p.71.

as

“the beginning of action, and action is the end of knowledge; a beginning without an end is futile, and an end without a beginning is absurd.”¹⁰⁰

Yet which knowledge could lead to action? To al-‘Āmirī, what philosophy could provide to man is only the general abstract principles; it offers no guidance of daily life. Only the knowledge, which is based on religion, could provide man with a detailed program of moral action.¹⁰¹

Contrary to the skeptics, there are those who claimed that the good works or duties are concerned with ignorance and ordinary people only. Some voices were raised claiming that the main purpose of knowledge is to save the intelligent from “the barbarity of ignorance.” Why? Because the nature of ignorance is ugly and dark, while its opposite is good and gratifying. Those who excel in knowledge are not required to practice the religious duties. Once they achieve a high level of wisdom, their main responsibility for others is guidance. Accordingly, the equality between those who are advanced in wisdom and classes of ignorant people in duties is apparently despicable. Suppose this implies that the ignorant people do not follow those with knowledge.¹⁰²

Al-‘Āmirī associated these claims with two groups: philosophers and Bāṭiniyyah. There are Greek philosophers who make preference to theoretical knowledge over practical wisdom. For example, *technê* - i.e. grammar, rhetoric, lyre playing, music, housebuilding, medicine, and farming- was further down in Plotinus' list of concerns.¹⁰³ Al-Jāhīz (d. 868) clearly recognizes this tendency as the nature of Greek people. According to him, “The Greeks know the theory, but do not concern

¹⁰⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.123; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 39 and 247.

¹⁰¹ Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.115; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.97. Compare with Wittgenstein. He holds that philosophy provides no explanations but merely assembles reminders. See: Bird, Graham, *The Revolutionary Kant* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2006), p.779, footnote n.20.

¹⁰² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.74; for English see: Heck, *Skepticism*, p.96.

¹⁰³ For more see: *Episteme and Techne*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/episteme-techne/#6> (accessed March 21, 2018).

themselves with the practice.”¹⁰⁴ The other group or Bāṭiniyyah disacknowledges the importance of action too. They are, according to al-Baghdādī, zendik materialists that believe in the eternity of the universe and deny apostles and all precepts of the law. The practices of law or religious duties such as prayer, fast, hajj and jihad are torture. Further, they considered those who are following a revealed law as merely worshiping God whom they do not know. The outcome of their doctrine would surely entail the abolition of religious duties. Nearly a century later, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) observed the Bāṭiniyyah’s rejection of the religious laws. He mentioned that they consider the duties are incumbent on men until they obtain the rank of perfection in the sciences. Once one comprehends through the Imam the real natures of things, then the action-oriented injunctions fall away from them. The intelligent and those who perceive realities are higher in rank than those who, by their ignorance, are analogous to asses which can be trained only by hard labors.¹⁰⁵

Both groups, according to al-‘Āmirī, had committed a blatant error. Here again he establishes his respond based on the human nature. He further highlights the significance of good works for the prosperity of societies. Knowledge and action should be unified. In al-‘Āmirī’s words:

“Knowledge is the source of action, and action is the fulfillment of knowledge. One only seeks virtuous knowledge for the sake of good works.”

He goes further insisting that if human nature, as God created it, is limited to the acquisition of knowledge without rectifying one’s actions, then the human practical faculty would be either superfluous or incidental. If this were true, the absence of action would not disrupt *‘imārat al-bilād* [the prosperity of lands or countries] and *siyāsāt al-‘ibād* [the governance of slaves or subjects]. Additionally, to accept these groups’ arguments would be to restrict good works and deeds entirely to ignorant and stupid people. Still, if this were right, then it would be acceptable for human nature to

¹⁰⁴ Walker, C.T. H. “Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath ibn Khaqan on the exploits of the Turks and the army of the Khalifat in general” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Oct. 1915), p.683.

¹⁰⁵ Ḥusayn, *ta’rīf al-‘ilm*, p.16; al-Baghdādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (Al Fark Bain al Firak)*, part II, tr. Abraham S. Halkin (*Philadelphia*: Porcupine Press, 1978), pp.118 and 132; al-Ghazālī, *Fada’ih al-Batiniyya wa fada’il al- Mustazhiriyya*, trans. McCarthy (Boston: Freedom and Fulfillment, 1980),pp.202-203.

undertake good works apart from true knowledge.¹⁰⁶

But which comes first, knowledge or action? For al-‘Āmirī, as for many other Muslim scholars, knowledge precedes action. It may be enough here to remember the prophetic tradition about the merit of the learned man over the devout worshipper. Rosenthal highlights five reasons why knowledge is superior according to Muslim scholars: first, knowledge in itself is action, while action without knowledge is not an action. Second, action without knowledge is not useful whereas knowledge without action may be useful. Third, knowledge is necessary, and action follows it like a lamp. Fourth, the learned man holds the same rank as the prophets. Finally, God is the source of knowledge, while man is the source of actions.¹⁰⁷

Yet, if there is no knowledge without action and vice versa; and if prosperity of society requires both knowledge and action, hence what exactly these actions are? The religious scholars frequently considered action as the acts covered by *Sharia*. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.463/ 1071), for example, sees actions as the only possible way to achieve salvation in the hereafter. To prove this, he relies on the Quranic tafsir, Hadith corpus, philology and Sufi statements. On the contrary, philosophers often regarded action as a self-emancipation effort from lower desires to achieve receptivity for pure knowledge.¹⁰⁸

In this context, al-‘Āmirī classifies the merits of human actions into three categories: personal ethics, domestic economy, and politics. Such classification was well known and widespread among the scholars. Al-Khwārizmī (d.387/997), in *Mafātīḥ al-‘Ulūm*, divides the practical division of philosophy into: personal ethics or "how a man regulates his own nature"; domestic economy or "the regulation of one's own household"; and political economy or "the government of a city or people, or

¹⁰⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.75; For English: Heck, *Skepticism*, p.97.

¹⁰⁷ Abū Zayd, *Al-insān*, pp.111-112; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp.248-249.

¹⁰⁸ For more see: al-Baghdādī, Al-Khaṭīb, *Iqtidā‘ al-ilm al-amal* (Beirut, 1984); Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p.248.

kingship."¹⁰⁹

Similarly, the first category, in al-‘Āmirī’s words, is “the betterment of what righteousness applies through a degree of human assistance.” These actions need the human interference to make them better; without that, these behaviors cannot be virtuous. To do so, the intellectual potency [*al-qūwah al-‘aqlīyah*] should be the advisor and the governor of the other two qualities: the passionate [*al-ghadabiyah*] and the concupiscent [*al-shahwaniyah*]. The second type of actions is “the preserving of what is lacking in its permanence to a degree of human potentiality.” These actions correlated to social relations and how the management of these relationships strengthen the social bond. Al-‘Āmirī counted four kinds of such relationships: the man and his wife, the man and his children, the owner and his properties, and the king and his subjects. Most of these actions could be located under the discipline of household management or economy [*tadbīr al-manzil*], and it cannot endure without preserving their permanence. The last type of actions is “the using of what actualizes its benefits through a degree of human managements.” These actions concern the community or politics in general. For al-‘Āmirī, a man who cannot conduct himself is surely a person who will be incapable of managing his household and social affairs, and who is unable to manage his society, there is no doubt that he will not be able to govern his Umma. This is a non-reversed order. One can find, for instance, a failed politician who is a successful father.¹¹⁰

2.3 Classification of knowledge

The aforementioned ideas of knowledge and action shaped al-‘Āmirī’s classification of knowledge. In tenth-century northeastern Iran, the categorizing of knowledge was an established vivid tradition. The above-mentioned scholar, al-Khwārizmī, was active in the Sāmānid court at Bukhārā. Before him, Ibn Farīghūn (around mid-fourth/tenth century in Transoxania) had written his *Jawāmi‘ al-‘ulūm* nearly fifty years earlier. In

¹⁰⁹Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilām*, pp.75-76; Bosworth, C. E. “A Pioneer Arabic Encyclopedia of the Sciences: Al-Khwarizmi’s Keys of the Sciences” *Isis* 54.1 (1963), p.103. I would like to thank: Prof. Alparslan Açıkgenç for his explanation and translation of the Arabic text regarding the classification of actions.

¹¹⁰Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilām*, pp.75-78; Abū Zayd, *Al-insān*, pp.111-112; Ḥusayn, *ta’rīf al-‘ilm*, pp.17-18.

the same vein, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Rustughfanī (d.350/961) wrote his lost book *K. al-Zawā'id wa-l-fawā'id* on the categories of knowledge, and, a generation before, al-‘Āmirī’s master Abū Zayd al-Balkhī had written his *Aqsām al-‘ulūm*.¹¹¹ In fact, the science of classification was not limited to specific geographical area, rather it was a hallmark of Islamic civilization. Such classifications appear in specific historical periods in which processes of intellection and their accumulated outcome occur in intensive levels. It is “the meaningful clustering of experience.”¹¹²

Various approaches have been proposed for classification among Muslim scholars. The theological works, for instance, commonly begin with a discussion of *aqsām al-‘ulūm*. In such taxonomy, knowledge is customarily divided into God’s and others, then the latter is broking down into: necessary and acquired. Again, the latter, or the acquired knowledge, is divided into: *nazarī* [theoretical] and *hissī* [sensory].¹¹³ Other types of classification were manifested largely in the encyclopedism that encompassed all branches of knowledge. Gutas distinguishes three main genres in early Arabic encyclopedism: the inventors of the sciences in which subject is briefly described, the mirrors of princes in which a wise man give a political and ethical advice to a ruler, and *adab* works that is collections of entertaining and instructive information on various subjects. What is important for our purpose here is the first type. According to Gutas, this genre is divided into two tendencies: the works which offer merely a classification of science such as al-Kindī and Ibn Sīnā, and another works that go beyond the descriptive approach and offer a substantial discussion of science such as al-‘Āmirī and Ibn Farīghūn.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Rudolph, Ulrich, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp.143-144.

¹¹² For more see: Ṭāhir, Ḥāmid “Taṣnīf al-‘ulūm ‘inda al-Fārābī” *Ḥawlīyat Kullīyat al-Sharī’ah wa-al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyah*, n.9 (1991), pp. 385-386; Kwasnik, B.H. “The Role of Classification in Knowledge Representation and Discovery” *Library Trends*, 48/1 (1999), p.24.

¹¹³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fīmā yajibu i’tiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu al-jahl bihi fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (Cairo, 2010), pp.14-15; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.186.

¹¹⁴ Gutas, Dimitri “The Greek and Persian Background of Early Arabic Encyclopedism” in *Organizing Knowledge, Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, edited by Gerhard Endress (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp.91–101.

For many scholars, like Gutas and Rosenthal, this type of classification is grounded in classical heritage or derives straightly from Greek prototypes.¹¹⁵ While this note is generally correct, it could be misleading in several points. Firstly, the process of knowledge is not completely rational but often is sparked and fueled by other factors like insight and faith. Likewise, this process always conducted within a particular socio-political and cultural context.¹¹⁶ Secondly, the reconciliation and organization of the different conceptions of knowledge within a single framework is based on one's definition of language. If language is a natural product or universal phenomenon, then any knowledge in any other language can be perfectly translated into another via the universal grammar. By contrast, if language is a product of culture, then the different fields of knowledge must be handled as a characteristic of a particular national or ethnic group, which cannot be fully translated into another culture. Here is, again, the issue of the cultural context. Many 'classical' scholars associated certain sciences with a particular cultural domain such as: the association of Greek culture with philosophy and astronomy, Persian with history and political culture, and Arabic with poetry and grammar. Therefore, it is not strange that the most distinguished translations were those of medical, astronomical, and philosophical works.¹¹⁷ Thirdly, the flourishing of classification during the tenth century was to some extent a result of the competing intellectual circles. Members in knowledge-based groups have bonded into specific discipline and constructed their loyalties based on it. A primary effect of these groups was to reinforce the strict boundaries between different intellectual circles such as philosophers and grammarians. Others, like al-ʿĀmirī and al-Tawḥīdī, were belonging to a cross-discipline groups who maintained a comprehensive notion of knowledge which is reflected in their classifications.¹¹⁸

It can be said that al-ʿĀmirī's classification is heavily influenced by the aforementioned issues especially three main points: the disputations between intellectual circles, the unification of religious and philosophical truths, and the

¹¹⁵ Ibid; Rosenthal, F., *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.52.

¹¹⁶ For more see: Kwasnik, *The Role of Classification in Knowledge*, pp.23-24; see also: Heck, P. "The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization" *Arabica* 49 (Jan., 2002), pp.27-28.

¹¹⁷ Heck, Ibid.

¹¹⁸ For more see: Al-Sha'ar, *Ethics in Islam*, pp.41-48.

relation between knowledge and action. The main characteristics of his classification then can be reduced into three main features. First, the holistic approach of sciences that any science is useful even the low-ranking sciences. Practitioners of one science or another have a proclivity and tendency to reduce the importance of other disciplines. As one scholar put it, “why does every man of science say: ‘there is no discipline in the world more noble than mine...?’”¹¹⁹ Hence, the integrative approach is obviously against this widespread tendency during the tenth century. Second, the knowledge attained by human effort and that by divine revelation share a common purpose. This attitude was calculated to object those who claim the independence of religion from philosophy, such as Abū Sulaymān Al-Sijistānī al-Manṭiqī (d.371/981) who considered revealed and non-revealed knowledge constitutes two different and non-overlapping epistemological realms.¹²⁰ Finally, the religious knowledge is superior to philosophical knowledge for its practical aspects. This attitude was quite in tune with al-‘Āmirī’s view of action and knowledge.¹²¹

These features had influenced other writers; they appear explicitly in another form in al-Tawḥīdī’s *risāla fī al-‘ulūm*. In fact, the classification texts can also be classified according to their subject-matter. For example, the strict classifications can be found in the texts of al-Fārābī, Ibn Farīgūn, and al-Tawḥīdī. The catalogue of the existing literature in Ibn al-Nadīm, while the dictionary of technical terms in al-Khwārizmī’s. The religious and philosophical encyclopedia in rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, and the using of classification to defend Islam in al-‘Āmirī.¹²²

Here we limit ourselves to al-‘Āmirī’s classification. In *Kitāb al-I’lām*, he presents a division of science based on the established dichotomy between the religious and philosophical sciences. For him, knowledge is divided into: *al-‘ulūm al-milliyya* [the religious sciences or more accurately: the science which belongs to the religious

¹¹⁹ Al-Tawḥīdī reported that and translated in: Al-Sha’ar, Nuha “An Analytical Reading of al-Tawhidi's Epistle: On [The Classification of] Knowledge (Risāla fī al-'Ulūm)”, in *Reflections on Knowledge and Language in Middle Eastern Societies*, eds. Bruno De Nicola et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p.156.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, pp.156-157.

¹²¹ For more see: Al-Sha’ar, *Ibid*.

¹²² Heinrichs, *The Classification of the Sciences*, p.122.

community], and *al-‘ulūm al- ḥikmiyya* [the philosophical sciences].¹²³ His terminology is highly selective. For instance, he did not use *shar’ī* and *falsafī* as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā did, but rather *millī* and *ḥikmī*. This indicates two main points of departure for al-‘Āmirī’s approach. First, the uses of *millī* implies his view of the plurality of religions, and thus the need to establish a comparative method in order to select the authentic religion among them. Second, the carefully chosen term *ḥikmī* instead of *falsafī* represents his serious endeavor to face the powerful criticisms against philosophy.¹²⁴ The distinction between *millī* and *ḥikmī* requires another distinction between the masters of these sciences. The religious sciences, that is based on revelation, can be taught only by the chosen prophets, while the masters of philosophical sciences are the recognized philosophers. To al-‘Āmirī, “every prophet is a philosopher but not every philosopher is a prophet.”¹²⁵ The major point here is that the religious and philosophical sciences are indeed in harmony, but still they are distinguished by the prophecy. A point that differs from al-Fārābī’s idea that prophet and philosopher are similar.¹²⁶

Each group (religious and philosophical sciences) in turn was divided into three sub-branches and an organon that serves all three branches. The religious sciences are three kinds: *ḥissiyya* [based on sensual perception] that is the science of *ḥadīth*; *‘aqliyya* [based on intellect] that is theology/ *‘Ilm al-Kalām*; and *mushtaraka bayn al-ḥiss wa-al-‘aql* [shared between sense-perception and intellect] that is the science of jurists or *al-fuqahā’*. The art of language is the *āla* [instrument or organon] for these three disciplines. The philosophical sciences as well consist of three sciences: *ḥissiyya* that is the natural science or physics; *‘aqliyya* namely metaphysics; and *mushtaraka bayn al-ḥiss wa-al-‘aql* that is mathematics. The organon for all these three sciences is

¹²³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.75; For English: Heinrichs, *ibid*, p.131; Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.63.

¹²⁴ Heinrichs, *ibid*, p.132.

¹²⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.75; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.63. Notice there is an error in the translation. Rosenthal translated it as: “The masters of the religious sciences are the recognized philosophers,” which gives completely different meaning.

¹²⁶ Abū Zayd, *Al-insān*, pp.93-94.

logic.¹²⁷ Here it could be seen that al-‘Āmirī did not distinguish between the perception of any kind in philosophy and the perception of language in religion. Moreover, it seems that each of the two organons (language and logic), which was point for intensive debates between philosophers and grammarians as mentioned before, has its own system and value orientation.¹²⁸ Hence, language and logic are compatible and harmony.

Another significant classification can be found in al-‘Āmirī’s other book *Kitāb al-amad*. In this classification, the religious sciences are totally omitted. The analogy is rather between philology and philosophy. He crafts the parallelism as follows:

“He who excels at memorization of the lexicon is described as a lexicographer/philologist, and he who is skillful at the science of inflection is described as a grammarian, and he who is a master in rules of prosody as a prosodist. If someone combines these three fields, with the result of being able to produce verbal art, he is called... *adīb* [a litterateur]. In the same way, he who excels at the science of measures is described as a geometer, he who is skillful at physics is described as a physicist, and he who is a master of the rules of logic is described as a logician. If someone combines these three fields, with the result of being able to ascertain metaphysical matters, he is called a philosopher-that is the lover of wisdom.”¹²⁹

Here we can clearly notice that logic is an independent science and is not an instrument as in the previous classification. Besides, what al-‘Āmirī meant by language in the first classification seems fairly obvious. He meant by that, as it appears in the second classification, linguistic in the broad sense, and not the narrow sense of grammar.¹³⁰ What is quite interesting too is a total absence of practical science [ethics, household management, and politics] in both

¹²⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.80-81; For English: Heinrichs, *ibid*, pp.131-132; Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.63.

¹²⁸ For more see: Heinrichs, *ibid*, pp.132-133.

¹²⁹ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 60 (Arabic); 61 (English); Heinrichs, *ibid*, pp.136.

¹³⁰ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.189; Heinrichs, *ibid*, pp.133.

classifications.¹³¹ A final note here is that al-‘Āmirī in both classifications deals with philosophy or wisdom as the outcome of the mastering of different independent sciences.¹³²

Having established the classification, he proceeds to speak about specialization. The greatest gift of God, according to al-‘Āmirī, is that He created man with a natural love of knowledge. However, mastering all branches of sciences is beyond the natural capacity of any man. There are different characters of a human nature, just as there are diverse sciences. Thus, it is normal that some people feels drawn to specific science without being drawn by other branch of knowledge. The power of attraction comes from one main source which is the love of the selected science. This love happens through the personal choice or the supervisors’ and parents’ choices:

“one man feels drawn to one branch of knowledge, another to another, either by personal choice or by the will of those who has the power of decision over him; then his familiarity [with his special branch of knowledge] ascertains, and his passion for it strengthens, so that he assigns it a dearly love in his heart, and prefers it to any other knowledge, even if it is less valuable...”¹³³

But how could one be well equipped to choose his specialty with confidence? To al-‘Āmirī, the acquaintance with the value of each discipline is the strong help to correctly selecting among the sciences.¹³⁴ In fact, the love of a specific science somehow reflected his belief that it is useful. Additionally, knowing the value of each science is not intended only for personal choices but also for scientific purposes and social benefits. In what follows, therefore, al-‘Āmirī turns to the benefits of the branches of knowledge.

¹³¹ Rowson, *ibid.*

¹³² For more about this issue see: Adamson, P. “The Kindian Tradition: The Structure of Philosophy in Arabic Neoplatonism,” in *Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. C. D’Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp.358-59.

¹³³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.82; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64; see also: Ḥusayn, *ta’rīf al-‘ilm*, pp.18-19.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

2.4 The Superiority of Religious knowledge

The idea of knowledge's benefits is, in essence, a quest for value. Man is guided by values in all of activities; he is a "value-oriented creature." Hence, the scientific activities too are not value-free. By and large, Muslim scholars discussed the benefits of knowledge and sciences in two main contexts: in the theories of faculty of psychology especially the cognitive part, and in theories of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The first type is more relevant to the quest for knowledge as it echoed at the individual or personal level. It deals with the different faculties of human nature in order to understand the entire range of human needs at the individual level. In turn, these individual needs represent too the meaning of beneficial knowledge. The second type, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, is more concerned with the societal quests of knowledge, because, in Islam, the societal activities and benefits are governed by the *sharī'ah*.¹³⁵ In this respect, al-‘Āmirī presents the absolute benefits of philosophical and religious knowledge, then he proceeds to the particular benefit of every science within each group. Here, again it is important to remember that he presents the benefits under the influence of the competing claims that were influential in intellectual circles.

As for the philosophical sciences, al-‘Āmirī discusses, firstly, the *hashwīyah* critiques of philosophy. Those *hashwīyah*, for many scholars, are the scholars of *ḥadīth*, who believed that the way to know God is only via revelation, and that the faith is based on the reports of prophet.¹³⁶ According to them, philosophy is anti-religious sciences; and whoever dedicated themselves to the study of it, will forfeit this world and the next. Philosophy further contains empty phrases and impressive words that deceive blockheads and fond conceited fools. Al-‘Āmirī refutes this argument by noting that the foundations and branches of the philosophical sciences are in harmony with pure reason and confirmed by the valid proofs, and there should be no contradiction between what reason demands and proof confirms and the commands of the true

¹³⁵ See: Bakar, O. "Science and Technology for Mankind's Benefit: Islamic Theories and Practices – Past, Present and Future" in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Technology*, eds. Kamali M., Bakar O., Batchelor DF., Hashim R. (Singapore: Springer, 2016), pp.17-19;31-32.

¹³⁶ See for instance: Jackson, Sherman A., *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi* (Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1996), p.20.

religion.¹³⁷ This position is containing much that will be familiar and similar to the ideas of many scholars who did not see a contradiction between reason and divine law. Ibn Taymiya al-Ḥarrānī (d.728/1328), for example, sets out similar notions. He affirms that there is no contradiction between a correct understanding of the divine law and what is clear to the intellect. What it is truly rational will be in harmony with the proper understanding of revelation.¹³⁸

If so, then what are the benefits of studying philosophy? Al-‘Āmirī identifies three absolute advantages for those who master the philosophical sciences. A first benefit is the perfection of human virtue by being

“familiar with the true reality of things and being able to control them.”¹³⁹

This stems from al-Kindī’s tradition who defines philosophy as “the knowledge of the essence of things, insofar as is possible for man.”¹⁴⁰ But it is also common among Arabic philosophers to regard the development of human virtue, mainly the intellectual virtue, as the happiness.¹⁴¹

The second benefit is to get the

“insight into all that reveals the wisdom with which the Creator has created the various things in the world, and to understand their causes, its results, and the wonderful order and splendid arrangement they have.”¹⁴²

This idea is consistent with the teleological arguments, that proposed to proof God’s existence and attributes. Al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111), for example, wrote his *al-ḥikmah fī makhlūqāt Allāh*, in which he explores the wisdom in the creation of the cosmos.

¹³⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.82-83; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64.

¹³⁸ See for instance: Malkawī, Fathi Hasan, *Epistemological Integration: Essentials of an Islamic Methodology*, IIIT Book-in-Brief series (Herndon: IIIT, 2015), pp.3;6-7; see also the editor introduction of *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.17.

¹³⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.83; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64

¹⁴⁰ Al-Allaf, Mashhad, *The Essence of Islamic Philosophy* (USA: IIC, 2003), pp.22-23.

¹⁴¹ See for instance: Butterworth, C. E. “State and Authority in Arabic Political Thought” in *The Foundations of the Arab State, vol. 1*, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: Routledge, 2006), p.95.

¹⁴² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.83; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64

Everything is created in its best form and in conformity with human needs, that is the proof of the existence of God.¹⁴³

Al-‘Āmirī continues to the third and last benefit that is the scholar of *al-‘ulūm al-ḥikmiyya* will be

“well versed in the arguments upon the traditional claims and will be in no danger of soiling himself with vain dogmas through a blind belief in authority.”¹⁴⁴

Here, al-‘Āmirī touches on the issue of imitation in belief which is apparently consistent with the theologians’ arguments. As is well known, the majority of theologians consider *al-īmān al-taqlīdī* [the imitative faith] is not sufficient, rather one should acquire the proofs which are aided by evidences that are based on authority. In other words, faith should be strengthened to the level of *al-īmān al-taḥqīqī* [the investigative or verified faith].¹⁴⁵

The philosophical sciences consist, as above mentioned, of three main disciplines: mathematics, natural sciences, and metaphysics. What are the benefits that can avail by studying each science? At that point, al-‘Āmirī sought to impart the consistency of discussion to the particular advantages of these branches independently of each other. If we look at mathematics, it contains five sub-branches: *‘ilm al-‘adad* [the science of numbers] or in general *al-ḥisāb* [arithmetic]¹⁴⁶, *al-handasah* [geometry], *al-tanjīm* [astronomy], *al-ta’līf* [music?], and *al-ḥiyal* [mechanics]. The main advantages of

¹⁴³ The attribution of the book to al-Ghazālī is not that authentic. However, al-Ghazālī used the teleological argument in his other writings. See: Yaran, Cafer S., *Islamic Thought on the Existence of God: Contributions and Contrasts with Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), pp.33-35.

¹⁴⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.83; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.64

¹⁴⁵ There are many writings on this issue. See for instance, al-Taftazani, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, p. 9-10.

¹⁴⁶ There are six disciplines that overlap in the study of numbers. These are: *‘ilm al-a’dad*, *al-arithmāṭiqī*, Indian arithmetic, algebra, *al-ḥisāb*, and integer Diophantine analysis. *‘ilm al-a’dad* refers to the arithmetic in the Hellenistic tradition and its Arabic development. It also referred to the arithmetic books of Euclid’s *Elements*, while *al-arithmāṭiqī* referred to the arithmetic tradition of the neo-Pythagoreans. For more see: Rashed, Roshdi, *Classical Mathematics from al-Khwārizmī to Descartes* (Oxon & New York: Routledge and CAUS, 2015), pp.712-715.

arithmetic skills are three: the intellectual pleasure since it is “a source of the profoundest joy to human reason;” the science of numbers is a certainty information that is free from doubts and contradictions; and finally, it is the arbitrator in the issues of *al-mu'āmalāt* [transactions].¹⁴⁷ Geometry, which follows *al-ḥisāb* in value, is much easier to understand because it deals with sensual prototypes. The values and utilities of it are namely in the determination of the shapes of sites, the calculation of seas’ extent and mountains’ height, beneficial to many crafts like it is useful to all gifted architects and carpenters, and lastly it is used for the manufacture of astronomical instruments such as astrolabes and sun-clocks. As for astronomy, no one can deny that it is a noble science. Here, al-‘Āmirī uses both the intellectual and religious to prove its importance. On the scientific level, astronomy examines the upper world and seeks to discover the causes of eclipse and what happens to ‘the receding and running’ stars¹⁴⁸ such as the visibility and invisibility, and the rising and setting of it. On the religious level, astronomy is beneficial to reflect on the creation of heavens. There are too many verses that constantly call for reflections from which Al-‘Āmirī selects only two: the first (Q 30:8) rebuking those who do not contemplate in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the other (Q 3:191) praising those who give thought to it. In the same way, *‘ilm al-ta’līf* is based on “the reasoning conceiving the possible and impossible combinations of powers and quantities in the heavenly and earthly worlds and in the spiritual and corporeal.”¹⁴⁹ In addition, the Prophet (PBUH) has said: “Adorn the Quran with your voices.” The last science, mechanics, shares both mathematics and natural science, and it has many benefits such as bringing the hidden water from the interior of the earth. To speak concisely, then, there is no contradiction between the utilities of the mathematical sciences and religious sciences.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.84; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.65. Al-‘Āmirī also uses the Qur’anic verses 19:94 and 72:28 as a proof of its value.

¹⁴⁸ He uses the terms: *al-khunnas al-jawārī*, that is taken from Quran [81:15-16].

¹⁴⁹ By mentioning the spiritual, al-‘Āmirī may refers to the uses of music as a therapy. For more on this issue see for example: Sufie, S. and Roziah Sidik “What is Medical Music Therapy in Islamic Civilization?” *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March, 2017), pp.195-199.

¹⁵⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.84-87; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, pp.65-66.

Natural science, the second discipline of philosophical sciences, deals with the physical objects. Among its objects it will be enough here to mention that from natural science other crafts, such as medicine and the culinary art, have developed. Al-‘Āmirī relies here on (Q 2:164) and tradition to proof the great utility and abundant result of natural sciences. Imām Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, he mentions, said: “science consists of two sciences: the science of religions and the science of bodies.”¹⁵¹ This quotation requires a mention of al-‘Āmirī’s master Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, who constructed his famous book *maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa'l-anfus* [Sustenance for Bodies and Souls] on this duality. Al-Balkhī gives the priority to the preventive medicine over the therapeutic. According to him, the sustenance of body -the first part of the book- starts in one’s home then in the surround environment. In the sustenance of soul (or the psychological medicine), he emphasizes the relation between psyche and body. Health preservation cannot be accomplished unless both sides (body and soul) are taken into consideration.¹⁵²

The last branch of philosophical science, or metaphysics, is exclusively designed to investigate the first causes of the existing and the nature of the One, who is the aim of all endeavor. This purpose can only be grasped via the pure reason. For al-‘Āmirī, the gain of this science is the attainment of eternal bliss. For that, it could be achieved only after the mastering of other disciplines. Moreover, only the one who gain this knowledge can be described as *ḥakīm* [sage]:

“he who testifies against himself that he is doubt whether the world is without temporal beginning or created in time, and whether the hereafter is real or not, and whether the soul is substance or an accident, occupies too humble rank to be called a sage.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Ibid*, p.88; For English: Rosenthal, *Ibid*, p.67.

¹⁵² *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa'l-anfus* published twice. The complete edition is published by Dr. Maḥmūd al-Miṣrī (Cairo, 2005). The psychological part (the sustenance of soul) published before that by Dr. Malik Badri (2003). Later on, Dr. Badri translated his edition into English under the title “Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi's Sustenance of the Soul: The Cognitive Behavior” (IIIT, 2015).

¹⁵³ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 74 (Arabic); 75 (English); Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.89; For English: Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p.67; Abū Zayd, *Al-insān*, pp.96-98. The importance of logic is mentioned in the first chapter, so we will don’t tackle it here.

Before moving to the religious sciences, al-‘Āmirī splits his systematic classification and introduces unexcepted passage on *al-ādāb* [literature]. According to him, some *nussāk* [pious people] claimed that those who devote themselves to the acquisition of literature must be one of two: either someone who wishes to be praised for their fluency of tongue, or someone who wishes to impress the noble men to reach benefit and high position. This statement, al-‘Āmirī claims, is a mistake since *al-ādāb* is

“a discipline dependent on *bayān* [clarity] which with regard to impressionable souls is like a bridle and a restraint, since the eloquent speaker becomes empowered through it to pull them [the souls] from one state to another.”

The relationship between words and meanings is very similar to the soul-body relationship. Just as the good deeds of souls come forth in bodies, the truthful meanings appear only in words. The knowledge of language then is not intended for only a thorough command of *al-fuṣḥá*, but rather to reach the natural speech as is the case in poetry, speeches, epistles, and proverbs. In any case, this passage is mysterious either in its place, which does not fit in the general construction, or in some issues like the identity of those pious men. Some scholar argued that *al-ādāb* is the science auxiliary to logic, while others allocate *ādāb* to philosophical sciences and *adab* to religious sciences. Although his intention was not clear, it is obvious that al-‘Āmirī was thinking of certain ‘stylistic moulds’ that generate such eloquent sayings. Moreover, his description of the pious men as “they beguiled away from the attachment to worship or from the pursuit of wisdom,” reflects the opposition of those men to the beautification of language in all sciences. Therefore, *al-ādāb*, as Heinerichs claims, would encompass and affect all the sciences within al-‘Āmirī’s system of classification.¹⁵⁴ At this last point shows, *al-ādāb* seems to be the link between the two domains of knowledge.

Having demonstrated the benefits of philosophical sciences and its harmony with religious knowledge, al-‘Āmirī left with the task of presenting the advantages and superiority of religious sciences. It is worth mentioning here that he, as a Muslim philosopher, will discuss the religious science of the Muslim community. However,

¹⁵⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.92-93; for a very good translation and discussion of the passage see: Heinrichs, *The Classification of the Sciences*, pp.133-135.

his uses of the word *al-milliyya* indicates al-‘Āmirī’s view that each religious community has its own religious knowledge. In this context, he claims that religious sciences are more useful and superior to all other sciences. How did al-‘Āmirī reach this conclusion? He established his argument on two pivotal points: the idea of *al-fāḍil* [the preferer or the excellent] and *al-mafḍūl* [one preferred], and the limitation of intellect. As far as the first point is concerned, al-‘Āmirī notices, the preferability is common not only in sciences, but also among all the surround things. He cites three representative verses of the higher and the lower in preferability as its explicitly mentioned in the Quran: (a) man is the foremost and honored creature that God preferred him over all creatures (Q 17:70); (b) human beings are different in ranks or degrees (Q 6:165); and (c) God has have exalted some prophets above the others (Q 2:253). The same goes for some places and times. For instance, Ramadan has a distinctive position over all months, while Mecca -and holy cities- occupies a unique position to all other places. This idea was widely articulated among scholars of different background. Ibn Ḥazm, for example, divided the types of distinctions into two kinds: the distinction granted by God with no need of action by the person concerned, and the earned distinction through actions as a reward from the divine legislator. This does not mean, however, that low-level sciences shouldn't be acquired. Low-level sciences have their significant position, since its absence would cause the world to be in disorder and confusion.¹⁵⁵

As to the second point, al-‘Āmirī insists in different passages on the intellectual ability to attain the mere general abstract principles that anyone can accept. However, the practical use of this abstract principles lies beyond the capacity of human intellect to achieve on its own. For instance, the intellect can know that the thief should be punished, but how to punish him? Here, the intellect can imagine things in totally different ways, thus, above it is necessary to have an appropriate authority to solve this. Otherwise, the social order will be on the edge of chaos. Thus, the intellect can make judgements only of the sorts of things that lie within its capacity. These rational judgments are divided into three categories: (a) necessary or what intellect deems to

¹⁵⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-Ilām*, pp.95-96. For Ibn Ḥazm’s and other categorization of preferability see: Sattam, Abdul Aziz bin, *Sharia and the Concept of Benefit, The Use and Function of Maslaha in Islamic Jurisprudence* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp.84-86.

be required, (b) permissible or what intellect permits, and (c) impossible or what intellect rejects. The universal character of intellect or the general principles falls into the first and the third categories: the necessary and impossible. The other details that govern the daily life are in the second category or the permissible, in which the intellect needs an authority to permit or reject its views:

“It appears that the intellect is compelled, in what concerns permissible matters, to await the appearance of a [divine] command, in light of its incapacity to comprehend all truths by itself and its need in many of them for elements from the outside.”

Accordingly, ethics and practical morality is based mainly on the divine revelation. The role of revelation, then, is to provide intellect with the details of the common good.¹⁵⁶

It is in this sense that al-‘Āmirī explicitly prioritizes religious sciences over all other sciences including philosophy. For him, the superiority of religious science lies in its special and different *gharaḍ* [purpose], concerns of the actual usefulness, the unerringness of revelation, and the highest degree of reliability. In other words, religious sciences are superior for three main reasons: first, the goal of all sciences is to attain good. Thus, the good achieved via religious science, or serving God, is the greatest good since it ensures the eternal happiness, which other sciences cannot. Second, there is no religion that exists only for the benefit of private or partial interests, but rather it serves *al-maṣlahah al-kullīyah* [the universal interest]. By contrast, other sciences, despite its values, have restricted purposes and are individually oriented, that makes it inferior to religious science. Third, and most strikingly, religious science is the basis of other science since its rooted in divine revelation which is beyond doubts, and, thus, making it the source for the first principles of all other sciences:

“That religious science can serve as an *asās* [foundation] upon which the rest of sciences are built; for it is drawn from no place than the niche of light to which is ascribed the first positions of every theoretical craft: by this I mean the divine revelation which is subject to no doubt, and in which neither negligence nor error is permissible. But not one of the other sciences is such as to be capable of serving as a foundation for the science

¹⁵⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.99-100; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.120-121.

of religion or determining any part of it. The religious science, then, must necessarily in itself occupy the same position as the roots and first principles of the theoretical crafts, in its veracity and power.”

This last point indicates that all human knowledge, including philosophy and particular sciences, is grounded in religion. To prove that, al-‘Āmirī mentions three examples: doctors attribute medical caring to Asclepius, while astrology was also attributed to Hermes. Both of them (Asclepius and Hermes) were ascended to heaven in order to gain knowledge. Additionally, the sages of India do not hesitate to attribute the various types of knowledge to either prophetic revelation or divine inspiration.¹⁵⁷

All that remains is to demonstrate how the religious sciences stand in merit with regard to their quantity and quality. So, the science which have many branches and subdivisions has the right to be accorded merit. Similarly, the science which have greater benefit and utility is worth of being considered distinguished. Based on that, al-‘Āmirī classifies the religious sciences as following: (a) the science of *ḥadīth* which function as matter for religious knowledge has the merit of *ibtidā’* [beginning or priority]; (b) the science of theology which is the final objective of these sciences has the merit of perfection; (c) the science of jurisprudence is the intermediary between *ḥadīth* and theology has the merit of *al-I‘tidāl* [balance]; and (d) the science of language as an instrument for all has the merit of easing and facilitation.¹⁵⁸

The four branches are playing an important and complementary role to defense of religion. It is important enough to remember again that the disputations among the intellectual circles have deeply affected al-‘Āmirī’s presentation of the benefits of religious sciences. In this context, both *aṣḥāb al- ḥadīth* (literally companion or people of narration) and theologians are compatible in serving religion. The main benefit of *al- ḥadīth* is to preserve the reports and tradition of the prophet and his companions. Each branch of knowledge, al-‘Āmirī notices, has transmitted reports, either from the holy books or prophets, or from ancient sages. The science of reports then serves as

¹⁵⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.101-103; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, pp.120 and 122; Adamson, *The Kindian Tradition*, P. 367. al-‘Āmirī “Knowledge and The Religious Sciences” trans. by E. K. Rowson, in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. I: From Zoroaster to ‘Umar Khayyam*, ed. Nasr, S. H., and Aminrazabi, M. (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), pp.198-199.

¹⁵⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.106-107; for English translation see: al-‘Āmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, pp.198-199.

matter for all sciences. Besides, the scholars of *ḥadīth* are the evaluators of reports in order to maintain the authentic prophetic tradition and save it from the false tradition and tampered texts.¹⁵⁹ Despite their notable position, *aṣḥāb al- ḥadīth*'s critique of theologians, namely describing them as the masters of disputation and that God blamed arguing, is not acceptable for the following four reasons: first, it is a divine command (Q 16:125) to argue or dispute in the best way possible. Second, the disputation of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb with Jews was confirmed by the revelation. Third, and most importantly, the religious issues are divided into: *al-uṣūl* [foundations or principles] such as the unity of God, and *al-furū* [branches/ancillaries] such as the ordinary laws that Muslim should observe. The principles are clearly prior to the branches. Hence, the main importance of theology is concerned with consolidating the foundations of the religion. One can add here that this idea or the separation between the principles and branches will shape al-'Āmirī's methodology of comparing religions as we shall see in the third chapter. Fourth and finally, theology as a discipline can be utilized with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Further, man via theology can insightfully analyze the theological matters that differentiates him from the masses who are merely imitators.¹⁶⁰

As for jurisprudence, al-'Āmirī disagrees with a branch of *al-Imāmīyah* and a group of the *Ḥanābilites* who charged jurists with heresy. Both groups claimed that the religious *aḥkām* [ordinances] should be based mainly on the Book and Sunna with the exclusion of *al-ra'y wa al-qiyās* [personal judgments and analogical reasoning]. Such claim is directed primarily towards the Ḥanafī school of law. Al-'Āmirī, who probably was Ḥanafīte, refutes this argument by noting that companions of the Prophet were divided into two groups: one used analogies while the other preferred to abstain from using it. Both groups did not judge and criticize each other, which means the validity of analogy. More importantly, the prophetic reports are limited, and the novel events are potentially infinite. If al-ijtihād is prohibited, then there will be only two ways for jurisconsults: either they must affirm the existence of an infallible imam as the

¹⁵⁹ Al-'Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.107-110; for English see: al-'Āmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, pp.199-201; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.121.

¹⁶⁰ Al-'Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.110-112; for English see: al-'Āmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, pp.201-202; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.121.

Twelvers argued, or they permit whatever the intellect considers best as al- Nazzām claimed. Both ways are not authentic since the location of imam is unknown which means the impossibility to consult him during the occurrence of novel events; and the independent uses of intellect, which will result in a law without tradition, is the greater heresy according to *al-Imāmīyah* and *Hanābilites*. Therefore, there is no alternative other than to follow the Sunna of the companions or in other words:

“God has legislated general root principles in [the mankind] religion and then granted them sound intellects so that they might utilize them in referring the branches back to these root principles.”¹⁶¹

To prevent the internal disputations, al-‘Āmirī insists that the scholars of each discipline should have particular requirements in order to ensure the proper conduct of the discipline, or in other words to achieve the merits of religious sciences. These requirements are generally related to the educational and ethical character of the scholars because, according to al-‘Āmirī, anything is liable to corruption from the one who supplies the matter. Therefore, the scholar of these sciences must ground himself in his discipline, but without undermining the role of other disciplines. For al-‘Āmirī, al-taqlīd is one main reason for the disputation between the masters of the religious sciences, but still the truth is known by itself and not by men.¹⁶²

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed al-‘Āmirī's definition of knowledge as the comprehension of the thing as it is without mistake and error. It also presented the menaces of the skeptical claims about knowledge, because it could lead to the denial of morals and good actions. Al-‘Āmirī was also aware of the attempts to limit the good works and duties to ordinary people only, inasmuch as those who excel in knowledge are not required to practice the religious duties. However, such claim means that either the theoretical or practical faculties of human nature would be superfluous or incidental.

¹⁶¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.113-117; for English see: al-‘Āmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, pp.202-205; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.121-122.

¹⁶² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.117-119; for English see: al-‘Āmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, pp.205-206.

It means as well that the absence of action would not affect the prosperity of society, and it will restrict the good actions entirely to ignorant people.

Moreover, I have also shown in this chapter how al-‘Āmirī maintained a comprehensive notion of knowledge which led him to craft a holistic classification of sciences. Knowledge, in such classification, was divided into philosophical and religious sciences. Both are in harmony, but still religious knowledge is distinguished by the prophecy and revelation. Interestingly enough, the practical sciences are absent in such attempt of classification, but this could be due to his counting of ethics, household management, and politics in actions.

Three main factors have a large influence on al-‘Āmirī’s attempt to integrate the whole sciences into one framework: the disputations between intellectual circles, the unification of religious and philosophical truths, and the relation between knowledge and action. Therefore, al-‘Āmirī had tried to present the absolute benefits of philosophical and religious knowledge in order to prove the complementary role of both group of sciences. Still, he favored religious sciences because of its purpose, public benefit, and the authenticity of revelation. He strikingly argues that religious science must occupy the roots and first principles of the theoretical crafts. This means that all human knowledge, including philosophy and particular sciences, could be grounded in religion.

CHAPTER THREE

Al-‘Āmirī’s Methodology in Comparative Religions

“... the intelligent will not convince him to observe the proper meanings of the thing unless he probes what are the dissent meanings of it.”

Al-‘Āmirī

3.1 Introduction

Muslim scholars have used different methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of religion, ranging from the historical method to the refutation approach. One can identify four main approaches. The first uses the historical description of other sects and religions such as al-Shahrastānī (d.548/1153) in his well-known work *al-milal wa-l-niḥal*. The second employs an analytical and comparative methodology as it appears in different works such as al-‘Āmirī’s. The third relies on the method of critique in which scholars apply critical analysis to other religious doctrines like al-Ghazzālī’s *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhīyāt ‘Īsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-Injīl*. The fourth is based mainly on disputation, dialogue, debate, and refutation which would take place in *al-majālis* or compiled in letters and books such as Ibn Ḥazm’s *al-Faṣl fī al-milal wa-al-ahwā’ wa-al-niḥal*.¹⁶³

In *Kitāb al-I’lām bi manāqib al-Islām*, al-‘Āmirī offers a systematic comparison between world religions -Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Šābianism, and pagan idol worship- with an aim to present the superiority of Islam. He did not attempt to provide a full description of these religions, but rather his main aim was to establish a rational methodological tool to compare between them.¹⁶⁴ Although he believes in

¹⁶³ For more see: Comparative Religions in Islamic Thought. *dar-alifta.org*.eg.

<http://dar-alifta.org/Foreign/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=117&CategoryID=3> (accessed April 29, 2018).

¹⁶⁴ Al-‘Āmirī relies on the accumulation of the Muslim scholarship of other religions. In Fourth/Tenth century, there were a flurry of works on other religion. One main work was *shajarat al-adyān* written by al-‘Āmirī’s master Abū Zayd al-Balkhī. Unfortunately, we did not receive this work. For more see: Işık, Hidayet, *Amiri’ye Göre İslam ve Öteki Dinler* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006), pp.24-28.

religious diversity, al-‘Āmirī is of the idea that only one of them is the authentic and rational. This conviction stems from his definition of man as religious by nature and the superiority of the religious over the philosophical sciences. In other words, if religion is part and parcel of human nature, then with all this religious diversity, how man can select the correct among them? There is a need for a systematic methodology to determine the authentic way among the reality of religious pluralism. *The aim of this chapter, then, is to explain al-‘Āmirī’s methodology in further detail.* It will begin with an overview of his methodology and its scope and rules, then the rest of the chapter will discuss the methodology sections in depth.

3.2 An Overview of Al-‘Āmirī’s Methodology

Comparison is unavoidable activity of human mind. It is one aspect of scientific approaches that gathers the unrelated facts into categories and classification. It could be applied to both the local and global levels. Religion, in this sense, is a comparative and cross-cultural category. There is no study of religion without cross-cultural perspective; without knowing the common and different between the various religious phenomena. Comparison is not an ideology in itself but rather it is an activity or a tool which can be employed for scientific and religious purposes. It has been used in religious studies for various objectives such as: a) demonstrating the superiority of comparatist’s own religion; b) presenting the universal aspect of religion namely the spiritual aspect; c) undermining the uniqueness and undercutting the absolutist claims about any religion; d) presenting the ability to understand other religions from their own perspective; and e) testing any theory about religion by giving some evidences from different religions.¹⁶⁵ Al-‘Āmirī’s attempt belongs to the first type as he uses Islam as both the ideal religion and the standard of comparison. It also could be lapped within the second kind or universalism, but it should be noted that the universal aspects according to al-‘Āmirī, as we shall see later, is not limited to the spiritual side only.

Before we proceed into further discussions about al-‘Āmirī’s comparison, it is probably worthwhile mentioning again that the main aim of *Kitāb al-I’lām* is to emphasize the superiority of Islam over the other religions. Therefore, the comparison

¹⁶⁵ Paden, William E. “Comparative Religion” in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by John R. Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.208-209.

itself is dedicated to religious man in order to be able to make an informed and rational judgements in the compared pillars between religions. This stems from al-‘Āmirī’s belief that man can reach decisive and rational conclusions about religious truth.¹⁶⁶ Another main target for the comparison is the issue of *taqlīd*. Al-‘Āmirī was aware of the issue of *taqlīd* and religious assent as opposite to *ijtihād*. At the end of his classification of knowledge, he warned the religious scholars of the acceptance the previous decisions without examining how their masters reached it. Truth, as it is widely acknowledged, is not known by men but rather by itself. Here again he insists on the independent reasoning as the proper way to reach truth.¹⁶⁷ Al-‘Āmirī furtherly refers to the importance of using analogy between the common components among religions and to appoint the intellect as a judge to know the most and least honorable religion.¹⁶⁸

In this context, how the comparison can be done? The structure of any comparison is based on seeing the broad common factors with regard to a choosing criterion. For instance, religions (= the broad common factor) can be compared according to their types of authority (the chosen criterion or aspect).¹⁶⁹ The same goes for al-‘Āmirī. Religions as a common factor could be compared with regard to either their essence or their tradition. For him, comparison between religions can be made with respect to eight basic elements: their beliefs, rituals, morals, punishments, political system, social structure, civilization, and cultural achievements. These eight elements are not at the same level of consideration. Rather, these components are divided into two categories: the first four represents the essence of religion, while the others encompass the religious tradition. All religions, al-‘Āmirī claims, share an inner core of some sort, which compose the essence of religion:

“The foundations of all the religions are classified into four sections: *i’tiqādāt* [beliefs], *‘ibādāt* [worships], *mu’āmalāt* [morals or the communal relations], and *mazājir* [punishments].”

¹⁶⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.122; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.95.

¹⁶⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.118-119; 122.

¹⁶⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.123.

¹⁶⁹ Paden, *Comparative Religion*, pp.208-209.

This essence is manifested in politics, societal relations, ethnicity, and scholarship.¹⁷⁰ In this sense, the uniqueness of any particular religion can be demonstrated by comparing its eternal and external forms with other religions.

Ninian Smart have a similar approach in his book the world's religions. For him, it is more particular to know what *a* religion is before what religion is in general. To do so, Smart suggests a scheme of seven components for better understanding of the nature of religion. 1) the first component or dimension is the practical and ritual such as worship, prayers, and so on. This dimension is important either in religions with sacramental aspect like Eastern Orthodox Christianity or in other belief systems such as Buddhism in which meditations can count as a form of prayer. 2) the second dimension or the experiential and emotional is the food on which all other dimensions of religion feed. It is very important to enter into the feeling which religion generates and to understand its inner dynamism. 3) the third dimension is the narrative or mythic in which the religious experience is expressed by sacred narrative or myth. 4) the doctrinal and philosophical is the fourth dimension which is important because it provides the coherent intellectual form of religion. 5) the fifth dimension is the ethical and legal dimension which addresses the question of salvation and ultimate liberation. 6) the social and institutional dimension represents how the aforementioned dimensions are embodied in a group or specific community. 7) the last dimension is the material or the physical forms such as building, natural features and sacred landmarks. According to Smart, if this seven-dimensional portrait is adequate, then then the definition of religion is not a serious problem.¹⁷¹

Al-‘Āmirī’s elements and Smart’s dimensions have similar structure and corresponding similar content. However, al-‘Āmirī’s main concern is the comparison while Smart aimed to provide a phenomenological approach for better understanding of religions. Moreover, it is clear enough that al-‘Āmirī depends primarily on Islamic thought particularly on the division between *al-uṣūl* and *al-furū‘* on one hand, and on the idea of *al-fāḍil* and *al-maḥḍūl* on the other hand. As for the first, it is well known that there are *uṣūl al-dīn* and *furū‘ al-dīn*:

¹⁷⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.121-122.

¹⁷¹ Smart, *The World's Religions*, pp. 11-22.

“Religion is divided into things which count as *al-uṣūl* [roots or principles] - that is what the believer is obliged to subscribe to, including the Unity of God, the affirmation of the Apostles, and the Hereafter - and things which count as *al-furūʿ* [branches or the subsidiary elements] - that is the laws and ordinances which the Muslim is obligated to practice. It is clearly known that the root is prior to the branch, since the branch is invalidated if the root is; and this why error in the roots of religion is considered unbelief.”¹⁷²

Likewise, the idea of *uṣūl* and *furūʿ* dominated the entirety of al-ʿĀmirī’s thought in dealing with other religions. It’s no surprise then that he classifies the comparison’s elements into essence and tradition.

One can add here that this point also shaped the different ways in which Muslim scholars judged other religions. The Muslim judgements of other religions can be divided into two main types:

A) judgments on the doctrine, rites, and laws. These judgements may be described as theological and legal since its main target is the essence of religion specifically the beliefs dimension. Accordingly, the religions are classified into four main categories based on their doctrines: the Muslim sects who are part of the *Umma*; *Ahl al-Kitāb* or the People of the Book; other communities like Zoroastrians and Sabians; and the *Mushrikūn* or the polytheists.

B) judgments of the other ways of life such as cultures and societies. These judgments are not on the religious nature but rather on the religious tradition of other religions. It refers to Islam as the value and norm. However, they are not that strict as the first type and are more likely to be linked with their historical situation.¹⁷³

While on the normative level, Muslim judgments of other religions have four normative levels:

a) the universal norms that valid for all humanity and are timeless;

¹⁷² Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-Iʿlām*, p.111; for English see: al-ʿĀmirī, *Knowledge and The Religious Sciences*, p.202.

¹⁷³ For more see: Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, pp. 57-58.

- b) the particularistic religious norms like the relation with other religious communities;
- c) the social rules and customs which expressed in specific situations and contexts; and
- d) the sensitivities and emotions which rises in situation of tensions and crisis between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁷⁴

As for the other idea, or *al-fāḍil* and *al-mafḍūl*, it is certainly takes a prominent role in al-‘Āmirī’s thought. He used it to favor religious knowledge over the other sciences. Yet here again he relies on the same idea to give the categories of the essence of religion more attention. Thus, al-‘Āmirī crafts another sub-classification of the four dimensions under the essence of religion and goes further to prefer the beliefs and its components over the other three sections. How does he do that? As it mentioned before, the foundations of all religions are four: *i’tiqādāt*, *‘ibādāt*, *mu‘āmalāt* and *mazājir*. To al-‘Āmirī, each of section of these foundations is divide into another five components as the following:

1. *I’tiqādāt*: believes in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day (as in Q 4:136).
2. *‘Ibādāt*: *al-‘Ibādah al-naḥsīyah* [personal worship] or prayer; *al-‘Ibādah al-badanīyah* [bodily worship] or fasting; *al-‘Ibādah al-mālīyah* [financial worship] or almsgiving/charity; *al-‘Ibādah al-malakīyah* [political worship] or jihad; and *al-‘Ibādah al-mushtarakah* or the worship that shares the previous four forms that al-Hajj.
3. *Mu‘āmalāt*: business and commerce transactions; *Mukhāṣamat* or altercations; *Munakahat* or nuptials; *Amānāt* or trusts; and *al-tarikāt wa-al-mawārīth*.
4. *Mazājir*: the punishments of *Qatl al-naḥs* or -literally- the killing of the soul such as diyāt; theft punishments such as amputation of the hand; *hatk al-satr* [or in other words the punishment of adultery/fornication] like stoning and flogging; the punishments of slanderous accusation of unchastity such flogging; and death penalty for *al-Ridda* (apostasy).

¹⁷⁴ For more see: Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, pp. 57-58. Notice that Waardenburg did not mention the idea of *uṣūl* and *furū‘* but these two types of judgments are clearly based on it.

So, there are twenty pillars on which the comparison would apply.¹⁷⁵ Based on idea of *al-fāḍil* and *al-maḥḍūl*, al-‘Āmirī asserts that the five components of *I’tiqādāt* are superior to other sections, because this section is considered from knowledge while the other three sections are from action that is obviously based on knowledge. The relation between knowledge and action, according to him, is merely like the relation between cause and caused or beginning to end:

“knowledge is the beginning of action and action is the end of knowledge; a beginning without an end is futile, and an end without a beginning is absurd.”¹⁷⁶

Obviously, the aforementioned twenty subcategories exhibit an Islamic understanding of religion. Islam here is the norm on which other religions to be understood. However, al-‘Āmirī claims that these categories apply on the major world religions or -to put differently- on the main six religions under comparison. What are these religions? According to him, the major religions are identified by the Quran:

“As for those who believe, and those who are Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, indeed God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection.” (22:17).

Hence, all the religions of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Sabeans, Zoroastrianism¹⁷⁷, and polytheists embrace the essence-tradition comparison as same as they fall into the twenty pillars.¹⁷⁸

The comparison would then be examining of each point in all religions. It flows based on the hierarchy of the twenty points starting from the most important (belief in God) to the apostasy. Once this is done, the traditions of these religions could be compared

¹⁷⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.122-123. In *Kitāb al-I’lām*, al-‘Āmirī discussed only the first two types (*I’tiqādāt* and *I’bādāt*). For the other two sections (*Mu’āmalāt* and *Mazājir*), he refers to his other book *Kitāb al-ibāna an ‘ilal al-diyāna* (An Explication of the causes of Religion), but we did not receive this book.

¹⁷⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.123; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p.247. he also insists that “excellent knowledge is desired only for the sake of good action.” see: al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.75.

¹⁷⁷ Magians or *Majūs* (or also Mazdeism) is understood by most Muslims to be reference to Zoroastrians in general. See: *The Study Quran*, edited by S. H. Nasr (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), p.834.

¹⁷⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.121-123.

with each other. Does doing so ensure the validity and accuracy of the comparison? As many modern critics point out, the comparison could lead to false analogies, superficial parallels, and misleading associations. It also could suppress the significant differences between religions or rely on an inaccurate representation.¹⁷⁹ Al-‘Āmirī too was very aware that the comparison has its problem and could lead to false interpretations. In fact, he uses it as a tool or intellectual activity to select among the different religious paths. But as for its results, it could be either accurate or inaccurate. For al-‘Āmirī, the accurate comparisons can only be made advantageously by taking into consideration two preconditions:

A) the comparison is undertaken between homogeneous forms or issues. One cannot - to specific level- compare apples and oranges. The comparison is similar and comparable issues, which means that one cannot compare principle in one religion with subsidiary issue in other religion.

B) the comparison is based on the widely accepted doctrine among the adherents of each religion. That one does not consider the minor sect's understanding as a representative of the whole religion.¹⁸⁰ Both preconditions, in essence, require a deep understanding of the compared religions. It also requires a replacement of subjective views to the phenomenological approach for better understanding of religion before comparing them.

All that remains is a point-by-point comparison between the six religions in the light of the aforementioned components. But before going into further details, it would be better to mention that al-‘Āmirī did not provide informative or descriptive study of all religions. Rather, his comparison, as any other comparison, is selective as if it is a practice of his theory; in which Islam is the superior, authentic, and the mean between the extremes.¹⁸¹

3.3 The Four Cornerstones of Religion

Islam in what follows will be presented as the most moderate and rational among religions. Al-‘Āmirī here relies on the idea of *Wasatīyat al-Islām* which expressed in

¹⁷⁹ For more about the modern critiques of the comparative method see for example: Paden, *Comparative Religion*, pp.216-218.

¹⁸⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.125.

¹⁸¹ For more see: Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.137; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.100.

many Quranic verses such as “Thus, have We made of you an ummah (Community) justly balanced (wasatan), that ye might be witnesses over the nations...” (Q 2:143). He also draws on the Aristotelian idea that virtue is a mean between two vices of excess and deficiency.¹⁸² The ultimate aim of doing so is to prove that Islam is a mercy for the world (i.e. Q 21:107).¹⁸³

I. I'tiqādāt

In this context, the comparison begins by affirming *God's Unity*. “At the core of religious experience stands God.”¹⁸⁴ There are various concepts of God such as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, monism, and dualism. Al-‘Āmirī claims that only *al-Tawḥīd* among all these beliefs is the rational choice, since there is no other faith concerned to strength their beliefs on rational basis as Muslims especially in the theological works. He refers to two main levels of dealing with *al-Tawḥīd*. The first level is the role of Muslim theologians in utilizing intellectual premises to reach theoretical and justified conclusions about the existence and unity of God. The outcome of this approach saved Muslims, according to al-‘Āmirī, from falling into misperception of the nature of God. It freed Muslims from the Jewish anthropomorphism in which YHWH’s character become humanized and appears as a conqueror, a father a lawgiver, a friend, etc.¹⁸⁵ It also liberated Muslims from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that is compromises the unity of God and entails tri-theism;¹⁸⁶ and the dualism of Zoroastrianism in which the cosmos is governed by two primordial sacred powers: good and evil or light and darkness.¹⁸⁷ The same goes for

¹⁸² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. Robert Williams (London: Longmans Green, 1869), p.56.

¹⁸³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.123.

¹⁸⁴ Faruqi, Ismail Raji al, *Al-Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982), p.1.

¹⁸⁵ Jack Miles traces the different images of God in Hebrew Bible. See his book: *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

¹⁸⁶ For more about Muslim criticism of trinity during the ‘medieval’ period see for example: Sharafī, ‘Abd al-Majīd al, *Al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-radd ‘alā al-naṣārā ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-rābi’/ al-‘āshir* (Tunisia, 1986), pp.197-258.

¹⁸⁷ For more see: Livingston, James C., *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), pp.165-167.

polytheism in which the world is created and maintained by different gods. Each god has its particular function under a highest god who rules as a king over the world of gods.¹⁸⁸

The second level of *al-Tawhīd* is the Muslim's experience where God is the core of normativeness that He is the One Who commands and the final end of everything, and Whose will is the guide for all men's lives.¹⁸⁹ This is very obvious in the Muslim life either he is worker, farmer, or fighter; and whether he is in land and sea, or plain and mountain in day and night or evening and morning. Interestingly, al-ʿĀmirī viewed the praising of God everywhere as a confirmation of what has already revealed in the previous scriptures.¹⁹⁰ He did not mention any specific verses, but it seems that he meant some verses like Psalm [48:10]: "Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness." He could also have meant the annunciation to the shepherds in Luke [2:13-14]. When an angel announced the Christ's birth and suddenly a host of angels praising God and saying: "Glory be to God in the Highest, And on earth peace, And among men good will."¹⁹¹

Similarly, the Islamic understanding of *prophecy* is the mean between the two forms of distortion: exaggeration and understatement. Here al-ʿĀmirī refers only to the main examples in Abrahamic religions: Christianity and Judaism.¹⁹² He perceives the doctrine that Jesus was the "Son of God" as an exaggeration and doctrinal error. Muslim scholars have always rejected the hypostatic union between God and human or the divine nature of Christ. This rejection is based on two main pivot components: (1) the Quranic information that Christ is prophet which is seen to be consistent with the fact that Jesus never claimed to be God in the Gospels; and (2) the significant

¹⁸⁸ For more see for example: Assmann, J. "Monotheism and Polytheism" in *Religions of the Ancient World, A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge Mass, 2004), pp.17-31. Notice that al-ʿĀmirī did not mean Arab paganism only, rather he spoke in general.

¹⁸⁹ For more see: Faruqi, *Al-Tawhīd*, pp.2-4.

¹⁹⁰ Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.129.

¹⁹¹ 'Abdul-Ahad Dawud also argued that this verse is a description of Islam and Muslims. See his book: *Muhammed in the Bible* (Kuala Lumpur, 1987), pp.130-140.

¹⁹² Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.129-130.

differences of Christian churches in Christology indicates the irrationality of the whole doctrine.¹⁹³

Judaism as well is an example of distortion but in minimizing the prophets' role. Al-‘Āmirī gives two instances of that. The first, according to him, is the Jewish denying of Abraham's Prophethood and seeing him as merely a righteous man or a paragon of virtue. Despite the fact that Abraham is a central patriarch in Judaism, his prophetic role and message (*ḥanīf*) has been minimized. The Jews considered themselves as the descendants of Abraham and thought of him as the prototypical Jew who obeyed the God's commands and laws. This image of Abraham as Torah-abiding Jew was rejected by Quran in many verses such Q. 3:65-7 in which he obeyed neither the Torah nor the Gospel but rather a *ḥanīf* Muslim who was not one of those who associate other gods with God. The second example is Lot and his daughters in which a noble prophet depicted as a drunker and committed fornication with his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38).¹⁹⁴

By contrast to the aforementioned conceptions of prophecy, the prophets have their own special significance in Islam. They are the highest rank among human beings, and they are chosen and outstanding (Q. 38:47). All of them conveyed a divine message from God and they were divinely protected or were preserved from falsehood. They were sent to different nations at various times with an essential message of Divine Unity or *al-Tawḥīd*. This unity of revelation is very clear in many verses in Quran (i.e. Q 2:136) in which each prophet from Adam to Muhammed confirmed the previous prophets. This continuation of revelation is also very clear in the prophet's report (al-

¹⁹³ Waardenburg, Jacques "Classical Attitudes in Islam towards Other Religions" in *Religions View Religions, Explorations Pursuit of Understanding*, ed. Jerald D. Gort and Others (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 139-140. Al- Sharafī discussed both issues in more details. See his book: *Al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-radd ‘alā al-naṣārā*, pp.259-303.

¹⁹⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.130; for more about Abraham (pbuh) see: Šāliḥ, Fāṭimah, *Ibrāhīm ‘alayhi al-salām fī asfār al-Yahūd*, MA in Umm Al-Qura University (2001), pp.185-189; Robinson, Neal "Surat Al 'Imran and Those with the Greatest Claim to Abraham" *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2004) pp.6-8.

Bukhārī 60.51 no.3481): “the prophets are half brothers; their mothers differ, and their religion is one.”¹⁹⁵

The perception of *angels*, the third component in this section, developed theologically throughout the history of religions in varied forms varies from religion to religion. In Arabia, some idolaters, like *Kinānah* and *Khuza'ah* tribes, believed that angels were Allāh's daughters. They regarded them as God's offspring and they have considered the angels to be females. A belief that is abominable and unjustified according to al-‘Āmirī.¹⁹⁶ The same applies to Zoroastrianism angelology in which angels assigned to do more functions and have more powers as if they were God. For instance, The Zoroastrian has to choose a patron angel for her or his protection every fifteen years, and endeavors to always carry the angel with her/him in worship, meditation, and acts. Even their supreme god, Ahura Mazda, represents an angel-like concept.¹⁹⁷

Judaism as well includes distorted beliefs in angels such their statement that angels may commit the sin of unbelief and be punished by Allah with metamorphosis.¹⁹⁸ Al-‘Āmirī here may mean the development of the angelological stories regarding the fallen angels, or those angels who were accursed and damned after their rebellion against God. These stories had developed under the Zoroastrian's impact upon Jewish religion. When the dualistic belief in the existence of evil became an essential component popular Jewish religion, many attempts were made to find biblical references for the concept of fallen angels. In this manner those angels taught man the demonic wisdom. Each angel taught human beings or perversion which led to the corruption of mankind. Besides a particular evil tool that, there is also the concept of

¹⁹⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.130; Al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*, p.14; for more see also: Lombard, J. “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions” in *The Study Quran*, ed. S. H. Nasr (New York: Harper One, 2015), pp.1765-1784.

¹⁹⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.131; See the commentary on Q 16:57 in *The Study Quran*, pp.670-671. For more see also: Hawting, G. R., *The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.52-53.

¹⁹⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Ibid*; Farridnejad, Shervin “The Iconography of Zoroastrian Angelology in Sasanian Art and Architecture” in *Spirits in Transcultural Skies*, ed. Niels Gutschow and Katharina Weiler (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), pp.19-21.

¹⁹⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.131.

rebellious angels in apocryphal literature which refer to the seventy angels whom had the power from God over Israel after the destruction of the First Temple, but they abused this power and violated God's will by persecuting Israel. Therefore, the punishment will be meted out by God on them.¹⁹⁹

The Islamic angelology, again, is the mean and more rational among these ideas. For Muslims, angels are honored servants who do not “precede Him in speech and they act according to His command” (Q. 21:26-27).²⁰⁰ Al-‘Āmirī did not go into further details, but this brief exposition is a refute to the other beliefs in angels since it indicates that angels neither speak nor act except as commanded by God and they are not described as males or females.²⁰¹

The comparison between *scriptures* is the fourth component in *al- I'tiqādāt* section. Based on Quran and Sunna, Muslim scholars have always emphasized on the scriptural falsification that *ahl al-kitāp* changed and corrupted their scriptures. Different arguments were used as an evidence of the *tahrīf* and *tabdīl* in the earlier books. For instance, the aforementioned doctrines of anthropomorphism and trinity are a proof of the corruption in these books. Other scholars emphasized the textual contradictions and the mistakes in the text such as the replacement of Ismael by Isaac for sacrifice. They also stressed the unreliability of the historical transmission (*tawātur*) which means that the corruption in these scriptures have occurred in the span of time between the prophets and later periods.²⁰²

Al-‘Āmirī, on the contrary, did not mention the issues of *tahrīf* and *tabdīl*, but rather states that all revealed books are honored, exalted and purified (Q. 80:13-14).

¹⁹⁹ Jewish Concepts: Angels & Angelology in [jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org):

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/angels-and-angelology-2> (accessed May 2, 2018). For more about the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism see for example: Barr, J. “The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity” *JAAR* 53 (1985), pp.201-235.

²⁰⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.131.

²⁰¹ For more about angels in Islam, Satan, and Hārūt and Mārūt see: Al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*, pp.134-135.

²⁰² For more see: Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, pp.52-54.

However, the Quran enjoys the highest rank among the revealed books.²⁰³ What makes Quran is the most excellent are three unique features that are incomparable to other books: a) *Ṣūrah al-khiṭāb* [the form of discourse], b) *Naẓm al-Alfāz* [the versifying of terms or expressions], and c) *Ta'liḥ al-ma'ānī* [the composition of meanings].²⁰⁴

The first, *Ṣūrah al-khiṭāb*, indicates that the Qur'ān's text, guidance, and warning is from a God who is sovereign above His servants. By contrast, all other scriptures are collected wisdom of sages and attributed part of such wisdom to God. The second, *Naẓm al-Alfāz*, refers to the uniqueness of the Qur'anic syntactic structure (*naẓm*) which is entirely different from all forms of human expressions. Further, none can add a verse on the Quran since its coherence is amazingly unique. Such systematic coherence is absent in the other scriptures. The third feature or *Ta'liḥ al-ma'ānī* that the meanings in its parts are similar to its whole message. So, reading some verses are in fact enough to cover not only the beliefs, rituals, morals, and punishments, but also literature and the history of previous nations. To al-ʿĀmirī, the other scriptures are lacking in unity and coherence and its meanings are divided throughout the book.²⁰⁵

The last element in *al-I'tiqādāt*'s section is *eschatology* and the concepts of *hereafter* in religions. There is a certain commonality among the different religious systems that "human beings will continue to exist in some form after the experience they term death."²⁰⁶ The importance of death, or hereafter in general, in all religious systems has led some Western scholars to base their theories of the origins of religion on the human response to death. For instance, the well-known anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-

²⁰³ Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p. 132; see also: Al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*, p. 135: "the most excellent is the Qur'an, then the Tawra, then the Injil, then the Zabur."

²⁰⁴ Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p. 132.

²⁰⁵ Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp. 132-133. It is worth mentioning here that the *Qur'anic naẓm* is linked with the issue of *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* [The Qur'ān's inimitability]. For more about the idea and its history see: Mir, Mustansir, *Coherence in the Quran* (Washington: American Trust Publications, 1986), pp. 10-24.

²⁰⁶ Smith, Jane I. "Afterlife: An Overview" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2005), p. 135.

1917) went too far to claim that death was the reason religion existed.²⁰⁷ This belief in afterlife cannot be separated from the understanding of the divine and judgment in hereafter.²⁰⁸ As al-‘Āmirī puts it: "There is no one who acknowledge the Creator who does not also acknowledge the eternal reward."²⁰⁹

In this respect, the conceptions of immortality and hereafter are different from one religion to another. Some are adherents of the doctrine of reincarnation and transmigration of souls.²¹⁰ Al-‘Āmirī explicitly associates this creed to the Stoics in his *Kitāb al-amad 'alā l-abad*.²¹¹ This group of philosophers, unlike al-‘Āmirī's claim, did not believe in transmigration but rather in a corporeal soul which either disintegrates or remains in a static state until the ekpyrōsis [Cosmic Conflagration].²¹² In fact, reincarnation, as a form of life after death in some physical and metaphysical manifestation, has been held in many religions. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 /1153), for example, mentions that reincarnation appears in all religious systems, but they are different on its techniques and aims.²¹³ However, the belief in reincarnation, al-Bīrūnī (442/1150) remarks, is the characteristic doctrine of the Hindu, just as the Shahada for Muslims and Trinity for Christians. Whoever does not believe in reincarnation is not obviously a Hindu.²¹⁴

Al-‘Āmirī mentions, without attributed them to a particular religion, another two groups as an example of the doctrines in hereafter. The first are those who believed that spirits turn into a condition of light as a reward and into the opposite as a punishment.²¹⁵ In *Kitāb al-amad*, al-‘Āmirī refers to the Peripatetic philosophers as a

²⁰⁷ Eberesole, Gary "Death" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (USA: Macmillan Reference. 2005), p.2237.

²⁰⁸ Smith, *Afterlife*, p.128.

²⁰⁹ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.160 (Arabic) 161 (English).

²¹⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.133.

²¹¹ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.160 (Arabic) 161 (English).

²¹² Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.317.

²¹³ Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-al-nihāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1992), p.714.

²¹⁴ Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq mā li-l-hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fī al-‘aql aw mardhūlah* (London, 1887), p.24.

²¹⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.134.

contrary group to the Stoics. According to him, the Peripatetics affirmed the reward and punishment of souls, but they denied the resurrection of bodies. They also believed that the blessed souls attain the upper world and the damned souls ensnared in the lower world. The angles accordingly are the upright souls in the upper world, while the devils are the rebellious souls in this world.²¹⁶ The second are and those who believes that the reward is the freeing of spirits from bodies. He might refer to the Manicheans. Muslim scholars have always criticized the errors in the Manicheans' religious practices. One issue was their spilt of body and spirit, or the disdain of material reality since it belongs to the realm of darkness and esteeming the spiritual reality because it is part of the light's realm.²¹⁷

The comparison of Islam with aforementioned doctrines in eschatology will prove, al-‘Āmirī argues, that Islam is the most virtuous amongst them and will demonstrate its superiority over the opponents' claims.²¹⁸ Accordingly, in what follows, he will summaries the mainstream of Islamic belief in death and hereafter that the angel of death takes spirits. Once the spirit leaves the body either they will have reward or punishment until they return to their bodies in the Final Raising and the eternal reward in the Garden or punishment in Fire.²¹⁹ Both reward and torment inevitably should be made in a way that its nature could be apprehended by giving a standard or a gauge for it of what human senses have experienced. Further, bodies there

"cannot be composed of corruptible humors and mixed contradictories, for if they were they would be subject to deterioration and disintegration, and the senses joined to [these bodies] will enjoy their pleasure in a spiritual way, refined from [all] heaviness and pollution."²²⁰

According to al-‘Āmirī, the aforementioned is the interpretation of the Qur’anic verse (56:61) "... and produce you in that [form] which you do not know." Obviously, al-‘Āmirī deals here as if the superiority of Islam is an evident matter. Moreover, what

²¹⁶ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.162 (Arabic) 163 (English).

²¹⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.134; Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, p.39.

²¹⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.133; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.166 (Arabic) 167 (English).

²¹⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.134-135; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.164 (Arabic) 165 (English).

²²⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.135; for english translation see: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.324.

he represents is a rationalized version or rational understanding of the Quranic verses and hadith on hereafter.²²¹

II. 'Ibādāt

The modes of worship are central focal points in the study of any religion. All major religions have different worship practices. Here again al-‘Āmirī highlights Islam as the more rational, mean, and well-balanced among religions in the acts of worship. For him, the moderation is what makes any religion deserves the long survival:

"That is the most deserving of lengthy survival among religions is the one that is found to be moderate between harshness and laxity, so to find for every diverse nature what may amend his condition in the Hereafter and this life and gather for him the goodness of both."²²²

Accordingly, what al-‘Āmirī will do is to present how the rituals of Islam are fuller and more balanced in practice than in other religions. It stands as a mean between extremes in terms of quantity and quality.²²³

In this respect, *al-'Ibādah al-naḥḥīyah* or *prayer* in Islam is more reasonable and moderate than in other religions. In terms of quantity, there is reasonable amount of prayer in Islam in which Muslims are expected to perform five daily prayers distributed throughout the day, in such a way that one can live his normal life without forget the right of duty of worshipping God. Other religions, according to al-‘Āmirī, are in lack of this appropriate organization. Some are having a little amount of prayers such as in Zoroastrianism, while others have a large number of prayers as in the Christianity.²²⁴ In terms of quality, Islamic prayer is also superior to other religions since it is practiced in more coherent styles that is appropriate to resembling homage to a true God. To prove that, al-‘Āmirī determines four forms of submission to kings: standing between their hands, bowing, prostration, and kneeling. Only Islamic prayer have the four forms of respecting kings plus the feature of entering and leaving the prayer (*takbīr* and *taslim*). The components of prayer in all other religions are missing

²²¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.135; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.325.

²²² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.137.

²²³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.137-138.

²²⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.139; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.123.

one form or another such as in some religions the style of prayer is consist of bowing without prostration or vice versa, and in other there is no opening or concluding portion. Islamic prayer is superior not only in terms of quantity and quality, but also has another two unique features: Adhān and Friday Prayer. There is no other religion, al-‘Āmirī states, has these two characteristics and its merits: the ritual call to prayer and the public worship in which enhancing the bonds of unity.²²⁵

Fasting, or *al-‘Ibādah al-badanīyah*, is also shown to be the most reasonable among the customs or practices of fasting of other religions. In terms of quantity, the period of fasting in Islam - one month and starts from sunrise to sunset - is neither that long to cause tedium, as in Christianity, nor shorten so there will be few days or no fasting as in Zoroastrianism.²²⁶ The fasting in Islam is also well balanced in terms of quality. It has specific period, that the ninth month of Islamic calendar, which is determined based on sighting the crescent. This is different, for instance, from the fasting practices of the Judaic tradition. The only one day of fasting in Judaism is Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, and later four additional days were added after the Babylonian exile with many individual voluntary fasts. To al-‘Āmirī, this Jewish way of fasting is neither organized nor have well-known specific times.²²⁷ Further, the fasting in Islam includes refraining from food, drink, and sexual intercourse. Other religions are again not well balanced in fasting, as in Christianity where one is bid to abstain from meat-eating.²²⁸ What al-‘Āmirī did not mention here is that fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, while in other religions, like Christianity, is not compulsory.

The third component of *Ibādāt* is *al-‘Ibādah al-mālīyah (zakāt)* or almsgiving (Literally, the purifier). All religions, except Christianity and Manicheism, are promoting charity in one form or another. According to al-‘Āmirī, the zakāt is absent in Christianity because it is based mainly on pure deification, and in Manicheism because it is a mixing of Christianity and Zoroastrianism.²²⁹ By contrast, the amount

²²⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.139-141.

²²⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.142.

²²⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.142; Rader, Rosemary "Fasting" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (USA: Macmillan Reference. 2005), p.2996.

²²⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.142-143.

²²⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.143. He did not elaborate on this issue, rather he refers to his other book "A Guide to the Rectification of Religious Belief." Unfortunately, we did not receive this book.

of charity in both Judaism and Zoroastrianism is high. For instance, the Jew gives ten percent of their plant and animal to charity.²³⁰ Only in Islam *zakāt* takes a more reasonable form. It is one of the pillars of Islam which comes after prayer. Moreover, *zakāt* is very-well justified in the Qur’anic discourse which touches the human nature. For instance, the order of it is linked with the purification (Q. 09:103), and it was described as goodly loan in which God will multiply it for the one who practice it (Q. 57:11). Such investigation, to al-‘Āmirī, is absent in all other religions.²³¹

The political worship, *al-‘Ibādah al-malakīyah* or *jihad*, is common in all religions for the preservation of society. It is very clear for al-‘Āmirī that the basis of the world cannot withstand its absence:

“Were people of religion not to undertake the defense of their religion by force [lit. by the sword] in order to put down their enemies, corruption would prevail on land and sea [cf. Q 30:41] and places of prayer [lit. monasteries, synagogues and mosques, cf. Q 22:40] would be torn down.

The foundation of the world, then, cannot support its neglect.”²³²

It is this what made al-‘Āmirī criticize the non-violence of both Christianity and Manicheism because it is against human nature. Take, for example, the famous saying of Jesus (Matthew 5:38-42): “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee. on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” This, in al-‘Āmirī’s understanding, is to be applied on limited personal level like between brothers and cannot be applied on the social or political level.²³³ Interestingly, Bertrand Russell (d. 1970) sarcastically advise Christians not to go and smite the Prime Minister on one cheek because they will find out that this text was intended in a figurative sense.²³⁴ Both al-‘Āmirī and Russell understood Jesus’ proverb metaphorically.

²³⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.144.

²³¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.144-145.

²³² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.146. For english see: Heck, Paul L. “Jihad Revisited,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 1 (March, 2004), pp.104-105 footnote n.12.

²³³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.146.

²³⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.146 and footnote n.5; Russell, Bertrand, *Why I am not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), p.11.

The last component of worships is *al-'Ibādah al-mushtarakah* that is *al-Hajj*. Al-‘Āmirī refers to the verse (22: 67) “For every religion We have appointed rites which they perform” as an evidence that the phenomenon of religious mobility or pilgrimage is in almost all religions and nations. Herein, he describes the rituals carried out by Muslims during the Hajj as unique religious rites that is superior to what in other religions such as Zoroastrian's fire temple.²³⁵

3.4 The Religious Tradition

Al-‘Āmirī continues to prove the superiority of Islam to all other religions in politics, societal relations, ethnicity, and scholarship. This section seems to be noteworthy because its organization and content constitute al-‘Āmirī's own contribution, and it is very well structured and presented in philosophical and systemic way. In what follows, I will present al-‘Āmirī's main ideas in the four sections as well as in the appendix attached to his work.

In the *political* sphere or “*the superiority of Islam with regard to Royal Authority*,” al-‘Āmirī firstly determines the types of leadership and the sorts of political leadership in general, then he goes further to compare religions according to this understanding. For him, there are two types of leadership: the true prophecy and the real royal authority:

“Learning and wisdom know no higher authority than prophecy;
power and dignity know no higher authority than royal authority.”

It is clear here that al-‘Āmirī accepts religion and politics as two and separate domains. But, for him too, both prophecy and rule are interdependent since no one can have both or one of them except by *mawhaba samāwiyya* [heavenly endowment].²³⁶

Both, prophecy and rule, do have as well a deep connect with *makārim al-akhlāq* [the noblest of moral attributes]. As for the rulers, they must strive for achieving the

²³⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.148-149. For more about Zoroastrian's fire temple: Boyd, James W. and Firoze M. Kotwal "Worship in a Zoroastrian fire temple" in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 26 (1983), pp.293-318. The other two components (Mu'āmalāt and Mazājir) are in his lost book "An Explication of the Causes of Religion."

²³⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.152; for English see: Rosenthal, F. "State and Religion according to Abul-Hasan al-'Amiri", *Islamic Quarterly*, 111 (1956), p.47.

nobility in their moral qualities, because they are an example for those below them. The ruler who does not strive hard to subdue his ignoble qualities cannot receive the praise he needs, nor he can control his subjects.²³⁷ The qualities of the ruler, as it mentioned in the first chapter, was a common topic among the scholars. The reference of this issue here is significant because, as it will be mentioned later, al-‘Āmirī will use it to disassemble the relation between the corruption of rulers and Islam as a religion. The same applies to all religions. There is no religion can ever be judged as perfect unless it includes *makārim al-akhlāq*, so that the believer can earn the praise in this world and the reward the hereafter. In this regard, al-‘Āmirī specifies the relation between religion and politics as follows:

“the relationship of religion to royal authority is like that of the foundation to the building erected upon it, and the relationship of the rule to religion is like that of the person who undertakes to fulfil the basic obligations of a covenant to the basic obligations themselves.”²³⁸

The moral essence of royal authority, then, and the ethical message of religion is what gives religion its important role in the society.²³⁹ It is as if al-‘Āmirī wanted to say that the interlinked relationship between religion and royal authority is the main cause for societies prosper and the welfare of this world. This was a common theme amongst many scholars. Al-Bīrūnī, for example, affirms that the perfect harmony of society happens when the royal authority rests in some degree on religion, since their union represents the highest development of human society that all men can possibly desire.²⁴⁰

In each domain, human cannot achieve the highest possible praise unless there is assistance of external factors, or in Khaldun terms: unless there is *‘Asabiyya*. For al-‘Āmirī, money and friends are two essential agencies to ensure the effective control over society. Without the sufficient financial resources and companions, one cannot have influence over any society. They are the key to achieve power. With this in mind,

²³⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.152-153; for English see: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.47.

²³⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.152-153; for English see: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.47-48.

²³⁹ For more see: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.44.

²⁴⁰ Al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India*, trans. Edward C. Sachau, vol.1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1910), p.99

any religion that forbid acquiring wealth or encouraging them to shun human society are not worthy of being powerful.²⁴¹ Even if he did not mention which religions exactly, it is obvious that al-‘Āmirī meant Christianity.

Once the aforementioned three reasons - heavenly endowment, financial resources and companions - is accumulated, then the political leadership is the normal result. For that, al-‘Āmirī turns the discourse into the types of political leadership, that is for him is divided into two kinds with two different purposes and entails two different results:

“The one kind of political leadership is the imamate; its purpose is the acquisition of personal merit, and its result is the attainment of lasting happiness. The other kind of political leadership is *al-taghallub* [tyranny]; its purpose is the enslavement of mankind, and its result damnation and servitude.”²⁴²

What makes the difference between both types of rule is in essence ethical. Like any other instrument, the rule is neither good nor bad by itself, but rather it is either beneficial or harmful based essentially on the purpose. The good use of power of politics can produce beneficial results and thus could be described as an imamate. Using it in wrong way, it will lead to tyranny.²⁴³ This would tend to increase the importance of religion's moral guidance for both rulers and subjects, in order to preserve the social unity and harmony. This linking between the good uses of power and imamate, or the idea of Sultan as Deputy was firstly hinted by al-‘Āmirī. Later in Sunni thought, this idea will be developed so that the ruler can perform more legal and religious functions as Deputy.²⁴⁴

It is in this context that al-‘Āmirī presents the superiority of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and Islam to all other religions. Only Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is the one who combines both prophecy and kingship as an example for Muslims to follow. Yet, the Prophet's power -or in particular: the prophet's uses of sword- should be considered

²⁴¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.153; Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.44; 48.

²⁴² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.154; for English see: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.48.

²⁴³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.154-155; for English see: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.44;49.

²⁴⁴ Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*, p.69. This will be very clear later in the works of al-Māwardī.

an imamate or tyranny?²⁴⁵ This issue was particularly sensitive especially in the polemics with non-Muslims, therefore al-‘Āmirī asked himself the question. In order to give an answer, he begins by classifying the armed actions into three types: Jihad, *al-Fitnah* [civil strife or rebellion], and *al-Taṣa‘luk* [brigandage]. The first, jihad, is that which governors and leaders undertake to defend religion and preserve the social order. *Fitnah*, on the contrary, refers to the commotions and fights that happens among different nations as a result of tumult and fighting due to local or ethnic chauvinism or prejudice. *Taṣa‘luk* as well is a warlike activity aims to plunder possessions and pillage property.²⁴⁶ At this point, al-‘Āmirī uses his philosophical skills to rationalize jihad through categorizing the three types according to the tripartite division of the soul. It is not a surprise then that jihad is the result of the rational faculty that makes it praiseworthy by all intelligent. The other two types, *al-Fitnah* and *al-Taṣa‘luk*, result from the irascible and appetitive faculties, respectively, and both are considered blameworthy in the eyes of the intelligent. Once again, like the differentiate between imamate and tyranny is based on the outcome of each, the proper end of the armed struggle is what decides the worth of action.²⁴⁷ Now, by following the Prophet's war activities one can find that his ultimate aim was not for the sake of local or ethnic prejudice neither for his own possession and property, but rather to bring people close to God and to obey Him instead of obeying their worldly masters. When the kind words did not work out, it was a necessity to use power to bring people back to the obedience of their Creator, as an experienced physician whose final goal is the patient health even if it requires the amputation of his limbs. The Muslims rulers, consequently, are supposed to follow the prophet's path, and to bring mercy to the world together with being a praiseworthy model for mankind.²⁴⁸

Al-‘Āmirī goes further by affirming people's need for *al-wāzi‘* [the restraining influence], and that "the restraining influence exercised by the ruler extends more

²⁴⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.155; Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.45; 49.

²⁴⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.156; for English see: Heck, *Jihad Revisited*, p.105; Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.49.

²⁴⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, p.156; for English see: Heck, *Jihad Revisited*, p.105; Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.49.

²⁴⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I‘lām*, pp.157-158; for English see: Heck, *Jihad Revisited*, p.105; Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.49-51.

widely than that of the Quran."²⁴⁹ Based on this, he argues that the political precepts of Islam are more reasonable and appropriate for human condition than in other religions. Judaism, for al-‘Āmirī, is based upon the pure and simple superiority, while Christianity is based upon the pure and simple humility. The Zoroastrians' Avesta that contains ethical commandments and precepts is very advanced, but still cannot be compared to the Quran. Why? Because the Persian rulers considered human nobility inseparably connected from family origins. Al-‘Āmirī claims that if Zoroastrianism insisted on *makārim al-akhlāq* as did Islam, the Persian rulers would have dared to oppose its advice. They would have linked nobility with rational soul and not to physical descent.²⁵⁰ Such argument contains it is Achilles' heel because the same could be said about Muslim rulers who do not follow the Prophet's path. If, as al-‘Āmirī states, Muslim community cannot be blamed for any corruption that might affect the royal authority,²⁵¹ then what prevents the application of this norm on other religions?

Regardless of this point, what al-‘Āmirī attempts to prove is that the main affairs of human life, including politics, is carefully mentioned in the Quran, which make Islam superior to other religions:

“the virtues of humanity can achieve its full flowering only where there is mixture of religious and worldly affairs, and by a combination of other-worldly and mundane causes. All these [elements] are contained neatly arranged in the religion of Islam which takes all the different aspects into consideration.”²⁵²

This opinion stems from the defense of religion as an essential element of human nature and moral guide for the preservation of the social order.²⁵³ It is also based on the worldview of Islam which encompass both *al-dunyā* [this world] and *al-ākhirah* [the hereafter], in which the worldly matters must be related in inseparable way to the

²⁴⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.158. For English: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.51. *La abd li nās min wāz'ah* is a very famous quotation backing to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.110/728). It has been mentioned in several books. See for example: Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb ta'wīl mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1908), p.13. The second quotation is attributed to the caliph Uthmān.

²⁵⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.159-160. For English: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, pp.51-52.

²⁵¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.158.

²⁵² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.159. For English: Rosenthal, *State and Religion*, p.51.

²⁵³ Heck, *Jihad Revisited*, p.106.

hereafter aspects, and in which the hereafter has the ultimate significance. The *dunyā* in this sense is the preparation of *al-ākhirah*. The worldview of Islam, then, does not admit the dichotomy of the sacred and profane as the in the modern Western scholarship of religion.²⁵⁴

The social dimension is the second component of comparison between religions in this section. Here al-‘Āmirī turns the discussion to the societal relations or what he calls “the superiority of Islam with regard to the various classes of subjects,” with the same aim (to present the excellence of Islam over all other religion) in view. For him, every society in each age is divided into three kinds of class systems: noble and base, powerful and powerless or weak, and supporters and enemies.²⁵⁵ As for the first category, both *al-Sharīf* or the noble and *al-waḍī* or the inferior are from '*asma*' al-'*idafa* [literally means: names of the addition], which means that every nobleman is inferior in addition to who is above him and vice versa. The reverence and dignity in Islam, unlike other religions, are relative consideration insofar one borne greater responsibilities.²⁵⁶

Strengths and weaknesses is another layer in categorizing classes. Both the strong or powerful and weak or powerless are carefully discussed with greater coverage in Islam, al-‘Āmirī claims, more than in other religions. The discourse for the powerful is to encourage them to use their power for acquiring the astonishing feats and tend to be more behaviorally oriented.²⁵⁷ But for weakness, one has to determine the main reason for weakness and to examine how the religions dealt with it. According to al-‘Āmirī, there are five types of weakness: 1) the weakness of synthesis or women: Islam's leniency towards women is more advanced level than others religious systems. 2) The weakness in 'age' or orphans: Islam offered them a unique care to ensure their basic needs and rights.²⁵⁸ 3) The weakness in livelihood income or the poor: so, Islam

²⁵⁴ Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), p.1.

²⁵⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.163.

²⁵⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.165.

²⁵⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.163-164.

²⁵⁸ Interestingly enough that al-‘Āmirī did not mention children in one of the aforementioned categories

insisted on the rights, helping, and well treatment of the poor. 4) The weakness of slave: the Quran motivates Muslims to emancipate the slaves. 5) The weakness of emigration: the rights of *Ibnus Sabeel* are well mentioned in Quran.²⁵⁹ Al-‘Āmirī here did not compare the same topics in other religions. Rather he presented it as if the excellence of Islam is well-known issue. The topics are not unique in themselves, but the good organization of these topics and using it in comparing between religions is unique and, one can argue, unprecedented.

The third kind of classes is the supporters and the enemies. As for the supporters, there three types of *al-wilāyah*: genealogical, contractual alliance, and religious alliance. All these types are mentioned in the Quran than in other religious books.²⁶⁰ The enemies, by contrast, is more important for our purpose here, since al-‘Āmirī’s division of them is not political but rather religious. According to him, the enemies are three categories: the atheists, the polytheists, and *al-kitābī* [Scripturists or the People of the Book].²⁶¹ Each group has its own lesion or sickness preventing them from accepting the truth. The lesion of atheism lies in their open acceptance of pleasures and sensuous desires. As it mentioned in the first chapter, this is linked with the doctrine of *takāfu’ al-adilla*, in which they deny the moral and social guidance of religion.²⁶² The polytheists sickness lies in two main issues: the visualization of divinity that capture the intellect which entails polytheism, and in the authority of *Sadanat al Aṣnām* [the priests of idols] over the common people. Al-Bīrūnī too admits this in his investigation on the origin of idol worship. According to him, the popular intellect lens towards the sensible with an aversion to the abstract which is only comprehended by few educated men. Since the common mind is only acquiesce in pictorial representations, many of religious communities have such imagery in their books and houses of worship, such as the Jews and Christians and, more than all, the Manicheans.²⁶³ The sickness of the people of the Book, in contrast, lies in the forgery of their scriptures. One main argument of Muslims scholars against Judaism and Christianity is the forgery and

²⁵⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.164.

²⁶⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.166.

²⁶¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.166.

²⁶² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.166; See also the first chapter pp. **15-16**.

²⁶³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.166 and footnote n.1; Al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India*, vol.1, p.111.

corruption of their texts. This criticism was twofold: a) The historical forgery which was a result of the wrong transmission of the preaching and doctrine of both Moses and Christ; b) the literary forgery in which certain books were added to the *Tawrāt* such as the books of prophets and in which Christians canonized a text that is different from the original text brought by Christ.²⁶⁴ Those according to al-‘Āmirī are the main three enemies of Islam. The other religions, namely Zoroastrianism and dualism, are in some respects are like the polytheists while in other issues are like the People of the Book.²⁶⁵

To al-‘Āmirī, it is much easier to deal with the People of the Book rather than atheists and polytheists. The reason behind this is that there is a *muqaddimah* or former between them and Islam. Both atheists and polytheists, by contrast, are lacking this common ground, and, more importantly, the beliefs of each group are deeply connected with the sensuous world. Al-‘Āmirī’s observation [the connection between atheism or polytheism and senses] lead him to an important insight:

“...and for this reason, what resembles the authority of the true religion, when near eternal extinction, is shirk, and what resembles the authority for the religiously intellectual [when they adhere only to the intellect] is the atheist.”²⁶⁶

To put it differently, the weakening of the religion is accompanied with the public increase of idolatry aspects, and the greater the level of dependency on reason it will enviably lead towards atheism. This a unique and quite early observation that is still reverberate within the current discussions regarding religion today as in the claims of new atheists.

The third component is *ethnicity* or “*the superiority of Islam with regard to al-ajyāl [the people or generations].*” Adapting a traditional Persian schema of seven *keshvars* or countries, al-‘Āmirī divides the earth into six *umam* [people or nations]:

“The major nations inhabiting the extremes of the earth are limited in number to six: the Chinese, the Indians, the Blacks, the Berbers, the

²⁶⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.167; Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period: 650–1500*, pp. 49; 54.

²⁶⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.167. He did not give examples for that.

²⁶⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.167.

Greeks, and the Turks... these six dominions make up the population of the extremes of the inhabited earth, with the land of Iran and the Arabian Peninsula between them *in the middle*.²⁶⁷ (emphasis added).

By adding the Arabs and Persians in the central, he aimed to prove that the *Ummah* is in the heartlands of the world or midmost community as in the Quranic verse (Q 2:143): “And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people.”²⁶⁸ The superiority of Islam, then, to other religions is due the superiority of the central land to the peripheral lands. Moreover, the excellence of Islam is also due to the benefits brought by it to these two nations: Arabs and Persian. The peninsular Arabs inextricably intertwined with the dawah of Islam and having a kingdom after the stage of the tribes and the time of ignorance. The Persians suffered from the biohereditary notion of division of both the Sasanian kings and in Zoroastrianism teaching, which prevented many free people from achieving their goals and fulfil their rational capacities. Islam was the saviour of Persians from this social system and its crisis.²⁶⁹

The fourth and last component is *scholarship* or “*the superiority of Islam with regard to knowledge*.” Two main points al-‘Āmirī has in his discussion of this topic: the importance of disputation and the capacity of Islam to absorb all other knowledge. As for disputation, the advancement of religion may be executed by 'hand' or warfare and 'tongue' or literary abilities. The need for the physical powers comes only when the words cannot achieve the guidance for people because the tyrants.²⁷⁰ The need for knowledge is, hence, superior to using force or power. Al-‘Āmirī, therefore, insists on the significance of training in *al-munāẓara* [the art of disputation and argument], and the importance of using it with oneself as with others. One should know the counter

²⁶⁷ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.66 (Arabic) 67 (English); Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.171.

²⁶⁸ Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.199. In fact, the inclusion of Arabs in the center was a common theme in the historical and geographical writings.

²⁶⁹ For more see: Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.172-177; Ashraf, A. and Ali Banuazizi, “Class System: Classes in Medieval Islamic Persia” in *iranicaonline.org*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/class-system-iv> (accessed May 30, 2018).

²⁷⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.179.

arguments against his and explore the different forms of dialectics with examining the validity of his creed as well as the other's:

“... the intelligent will not convince him to observe the proper meanings of the thing unless he probes what are the dissent meanings of it.”²⁷¹

By doing so, one can avoid the decorative speech and being subject to attempts at religio-intellectual falsification.²⁷²

As for the religion and knowledge, Islam is more inclusive in knowledge than other religions. Strangely, al-‘Āmirī argues that Judaism is limited to Hebrew bible while Christianity revolves around church ecumenical councils. The same applies on Zoroastrian's Avesta where is the process of *istinbāt* [deduction] is absent, and on Manicheanism where their books cannot stand in front of the critique of Muslim theologians.²⁷³ Only Islam have accumulated higher levels of knowledge in various sciences than other religions. For al-‘Āmirī, religious knowledge is not only superior to philosophical knowledge, but also the Islamic religious sciences are higher than those in other religions. This breadth and effectiveness has allowed the Muslim scholars to accept the wisdom of other nations:

“...and then we find that the sages from the people of Islam were blessed that, by what was well affected by Allah, to transmit the books attributed to the famous among the philosophers of Rome [Byzantine], Persia, India, and Greece, and inquired into the profound wisdom of their meaning, and resolved the loci of specious arguments in them, and performed exposition and propagation of them...”²⁷⁴

If other religions have the characteristics of Islam, they would have done the same. A counter question may be asked: why then most of translators in Islam are Christians or non-Muslims? The question was crucial for the running debates with both non-

²⁷¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.183.

²⁷² Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.180. For more about *Ādāb Al-Baḥṭh Wa-al-Munāzara* see for example: Belhaj, Abdessamad. “Ādāb Al-Baḥṭh Wa-al-Munāzara: The Neglected Art of Disputation in Later Medieval Islam,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 26.2 (2016) pp. 291–307

²⁷³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.180-181.

²⁷⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.182. Notice also the mentioning here to the critical dealing with the received wisdom of other nations including Greek philosophy.

Muslims and the opponents of philosophy. However, this question for al-‘Āmirī is irrelevant since the translators did that on the behalf of Islam and within its domination or influence.²⁷⁵

The previous question leads al-‘Āmirī to conclude with the commonly *shubuhāt* [specious arguments] against Islam by its enemies. He selected four main specious arguments in which all other ambiguities return to them. The first is how can Islam be the religion of mercy when it used the sword for spreading the faith? Here al-‘Āmirī repeats what he discussed above under the section of religion and politics, that is the action's proper end is the norm to decide its worthy. Thus, the main purpose of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the common good and not for a personal aim or enjoyment.²⁷⁶

The second *shubhah* is “how could any truth be obtained in a religion that is so fractiously divided?” Al-‘Āmirī's answer is twofold. The first part of the answer is the intellectual that is human beings are in essence imperfect, and, therefore, human can be in error. The second part is the psychosocial that many were angry and jealous because the success of Islam and its intellectual virtuosity. Hence, the pseudo-intellectuals sow the doubts about religion in order to undermine the role of Islam and attack it.²⁷⁷ But are the internal conflicts general phenomena in all religions or limited only to Islam? For al-‘Āmirī, the creedal diversity is a common feature that run through all the religions. The causes for it are four main reasons: a) one's impression of his creativity and intelligence, so he calls for his ideas as if it the true religion; b) the human tendency to innovate and to prefer witty and charming falsehood statements over the true speech; c) the persons whose main intention is the intransigence of true ideas and doctrines as it can be seen in common people; and d) the persons whose intention is to false and weaken the foundation of religion for political or ethnic bias and for the compulsion of *khalā'a* [profligacy] or the inclination to licentious

²⁷⁵ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.183; Rosental, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, p.6.

²⁷⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.188-191; Heck, *Jihad Revisited*, pp.105-106.

²⁷⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.192-193; Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.123; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.101.

behaviour.²⁷⁸ All these four groups uses three different types of stratagems to achieve their goals. The first is through acknowledge something basic then gradually leading the victim away from the foundations of his religion to the trickster's creed. The second is through addressing the doctrine in “elegant phrases, pretty words, elaborate descriptions, a fine persuasive style, cleverly devised points, and good delivery.” Exactly like a merchant who displays his fraudulent goods in good words to someone who has no understanding of them. The third strategy is through attributing the promulgating *madhhab* [doctrine] to very eminent man, such as a sage or one of the intellectuals of his time. So, when the victim listens, accepts it for himself too, concluding that this famous man with his excellent intellect would not say that if it is not true. Al-‘Āmirī concludes that all these four causes and the three different types of stratagems are common to all religious traditions. No one can blame Islam for it.²⁷⁹

The third *shubhah* is that how can all competing sects use the Quran to support their arguments? This means that the Quran in itself is not sufficient or persuasive. To provide an answer, al-‘Āmirī classifies the purpose of versified speech into three branches: a) to be expressed in symbolic form without disclosure, b) to be based on brevity, and c) to be subtle or meticulous in its meaning or requires a former background. All these branches are in Quran: a) the verses of al-ghayb [the Unseen] as the representative of the first branch, b) the verses of the rules and laws for the second branch, and c) the verses of creed and '*Aqidah* as for the last type.²⁸⁰ It is not a surprise then to find different understanding of the text, but still the Quran, as mentioned above, is superior to other books in its coherence, *balāghah* [correct style], and persuasion.²⁸¹

The fourth and last *shubhah* is regarding the mentioning of prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in the previous Books. Before we proceed to sum up al-‘Āmirī's argument, it

²⁷⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.193-194; For partial English translation see: Heck, *The Crisis of Knowledge*, p.123; Heck, *Skepticism*, p.101; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p.186.

²⁷⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.194-195; For English translation see: Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp.186-187.

²⁸⁰ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.198.

²⁸¹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.199-200. Al-‘Āmirī refers to his book *Al-Irshād li-taṣhīḥ al-i'tiqād* for more about the rules of Tafsīr. We did not receive the book though.

is worth mentioning that most of the texts on *al-Bishārah*, that had been written during the ninth and tenth centuries, did not survive till our time. Al-‘Āmirī’s text in *I’lām* is by far the only contribution that we receive from the fourth-tenth century.²⁸² In this text, he refutes the opponent’s claim that there is no mention of the prophet of Islam in the Bible. According to the verse Q. 7:157, prophet Muhammad is mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, but the reader of these books, some argue, cannot find the name of Prophet. The question then where is *al-Bishārah*? To Al-‘Āmirī, the Bible prophesy the coming of prophet in symbolic form and it cannot be obvious, but it appears for the intelligent and mujtahid. The Jewish rabbis and Christian monks or priests denied it mainly in order to save their religious authorities.²⁸³ Al-‘Āmirī thus will present a number of verses in the Bible then he will use an analytic approach to analyze them. Accordingly, the verses are: Deuteronomy 18:15;18-19 and 33:2 in the Torah, and John 14:26 in the Gospel. One can notice here the differences of today’s version of Bible and that is of al-‘Āmirī’s era. In John 14:26, for instance, he used the word Paracletus instead of Advocate which is commonly used today.²⁸⁴

Al-‘Āmirī argues that the comprehensive analysis of the Torah’s verses can display the prophesy of prophet. According to him, there are four main descriptions. The first is that the prophet will be among the brethren of Jews, and Arabs are the brothers of Jewish people. The second is that the prophet will be like Moses (pbuh), and what Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) did with Arabs are nearly the same of Moses with Jews. Even Quraysh, al-‘Āmirī asserts, described Islam as a renewed Judaism. The third description is that God will punish those who will not follow him.²⁸⁵ This happened with only the prophets Moses and Muhammed. The fourth and last description is the

²⁸² One could refer to ‘Alī ibn Sahl Rabban al- Ṭabarī (d.247/861?) who represent a quiet early attempt to gather the mentions of the prophet in Torah and Bible. The period between him and al-‘Āmirī is still vague since we just know the titles of the books, but we know not what it contained. For more see: Sharafī, ‘Abd al-Majīd, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-radd ‘alā al-naṣārā ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-rābi’/ al-‘āshir* (Tunisia, 1986), pp.504-505.

²⁸³ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, p.202.

²⁸⁴ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I’lām*, pp.202-203, footnote n.3.

²⁸⁵ Al-‘Āmirī’s quotation of Deuteronomy 18-19 says: "... those who will not listen to this prophet God shall punish them." In the modern text it is a bit different: "... and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

prophet will raise from the Mount of Paran, and Paran, that is al hijaz, is the place where Ismail lived and became an archer (Genesis 21:21). Al-‘Āmirī concludes that all these four descriptions are obviously for Prophet Muhammed.²⁸⁶

As for the Gospel's verse or John 14:26, it contains two main descriptions. The first is the prophet is described as a spirit: “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name.” Using his philosophical background, Al-‘Āmirī classifies the souls into: rational in which one can be intelligent and holy souls that is limited to the prophets particularly Christ. In the Quran, Christ is described as “the Word of God” and God strengthened him with the holy spirit. Only prophet Muhammed amongst the prophets who have similar description in Quran, such as Q. 42:52 and 16:102, as Christ. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit whom father will send is prophet Muhammed.²⁸⁷ The second description is that the prophet “will teach you all things.” Al-‘Āmirī here argues that prophet Muhammed appeared in a time that Christians was really in need for one who can teach them the true creed and the rules of God. The four Gospels, he continues, were merely the historical reports of the life of Christ, his prayers, and his praising of God. Much the same with regard to Acts of Peter, but with the life of the companions of Christ. The Pauline epistles comes after the previous books, and it contains what is apparent contraventions in contrary to what is in the Gospel.²⁸⁸

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how comparison has been used by al-‘Āmirī as a tool to select among religions. It presented his believe that independent reasoning is the proper way to reach truth. Religions are to be compared according to eight basic elements: their beliefs, rituals, morals, punishments, political system, social structure, civilization, and cultural achievements. These components are divided into the essence of religion (the first four elements) and the religious tradition (the other four elements). The essence of religion contains, as it mentioned in the chapter, twenty pillars. According to al-‘Āmirī, the comparison would apply on the major world religions, or

²⁸⁶ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.204-205.

²⁸⁷ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.206-207.

²⁸⁸ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, pp.207-208. Interestingly, al-‘Āmirī, unlike many modern Muslim scholars, did not mention the name of Paracletus as an evidence of prophet Muhammed.

Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Sabians, Zoroastrianism, and polytheism. It will follow be examining of each point in all religions on a hierarchical order from the most the belief in God to the apostasy, then it will move to the components of traditions.

To ensure the accuracy of the comparison, the scholars of religions should take into consideration two preconditions: A) the comparison is undertaken between homogeneous forms or issues, and b) it should be based on the widely accepted doctrine among the adherents of each religion. Based on this, al-‘Āmirī continued his point-by-point comparison between the six religions based on one main rule: the moderation is what makes any religion deserves the long survival. Islam, then, is presented as the most moderate and rational among religions.



CONCLUSION

“Truth is accessible to its seekers and to those who want to speak it, but the souls prefer its predilection over reward.”²⁸⁹

Al-‘Āmirī

A relatively neglected aspect of research is the study of the Muslim non-purposiveness contribution or the scattered information on religions in disciplines other than *'ilm al-milal wa-al-niḥal*. Attempting to fill this gap, this study offers an analysis of al-‘Āmirī understanding of religious phenomenon and world religions. The main aim was to provide a holistic construct of the phenomenon of religion as reflected in al-‘Āmirī's thought. Unlike other studies on al-‘Āmirī, this study argues that al-‘Āmirī is consistent in his analysis of human nature and his comparison between religions.

His thoughts, I claim, runs as follows: religion is not only a logical necessity but also a part and parcel of the human condition. Human intellect can reach a conclusion or some kind of judgment concerning abstract general ideas and their competing alternatives. However, reason alone is insufficient to provide the guidance that man needs in his daily life. Only religion can provide man with a realistic detailed program to perform in day-to-day activities. Adherence to these religious practices would allow the human soul to move beyond the worldly distractions and to attain truth behind his sense experience. Religion, then, is what makes the rational faculty of man works appropriately, and therefore man is religious by nature. Religious knowledge is likewise far superior to the rest, particularly philosophical sciences, insomuch as it is the source for good deeds. Yet, the vast diversity of religions is in essence competing in religious claims. There is, then, a necessity for an effective methodological tool to select the suitable religion for human nature. This method should focus on the common essence of all religions and be used as a tool to determine where to find the *ḥaqq* or truth. It also should be a quest to decide the moderate among these religious traditions. As a Muslim philosopher, al-‘Āmirī sees Islam from among the world religions to be the most moderate, logically consistent, and the appropriate religion for human nature.

²⁸⁹ Al-‘Āmirī, *Kitāb al-I'lām*, p.131.

The philosophical defense of al-‘Āmirī, as the first chapter has shown, emerged in a period of political fragmentation, social conflicts, intellectual and religious disputations. It was also a time of great doubt and skepticism when the claims of skeptics seemed to undermine the role of religion in personal and social fields. The conflicting truth claims led to the equivalence of evidences in which the role of religion and religious doctrines were often doubted. Al-‘Āmirī, as many other scholars, sees logic as an unbiased and neutral tool through which the evaluation of ideas, weighing competing opinions, and distinguishing between truth and untruth is made possible. No surprise, then, that he had been an active participant in many debates over the value of logic which took place during this era.

The era was also a time that fostered the interest in applying the philosophical approach in other disciplines such as history (al-Maqdisī) and Islamic studies (al-‘Āmirī), which was preceded by the rational discourse of religion against the skeptics and pseudo-philosophers who were seeking to undermine its core role. One distinct feature of this discourse is the profound connection between *ḥikma* and *sharia*, so that the outcome of pure reason should not contradict the demands of the true religion. The highest level of wisdom can as well be only obtained via religion, in which one cannot be a sage unless he masters the religious sciences. Moreover, the purpose of the rational soul is to train man in being the representative of God in lower world. Goods, like wisdom, are to help man fulfil and achieve this purpose. This to be achieved while taking into consideration the limitation of our intellectual capacities. The intellect exists to know the truth and to act in conformity with it. In other words, the main function of the intellect is to search for truth among the chaos of ideas, and the submission after it is found.

Another main feature of this rational discourse was the defense of the universality of religion against those who regarded religion, unlike the universality of philosophy, to be merely some legal customs and conventional norms. All religions, for al-‘Āmirī, have a universal essence, that is: beliefs, worships, morals, and punishments; and is manifested in political, social, cultural, and civilizational traditions. Additionally, man is religious by nature, since religion is what liberates the rational faculty of human from the wrong desires and, by doing so, it could work appropriately. True belief in

this sense is based mainly on the intellectual faculty rather the imaginative power of man. This means that religion is as universal as philosophy because it is part and parcel of human nature.

These ideas had been developed while the Muslim community suffered fragmentation due to its internal political disintegration and religious separatism. The political discussions centralized around the nature of rulership and the relationship between the ruler and his community due to the emergence of new political systems. Some people claimed that both the prophet and the ruler are divinely sent, but the prophet is more celebrated than the ruler who is more hidden. For al-‘Āmirī, there is a difference between the rulers who follow the prophetic model and the tyrants. An idea that he will use frequently to defend Islam in the issue of rulers' corruption. Furthermore, the community, for him, is not political but rather religious as its members are humans. The application of religious rules, then, is what bonds the community and the ruler.

In the religious realm, the identity of the Muslim or who belongs to the Muslim community was the central question. This ran parallel with the developments of different sects, such as the Ismā’īlī movement or al-Karrāmiya, and the development of *ilm al-firaq*. Therefore, several attempts were made to interpret and determine the seventy-three sects in the famous report of *Ḥadīth al-Iftirāq*. Unlike the theological interpretation of the *Ḥadīth*, al-‘Āmirī provided his unique philosophical explanation in which the seekers of virtue are considered to be the saved sect.

Religious and intellectual segregation had affected al-‘Āmirī, as discussed in the second chapter, to craft his integrative classification of knowledge. This classification is based on the intimate relation between knowledge and action, and on the complementarity between philosophical and religious sciences. The skeptical claims over knowledge posed a serious threat to faith and the Muslim community since knowledge is closely associated with action. Knowledge, for him as for many others, is not an aim in itself, but rather a way to render action in accordance with virtue.

It is in this context that he divided knowledge into *al-‘ulūm al-milliyya* [the religious sciences or more accurately: the science which belongs to the religious community], and *al-‘ulūm al-ḥikmiyya* [the philosophical sciences]. Both are two completing parts

which reflect the unification of religious and philosophical truths. Moreover, his holistic approach to the sciences meant that any science is useful, even the low-ranking sciences. But mastering all branches of sciences is beyond the natural capacity of any man. There are different characters of a human nature, so that some people feels drawn to specific science without being drawn to other branches of knowledges. The attraction in this case comes from the love for the selected science by personal choice, or by the supervisors' and parents' choices.

Contrary to those who preferred theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge, al-‘Āmirī argues that philosophy could provide man with the general abstract principles insomuch as the intellect is limit. The rational judgments are divided into three categories: necessary, permissible, and impossible. The universal character of intellect or the general abstract principles falls into the first and the third categories: the necessary and impossible. The other details that govern daily life are in the second category or the permissible, in which the intellect can imagine solutions in different ways. Therefore, it needs an authority which permits it to accept or reject options. This authority, for al-‘Āmirī, is divine revelation. Only religious knowledge that is based on revelation could provide man with a detailed program of moral action.

The superiority of religious science, then, lies in its special and different purpose and revelation's immutability from error. Indeed, philosophical knowledge is in harmony with religion, and one would profit greatly from its benefits: to know the true reality of things, to reflect on the Creator's cosmos, and to be well-versed in argumentation. Still, all these benefits are preferred or *mafdūl*. On the contrary, the benefits of religious knowledge are excellent or *fāḍil* due to three main reasons: the goal of these sciences is to serve God which lead to the eternal happiness, it serves *al-maṣlahah al-kullīyah* while other sciences are for the benefit of private or partial interests, and religious science is the basis of other science since its rooted in divine revelation which is beyond doubts. This lead al-‘Āmirī to consider, unlike other philosophers, every prophet to be a philosopher but not every philosopher is a prophet.

So, if man is religious by nature and religious knowledge is superior to all other sciences, then which religion is the most suitable for man? Religious diversity could cause confusion and lead to the denial of all religions, as the adherents of equivalence

of proofs have claimed. Despite his acceptance of religious diversity, al-‘Āmirī believed, as the third chapter has shown, that only one of the available religions is moderate, rational, and suitable for man. This stems from his belief that man can reach decisive and rational conclusions about religious truth. The comparison, as a methodological tool, between religions could lead man to select the truth among the various and contrary creeds. It will also lead man to review and revise his prior accepted decisions. Using Islam as the standard, al-‘Āmirī crafted his systematic comparison between world religions which include Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Ṣābianism, and pagan idol worship. However, one could say that the focus of the comparison was mainly in three religions: Christianity, Judaism, and to a little degree Zoroastrianism.

The structure of the comparison is based on what al-‘Āmirī considered to be common among all religions. Drawing primarily on the division between *al-uṣūl* and *al-furū‘* in religious issues, this commonality is divided into essence and tradition. The essence is divided into beliefs, worships, morals, punishments, and each pillar of these is divided into -as it mentioned- another five sub-pillars. All of these twenty pillars are manifested in political, social, ethnically, and scholarly traditions. Based on idea of *al-fāḍil* and *al-maḥḍūl*, al-‘Āmirī prioritizes the essence of religion over the traditions, and the section of beliefs within the essence over the other sections. Obviously, such structure demonstrates an Islamic understanding of religion in which all other religions are examined accordingly. The comparison then commences by examining the twenty points starting from the most important (belief in God) to the apostasy in all religions. Once this is done, the four sections of tradition could be compared with each other. Instead of presenting the main topics of point-by-point comparison again, it will be enough to say that al-‘Āmirī’s main concern with the comparison was to prove that the perfect religion for man is the mean among them. An idea that can be considered as the application of *Wasatīyat al-Islām* and the Aristotelian idea of virtue as a mean between two vices of excess and deficiency.

The comparison, as a methodological tool, could suppresses the significant differences between religions or rely on an inaccurate representation. To avoid potential pitfalls, al-‘Āmirī sets two preconditions to ensure the accuracy of the comparison. The first is that the comparison must be between homogeneous forms or issues that is one cannot

compare in principle in one religion with subsidiary issue in other religion. The second, it should be based on the widely accepted doctrine among the adherents of each religion, so one does not consider a minor sect's understanding as a representative of the whole faith. Both preconditions indicate the necessity for the profound understanding of the compared religions, and the need for a 'phenomenological' approach for better understanding of religion before comparing them.

It could be stated that al-‘Āmirī’s approach in the study of religions is at once familiar and strange. The topics in itself are not unique, but the well-organized topics and its application in comparing religions is unique and, one can argue, unprecedented. That is to say, if al-Shahrastānī counted al-‘Āmirī as a great philosopher alongside with al-Fārābī and Ibn Sina,²⁹⁰ this thesis argues that he should be counted as well as a great scholar of religions alongside with al-Shahrastānī, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Ḥazm.

At this point, one can ask: what are the primary lessons for our age? I believe that our circumstances are very similar to those in the tenth century. Political fragmentation, societal disintegration, ideological and doctrinal conflicts, and the undermining of the role of religion were the main characteristics of that era, as it is today. Such a moment of ambiguity posed serious threats to the role of religion and to religious communities. No surprise, then, that such an environment has developed a very similar rational-spiritual discourse of religion such as this of al-‘Āmirī and that of Taha Abdurrahman (whom I consider the al-‘Āmirī of our day).²⁹¹ This brings us to the liveness and richness of the Muslim heritage in the different fields. I believe that it is a requirement for any Muslim scholar who seeks to be specialist in humanities or social sciences to be well-grounded in religious sciences and to have a deep and broad grounding within the traditional sources. This is what we need to make a unique contribution to our present age. This thesis has tried to connect al-‘Āmirī with some modern scholars, but, I admit, it did so in very limited manner, and which need further study. In this context, one could argue that the rich Muslim heritage in the study of religions, either in *ilm al-milal wa-al-niḥal* or in the scattered information on religions in other disciplines, could

²⁹⁰ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-al-niḥal*, p.522.

²⁹¹ One professor once said that al-‘Āmirī is Taha Abdurrahman of his era. But I think it should be rephrased as: Taha Abdurrahman is al-‘Āmirī of our time, due to time precedence.

enhance our intellectual abilities to critically interact with the science of religion in Western and non-Western scholarship, and may lead to the establishment of a new *ilm al-milal wa-al-niḥal*, or at least its renewal. Another significant issue to conclude with is the need for a new classification(s) of science. There is a necessity to study the attained level of the available classifications in Islamic civilization, and to search when and why it declined. Accordingly, attempts should be made to craft a classification for Muslims today, as a means to organize the Muslim mind. This is vital to prioritize the cultural necessities concerning knowledge.²⁹²



²⁹² Look for instance to the ongoing translation movement in Arabic world. The Translators are really fascinating by the western scholarship in Islamic studies even if it detected mainly to the western reader. For example, a normal book like God and logic in Islamic civilization by J. Walbridge has been translated into Arabic, while some other significant works in Islamic studies, i.e. Yeni İlm-i Kelam by İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, did not translated into Arabic till now.

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Publications

- ***Rise of the Mamluks***, in *Great Events in Religion, An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History*, edit by Florin Curta and Andrew Holt (ABC-CLIO, October 2016).
- ***Şêx Adî and the establishment of Yazidism***, in *Great Events in Religion, An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History*, edit by Florin Curta and Andrew Holt (ABC-CLIO, October 2016).
- Review of ***Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*** by A. I. Dawisha, in *Insight Turkey* (Fall, 2017).