INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

The Epistemic, the Hermeneutic, the Ethic, and the Aesthetic in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Issue 27: NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

ANGUS SLATER

RSiS S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY SINGAPORE

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Occasional Papers of The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies Programme

The Epistemic, the Hermeneutic, the Ethic, and the Aesthetic in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Angus Slater

ISSN: 2661345X

Editors:
Professor Abdullah Saeed, *University of Melbourne, Australia, and Advisor to the SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Dr Paul Hedges, *SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

Editorial Assistants:
Nursheila Muez, *SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Luca Farrow, *SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

Advisory Board:
Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, *SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Ambassador Barry Desker, *RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Rt Rev Dr John Chew, Emeritus, *Trinity Theological College, Singapore*
Professor Lily Kong, *Singapore Management University, Singapore*
Professor Joseph Chinyong Liow, *College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (COHASS), and RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Professor Julius Lipner, Emeritus, *University of Cambridge, UK*

Editorial Board:
Dr Mohamed Ali, *SRP Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*
Professor Scott Appleby, *Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame, USA*
Professor Azyumardi Azra, *Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia*
Dr Lang Chen, *Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong*
Professor Catherine Cornille, *Boston College, USA*
Professor Gavin D'Costa, *Bristol University, UK*
Professor Farid Esack, *University of Johannesburg, South Africa*
Dr Julianne Funk, *University of Zurich, Switzerland*
Dr Marion Grau, *Norwegian School of Theology, Norway*
Dr Anne Hege Grung, *University of Oslo, Norway*
Dr Anna Halafoff, *Deakin University, Australia*
Professor Elizabeth Harris, *University of Birmingham, UK*
Dr Heidi Hadsell, *Hartford Seminary, USA*
Professor Jeanine Hill Fletcher, *Fordham University, USA*
Professor Manuela Kalsky, *Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands*
Professor Paul Knitter, Emeritus, *Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University, USA*
Professor Lai Pan-Chiu, *Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*
Professor Marianne Moyaert, *Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands*
Professor Ebrahim Moosa, *Kroc Institute, Notre Dame University, USA*
Professor Vali Nasr, *Johns Hopkins University, USA*
Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, *Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), Singapore*
Dr Jennifer Howe Peace, *USA*
Professor Michelle Voss Roberts, *University of Toronto, Canada*
Dr Dicky Sofjan, *Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

Abstract

This article addresses contemporary practical and comparative theological forms of interreligious dialogue, aiming to highlight the difficulties of maintaining distinctions in this way. It does this specifically in the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue where, although great strides have been made in the academic study, there are broader political and social considerations which often play a role in the formation of well-meaning, but shallow, forms of interreligious consideration. The difficulty of parsing aspects of practice from other considerations is considered here in the context of the use of aesthetics within ethical consideration in both religious traditions – an area that has been repeatedly identified as a site of potential dialogical interaction. However, in doing so, the use of beauty as an ethical marker involves and includes significant hermeneutic, epistemic, and ethical considerations stemming from the specificity and particularity of both the Christian and Islamic traditions.

The argument considers the inter-connections of hermeneutics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics in the Christian and Islamic traditions in order to outline the extent to which each of these considerations and their inter-connection influence and structure aspects of ethical reflection. Without an awareness of both the content of these considerations and their function within the overall structure of each tradition, our ability to coherently understand points of connection and comparison between them are compromised.

Introduction

Current forms of Christian-Muslim interaction have increasingly come to occupy a central place in the contemporary West, especially those interactions framed as deliberately "dialogical" in nature. Each day, it seems, another formation or practice of inter-tradition dialogue is set up with the laudatory aims of social cohesion, integration, and the promotion of interreligious understanding. It is impossible to have missed this flowering of attention to the area of Christian-Muslim dialogue in recent years, with prominent academic work being done, notable social programmes being established, and the furtherance of inter-community understanding being developed. This has occurred from the grass-roots level, at the level of religious institutions themselves, and through representatives and leaders within each of these traditions. Beyond this general discourse, we have also seen a significant uptick in the academic consideration of forms of Christian-Muslim interaction, particularly in areas of law and ethics,[1] scriptural and hermeneutic work,[2] and shared religious figures and practices.[3]

We have also seen, perhaps over the last thirty or so years, a tremendous increase in the presence of aspects of Christian-Muslim dialogue within a broader trend of increased attention to religion being paid by the largely post-Christian western secularised state. This can be seen in political discussions around religious practice, identity, and integration in heterogenous societies, for example attempts in the UK to define "British values,"[4] and in political concerns over religious violence and extremism, usually targeted towards the Muslim community,[5] although with greater attention being paid to Christian Far-Right Extremism in recent years.[6] In these circumstances, explicitly religious or theological dialogue driven by religious actors seems to have somewhat fallen by the wayside in the public space, replaced by forms of dialogue that foreground the potential social outcomes of the interaction. This movement elides, somewhat, the difficulty presented to the liberal secular state by religious belief[7] and grounds these forms of interreligious dialogue within the process of "managing" religious identity that the liberal secular state has tended to adopt.[8] In doing so, the dynamics of these dialogues are often at the forefront of the secular state's attempt to interrogate, understand, and construct the meaning of religious traditions within a framework of liberal, secular, values.

This desire has arisen, largely, due to the increased visibility and presence of forms of behaviour and identity categorised as religious by the liberal secular state within the last few decades, and the increasingly problematic nature of this behaviour to the maintenance of stability by that state. An obvious example of this is the increased visibility and presence of terroristic behaviour, motivated or inspired by religious belief, that interrupts and challenges the order of the liberal secular state, whether that terroristic behaviour is state sponsored in some form,[9] or deliberately non-state in its function.[10] Beyond this, we also see an increased area of difficulty between the secular state and religious belonging expressed in the arena of integration, immigration, and counter-radicalisation policies, particularly over the last 20-30 years and particularly within Europe.[11] In

---

[1] Joshua Ralston, *Law and the Rule of God: A Christian Engagement with Shari'a*, 1st ed., Current Issues in Theology, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020; John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
[2] Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin, eds., *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
[3] Rita George Tvrtković, *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History*, New York: Paulist Press, 2018.
[4] Gwen Griffith-Dickson, "Religion, Security, Strategy: An Unholy Trinity?," in *Religion and the Public Sphere: New Conversations*, eds. James Walters and Esther Kersley, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, 62-71.
[5] Therese O'Toole et al., "Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State–Muslim Engagement," *Sociology* 50.1 (2016): 160-177.
[6] Tahir Abbas, "Ethnicity and Politics in Contextualising Far Right and Islamist Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11.3 (2017): 54-61.
[7] Christian Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege: Religion and Politics in Europe and America*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015.
[8] Marion Maddox, "Religion and the Secular State Revisited," *Australian Religion Studies Review* 11.2 (1998): 98-113.
[9] Edgar O'Ballance, *Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism, 1979-95: The Iranian Connection*, Basingstoke: MacMillan press, 1997.
[10] Edward D. Last, *Strategic Culture and Violent Non-State Actors: A Comparative Study of Salafi-Jihadist Groups*, London: Routledge, 2020.
[11] Willfried Spohn, Matthias Koenig, and Wolfgang Knöbl, eds., *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*, Identities and modernities in Europe, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

each case, the salience of means and processes for the "management" of religious belief, identity, and behaviour has increased for the liberal secular state, as has the need for mechanisms to address and dissipate interreligious disputes within a plural society. Given the secularised nature of political and, increasingly, social discourse in these states, this increased importance of religiousness has been met largely with confusion.

In general, this increased attention to the dynamic interaction of the Christian and Islamic traditions has led to the flourishing of many different forms of dialogical interaction, from practical and pragmatic dialogues over the sharing of physical space or social location, to generalised discourse over comparative theological aspects of difference and similarity. Examples of these abound, such as initiatives between Muslim and Christian groups over payday lending in the UK,[12] or more theologically orientated discussions over the monotheism shared between both the Christian and Islamic traditions.[13] Yet, in an increased foregrounding of forms of Christian-Muslim interaction, we have also seen the emergence of forms of dialogue which prioritise social outcomes motivating them; sometimes above the form and content of the dialogue itself.[14] This prioritisation of social outcome – integration, social harmony, peace, emotional understanding, an awareness of "them" being just like "us" – has come to be elevated as the distinct contribution of forms of religious dialogue to the liberal secular state. Beyond this, it has often developed into the raison d'etre for the interaction itself. We see this clearly in various critiques of the contemporary liberal and pluralistic forms of dialogue,[15] but we also see the formation of this approach in the selection of dialogue topics within instances of interaction which, while of great importance for the maintenance of the liberal social order, may be of lesser importance for the internal needs and desires of the religious communities themselves.

This approach, while undoubtedly producing significant social value for the communities involved, runs the risk of a flattening of the distinctive qualities of the particular traditions and of the specific views and beliefs enunciated within them. This is done in the hope of delivering a sense of similarity and homogeneity within the wider community. However, as we see in more social outcome orientated dialogical interactions, there is often a lack of emphasis on the necessary context and depth for a true and well-developed form of interreligious understanding to emerge. This is especially apparent where concepts and terms that may appear similar across religious traditions are assumed to be compatible and transferrable.[16] This exposes a significant difficulty even in those areas where the concept under discussion is peripheral to the religious tradition. Indeed, almost all religious traditions, in operating as universalising meta-narrative forms, are internally intricate and utilise the connected nature of the theological concepts which make them up in order to better serve that narrative purpose.[17]

The difficulty with the forms of social-outcome orientated dialogue encouraged by the liberal secular state is threefold. First, it encourages a sense of contextual unimportance on the part of those engaged in interreligious encounter in this way, by placing the potential outcome of the dialogical encounter as more important than the accuracy of the reflection of that outcome within the religious traditions themselves.[18] Second, it precludes an appreciation of the significant depth which religious concepts necessarily have within their own traditions, flattening the unique distinctiveness of complex and changing religious traditions in service of the desire of the liberal state to manage religious identity in a homogenous and consistent manner.[19] Third, this approach remains too focused on outcomes – the conceptual outcomes of the religious traditions themselves, which continue to change, morph, and renew their conceptual architecture in response to the

[12] Therese O'Toole and Ekaterina Braginskaia, "Public Faith and Finance: Faith Responses to the Financial Crisis," 2016.
[13] John Corrigan et al., eds., *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions*, 2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2016.
[14] Renee Garfinkel, *What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs*, United States Institution of Peace, July 2004, available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr123.pdf.
[15] David Shatz, "Morality, Liberalism, and Interfaith Dialogue," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations: In Honor of David Berger*, eds. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter, Leiden: Brill, 2012, 491-519.
[16] Lilach Sagiv and Shalom H. Schwartz, "Personal Values Across Cultures," *Annual Review of Psychology* 73.1 (2022): 517-546.
[17] Ephraim Meir, "Constructing Religious Identity," in *Interreligious Theology: Its Value and Mooring in Modern Jewish Philosophy*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015, 146-152.
[18] Pernille Rieker and Henrik Thune, eds., *Dialogue and Conflict Resolution: Potential and Limits*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.
[19] Joel Thomas Harrison, *Post-Liberal Religious Liberty: Forming Communities of Charity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 56.

myriad changes and variances of geographic, cultural, historical, and social difference, and the outcomes promised by the instance of dialogical interaction itself, whether this is communal peace, religious minority integration, or a furthering of religious understanding. In doing so, we have in some cases developed a functionalist form of interreligious dialogue in general, and Christian-Muslim interaction specifically, as our general form of social discourse. This is a discourse that bends the practice of dialogical interaction, the content of dialogical interaction, and the outcomes of dialogical interaction into feeding a very specific and peculiarly constructed form of dialogue that serves the desires of the liberal secular state above the needs, desires, or wants of religious communities.

Social-Outcome Orientated Dialogical Interaction

There are, however, a number of areas in which this social-outcome orientated dialogue is an appropriate response to the existence of religious plurality, both from within specific religious traditions and in reaction to external events and pressures from a secular society. In engaging in this form of dialogue, many issues of tension or problematic areas of interaction that affect religious communities can be resolved, as can, in some situations, shared areas of tension between religious communities and the state. Practically orientated dialogues and joint social action have shown great promise at the local level, particularly in reducing community tensions after violent or problematic events, such as religious dialogues during the Black Lives Matter movement or terror attacks associated with particular religious communities,[20] as well as taking place between institutional forms of religious traditions, such as recent dialogues between the Vatican and Al-Ahzar.[21] The place of this form of dialogical encounter is therefore not being questioned in this article, rather, the role and implications of its adoption as the primary form of religious interaction within the bounds of social discourse in a liberal secular state. Therefore, it is not my intention in this article for my position to be read as a critique of these social outcome orientated dialogical forms per se, but rather as a plea for greater attention to the mechanics by which the forms of similarity identified in the more generalist discourse are produced and the service these forms of dialogue provide to the structure of the liberal secular state.

It is worth unpicking exactly where the problematic issues of this foregrounding of this form of dialogical interaction within the public and state discourse arise. While outcome-orientated dialogues, generally focused on social cohesion, peaceful inter-communal relations, and the prevention of communal and terroristic violence have proliferated within contemporary liberal pluralistic political milieux, this proliferation of activity and attention has raised a number of problematic issues not with the form of dialogical encounter itself, but rather with its foregrounding and prominence as the default form of religious dialogical interaction in contemporary secular societies. This problematic overlapping of aspects of interfaith dialogue with the goals and aims of the secular state has been clearly identified by scholars such as Hedges, who suggests in his 2019 article “The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space” a stronger and more centrally located role for interfaith dialogue in diverse secular situations than would be expected.[22]

In adopting this preeminent position in contemporary social discourse around religious dialogical interaction, social-outcome orientated forms have developed a distinct focus on the ability of religious “traditions” to speak to one another in a mutually comprehensible and solutions-orientated manner.[23] In doing so, we have seen the development of a framing of religious belief, religious belonging, and religious tradition in homogenous and fundamentally binary ways – either one is a religious believer, or one is not, either one belongs in some measurable way to a religious community or one does not, either a religion “exists” in a manner identifiable to the secular state (membership lists, institutional forms, religious leaders etc) or it does not.[24] In doing so, the

[20] Akbar S. Ahmed and Brian Forst, eds., *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005.
[21] Egypt State Information Service, “Al Azhar, the Vatican Keen to Cement Principles of Dialogue, Fraternity,” last modified October 5, 2021, available at: https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/159389/Al-Azhar%2C-the-Vatican-keen-to-cement-principles-of-dialogue%2C-fraternity?lang=en-us.
[22] Paul Hedges, “The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space: Discourse and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Nation-States,” *Religions* 10.9.498 (2019): 1-15, 7.
[23] George Daniel Petrov and Victor Marius Plesa, “Interreligious Dialogue and Socio-Religious Dialogue in Today’s Society,” *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 25.1 (2021): 754-758.
[24] J. Milton Yinger, “Pluralism, Religion, and Secularism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6.1 (1967): 17-28, 17.

categorisation of religious belief, belonging, and tradition as singular and homogenous results in the deformation of the actuality and reality of these things – we are aware from the bevy of research done that none of these aspects are singular or homogenous, but are instead complex multi-faceted and contested issues. In avoiding this engagement with the reality of religious belief and belonging, we see the determination of these things take place according to the understanding of the liberal secular state, but also according to the mechanistic desires of that state. Seeking the outcomes of the proposed dialogical interaction can overwhelm this necessary attention to the detail and complexity of the religious traditions and religious individuals involved very easily – it is not just a case of state imposition here, but also a perfectly natural desire for agreement to flow from interactions.[25]

Similarly, there are problematic aspects of the foregrounding of these forms of dialogical interaction as the preeminent form of "interreligious dialogue" within the contemporary political structure of western liberal secular states. By eliding much of the difficulty of categorisation around aspects like religious belief, religious belonging, and religious tradition, forms of dialogical interaction on the basis of social outcome also elide the distinct nature of "dialogue" in favour of negotiation over potential outcomes.[26] In these circumstances, the desire for particular social outcomes is the driving force for the initiation, continuation, and resolution of the interaction which, while perhaps resolving a critical question of social impact, does not necessarily prioritise (and in some cases dis-incentivises) the necessary exchange of meaning over the relevant question of social impact that a dialogue as commonly envisioned would seem to require.[27] Rather than allowing for an exchange of the meanings attached in a variety of ways to actions of social impact by religious traditions and communities, outcome-orientated dialogical interactions have pre-eminently positioned the process of negotiation – a process that discards much of the meaning surrounding actions through a reduction to utilitarian considerations of "value." Negotiation requires not shared accounts of meaning or a deepening of understanding between opposing positions in order to resolve an issue, but rather can often be characterised by a rather mercenary attitude towards the compromise and adjustment necessary for resolution. In the contemporary context, the impetus towards a stance of negotiation between religious communities and traditions, rather than a stance of dialogue, furthers and encourages the solutions-orientated forms of dialogical interaction over instances of concrete dialogue between religious believers and traditions. In doing so, and in presenting these functionalist forms of dialogical interaction as representing "interreligious dialogue" in the contemporary secular sphere, we run the risk of absolving the current trend towards social-outcome oriented dialogue of responsibility for its defects regarding the complexity and multi-variance of religious belief, belonging, and representation by emphasising the role that negotiated solutions play in developing a location for "interfaith dialogue" within a secular liberal paradigm.

Following on from this concern regarding the incentives provided to social outcome focused dialogical interactions are further concerns about the implication of the provision of this form of dialogical interaction in its service to the secular state. Within the contemporary structuring of social outcome orientated dialogical interaction as "interreligious dialogue" we see the re-inscription of a number of problematic assumptions about religious belief and belonging that are characteristic of secular liberal accounts. The prime example of this is the framing of religious belief and belonging as problematic to the work of the secular state – something to be minimised , managed, and corralled within acceptable limits. While we see this right at the genesis of secular accounts of nationhood in a prominent way,[28] even our contemporary liberal forms of secularism depend on this assumption for the location of religion within a deliberately held a-religious political (and increasingly social) sphere.[29] The adoption of social outcomes as the pre-eminent reason for interreligious engagement not only furthers this framing of religious belief and belonging as problematic to the secular state and therefore in need of a solution, but also diminishes the extent to which religious traditions are able to offer convincing social and

[25] Scott Steinkerchner, *Beyond Agreement: Interreligious Dialogue Amid Persistent Differences*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011, 5-6.
[26] Catherine Cornille, "Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 20-34.
[27] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Inter-Religious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 193-217, 206.
[28] Montserrat Guibernau, *Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1995, 58-60.
[29] Rex Ahdar and Ian Leigh, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

political alternatives to the liberal state.[30] In doing so, and as identified by Hedges,[31] traditions retreat from their ability to tussle with the demands of the liberal secular state as equal claimants to potential meta-narrative status, instead being relegated to a subsidiary role of self-flagellation, while also facing significant difficulties in challenging their location as anything beyond a mechanism for social cohesion.

In order to attempt to avoid these problematic characteristics of this form of dialogical interaction, while still operating within the context in which we find ourselves, greater attention must be paid to the mechanics by which the social-outcomes desired are arrived at – how is it that a religious tradition understands and produces the conceptual architecture of the concept of peace? How is that the similarity identified between Christian and Muslim conceptions of personhood arise from their differing scriptural sources? What are the theological commitments, and the epistemological, hermeneutical, ethical, and aesthetic functions that allow religious traditions and their believers to fully grapple with the diversity and plurality of their social realities? Each of these aspects is part of the overall meta-narrative structure of the religious traditions themselves, with an attempt at comparison that does not take them into account offering a comparison only of outcomes, rather than the complex internal mechanics by which these outcomes are achieved. This comparative methodological approach can be seen in some forms of comparative theology, such as the work of Clooney et al,[32] which seeks to better understand the theological commitments and mechanisms of the other religious tradition in order to enhance and influence the originator tradition, a process of exploration and return that seeks to mirror the broader cultural and social interaction of the traditions in a more specific and generally academically orientated manner.[33] This form of approach emphasises the points of similarity and difference in the content of the other religious tradition,[34] but also seeks to understand the internal mechanisms by which that religious content is both made and made meaningful. In doing so, it seeks to uncover the myriad ways in which religion interacts with and influences our social and cultural habits across the lines between religious traditions, but also aims to more fully understand the ways in which the religious tradition seeks to formulate meaning about our realities. This process of leaving and returning to religious traditions is constructive and allows for the holding open of difference in a way that forms of solution-orientated dialogue do not.

Having sketched out these difficulties around much contemporary social-outcome orientated forms of dialogical interaction, it is my plea that more space be opened up in our interactions for the forms of comparison and dialogue highlighted above – the epistemological, hermeneutical, ethical, and aesthetic considerations which produce the social, political, and theological meaning of the concepts discussed in most forms of interaction. I wish to quickly demonstrate this by tracing, through the Sunni Islamic tradition, the epistemological, hermeneutic, ethical, and aesthetic considerations that underpin the use of the concept "beauty" in ethical reasoning. This is not only because this element of interaction has become a focus of some attempts at Christian-Muslim dialogue in recent years both theoretically[35] and practically,[36] but also because it plays a prominent role in the resolution of ethical questions internal to the Sunni Islamic tradition by the prominent Islamic legal scholar, Khaled Abou El Fadl.[37] In examining these preceding factors in the use of beauty, the immediate possibility of comparison relative to the occurrence of notions of divine beauty in both the Christian and Islamic religious traditions can be seen to be made more complicated by differing epistemological, hermeneutical, ethical, and aesthetic considerations that are a vital part of comparative ethical work.[38] Beyond this and in addition to it, these differing epistemological assumptions, hermeneutical approaches, ethical

[30] Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 172-174.
[31] Hedges, "The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space," 10.
[32] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
[33] Paul Hedges, *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective*, Leiden: Brill, 2017.
[34] Michael Atkinson, "Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology: A Theoretical Approach to a Practical Dilemma," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 3.1 (2019): 47-57, 52-53.
[35] Vasile-Octavian Mihoc, "Aesthetics as Shared Interfaith Space between Christianity and Islam," *The Ecumenical Review* 71.5 (2019): 674-692.
[36] Leslie A. Hahner and Scott J. Varda, "Modesty and Feminisms: Conversations on Aesthetics and Resistance," *Feminist Formations* 24. 3 (2012): 25-28.
[37] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 113-115.
[38] Joshua Ralston, "Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: Riposte to Adrian Pabst," *ABC Religion & Ethics* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 4 August 2014), available at: https://www.abc.net.au/religion/islamophobia-and-the-comeback-of-christendom-riposte-to-adrian-p/10099132.

processes, and aesthetic qualities all inter-connect and interact within the religious tradition itself, producing the intricate and universalising forms of discourse that religious traditions epitomise. In examining this process within the very particular context of the integration of the aesthetic within legal and ethical reflection in the Sunni tradition, the intricacies of placement, function, and form can be more fully teased out.

Systematic Considerations in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Systematic considerations like these are deeply relevant to the interface of Christian-Muslim dialogue and they must be considered if a fuller picture of the nature of the different religious traditions and their comparison is to be accurate, productive, and to move beyond the confines of the liberal secular state. These considerations deal not just with the outcomes embedded within various traditions – the things that the traditions rely on in order to make sense of the world – but also the means and methods by which those answers are formulated. Indeed, as the increasing awareness of religious traditions as culturally specific, socially grounded, and flexibly changing responses to the difficulties of life grows, this area of comparison seems to offer much greater scope for fruitful engagement.[39]

Epistemological Considerations

As my colleagues involved in interreligious dialogue will well know, interreligious comparison and discussion is already a deeply difficult and complex endeavour. This is at least partially due to the myriad forms of beliefs, behaviours, and practices that emerge from those areas of human relationality we call "religions".[40] Even within this, further difficulty arises in attempts to distinguish the meaning of those beliefs, behaviours, and practices for members of religious traditions and communities, because of the conceptually integrated nature of much religious belief. This can include the dependence of aspects of doctrine or practice on other areas of doctrine or practice for their meaning.[41] Our terms of reference, either as scholars or as practitioners, arise from within and are informed by the connections of meaning made between various aspects of religious or cultural belief, practice, or behaviour. Within these religious or cultural systems of referential meaning, the importance of aspects of belief, practice, or behaviour, arises from where, within the system of reference, meaning can be attached with a sense of certainty or reliability. This apportioning of meaning through the reliability of the sources of knowledge represents the epistemological framework of the religious tradition, touching on key questions such as where reliable knowledge can be found, how that knowledge interacts with other and alternative sources of reliable and unreliable knowledge, the constraints and expansiveness of those sources, and our human ability to comprehend and understand the relevance and meaning of those sources.[42] Naturally, these epistemological assumptions and positions differ across religious traditions and in doing so, they expose fundamental and deeply influential differences between the motivations of religious belief, practices, and behaviours in each. In the specific case of Christian-Muslim comparison, the influence of differing epistemological positions is undeniable. These are apparent not just in the broad outlines of Islamic epistemology in the general sense,[43] but also in the very specific ways that aspects of this tradition are used to further the methodological goals of a variety of ethical and hermeneutic projects.[44] This article will highlight three specific areas of epistemological particularity that most deeply influence the forms of this work – the nature of the Qur'anic text itself, its relation to other sources of knowledge within the Islamic tradition, and the finitude of created beings in relation to the divine – although this selection should not be taken as an exhaustive account.

---

[39] Hugh Goddard, "Christian-Muslim Relations: A Look Backwards and A Look Forwards," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 11. 2 (2000): 201–212.
[40] Jan Platvoet, "The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 2.2 (1990): 180-212.
[41] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism," *Studies in interreligious dialogue* 15 (2005): 36-51.
[42] Trent Dougherty and Chris Tweedt, "Religious Epistemology: Religious Epistemology," *Philosophy Compass* 10.8 (2015): 547-559.
[43] Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.
[44] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourses*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001, 155-156.

The nature of the Qur'anic text is of central importance in any discussion regarding theological beliefs, religious practices, or ethical guidance within the Islamic tradition, due to the epistemological value placed on it. The Qur'an occupies the pre-eminent location for reflection within the Islamic tradition on the basis of epistemological uniqueness– as the source and foundational stone of the divine revelation, the Qur'an offers access to an epistemological certainty that cannot be matched elsewhere.[45] This epistemological and ontological primacy of the Qur'an is a distinct and often complicating aspect of its application within the Islamic tradition itself, as well as of its interpretation and reading from outside.[46] As we will see in the later stages of this article, the relationship between epistemology and the practice of ethics within a religious tradition is one that must take into account the reality of practice, as reflected in the stress that Brown places on the consideration of the Sunnah and the guidance of the Shari'ah in everyday Islamic ethical practice.[47] The Qur'an, as locus for ethical reflection, does not exist alone, but is also a moving part within the example of the Prophet and the reflection on these twin sources by Muslim scholars through the ages. In seeking to understand, and relate to, the world around us through the matrix of a religious tradition, it is this potential of certain knowledge that foregrounds the importance of scripture across a number of religious traditions but is perhaps most obviously the case within the Sunni Islamic tradition.[48] Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the theological, philosophical, and ethical importance of the Qur'an within the Islamic tradition's intellectual architecture, both as a locus of certainty, but also as a repository of the content and appropriate form of ethical, philosophical, and theological reasoning, even where this primacy may not be reflected in everyday practice.

This begins with the epistemological primacy assigned to the text, and how it influences and shapes the juridical method according to which the tradition aims to operate and according to which alternative forms can be critiqued.[49] This epistemological primacy can be seen in the ethical practice of the immediate reference of the contextual ethical dilemma to the text – a seeking of certainty for the resolution of a particular issue through divine guidance.[50] In doing so, the authoritative text, because of its divine origin and direct transmission, is applied to promote the authority of a specific interpretation and reading of it. This behaviour of the text, and the clarity of its epistemological primacy, is significantly different to the operation of similar religious scriptures such as the New Testament of the Christian tradition,[51] or other forms of scripture in other religious traditions.[52] The Qur'an is, by the nature of its revelation and theological meaning, to be understood as both specific, in that it provides a singular account of revelation in specific time, for a specific place, and in reaction to specific social, religious, and political contexts, and universal, in that it offers a direct connection to the divine through its revelation that offers access to universal rules for behaviour, religious practice, and legal and ethical choices.[53]

These characteristics of the Qur'anic text naturally have implications for the way that the ethical methodology of the Islamic tradition operates and interacts with the wider tradition. With the text of the Qur'an being central to ethical reflection within the Islamic tradition, the nature of the text necessarily also has implications. This characteristic nature, such as the finite and limited content of the text itself, the nature of the genres contained within it, and the initial purpose of the revelation and its text, all produce significant strains for the direct application of it into particular and contextual ethical dilemmas and its use as a universally applicable text for ethical reflection by believers. The limited nature of the text, in discursive and content aspects, means that its central epistemological place within the Islamic tradition necessarily requires an extensive and expansive hermeneutical approach that encourages both thematic analysis, in order to determine the underlying themes and rules that govern behaviour within the Qur'anic frame, and an awareness of the necessity for flexibility regarding the application of these themes in specific contexts, as not all contexts or situations can be covered

[45] Shabbir Akhtar, *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2008, 187.
[46] Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2014, 16.
[47] Ibid., 18.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, 115-118.
[50] Ibid, 40-42.
[51] David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 165-173.
[52] Ulrich Winkler, "Passion and Fog: The Impact of the Discussion about the Theology of Religions Typology on the Epistemology of Comparative Theology," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth Harris, Paul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi, Leiden: Brill, 2016, 297-308.
[53] M. Ashraf Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran: Elements of a Virtue Approach to Knowledge and Understanding*, Cham: Springer, 2019, 111.

within the limited scope of the text itself.[54] This means that the epistemological place of the Qur'an, both socially and culturally in Islamic communities, and in the specific delivery of legal and ethical rules, results in significant hermeneutical needs within the Islamic tradition, in order to allow for the applicability of limited revealed knowledge to the universal application of its teachings. Similarly, within the Christian tradition, the nature and content of the scriptural resources influence the way in which this resource is used in ethical reflection, although the exact nature of the scriptures in content, genre, and epistemological quality obviously differ.[55]

This process of application is another aspect of the epistemological framing that undergirds the Islamic tradition's broader legal methodology. The relationship of the Qur'anic text to other sources of religious knowledge is one of primacy, but given the limited nature of its extent, other sources of religious knowledge such as the Hadith are required in order to further the understanding, contextualisation, and application of the divine law.[56] This leads to situations where explicit answers to ethical or legal issues are determined through a process which, although based on the divine certainty offered by the Qur'anic text, also involves varying degrees of textual and traditional certainty around the knowledge being offered. This distinction is foregrounded in criticism offered by contemporary Islamic legal scholars of the role that the hadith material plays in the formulation of more literalist fatwa[57] – being misrepresented as forming an aspect of certainty in ethical and legal matters and being mis-contextualised in order to uphold a desired social outcome.[58] Furthermore, the limited scope, but epistemological primacy, of the Qur'anic text relative to other sources of ethical knowledge within the Islamic tradition, such as the Hadith, or reason, or the consensus of the community, results not only in the initiating of an expansive notion of the Qur'an's relevance to matters of ethics and law, but also requires from the ongoing and changing tradition an ability to interpret the Qur'an in multivarious ways depending on the specific social context.[59]

While the two preceding aspects of epistemological consideration stem from the characteristics of the Qur'anic text, there are other significant factors in ways that knowledge is treated within the Islamic tradition that have an impact on the formation of ethical outcomes. This can be clearly seen in the influence that aspects of Sufi thought have had on the development and interaction of Islamic ethical thinking,[60] particularly, and usefully contrasting to the considerations of text and law, and the way in which conceptions of the human finitude cause a distinction to be firmly drawn between the divine certain knowledge, and the human uncertain knowledge. Within Sufi traditions, there is a strong emphasis on the ability of mystical practices to achieve a sense of knowledge beyond the reach of human reason, which in turn, has led to an emphasis on the practices and behaviours by which this knowledge can be acquired or unveiled.[61] In addition, we see the development of a traditional mistrust, or an expression of hesitancy around, certainty when it is applied to the human, or finite. As an example of this, Abou El Fadl draws on both the Sufi tradition generally, and the specific concept of Wahdat al-Wujūd, the transcendent unity of being, to further explore this dynamic of hesitancy, uncertainty, and human knowledge and its relevance to ethical determination.[62] The concept relies on an understanding of the

---

[54] Abdulla Galadari, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 25.
[55] James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 24.4 (1970): 430-455.
[56] Taha Jabir Alalwani, *Reviving the Balance: The Authority of the Qur'an and the Status of Sunnah*, trans. Nancy Roberts, London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017.
[57] Robert Gleave, *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012, 175-178.
[58] Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, 108.
[59] Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*, xxxiv.
[60] Nazanine Eman, "On the Way to Beauty: The Need for the Reaffirmation of the Authoritative in the Contemporary Islamic Legal Context," *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 4 (2004): 75-94, 75; Angus M. Slater, "Queer(ing) Notions of Islamic Authority: A Methodological Disposition in the Work of Khaled Abou El Fadl," *Theology & Sexuality* 22.1-2 (2016): 25-41; Qurrotul Ainiyah Aini, "Contemporary Islamic Jurisprudence Though in the Work of Khaled Abou El Fadl," *Jurisprudensi : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah, Perundangan-Undangan dan Ekonomi Islam* 11.1 (2019): 1-22.
[61] Valentin Weigel, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, trans. John Renard, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004, 13-16.
[62] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001, 345-347.

nature of things as fundamentally all connected to the divine, and dependent upon the divine, for their existence.[63] The importance of this for Sufis is noted in Nasr's explanation of the goal of Sufism as:

> The Sufi is one who seeks to transcend the world of forms, to journey from multiplicity to Unity, from the particular to the Universal. He leaves the many for the One and through this very process is granted the vision of the One in the many.[64]

It is this ability and desire to seek after the oneness of reality, through its expression in the diversity and plurality of our experienced reality, that undergirds the importance of the concept of Wahdat al-Wujūd both mystically, and, for our purposes, epistemologically. It is Ibn ‘Arabi who is most closely associated with the development of the concept, having asserted that the core Islamic doctrine of tawhid, the unity and singularity of the divine, extended not just to the divine itself, but also to the created reality we experience. As Nasr again notes, Sufis:

> ... have realized that Reality or Wujūd belongs ultimately to God alone, that not only is He One, but also that He is the only ultimate Reality and the source of everything that appears to possess Wujūd. All Wujūd belongs to God while He is transcendent vis-à-vis all existents,[65]

meaning that the tradition sees the contingency of existence as resting ultimately on the divine being, rather than on an ontic self-existence. This necessarily has an impact on the framing and location of epistemological aspects of the tradition as well, such as the dependence on divine knowledge of human knowledge. Certainty and finality are, within the Sufi tradition, confined to God, because God alone possesses Wujūd – only God is not limited by his dependence on another for his being, but stands alone as One.[66]

This epistemological distinction is seen between the certainty of knowledge offered by the divine and divine revelation, and the uncertainty or limitedness of human knowledge – either human interpretations of the divine revelation or knowledge produced through the application of human reason alone. This can be seen most clearly in the invocation of the notion of human uncertainty in broader ethical work, specifically when examining the applicability of aspects of the tradition beyond their immediate textual context. Within the Christian tradition, similar concerns over the reliability of human knowledge regarding the nature of the divine can be found in a number of forms, including the via negativa of Christian mystical practice,[67] but also in more contemporary revisiting of medieval debates over the univocity of the divine itself.[68]

In each of these three cases, we see that epistemological aspects of the Islamic tradition exert a significant and central place on the formation of questions that are relevant to understanding the process and the functioning of ethical methodology. The nature of the Qur’anic text itself and its epistemological primacy over other sources of religious guidance within the Islamic tradition exerts a significant pull towards the development of structured modes of interpretation of the text to allow for its application to contextual events, but also preserves and validates the retention of openness and variety. Without this sense of openness, the epistemological primacy and limited direct scope of the Qur’an would result in a source of religious authority that was of limited relevance to new ethical situations and of limited usefulness for broader ethical reflection. The distinct epistemological qualities of the Qur’an and other aspects of the Islamic tradition offer distinctive

---

[63] Robert J. Dobie, “The Phenomenology of Wujud In the Thought of Ibn Al-‘Arabi,” in *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. 3, Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2007, 313-322, 313.
[64] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Living Sufism*, London: Mandala Books, 1972, 129.
[65] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 75.
[66] Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ‘arabî, the Book, and the Law*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993, 36.
[67] Rosalind Ward Gwynne, “Sign, Analogy, And The Via Negativa: Approaching The Transcendent God Of The Qurʾan,” in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sabbath, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 53-63.
[68] Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,” *Modern Theology* 21.4 (2005): 543-574.

qualifications and characteristics to Islamic approaches to matters of epistemology, but also, crucially, to Islamic approaches to other areas of potential Christian-Muslim comparison.

Hermeneutical Considerations

As we have seen aspects of so far, these characteristic qualities of the Islamic tradition regarding epistemology also have a significant impact on the role and formation of hermeneutical approaches within the tradition. It is not enough to identify where knowledge lies and its certainty or uncertainty, one must also produce, from the limited nature of certain knowledge, the readings and interpretations which can guide ethical action when faced with the ever-increasing plurality of ethical questions.[69] It is in this process of interpretation, which is both necessary and constant, that the universal guides of behaviour can be gleaned from the particular context of certain texts, that we can seek to determine the correct course of behaviour in a specific context.

This specific connection of hermeneutics to the production of ethical knowledge within the Islamic tradition is clearly connected to the epistemological positioning of the Qur'an and to the expansive nature of the ethical guidance seen to be contained within it.[70] However, this hermeneutical impetus is not necessarily towards a singular unified reading of the specific text, but, rather, one that preserves within it aspects of the epistemological hesitancy seen before regarding the application of the authoritative Qur'anic text and the universality of specific interpretations derived from it.[71] This extension of epistemological hesitancy into the hermeneutical realm can be seen in the pluralisation of religious knowledge within the classical Islamic legal tradition,[72] but also, as an example, within the work of Al-Juwayni (1028-1085).

This includes an epistemological assumption that, should there be a definitive ethical resolution to an issue, the divine would have ensured that this definitive answer was conclusively and clearly demonstrated within the revealed text of the Qur'an as, given its epistemological primacy, this would be necessary for absolute certainty.[73] Given that the physical nature of the text precludes that, being bounded by historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, but that the epistemological primacy of the text requires it. It is the process of seeking an answer correctly that is praiseworthy, with only the divine being able to conclusively determine the correct interpretation. Al-Juwayni outlines this when he says:

> The most a mujtahid would claim is a preponderance of belief and a balancing of the evidence. However, certainty was never claimed by any of them... If we were charged with finding the truth, we would not have been forgiven for failing to find it.[74]

It is the hermeneutical process that is both a necessary part of the legal and ethical determination but is also the resting place of ethical import in this process rather than the definitiveness of a single, unitary outcome. This plurality is not a threat to the epistemological position of the text itself, nor is it a retreat to a hermeneutical (or ethical) relativism but is rather an expression of the importance of hesitancy in the movement from a bounded, but authoritative, text to an expansive ethical system. The location of hermeneutics in the Islamic tradition occupies this middle role between the epistemological certainty of the Qur'an and the ethical hesitancy needed for the application of the text into multiple contextual situations. While this is largely mirrored within forms of the Christian tradition, the differing location of the Christian scriptures relative to epistemological certainty results in different requirements arising in the hermeneutical realm. Similar issues can be seen within the different forms of the Christian tradition, with distinct reactions occurring within communities that place a differing level of epistemic and hermeneutical stress on scripture. In this sense, while traditions such as Catholic or Anglican forms of Christianity have traditionally hewn to a nuanced account of the direct revelatory function of scripture, other more literalist forms of Christian community, such as those found within contemporary

---

[69] Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 26-27.
[70] Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 72-124.
[71] Knut S. Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 31-37.
[72] Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Islamic Legal Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Comparative Law*, eds. Mauro Bussani and Ugo Mattei, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 295-312.
[73] Imam Al-Haramayn Al-Juywani, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati Al-Adilla Fi Usul Ati Tiqad*, trans. Paul E Walker, Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2000.
[74] Ibid., 50-51.

Evangelicalism or Pentecostalism have located scripture differently in their hermeneutic and epistemic estimation.

As Al-Juwayni further notes, one should think it is as if God commanded:

> My command to my servants is in accordance with the preponderance of their beliefs. So, whoever preponderantly believes that they are obligated to do something, acting upon it becomes My command.[75]

This is a distinct qualification of the human ability to interpret the authoritative text with the same epistemological validity as the text itself has,[76] highlighting the extent to which epistemological considerations about the primacy of the text and pragmatic difficulties in the application of the text, necessitate certain hermeneutical formulations. Here, Al-Juwayni is not arguing that there are no ultimate truths that can be grasped by humanity, or that the text is too complex to ever allow a grasping of certainty, but he is arguing that where a distinct contextual difference exists between the text and the ethical situation, the preponderance of doubt has to mean that the ethical question remains open[77] – even after our best efforts at interpreting the text have been undertaken. In the case of a conflict in hermeneutics, for Al-Juwayni, it is the role of ijtihād[78] or human reasoning to then determine the most appropriate outcome for that specific situation, with no sense of universality or finality attached to its application in that specific context.

Al-Juwayni's process highlights the obligation to diligently investigate situations by the believer, while suspending the finality of judgement within any specific application. Within the Islamic tradition this hesitancy invites a multiplicity of opinions and interpretations of the text, mirroring similar moves seen within the bounds of Islamic mystical practice[79] – the awareness of the limit of an individual interpretation, a hesitancy over the fixing of meaning definitively and a self-awareness of the necessary particularity of interpretations. While Islamic jurisprudence, due to the social and political contexts of its functioning in a plural, multicultural caliphate, has always contained a certain ethos of diversity of opinions and pluralism between legal schools,[80] even the methodologies of the judicial process themselves contribute to the construction of this ethos. This continual engagement and re-engagement with the process of hermeneutical interpretation of the divine text is a critical factor in the Islamic tradition's legal and ethical methodology as it allows for an anchoring of the classical legal tradition within the epistemological primacy of the Qur'anic text. The moves expressed are not a retreat but are rather deep commitments to a particular vision of the relationship of epistemologically secure knowledge to the vagaries of contextual ethical dilemmas – a move that has been highlighted as a similar feature of trends in comparative theological methods.[81] It is to this hermeneutical connection between the epistemologically secure and the ethically applied that we must now turn our attention. So far, we have seen the way in which epistemological positions have a deep and critical influence on the needs and processes of the tradition within the hermeneutical sphere, but this also applies in the grittier application of these interpretations to specific ethical queries.

Ethical Considerations

The importance of this process of hermeneutical application to specific ethical contexts is most clearly seen in the form of reasoning that requires an exposition and exploration of the meaning of the text for specific ethical contexts. While within the processes of Islamic epistemology and hermeneutics there has been a traditional assertion that it is only the text that is ultimately authoritative, rather than the particular interpretations of the text made by an individual jurist, we can see in recent forms of Islamic ethical reasoning a retreat from

[75] Ibid., 61.
[76] Sari Nuseibeh, "Epistemology," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds., Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, London: Routledge, 1996, 824-840, 825-827.
[77] Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, 87.
[78] Al-Juywani, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief*, 36-38.
[79] Robert Hefner, "Modern Muslims and the Challenge of Plurality," *Society* 51.2 (April 2014): 131-139.
[80] Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*.
[81] Hedges, *Comparative Theology*.

this openness to doubt and an increased reliance on forms of reasoning that are presented, in their own right, as certain.[82] This increasing trend towards a form of almost mechanical certainty between the authoritative text and the ethical reasoning produced from it arises not from a quality intrinsic to the Islamic tradition itself, but is often identified as a symptom of, and reaction to, the interaction of the traditional forms of Islamic legal and ethical reasoning with forms of western epistemology through the processes of colonialisation, capitalisation, and globalisation.[83] This has been identified as especially apparent within Islamic communities in the West and within contemporary discussions surrounding the reading of the religious texts and their application to ethical situations,[84] and this lack of awareness of the need for epistemological and hermeneutical hesitancy leads to the development of an increasingly authoritarian aspect within the ethical sphere.[85] This identified relationship between the epistemological positions held and the hermeneutical approaches developed within contemporary authoritarian forms of ethical reasoning are explicitly framed by critics both as a fall into authoritarianism over authoritativeness[86] and as diversion from an authentic retrieval of the Islamic legal tradition.[87]

This approach is perhaps most clearly found in Abou El Fadl's critique of the SAS fatwa in his 2001 work *And God Knows the Soldiers*, but is also apparent in a more general form in his critique of "Islamicity" in his more recent work *Reasoning With God* (2014). As he notes:

> If the reader cites the text and then states a rule, the reader has unified himself with the text. The reader becomes one with the text and stands suspended, untouchable, and transcendent. The text and the construction the reader has given it become one and the same. Effectively, the text remains authoritative, but the reader becomes authoritarian.[88]

In arguing against the authoritarian in the hermeneutical interpretation of texts for the purposes of Islamic jurisprudence, this holds open the door for a return of epistemological and ethical hesitancy around definition and finality that we have seen are crucial aspects of Islamic approaches to epistemology and hermeneutics. If particular hermeneutical interpretations are seen as definitively epistemologically authoritative, then alternatives and engagements – whether internal to the religious tradition, or with those standing outside it are rejected. By aligning one interpretation of the text with the authority of the text itself, the discourse surrounding that text becomes mono-dimensional, confined, and defined solely by the whims of the interpreter – something that has equally become problematic in literalist and authoritarian accounts of the Christian tradition.[89]

Given this danger of a conflation between the text's authority and the latent authoritarianism in the reader's interpretation of the text, judgements must be made with an awareness of the distance between the epistemological security of the text and the epistemological insecurity of the interpretation, disrupting their authority to define the meaning of the text in singular ways. This suspension of ethical finality, mirroring the epistemological hesitancy and hermeneutical openness, functions as a continual check on the various actions involved in producing, from limited texts, the expansive systems of ethical reflection required in the contemporary world.

---

[82] Tamara Albertini, "The Seductiveness of Certainty: The Destruction of Islam's Intellectual Legacy by the Fundamentalists," *Philosophy East and West* 53.4 (2003): 455-470.
[83] Raficq Abdulla and Mohamed M. Keshavjee, *Understanding Sharia: Islamic Law in a Globalised World*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, 216-217.
[84] Mona Siddiqui, "Clarity or Confusion – Classical Fiqh and the Issue of Logic," in *Shari'a As Discourse*, eds., Lisbet Christofferson and Jörgen S. Nielsen, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, 17-28, 27-28.
[85] Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*, 44-48.
[86] Ibid., 271-281; Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, 94-101.
[87] Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, *Refuting Isis: Destroying Its Religious Foundations and Proving It Has Strayed from Islam and That Fighting It Is an Obligation*, Herndon, VA: Sacred Knowledge, 2016, 13-18.
[88] Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, 84.
[89] John Bartowski, "Beyond Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Conservative Protestants and the Hermeneutic Interpretation of Scripture," *Sociology of Religion* 57.3 (1996): 259-272, 259-261.

Aesthetics and the Epistemological, Hermeneutical, and Ethical Frames

This discussion has taken us through the interconnection between hermeneutics and epistemology in the context of the Islamic ethical tradition, tracing the way in which our epistemological approach to texts influences and informs the way in which we approach our hermeneutical project. Similarly, our hermeneutical outcomes have an influence on the way in which we then come to conceive of the epistemic value of certain texts, or of certain authoritative interpretations of them. The difficulty, of course, lies with understanding and developing a methodology by which our ethical actions can be guided by the texts we have chosen to hermeneutically and epistemologically value. How is it that we move from texts towards living out everyday lives in a way that makes sense?

We see, in both the Christian and Islamic traditions, that the answer to this problematic question centres on an invocation of aesthetics – that is the invocation of the notion of beauty in order to allow for discernment in the application of ethical maxims to specific contexts. While we often deem beauty to be readily apparent and informed solely by the representation or physicality of an object, this elides the deep and distinctive ability of beauty to be found beyond the physical, for example in the realm of the philosophical, the mathematical, the ethical, and the theological. Indeed, the rapture of Beauty is often exemplified as one of perfection aside from our desire to possess or own, an appreciation of the thing as is without the need to tinker, correct, or add,[90] while appropriateness to the contextual situation within which the facet of beauty is located has also been identified as a key marker of our aesthetic sense.[91]

Indeed, it is this unfixed and never settled quality of the aesthetic that encourages the methodological deployment of it in the epistemological, hermeneutical, and ethical circumstances we have sketched out here.[92] In addition, it is the sense of its transcendence of the particular and its pointing toward the universal that allows for its place within an expansive ethical methodology[93] – bridging the gap seen in the universal relevance, but specific context, of the epistemologically certain text and the universally expansive, but specifically contextual, ethical dilemmas faced.

> I ask my God for a guideline, and I always find it in beauty, for my guide is beautiful and sublime. How can The Beautiful demand of us anything but the beautiful? If there is a beauty to life it is that we derive from the magnanimity of God, the urge for the beautiful and the refined.[94]

The aesthetic allows the relation of specifically bounded ethical situations with other specifically bounded, but epistemologically certain, situations described within the textual sources, producing through their relation the potentiality for a harmonisation of their contextual differences.[95] In doing so, the aesthetic places the emphasis of coherency not on the limited text, or on the breadth of hermeneutical reasoning, but rather on the connection of specific contextual outcomes to the broader norms of aesthetics and their relation to the nature of the divine as found in the scriptural sources assigned value within the religious tradition itself. In this way, the invocation of the aesthetic within the Christian and Islamic traditions functions as a return to the epistemological primacy of the divine, expressed initially in the text but brought to universal coherency through its continuously perfected relation to contextually specific situations.

The use of beauty as a marker for discerning the relevance of particular hermeneutic outcomes and juristic formulations to specific practical occasions allows for the preservation of flexibility in the law regarding contexts and particularities. It allows the aesthetic to, in some ways, exceed the ethical in particular situations where there may otherwise be inconsistency or incoherence between differing hermeneutical readings of the

---

[90] Umberto Eco, *On Beauty*, trans. Alastair McEwen (London: MacLehose, 2010).
[91] Aryeh Kosman, "Beauty and the Good: Situating the Kalon," *Classical Philology* 105.4 (2010): 341-357.
[92] Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*, 373-374.
[93] Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55.4 (1997): 355-364, 355.
[94] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 114.
[95] Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Epistemology of the Truth in Modern Islam," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 41.4-5 (2015): 473-486.

epistemologically secure texts.[96] This location of the aesthetic within the ethical frame foregrounds aspects of beauty that resist completion or making static its account, while also leaning heavily on the notion of a diversity of appropriate beauteous outcomes in differing contextual circumstances – it is envisioned as a process of making and becoming beautiful of the ethical sphere.[97]

This is perhaps most clearly to be seen in the overlap that becomes apparent when a question of the law is explicitly framed as a choice between the beautiful and the non-beautiful, when the irresolvable hermeneutic and ethic plurality, stemming from a nominal place of epistemological security requires determination by the aesthetic. In doing so, and in making the interpretative pause and judgement at that point explicit, the invocation of the aesthetic in ethical decision making imputes a form of hesitancy, one that arises from its applicability beyond the specific circumstances within which it is offered.

Conclusion

In engaging in this process, a consideration must be borne in mind. That is that these differences are not to be seen as being viewed as somehow progressive, with hermeneutical differences arising only from epistemological differences, and so on. Rather, as has hopefully been demonstrated in the preceding sections, the different choices and assumptions operating within these facets of difference interconnect and support one another in deeply complex and continually changing ways. Some of these considerations are general areas of significant difference in approach and assumptions between the Christian and Islamic traditions as a whole, such as relation to epistemology and scripture, and some are more specific features arising from aspects of individual practice on the part of scholars within each tradition, such as discussion over methods in hermeneutics and ethics. Yet, both forms inform and structure the operation of theological and conceptual notions within each tradition, and thereby inform and structure the potential site of connection identified as arising from it. The danger of viewing these areas of difference as progressive, as sometimes occurs within liberal secular modes of dialogical interaction, is the opportunity for reduction to occur in the presentation and understanding of the religious tradition itself. It can be tempting when faced with this complexity to retreat backwards through these areas of difference, seeking to pin their genesis somewhere at the stage before; to retreat from ethical differences, and pin their genesis on matters of hermeneutics, and then to retreat from hermeneutical differences, and pin the "real" difference between religious traditions on their differing epistemologies and so on.

The difficulty with this tempting approach is that it is reductive of actual religious practice, as performed by both lay members and religiously educated members of religious traditions, who tend not to conceive of their religious beliefs and practices as solely arising from hermeneutics, or epistemology for example.[98] Even a cursory knowledge of the internal workings of the Christian or Islamic tradition runs counter to this logically progressivist position, with any study of a particular theological position within them drawing on a multitude of sources and methods. Rather, studies of the formation of religious beliefs and practices at young ages would tend to support a multi-various and changing process of negotiation and dialogue between these various religious commitments.[99] This tendency is apparent in many approaches to matters of dialogue, a tracing back of disagreement to "first principles" as it were, particularly from western, Christian, approaches. Within this is a distinctly quasi-Protestant valorisation of scripture as informing and creating religious belief, placing scripture as a pre-eminent and somehow preceding commitment amongst different religious sources that make up the diversity of religious beliefs across differing religious traditions.[100]

This is therefore not only a place where forms of comparison between religious traditions often go wrong, but also an example of the difficulty that arises from a lack of attention to differences in religious epistemology,

---

[96] Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam*, 330; Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*, 359-366.
[97] Slater, "Queer(ing) Notions of Islamic Authority."
[98] Riet Bons-Storm, "Complex Identities: Complex Patterns of Belonging," in *Complex Identities in a Shifting World: Practical Theological Perspectives*, ed. Pamela Couture et al., International Practical Theology Volume 17, Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2015, 43-52.
[99] Larisa Heiphetz, Elizabeth Spelke, and Mahzarin Banaji, "The Formation of Belief-Based Social Preferences," *Social Cognition* 32.1 (2014): 22-47.
[100] David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays, Volume 1*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020, 145-186.

hermeneutics, ethics, and aesthetics when seeking to engage in religious comparison more broadly. The Protestant epistemological assumption about the value and pre-eminence of scripture in the production of religious beliefs and practices continues to influence the way in which much interreligious dialogue orientates itself towards uncovering the "original" or "initial" difference of the religious traditions, rather than concerning itself with the current and complicated differences, or how those differences arise. We can see traces of this mismatch in the robust critiques of forms of dialogue offered by non-western scholars such as Muthuraj Swamy and MM Thomas, as well as the more general critiques of the pluralist orientation undergirding even seemingly non-pluralist dialogical conditions such as those by Yong Huang.[101] Even beyond these methodological concerns about this tendency, we can also see how its adoption poses issues for the complicated issue of religious definition – assuming that if only the "original difference" can be uncovered and explained away, then current difficulties of religious difference for the liberal secular state will fade away.

By engaging in this process and highlighting the role of the aesthetic in our hermeneutical and ethical deliberation, a move toward a more fully understood and explored epistemological and ethical pluralism can be preserved within complex and historically changing religious and cultural traditions. In this specific case, the move toward the aesthetic in ethical decision making has been identified as critical to both contemporary Islamic and Christian thinking, as well as being identified as a potential area of fruitful interreligious dialogue between them.[102]

In highlighting the extent to which considerations of this kind are grounded in the epistemological, hermeneutical, and ethical aspects considered in this article, the hope is that the identification of aesthetics as a potential location for Christian-Muslim dialogue can be more fully appreciated as a complex and complicated outcome of significantly different epistemological, hermeneutical, and ethical systems. This is not to deny the similarity between them – this similarity can be seen in many strands of Christian theology, where similar questions of authority and authoritativeness of religious sources are considered,[103] similar questions of the relation of religious authority to social or communal authority emerge,[104] and where political questions of organisation and relation to the secular are of pressing importance.[105] However, this is also a plea for greater attention to be paid in Christian-Muslim study to the comparative value of methodology and conceptual functioning, over, and as part of the oft-compared religious and theological outcomes of these traditions. In doing so, not only will we glean significant new knowledge about the ways in which these differing religious traditions function, but also open scope for greater detailed analysis of the similarities and differences of epistemological, hermeneutical, and ethical approaches embedded within them.

[101] Muthuraj Swamy, *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian-Muslim Relations*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016; MM Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Religious Pluralism,* Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987; Yong Huang, "Religious Pluralism and interfaith dialogue: Beyond universalism and particularism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37 (1995): 127-144.
[102] Ralston, "Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom."
[103] Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy*, Interventions, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012.
[104] John L McKenzie, *Authority in the Church*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2009.
[105] John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2009.

Bibliography

Abbas, Tahir, 2017, “Ethnicity and Politics in Contextualising Far Right and Islamist Extremism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11.3, 54-61.

Abdulla, Raficq, and Mohamed M. Keshavjee, 2018, *Understanding Sharia: Islamic Law in a Globalised World*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2001, *And God Knows the Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourses*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2014, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari’ah in the Modern Age*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2001, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oxford: Oneworld.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2015, “The Epistemology of the Truth in Modern Islam,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 41.4-5, 473-486.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2012, “The Islamic Legal Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Comparative Law*, eds. Mauro Bussani and Ugo Mattei, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 295-312.

Abou El Fadl, Khaled, 2006, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Adeel, M. Ashraf, 2019, *Epistemology of the Quran: Elements of a Virtue Approach to Knowledge and Understanding*, Cham: Springer.

Ahdar, Rex, and Ian Leigh, 2005, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ahmed, Akbar S., and Brian Forst (eds.), 2005, *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Aini, Qurrotul Ainiyah, “Contemporary Islamic Jurisprudence Though in the Work of Khaled Abou El Fadl,” *Jurisprudensi : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah, Perundangan-Undangan dan Ekonomi Islam* 11.1 (2019): 1-22.

Akhtar, Shabbir, 2008, *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Alalwani, Taha Jabir. *Reviving the Balance: The Authority of the Qur’an and the Status of Sunnah*. Translated by Nancy Roberts. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017.

Albertini, Tamara, 2003, “The Seductiveness of Certainty: The Destruction of Islam’s Intellectual Legacy by the Fundamentalists” *Philosophy East and West* 53.4, 455-470.

Al-Juywani, Imam Al-Haramayn, 2000, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitab Al-Irshad Ila Qawati Al-Adilla Fi Usul Ati Tiqad*, translated by Paul E Walker, Reading: Garnet Publishing.

Al-Yaqoubi, Shaykh Muhammad, 2016, *Refuting Isis: Destroying Its Religious Foundations and Proving It Has Strayed from Islam and That Fighting It Is an Obligation*, Herndon, VA: Sacred Knowledge.

Atkinson, Michael, 2019, “Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology: A Theoretical Approach to a Practical Dilemma,” *The Journal of Social Encounters* 3.1, 47-57.

Bartowski, John, 1996, “Beyond Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Conservative Protestants and the Hermeneutic Interpretation of Scripture,” *Sociology of Religion* 57.3, 259-272.

Bons-Storm, Riet, 2015, “Complex Identities: Complex Patterns of Belonging,” in *Complex Identities in a Shifting World: Practical Theological Perspectives*, ed. Pamela Couture, Robert Mager, Pamela McCarroll, and Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, International Practical Theology Volume 17, Zürich: Lit Verlag, 43-52.

Brown, Jonathan A. C., 2014, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet’s Legacy*, London: Oneworld Publications.

Burrell, David B, 2011, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Chodkiewicz, Michel, 1993, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ‘arabî, the Book, and the Law*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Clooney, Francis X, 2010, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Cohen, Mordechai Z., and Adele Berlin (eds.), 2016, *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cornille, Catherine, 2013, “Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 20-34.

Corrigan, John, Frederick M. Denny, Martin S. Jaffee, and Carlos M. N. Eire (eds.), 2016, *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions*, 2nd ed., New York: Routledge.

Dobie, Robert J., 2007, “The Phenomenology of Wujud In the Thought of Ibn Al-‘Arabi,” in *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, volume 3, Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 313-322.

Dougherty, Trent, and Chris Tweedt, 2015, “Religious Epistemology: Religious Epistemology,” *Philosophy Compass* 10.8, 547-559.

Eaton, Marcia Muelder, 1997, “Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55.4, 355-364.

Eco, Umberto, 2010, *On Beauty*, translated by Alastair McEwen, London: MacLehose,.

Eman, Nazanine, 2004, “On the Way to Beauty: The Need for the Reaffirmation of the Authoritative in the Contemporary Islamic Legal Context,” *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 4, 75-94.

Egypt State Information Service, 2021, “Al Azhar, the Vatican Keen to Cement Principles of Dialogue, Fraternity,” last modified 5 October 2021, available at: https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/159389/Al-Azhar%2C-the-Vatican-keen-to-cement-principles-of-dialogue%2C-fraternity?lang=en-us.

Galadari, Abdulla, 2018, *Qur’anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Garfinkel, Renee, 2004, *What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs*, United States Institution of Peace, available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr123.pdf.

Gleave, Robert, 2012, *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

Goddard, Hugh, 2000, “Christian-Muslim Relations: A Look Backwards and A Look Forwards,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 11.2, 195-212.

Griffith-Dickson, Gwen, 2018, “Religion, Security, Strategy: An Unholy Trinity?,” in *Religion and the Public Sphere: New Conversations*, ed. James Walters, Abingdon: Routledge, 62-71.

Guibernau, Montserrat, 1995, *Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Gustafson, James M., 1970, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 24.4, 430-455.

Hahner, Leslie A., and Scott J. Varda, 2012, "Modesty and Feminisms: Conversations on Aesthetics and Resistance," *Feminist Formations* 24.3, 22-42.

Hallaq, Wael B, 2009, *Sharīʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harrison, Joel Thomas, 2020, *Post-Liberal Religious Liberty: Forming Communities of Charity*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hedges, Paul, 2017, *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective*, Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Hedges, Paul, 2019, "The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space: Discourse and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Nation-States," *Religions* 10.9.498, 1-15.

Hefner, Robert, 2014, "Modern Muslims and the Challenge of Plurality," *Society* 51.2, 131-139.

Heiphetz, Larisa, Elizabeth Spelke, and Mahzarin Banaji, 2014, "The Formation of Belief-Based Social Preferences," *Social Cognition* 32.1, 22-47.

Huang, Yong, 1995, "Religious Pluralism and interfaith dialogue: Beyond universalism and particularism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37, 127-144.

Joppke, Christian, 2015, *The Secular State Under Siege: Religion and Politics in Europe and America*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Kosman, Aryeh, 2010, "Beauty and the Good: Situating the Kalon," *Classical Philology* 105. 4, 341-357.

Last, Edward D., 2020, *Strategic Culture and Violent Non-State Actors: A Comparative Study of Salafi-Jihadist Groups*, London: Routledge.

Maddox, Marion, 1998, "Religion and the Secular State Revisited," *Australian Religion Studies Review* 11.2, 98-113.

McKenzie, John L., 2009, *Authority in the Church*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub.

Meir, Ephraim, 2015, "Constructing Religious Identity," in *Interreligious Theology: Its Value and Mooring in Modern Jewish Philosophy*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 146-152.

Mihoc, Vasile-Octavian, 2019, "Aesthetics as Shared Interfaith Space between Christianity and Islam," *The Ecumenical Review* 71.5, 674-692.

Milbank, John, 2009, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Moyaert, Marianne, 2013, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Inter-Religious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 193-217.

Moyaert, Marianne, 2005, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism," *Studies in interreligious dialogue* 15, 36-51.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 2006, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 1980, *Living Sufism*, London: Mandala Books.

Nuseibeh, Sari, 1996, "Epistemology," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, London: Routledge, 824–840.

O'Ballance, Edgar, 1997, *Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism, 1979-95: The Iranian Connection*, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press.

O'Toole, Therese, and Ekaterina Braginskaia, 2016, "Public Faith and Finance: Faith Responses to the Financial Crisis."

O'Toole, Therese, Nasar Meer, Daniel Dehanas, Stephen Jones, and Tariq Modood, 2016, "Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State–Muslim Engagement." *Sociology* 50.1, 160-177.

Pabst, Adrian, 2012, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy*, Interventions, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Petrov, George Daniel, and Victor Marius Plesa, 2021, "Interreligious Dialogue and Socio-Religious Dialogue in Today's Society," *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 25.1, 754-758.

Pickstock, Catherine, 2005, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21.4, 543-574.

Platvoet, Jan, 1990, "The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 2.2, 180-212.

Ralston, Joshua, 2014, "Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: Riposte to Adrian Pabst," *ABC Religion & Ethics*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, last modified 4 August 2014, available at: https://www.abc.net.au/religion/islamophobia-and-the-comeback-of-christendom-riposte-to-adrian-p/10099132.

Ralston, Joshua, 2020, *Law and the Rule of God: A Christian Engagement with Shari'a*, 1st ed., Current Issues in Theology, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Renard, John, 2011, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rieker, Pernille, and Henrik Thune (eds.), 2015, *Dialogue and Conflict Resolution: Potential and Limits*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Sagiv, Lilach, and Shalom H. Schwartz, 2022, "Personal Values Across Cultures," *Annual Review of Psychology* 73.1, 517-546.

Shatz, David, 2012, "Morality, Liberalism, and Interfaith Dialogue," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations: In Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter, Leiden: Brill, 491-519.

Siddiqui, Mona, 2010, "Clarity or Confusion – Classical Fiqh and the Issue of Logic," in *Shari'a As Discourse*, eds. Lisbet Christofferson and Jörgen S. Nielsen, Abingdon: Routledge, 17-28.

Slater, Angus M, 2016, "Queer(ing) Notions of Islamic Authority: A Methodological Disposition in the Work of Khaled Abou El Fadl," *Theology & Sexuality* 22.1-2, 25-41.

Spohn, Willfried, Matthias Koenig, and Wolfgang Knöbl (eds.), 2015, *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*, Identities and modernities in Europe, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Steinkerchner, Scott, 2011, *Beyond Agreement: Interreligious Dialogue Amid Persistent Differences*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Swamy, Muthraj, 2016, *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian-Muslim Relations*, London: Bloomsbury.

Thomas, MM, 1987, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Religious Pluralism,* Geneva: WCC Publications.

Tracy, David, 2020, "Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays, Volume 1*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 145-186.

Tvrtković, Rita George, 2018, *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History*, New York: Paulist Press.

Vikør, Knut S., 2005, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ward Gwynne, Rosalind, 2009, "Sign, Analogy, And The Via Negativa: Approaching The Transcendent God Of The Qurʾan," in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sabbath, Leiden: Brill, 53-63.

Weigel, Valentin, 2004, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, trans. John Renard, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Winkler, Ulrich, 2016, "Passion and Fog: The Impact of the Discussion about the Theology of Religions Typology on the Epistemology of Comparative Theology," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, eds. Elizabeth Harris, Paul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi, Leiden: Brill, 297-308.

Yazdi, Mehdi Ha'iri, 1992, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence*, New York: State University of New York Press.

Yinger, J. Milton, 1967, "Pluralism, Religion, and Secularism." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6.1, 17-28.

About the Author

Angus M Slater is currently a Lecturer in Christian Theology and Interfaith Studies at the University of Wales Trinity St David in Lampeter. His principal teaching responsibilities include contemporary Christian Theology, Interfaith Studies, and Christian-Muslim Relations, while areas of research interest are centred around theological considerations of authority and aesthetics within the Christian and Islamic traditions, including queer approaches to authority, the formation of identity, and the role that aesthetics plays in religious construction. These interests can be seen in the recent publication of *Radical Orthodoxy in a Pluralistic World* (2017) with Routledge, as well as further work in the *Journal of Law, Religion, and State*, *Theology & Sexuality*, and *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*. His recent activity includes speaking at the UK Department of Education on LGBT+ and Faith Issues, assisting a UNESCO Peace Conference on multifaith initiatives, and advising the Church in Wales Doctrinal Commission regarding religious same-sex marriage.

About the Interreligious Relations Occasional Papers Series

Interreligious Relations (IRR) is a peer-reviewed Series of Occasional Papers covering issues of religious diversity, including questions relating to social cohesion, religious contextualisation, religious-state-secular interactions, bridge-building between faiths, religiously-motivated conflicts and peacebuilding, as well as cognate areas. The *IRR Series* focuses mainly on contemporary contexts of religious diversity, but at the same time, it is also interested in historical and methodological questions relating to religious diversity. Though its coverage is international in scope, there is a focus on Asia, especially Southeast Asia. Contributions are invited from a range of academic fields including interdisciplinary approaches, and papers may cover any religious tradition, as well as atheism and non-religion.

About the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** is a think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. With the core functions of research, graduate education, and networking, it produces research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-traditional Security, Cybersecurity, Maritime Security and Terrorism Studies.

SRP Programme aims to study various models of how religious communities develop their teachings to meet the contemporary challenges of living in plural societies. It will also deepen the study of inter-religious relations, formulate models for the positive role of religions in peace-building and produce knowledge to strengthen social ties between communities. The Programme seeks to be at the forefront in the development of scholarship and applied knowledge on the roles of religion and inter-religious relations in plural societies today.

For more details, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg and https://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/srp. Join us at our social media channels at www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-social-media-channels or scan the QR code.

RSiS | S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg