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ATHEISM IN THE ARAB WORLD
Islam and (Im)morality on the Basis of the Arab Atheists Magazine
(maǧallat al-mulḥidīn al-ʿarab)

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Contents

1. RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question of this paper is whether Islam conforms to the standards of morality or is at odds with them. The standards of morality that it should uphold are arbitrary in the sense that they are chosen by me (and hence can be debatable). However, they are universal in their aim to be acceptable by all those who share similar values, such as love, respect, rationality, caring… This question, whether Islam (or, to be more exact, certain Islamic stances) is moral, is further divided into three segments, which form the main part of the thesis:

1) Is homosexuality immoral?

2) Is the eternal Hell[1] in accordance with God's[2] characteristics (mercifulness)? Can it be said that it is moral?

3) Did the prophet Muhammad make an unforgivable mistake for a prophet by marrying Aisha? Did he commit an immoral act? Is a prophet bound by his surroundings when it comes to morality, or is he above it?

To answer all these questions, we first of all have to answer the question of what atheism is. To what extent is atheism spread within the Arab world? How are atheists perceived by others? What are some problems atheists face? Considering that atheists reject religious morality, do they have an alternative for it?

As one of the central themes of this paper is morality, the logical question arises. What is morality? How do we define it? Is there a plurality of moralities, or is morality one? What are some relevant moral theories for the purpose of this paper? To what extent does the Islamic God correlate to the standards of morality that will be established?

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[1] I will use Hell and Heaven, written in capital letters when speaking of the afterlife that Islam, and to a certain extent, other Abrahamic religions put forward (I say to a certain extent as there is a tendency in Christianity nowadays to reconsider and revise the traditional concept of Hell). Hell and heaven as envisioned by other cultures will be written with small capital letters.

[2] God, written with an upper case "g", will be used to refer to the Abrahamic God (and especially the Islamic God). In all other instances god will be written with a lower case "g".

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is based on qualitative research. It will examine the Arab Atheists Magazine (in further text „Magazine") and the three above-mentioned main objections to Islamic morality. By examining the first 20 chapters (i.e. 25 chapters for my third main part – Muhammad and Aisha) of the Magazine, the basis – skeleton – of the paper will be formed. All the other topics (atheism in general, definition of morality, and moral theories) are subordinate to the question of Islamic morality and their main purpose is to give more insight to the main part and complement it. When searching for suitable chapters in the Magazine, I was searching for information based on relevant chapter titles, or by entering keywords that should, according to my own evaluation, lead me to appropriate information to elucidate this subject. For example, the title of one of the chapters in the 13th issue of the Magazine is "*Moral values between divine and human legislation*". In this case, I would usually read the whole chapter as the likelihood of finding something relevant for this paper is very high. On the other hand, titles, such as „*My experience with Islamic economics*" (12th issue), would be impertinent to the topic of my paper and would not be read.

However, the most productive method for finding relevant information was by typing in keywords. To gain a general impression on the Magazine's stance concerning morality and atheism I would type the words "*ʾaḫlāq*" and "*ʾilḥād*", respectively. For the chapter and sections on homosexuality, my main keyword was "*ǧinsiya miṯliya*" (homosexuality). Keywords for the chapter about the problem of the eternal Hell were mainly different words for Hell, i.e. "*ǧahannam*", "*ǧahīm*", and *"nār"*. Another productive term in this context was "*ʿaḏāb ʾabadī*" (eternal torment/agony), or just "*ʿaḏāb*" (torment). For the chapter about marriage and its consummation between Muhammad and Aisha, my keywords were mainly their names, but also "*zawāǧ al-ʾaṭfāl*" (child marriage), and the numbers "*sitt/aʿ*" (six) and "*tisʿ/a*" (nine), i.e. the supposed age when Aisha got married and the supposed age when the consummate on of the marriage happened.

After the center ideas of the Magazine concerning relevant topics had been extracted I aimed to expand and reinforce their viewpoints, either by expressing my personal opinion or by quoting relevant literature, which is either equally critical of Islamic morality or critical of the same points as the Magazine (as the disapproval of the ideas, such as the eternal Hell or homosexuality, is not limited to Islam). With that being said, some opinions in favor of the Islamic morality are also mentioned, nevertheless, not in the same number.

3. STATE OF RESEARCH

Although much has been written about the topics of atheism and ethics, the literature concerning the critique of Islamic morality remains rather modest. This is even more true when it comes to the analyses, as it is in this case, of an online source that is critical of certain Islamic stances, or Islam in general. Whereas the literature about the critique of Christian morality is much more fruitful and lively, literature about the critique of Islamic morality falls short, maybe because of the fear that by doing so one would immediately be labeled as Islamophobic. One can hardly deny that today seemingly every critique of Islam is hastily and imprudently labeled as Islamophobic.[3] However, this should not be the case, as no religion and no idea should be immune to critique, especially when this critique is justified and supported by evidence. There is no literature, known to me, written concerning the Arab Atheists Magazine. One of the rare works that deals with a somewhat similar topic as mine – i.e. an investigation of the attitudes of Arab atheists in the online sphere - is by Tamara Abu-Hamdeh, and her examination of an online atheists' site (i.e. forum) named "*šabakat al-mulḥidīn al-ʿarab*" (Arab Atheists Network).[4] Her article contains the elements of both quantitative and qualitative research, as the number of users, topics, threads, date of registration of particular users, how long they are active, and similar particulars, are mentioned in detail. The author goes on to examine the content of specific threads, for example, atheists' disapproval of fasting, Islamic Hell, or the idea of god in general. However, there are also some threads that are not necessarily atheistic, but quite the opposite, the threads that venerate the Islamic God, pointing out his greatness. They are also the subject of the analysis by Abu-Hamdeh. A notable difference to my research is the nature of the examined online material. Whereas a forum is by its purpose place for exchanging opinions, the Magazine is far more one-sided. The second major difference, and probably the biggest, is that the work of Abu-Hamdeh does not deal with the topic of morality at all. Similarly Matthew Thomas in his 2017 master's thesis analysis examines two atheist Facebook groups - Arab Atheist Network and Forum and Radical Atheists.[5] The main object of his work is the examination of the role social media platforms play in creating societal changes and forming group identity. The research is more centered around the description of the groups and the reasons the members joined the groups than dealing with the topics discussed in the forum. It is interesting to point out that the author interviews the admins of the groups, one of them

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[3] See Rizvi: Atheist Muslim, p.82. Compare also pp.149, 155, 162.
[4] See Abu-Hamdeh: Kein Gott, keine Gelehrten.
[5] See Thomas: Illuminating Voices.

being ʾUsāma al-Binni, who is, besides being the admin of Arab Atheists Network and Forum, also the editor of the Arab Atheists Magazine. Helmi Noman also analyses the phenomenon of the emergence of Arab irreligiosity and religious skepticism online, its "content, discourse, and structure."[6] The author does not examine particular atheist groups in the online sphere, rather he analyses the potential the internet in general has on these groups in order to express their autonomy, attest their existence, as well as the power of the internet to serve as a medium for free speech, albeit anonymously. There are also some works I could mention that deal with atheists and religious groups online and their mutual relation (or to be more precise the polarization between them), which are relatable to my work in the sense that they describe Arab atheists online, however, focus on their interest is insofar irrelevant to my research, that I opt not to mention them in more detail.[7]

4. ATHEISM

Atheism, as just one of the many ideas and worldviews that man cherishes in his mind, probably appeared in its primitive form in the mind of man at the moment - if not before - when he thought that someone, something, beyond our senses and reason - let's call it a god or a set of gods - exists, and that it transcends us and is superior to us in every aspect. Maybe the exact point in time is not so important. Now, after thousands of years of sovereign rule by God and his like, it seems that the idea of atheism has never been more prevalent, at least not in the written history of mankind, and it seems to be spreading like a plague (or some other infectious disease) or like a truth-bearing light that languished for a long time covered by layers of stories, myths, and religions. Which one of these two it is, depends on which perspective we look at it, because for some this idea is blasphemous, terrifying, false, and for others obvious, rational, brave.

First of all, it would be useful to explain what atheism is, and then name different forms of atheism that will be mentioned in the paper. Strictly speaking, atheism is the disbelief in god or the lack of belief in god. More than being a set of ideas, an ideology, it is rather a state of not having a certain god-like belief. That being said, people, however, use the word atheism

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[6] Noman: Arab Religious Skepticism, p.1.
[7] For example, one such paper is by al-Hariri & Magdy & Wolters: Atheists versus Theists. It offers a nice insight into the polarization between atheist and religious users on Twitter, however, content-wise it is of little importance to my research.

as an umbrella term for a range of things that often do, but do not necessarily exclude a sort of belief in the supernatural. If we try to describe the term atheism and its different subgroups, the way people use it, rather than choosing a prescriptive approach, then we come to these, most common ones:

- Irreligion/the non-religious (*lā-dīniyya*) – often understood as simply not following any religion, but most often Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. This, however, does not imply that they do not believe that there could be some higher force that has an impact on our life, or that there is a reality beyond ours.
- Agnosticism (*lā-ʾadriyya*) – a term used for the view that we do not know whether a god or gods could exist, or that we are incapable of such knowledge. It is to some degree disputed if agnosticism should be counted as a form of atheism, but if we are to understand atheism as a lack of belief in a deity, then it surely must be considered as such.
- Antitheism (*ḍidda d-dīn*) – As clear for its name, antitheism is actively against theism. Whereas agnosticism or irreligion do not necessarily oppose theism, antitheism is ardently against theism, and hence religions, considering them intrinsically harmful and deteriorating for human civilization.

There is a lot of overlap between different atheist groups, and drawing a line between them can be a cumbersome task. Atheists rarely belong just to one particular group, rather they are an amalgamation of more groups, with some of their features being more prominent than others. There are some other divisions, that appeared in relatively recent times that may be more useful. For example, George H. Smith divided atheism into two groups: implicit and explicit atheism. Implicit atheism is defined as the absence of theistic belief without a conscious rejection of it (a good example would be children), whereas explicit atheism is the rejection of the idea of a god after it has been considered.[8] We can then say that the difference is epistemological, what unites them is the lack of belief in deities, and what differentiates them is the degree of knowledge. Most self-defined atheists today would fall into the group of explicit atheists, in any case, the group of atheists with whom we will be dealing in this paper. In the online Arabic dictionary – al Maʿānī – atheism is defined as "*the view of those who reject deity, including rejection of evidence adduced by thinkers on the existence of God.*"[9] This definition differs to a certain degree from the description of atheism stated above, as it

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[8] See Smith: Atheism, p.13.

[9] See Al-Maʿānī dictionary, under ʾilḥād, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF/, last access: 27.05.2023.

specifies that atheists reject the existence of a deity, and as such would correspond with the description of explicit atheism. When we speak of atheism (ʾilḥād) in the Islamic context we often hear terms murtadd (apostate) and kāfir (disbeliever), beside mulḥid (atheist). There are some differences between these two terms - an apostate being a person who previously belonged to a certain faith and then renounced it, whereas kāfir is a broad term, which can be used for everyone who is outside of Islam, may he be a believer or an atheist. In the Magazine, the term atheism is described as follows: "*The term atheism is a description used by a believer of a certain religion, for all those who are outside of this religion or religions prevailing in this period. For example, if any Muslim becomes a Christian or a Jew – but not restricted to just them – he becomes then an apostate (murtadd), or unbeliever (kāfir) from Muslims' perspective, but if he leaves the religion and chooses not to convert to any other one then he is an atheist (mulḥid).*"(2/15)[10]

Finally, the word atheism in the Magazine is mostly understood as a line of thinking which consciously rejects the existence of god(s), and hence it is explicit, it goes against the idea of God and criticizes it vehemently and thus it is anti-theistic. Concretely it is against the Islamic God, its holy book, and its last prophet and his works and deeds, and therefore it is quite clearly against Islam, it is, we could say, anti-Islamic.

4.1. MAGAZINE

"Arab Atheists Magazine" is an online magazine that was published every 12th of the month in the period between December 2012 and December 2021. In total, it has 109 publications, with every edition comprising an average of 90 pages. Every edition is available for download on their website[11], with the user able to choose between high and low definition versions, with the content being exactly the same. On the main page of each edition there are pictures and motives connected with the themes dealt with in the

A typical front page layout

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[10] In order to quote the Magazine I will use this pattern. The first number (in this case 2) will be used to designate the number of the issue, the second number is the page number. This means that in this instance we are talking about the 2nd issue, page number 15.

[11] The website link: https://arabatheistbroadcasting.com/aamagazine

Magazine, with some of the chapter titles, which the editors of the Magazine considered most intriguing, written in big letters. In smaller font, some basic information about the Magazine is adduced. I will cite it here in full, as written on every main page:

> *"The Arab Atheists Magazine is a magazine whose aim is to freely disseminate the ideas of Arab atheists of all their different political and ethnic orientations. The Magazine is a digital magazine built with individual efforts and does not endorse any political affiliation. The information and topics included in the Magazine are considered responsibility of the owners in terms of ethics and copyright, and the preservation of intellectual property."[12]*

Every edition consists of around 15 chapters, dealing predominately with genuinely religious themes, predominately Abrahamic religions - Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, but far from being restricted to them, it deals also with Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism, among others. Topics from psychology, biology, and other science branches are also an important part of the Magazine, but dealt with in such a manner to show them opposing and undermining the foundation religions are built on - evolution as evidence against the Creation myth of the Abrahamic religions, religions as a psychological defense mechanism against the unknown, would be some of the examples.

The Magazine is written and published only in the Arabic language. The authors of the Magazine are mostly anonymous, but from their writings, it can be concluded that they are of Muslim background and almost exclusively Arabs. Although there are some fixed authors of the Magazine, everyone can send their writings to the Magazine and get their essays and articles published after being approved by the editorial board to see if the writings match the Magazine's purpose and character. The Magazine is part of Arab Atheist Broadcasting, nonetheless, it can be regarded as a separate entity. Arab Atheist Broadcasting site contains apart from the Magazine, many free videos, documentaries, articles (which are not part of the Magazine itself), blog posts, and books about atheism. It is also important to mention that the Magazine is not part of any foreign government or non-government organization, and is not financed except from personal sources of the Magazine founders or voluntary donations by readers and supporters via PayPal.

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[12] All translations of the Magazine are done by me.

4.2. NUMBER OF ATHEISM IN THE ARAB WORLD

The exact number of atheists in the Arab world is hard to determine, be it for the reasons of insufficient studies concerning this occurrence, questionable methodologies, or simply because of the fear of stepping out and acknowledging one's disbelief, given the dire consequences this could entail for the person publicly acknowledging his atheism or leaving his faith. Still, some studies have been carried out in the region of the Near East and Northern Africa (MENA) with the results partly contrasting to a great extent. In spite of this, an approximate number can be discerned from the studies published, if not by relying solely on studies, then by comparing them. In 2010 a study conducted by "Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life", an American center specializing in religion and belief affairs, concluded that the lowest percentage of atheists is located in the countries of the Near East, where their number does not exceed two percent (2,100,000 atheists, at that point of time).[13] In 2012 Gallup International published a survey that distinguished between "convinced atheists" and "not religious". For example, two percent of the population of Lebanon is convinced atheist (4% in West Bank and Gaza, 5% in Saudi Arabia). The percentage of non-religious people is much higher (29% in West Bank and Gaza, 19% in Saudi Arabia, and 33% in Lebanon).[14] The distinction between non-religious and convinced atheists is logical and notable, however, I do not believe it to be of great importance in our context, as they both share the lack of belief in some sort of god, here the Islamic God. If we considered them as one group, the difference between them being zealousness and the degree of consideration of the matter (existence of God), we notice that the number of those who distanced themselves from Islam in Arab countries, or the countries of the Near East, is surprisingly high. In my work I will be using the term atheism/atheists in the context of Islam, meaning by it either an a-Islamic view or a view that is against Islam. Having said that, maybe the most surprising discovery is such a high level of atheists recorded in Saudi Arabia, which is undoubtedly one of the most conservative countries in the world, where overt atheism entails not only social qualms but also corporal punishments (such as whipping), and even death sentences (although, it must be noted, both of the punishments are rarely executed, but more on that in the next section). BBC published the results of the study by Arab Barometer, a research network concerned with social, political, economic, and religious attitudes of the Arab world, which was conducted in

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[13] See al-bāḥiṯ: The number of atheists.
[14] See Pipes: Atheism among Muslims.

2018 and 2019 showing a remarkable increase in atheism in the MENA region. The highest number of atheists (once again, non-religious are included under this term) is recorded in Tunisia (around 30%), followed by Libya (25%), Algeria (15%), and Lebanon (14%).[15] On the other hand there are reports of a much lesser, almost insignificant number of atheists, which try to represent them as a marginal occurrence in Arab countries that by no means can act as a threat to Islamic beliefs. Many websites cited a report published by the Observatory for takfīrī fatwas belonging to the Egyptian Dār al-ʾIftāʾ (an important Islamic institution based in Cairo), which again referred to the study conducted by "Red Sea" center from Gallup Institute (which I was not able to trace-back). The numbers in the year 2014, put forward by Dār al-ʾIftāʾ, are very precise and speak of 866 atheists in total, with the most atheists living in Morocco and Tunisia (325 and 320, respectively). The smallest number of atheists, according to the reports, is to find in Sudan (70), Syria (56), and 32 (Jemen).[16] Looking just from a logical perspective these numbers are absurd. Furthermore, there is no mention of the methodology used to reach these exact numbers, but there are some indications that these numbers were based on the number of members in atheist Facebook groups.[17] Leaving aside obvious problems of the methodology, even these numbers, presumably based on group members, were rather false. Just a quick Facebook search of Egyptian, Iraqi (or whatever other country) atheists at around that time gave a far larger number than in the mentioned report.[18] Maybe their exact number is not as important as the fact that their number is rapidly increasing, not just in the Arab world, but worldwide, and that this increase cannot be denied. There has always been a certain number of atheists throughout the Arabic history, but beginning from the 21st century, with the rise of global interconnection and the new wave of atheism (New Atheists), it seems to me that the voices of atheists have never been as loud as today, unyielding and permeating and that this sound has come to stay and resound in the ears of Muslims, like a continuous and unpleasing buzz.

The rise of New atheism, with its proponents being Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, which coincided with the increasing popularity of the internet, had indisputable a major effect on many people, especially the youth, who suddenly could seek answers to the questions which they were afraid or ashamed to ask their families, teachers, or even friends - easily and quickly on the internet. Their books, filled with anti-

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[15] See BBC: The Arab World. The study is comparative, i.d. it shows the percentage of atheists in 2013 and 2018-19. In all the countries studied the number of atheists increased, except for Yemen.
[16] See Albawaba: What Is the Number of Atheists.
[17] See Benchemsi: Invisible Atheists.
[18] See ibid.

religious sentiment, however at times their arguments lacked philosophical basis or real knowledge of the subject, and later their Youtube videos, found acceptance and admiration among those who felt oppressed or misunderstood by the dominant religious thought they lived in. They probably felt someone had eloquently and skillfully expressed what they sensed in them, something they never said to anyone (or even were conscious of), something they could not or were not able to express equally adeptly, and that in these individuals, who were respected and established scientists in their line of work, they could found intellectual and emotional anchorage for such thoughts. Influenced to a certain degree by the movement, Youtubers who propagated atheism, started to appear, not just in Western countries but also in the Arab ones. Most famous now are Sherif Gaber, Egyptian, and Kosay Betar, Syrian. Their videos reach hundreds of thousands and some even millions of views on their channel. As of September 2023, Kosay Betar had 172,000 and Sherif Gaber 406,000 subscriptions, which points to an active, noteworthy interest in atheism in Arab countries.

4.3. PUNISHMENT FOR APOSTASY

Before taking a closer look at respective Arab countries and the consequences of atheism or apostasy on an individual in modern times, I would like to briefly touch upon the problem of apostasy from an Islamic point of view i.e. the view which the Quran and hadiths take on this issue.

In every case, there is a consensus among Islamic religious scholars that apostasy is a negative thing, a path that leads to demise, a cluster of ideas that are in its essence contrarian to perfectly logical divine order, a reprehensible act that ought to be sanctioned. Punishment is almost universally undisputed, it is just the question of how. Historically, the prevailing opinion of religious scholars is that the punishment for apostasy is death. Harsh punishments are predominately based on hadiths, as the Quran is much more lenient and ambiguous on this matter. The hadiths that support the death penalty are:

- "…the Prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'' (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī 4:52:260)
- "…Muʿāḏ asked, "Who is this (man)?" Abū Mūsā said, "He was a Jew and became a Muslim and then reverted back to Judaism." Then Abu Mūsā requested Muʿāḏ to sit down but Muʿāḏ said, "I will not sit down till he has been killed. This is the judgment of Allāh and His Apostle

(for such cases) and repeated it thrice. Then Abū Mūsā ordered that the man be killed, and he was killed. (Ibid., 9:84:58)

- "*…The blood of a Muslim who confesses that none has the right to be worshipped but Allāh and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In Qisas for murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse and the one who reverts from Islam (apostate) and leaves the Muslims.*" (Ibid., 9:83:17)

Scholars who support the opinion that apostasy is not to be punished, base their judgments on the Quran, where no definitive punishment (i.e. death sentence) is mentioned for the act of apostasy. Instead of a punishment in this world, the punishment is postponed for the hereafter. Indeed, rather than castigation in this world the Quran opts for reprimands and warnings. The verses which are often cited in this context are: "*There is no compulsion in religion...*" (2:256), "*Say: The truth is from your Lord. So whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve.*" (18:29), and similar. On the other hand there are some verses that could be interpreted as supporting resentment towards disbelievers (4:89-90, 3:151, 4:56, 9:5…), as well as hadiths that promote tolerance and patience against disbelievers.

It seems that the issue of apostasy in modernity has become far more discussed and controversial than it was earlier and that the reasons for this are, before all, political and economic dominance of secular countries, their set of values which is regarded by them as superior to others, and their tendency to impose those values on other countries which, on the other hand, perceive them as a form of threat and coercion, or even as an extension of colonialism, as a form of mental occupation. My purpose is not only to point out some moral issues that could be raised against certain dogmas in Islam but also, to an extent, their implications and the implication of leaving Islam on the lives of every person who dares to leave Islam, to apostate, or just to doubt in certain Islamic tenets.

When it comes to modernity, leaving Islam is never easy in Arab countries, as it is never a step that is only restricted to one individual. Apostasy doesn't just affect one person, but the person's parents, family, and even the country itself. Especially in a culture where individualism is not as prominent as in Western countries, and where at the beginning (and the end) of almost every action stands a group and group identity. It is apparently considered such a big deviation, a despicable act that it is still punishable by death in some countries. Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauretania, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Nigeria are some of the Islamic countries where

disbelief in Allah can cost you your life.[19] Sudan is the most recent country that, in 2020, abolished death punishment for apostasy.[20] However, it needs to be said that the implementation of the capital punishment is rather a rare thing, where the state officials prefer to leave an "option" for the apostate between returning to Islam or proceeding with the punishment. It is not difficult to assume what most of the accused choose. Saudi Arabia's government had equated atheism and terrorism just a couple of weeks after the results of the abovementioned Gallup International were published (which showed that 5% of the Saudis are overt atheists) in their efforts to combat every action which could shake the fundaments of Islamic beliefs or be characterized as an insult to Islam.

In Egypt, there is no such law that punishes exclusively the act of apostasy, but there are elastic laws that penalize blasphemy in general. Such is Article 98(f) which outlaws "*disdaining and contempt of any of the heavenly religions or the sects belonging thereto*", where the terms disdaining and contempt are left to the interpretation of the juridical machinery. In Egypt it is mandatory that religious affiliation (just the three accepted Abrahamic religions) are marked on the identity card. This means that something like an atheist, or even a member of a different religious affiliation, officially does not exist. This praxis, which is widespread among Arab countries is criticized by many as at variance with the freedom of religion and belief, and it, in fact, paves the way for various forms of discrimination.[21] As per Sharia apostasy is punishable by death, however, Arab countries that apply Sharia to its fullest are rare and in most of them, traditional legal systems have been replaced by the ones inspired by the European model, although some Islamic principles are still being preserved. Secular countries are practically non-existent, as in all countries which do not exclusively implement the Sharia law, legal systems contain inferences to Sharia, especially when it comes to family law. That is why, for example, in some Arab countries you would be, if determined that you are an apostate, deprived of inheritance, forcibly divorced from your wife (as no female Muslim can be married to a non-Muslim man), or be stripped of the right of custody, even though the constitutions of the respected countries speak of religious freedom. In Kuwait, citizenship can be deprived of someone if a person renounces or behaves in a manner that clearly indicates his intention to abandon Islam.[22] Instances of criminal charges against apostates, under the pretext of undermining public security and national unity or contempt of religion, are not rare and many charged with these allegations actually get years-long prison sentences. It should be said here

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[19] See Villa: Blasphemy Laws.
[20] See Aljazeera: Changes in Criminal Law.
[21] See Whitaker: Arabs Without God, p.120.
[22] See Namazie, et al: Status of Apostates, pp.55-57.

that these apostates are all those who in some way spread atheistic beliefs, call people against Islam, speak against some Islamic practices, or in any other obvious way express their contempt for Islam. What counts as hate speech and where the boundary of free expression is, again, rather obscure, but anyhow this threshold is set pretty low as every utterance which negatively depicts Prophet Muhammad or Islam, in general, can be perceived as blasphemy, and therefore, punished. For example, Qatar affirms Islamic law as the main source of its legislation - like many other Islamic countries - and it contains strict laws concerning religion and crime against Islam. Offending the Islamic religion or one of its rituals, insulting and challenging Allah in writing, verbally or by any other means, insolence towards any of the prophets, and similar acts are official crimes that can get you imprisoned for up to five years (Articles 256-267).[23]

There are many cases in Arab countries of individuals being accused according to existing laws concerning apostasy or blasphemy. I will enlist just a couple of well-known cases that illustrate the difficulties atheists are faced with. For example, Alber Saber, an Egyptian blogger, was arrested in 2012 for blasphemy and content of religion. He had namely posted a link to a movie (Innocence of Muslims) that mocked Islam and denigrated the prophet Muhammad. He was later released on bail and left Egypt.[24] In Morocco 22-year-old ʿImād ad-Dīn Ḥabīb received several death threats as well as a warning from the government for his apostasy. He is the founder of the first atheistic organization in the country called "The Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco." Reportedly he said that his father was interviewed by the government, asking about the activities of his son, the government telling the father that he (ʿImād) has to stop, that he was considered an enemy of the state, and that that was the last warning before they act. After that, his house was raided and ʿImād went into hiding.[25] According to the Moroccan constitution, Morocco is an Islamic country and the religion of the country is Islam. But at the same time, it guarantees the freedom of belief and religious practices for all its citizens. The abovementioned Sherif Gaber had and still has to hide from the state organs because of his atheism and his public criticism of Islam. Because of his Youtube videos he was convicted to prison sentences multiple times. The filming of videos criticizing Islam also brought him numerous problems in the university and lasting tensions with his family.[26] In all those cases atheists face similar problems and qualms.

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[23] See الجرائم المتعلقة بالأديان والتعدي على حرمة الموتى,
https://almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=249&lawId=26&language=ar, last access: 14.09.2023.
[24] See BBC: Alber Saber.
[25] See CEMB: Hands of Imad.
[26] See Cairo Scene: An Interview.

When not faced with the death penalty or prison sentences for such "propagandistic" statements, apostates (atheists) face many other problems from both society and their families. They are left ostracized, marginalized on the fringe of the community map, and misunderstood. Such a state naturally has immense negative effects on a person's psychical health, leading to a sense of alienation, non-acceptance, or even the perception of losing one's identity (more on this problem also in the section 7.4. "Fear of Punishment").[27]

4.4. WAR ON ATHEISM

In Arab countries, atheism is predominately regarded as an anomaly, a type of psychical illness that needs to be treated. Many Arab countries have declared the so-called "war on atheism", which has for its goal direct confrontation (and ultimately vanquishment) of the whole concept of atheism, may it be through violent or peaceful means. The abovementioned equalization of atheism and terrorism in Saudi Arabia is one of the examples of these endeavors. Egypt, the county where atheistic voices are maybe the loudest, and their rhetoric most to be felt – especially after the 2011 revolution – authorities, the Ministry of Awqaf and the Ministry of Youth and Sports have together with Al-Azhar, the leading Islamic institution in the country, launched a national initiative to combat atheism in 2014. The plan was to gather specialists from different areas, like psychology, sociology, and politics who would be primarily addressing younger people and who would teach them the methods atheists use to attract younger generations and ways to combat these atheistic approaches, with a special focus placed on oral skills, i.e. how to discuss and win debates against atheists.[28] In recent years it has become increasingly popular to call atheists to TV shows in the attempt to familiarize the Egyptian public with the phenomenon of atheism by debating atheists. The goal, of course, would be to counter this dangerous idea by arguments, and by doing so, hopefully, assure the public of the superiority of Islam. However, there are instances where intolerance and the lack of acceptance have shown themselves in their full "light", in programs that were originally envisioned as a platform of mutual respect and a step towards a better understanding and cohabitation. In February 2018, an atheist Muḥammad Hāšim was invited to the TV channel "*Al-ḥadaṯ al-yawm*" and had a rather unpleasant experience with an Al-Azhar scholar there saying: "*Look, dear Mohammad, you need psychiatric treatment.*

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[27] For more about psychical and emotional consequences which Muslims faced upon leaving Islam as a reaction to their family's and society's non-acceptance, see Simon Cottee: The Apostates. When Muslims leave Islam.
[28] See al-Šurūq: War on Atheism.

Many young people today suffer from mental illnesses, due to material or mental circumstances", at the end the host Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-Halīm expelled him from the show, saying: "*I apologize to the viewers for having an Egyptian of this kind on our show. I'm sorry, Mohammad, but you cannot stay with us on the show, because your ideas are inappropriate, I'm sad to say. We cannot promote such destructive ideas.*"[29] It is paradoxical that the TV that invites atheists for the purpose of confronting their ideas, expels them under the pretext that such ideas are dangerous and somehow inappropriate, which all speaks quite clearly about the situations atheism, or any view that does not conform to societal expectations, are at.

Atheism also has increasingly been gaining popularity in recent years in Iraq and many calls for stopping the spread of all that for what this word stands for, could be heard from both clerics and politicians. That is most probably the reason why in March 2018, four persons were accused of charges concerning atheism, in Dhi Qar Governorate in southern Iraq.[30] Namely these persons were accused of „*giving seminars and spreading the culture of the non-existence of God, dissemination of atheism and expending of their public (popular) fundaments.*"[31] As in other countries where apostasy law does not exist, they were accused on the grounds of existing blasphemy laws. This is, of course, not an isolated case in Iraq and it represents a part of a wider anti-atheism movement in the country. Iraq, in particular, seems to be a fertile ground for the rapid growth of atheism, exacerbated by many wars in the pasts few decades, the rise of terrorist organizations, corrupt and disappointing country management, and quarrels between Shia and Sunni Muslims – alongside, of course, all previously mentioned factors which access to the Internet brought.

But the war against atheism is not only waged in the "real" world, it is not restricted to corporal punishments, imprisonment, or verbal threats and intimidations, it is also waged on virtual platforms. The occurrences where persons with radical Islamic beliefs infiltrate into atheist groups, post offensive content, and report it to Facebook, for the pages to be banned, are not rare and many of such cases have been registered.[32] Other platforms, with various success have served as a battlefield between atheists and Muslims.

Twitter served more as a means to provoke and insult, rather than a genuinely productive medium for exchanging knowledge, the main reason being the limited number of words available for writing, and in that sense, it is deprived of more elaborate, detailed, satisfying

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[29] MEMRI: Atheism Debate on Egyptian TV.
[30] See Al-Jaffal: Campaign Against Atheists.
[31] See ibid.
[32] See Whitaker: Arabs and Atheism.

atheistic-Muslim content or discussion. The same could be told of Instagram, as it is, from its design, even less suitable for such purposes. Different stories are, however, various internet forums, which truly represented a breakthrough, as they have made possible, on one side, a safe space for atheists to share their thoughts about Islam and how they perceive it, what is their major dissatisfaction with it, their problems or fears, and on the other side, it created a platform to exchange thoughts between atheists and Muslims, often leading to heated, passionate – but necessary - discussions, which would otherwise be unthinkable. "War" between atheists and Muslims has had a different pattern on Youtube, characterized by making of an array of response videos, which is in a way reminiscent of the philosophical medieval Arab commentary literature. One (be it a Muslim or an atheist) would publish a video on Youtube, then the other would make a response video to this one, to which the first one would reply, and so on. Recently, Youtube videos with a podcast form (debate /discussion) between atheists and Muslims have gained a lot of interest and is essentially the same as the first form content-wise, but characterized by far more tolerance, respect and composure – at least in most cases.

The Magazine we are going to take a closer look at, itself, is a war against the believers. At times seemingly unjust, as it only takes a look at one, atheistic, side, but most of the time fair, as the objections are argumentative and well-placed. At times, emotional (as most of the writers come from Muslim families, who shunned them because of what they are), but most of the time calm and coolheaded. At times condescending and haughty, as if the feelings got the best of them, but most of the time, conscious and empathetic.

5. DEFINITION OF MORALITY

„Morality is something which goes in the world; or at any rate, there is something which goes in the world to which it is appropriate to give the name of 'morality'. Nothing is more familiar; nothing is more obscure in its meaning."[33]

Morality is one of those things we normally tend to think we just "know", without the need of some intrinsic explanations or questioning. We intuit it, we feel it, and live by this mysterious principle every day. Of course, this did not prevent many minds, fond of philosophy, from

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[33] Perry: Realms of Value, p.86

pondering the questions about the meaning of morality, its beginnings, its significance, or even whether it exists at all.

Firstly, let it be noted that the terms "morality" and "ethics", although sometimes considered different and distinct, will not be used as such in this paper, rather they will be used interchangeably. Encyclopaedia Britannica, for example, mentions that the main distinction between morality and ethics could be understood in terms of morality being more subjective, personal, while ethics is more objective, often being tied to a group, society. However, this is far from a universal rule. Britannica mentions that the distinction between the two is as "*substantial as a line drawn in the sand*", saying that many ethicists themselves use the term interchangeably.[34] Hence, I will do the same, so as not to cause unnecessary confusion.

There is no doubt that what is moral (ethical), changes from person to person, from society to society, i.e. at least in its descriptive sense. This is why we can often hear Muslims describe women's wearing of make-up, having long nails, or wearing clothes that reveal certain parts of the body, as "bad" and immoral. Here, in Austria for example, but of course in many other parts of the world, few would agree that such things are indeed immoral, or that opposite of that, (not having make up, covering your whole body, and similar), is moral. Sticking with the example of wearing clothes that cover one's whole body, some would argue that this exact thing, which is deemed virtuous and good in Muslims, is in fact immoral, not because of the clothes per se, but because of that which it is brought in correlation with. Morality often, if not exclusively, exists not on its own, but exactly in correlation, in a link with other things, the outside world. Even the most unambiguous acts that are considered immoral, such as killing, seems to fall out of the scope of morality when thought in terms of existing on their own. Killing another human without reason is clearly an act that would be universally considered immoral, but killing oneself? It is only insofar immoral as it has an impact on people who might know us, or love us. It might also be considered immoral insofar as it concerns religious prohibition incumbent on us by god (or gods). If we neglected the connection between the act and the implication on the outside world, then that act itself becomes incomprehensible thought in terms of morality, which speaks first and foremost of the interdependent nature of morality. Neither the trivial action like listening to rock music (as it is the case in Islam), nor force feeding (as it is the practice in some tribes in Africa), nor eating beef (as it is the case in some parts of India) are spared of moral disagreement, but not only that, even issues like adultery, lying, killing, etc. (which are more universally shared) are

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[34] See Grannan: Morality and Ethics.

not absolute and without disagreement. All this speaks of a perplexing number of „moralities", which are, essentially, practices that are regarded „good" or "bad" in a specific society. This type of morality is descriptive and maybe the type of morality most of us are familiar with. It is changing, it is arbitrary and often irrational. It is the type I will not be speaking about primarily, rather when I use the term moral/immoral, what I will be having in mind is morality in its normative sense. What is meant by this is a *"code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational people."[35]*

To define morality in these, normative, terms, is no easy task. It is a form of idealistic morality to which many of us, although not fully comprehending what that would be, seem to allude to when saying – it is moral. In the famous Plato's cave allegory, a group of people in a cave only sees shadows of the real objects that are outside. They think these shadows are real, however, they are but mere reflections. Similarly, we can think of this normative type of morality as an outside world, the world of reality, whereas descriptive morality is little more than a shadow, a reflection on the cave's wall.

What is this idealistic, ought-to-be type of morality I seem to search for? Well, first of all, it is not restricted to any specific religion, nor any values imposed by it, in fact, it is exactly the opposite, it transcends religious morality and its arbitrariness and seeks the degree of universalization I think religions, at least Abrahamic, are not capable of. Secondly, it is based on objective rationality and the human ability to discern what is intrinsically good or bad, of course, not good or bad in regards to a particular individual, but more broadly, encompassing his surroundings, and eventually the whole world (not being restricted to us, humans, but extents to all sentient beings). This is different from religious morality where other non-human beings are often insofar important to the degree humans need them. Thirdly, this type of morality is also based on suffering (harm) and the well-being of an individual, the qualities that are less important in religious morality, or sometimes even totally neglected. We can take the example of homosexuals (see Chapter 6), or eternal torments in Hell disbelievers are destined to (Chapter 7), where formers' well-being is of little to no importance, and the latters' suffering is not just allowed by a merciful god, but extended to an infinite degree. However, the principle of harm and well-being is not absolute, in other words, not everything that is harmful is immoral, and not everything that is not harmful is moral. That in the bases of a moral judgment is not solely harmfulness quickly becomes obvious. Sinnott-Armstrong

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[35] Gert & Gert: Definition of Morality. The distinction between descriptive and normative morality is also taken from them. Cf. Frankena: Thinking About Morality, p.3.

& Wheatley give the example of spitting on your father's grave. Although it is not causing harm (in the everyday use of the word) to anyone, it is still considered immoral.[36] Sometimes what is harmful may in the end be good for you (operations), and not causing harm is often not an indication of morality at all. We can also try thinking about veganism to make this point more clear. Unnecessary infliction of suffering is one of the main arguments put forward by vegans for veganism case. Nevertheless, even if we devised a method of completely painless killing of animals, it would most likely not cease to be considered immoral by vegans, i.e. the assumption that we are not harming anyone (or anything) is no indication of its morality. Harm, understood as such, is then not decisive, albeit an important trait of normative morality I aim for. So, to base morality solely on this aspect would be wrong, or to put it differently "*moral judgments are not unified by being about harm to others*", as Sinnott-Armstrong & Wheatley write, trying to point out that at the core of moral judgments harm cannot be a sole decisive factor.[37]

To recapitulate, for an action to be considered moral there has to be some sort of agreement based on rationality, i.e. that rational minds would agree that certain actions, when based on certain conditions, must be moral.[38] This moral action has to be universalizable. This point is linked to rationality. Universalizable means that the moral action can be applied in similar situations and that it able is to be envisioned as a universal law (more on this in the next section). This moral action should also take into consideration the well-being of any sentient being.

> *"In judging X to be moral I am not merely judging that I approve, for then I would merely be reporting an autobiographical fact, nor that X meets my standards, for then again I would only be reporting a fact about X and me; and, if I say X is moral, you will understand that I am doing more than this. I am judging and saying that X is really moral [...], that X is moral by the true standards of morality, whatever these are."[39]*

In the next chapter there will be a talk about the classification of morality and some moral theories which I deemed important to mention, not just because religious morality (Islamic

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[36] See Sinnott-Armstrong: Disunity of Morality, p.360.
[37] See ibid.
[38] This is not to say that the nature of an action has to be reasonable in itself, as we can see that in many situations where it would be rational not do to something (as entering a house that is burning in order to save a person), it is nevertheless considered as moral (or at least virtuous) to do so. Rather what is meant here is that reasonable, fully informed, persons would have to be able to agree that such an act is moral or not. So, the focus of rationality is not on the action itself, it is on the reasonable minds perceiving it. More on the role rationality plays in ethics can be read in Adams: Rationality and Morality.
[39] Frankena: Thinking about Morality, p.48.

morality) includes certain elements of those theories, but also to show the plethora of moral theories, some of them with ancient roots, standing as opponents or equal contesters of religious understanding of morals. By doing so I aim to offer a structure in which our concept of morality can be placed, or a basis on which morality can be built without the need for a recourse to a form of divine power. This is done not just to give the reader a glimpse into the world of ethics, but also to determine where the Magazine would stand ethically.

5.1. MORALITY

„A hundred thousand good deeds could be done and helped, on that old woman's money which will be buried in a monastery![…] What do you think, would not one tiny crime be wiped out by thousands of good deeds? For one life thousands would be saved from corruption and decay. "[40] – are the words from one of the characters in the Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment, which, when first I read them in high school, struck me as immoral and clearly amiss. Surely, it can't be right to kill an old woman and take her money for your own aspirations and pleasures. Later, however, with the development of the plot and coming to be more conscious of the reasoning behind such form of thinking (for which I would much later come to know that it is called utilitarianism), I could not deny that it does make some sort of sense, although I still, intuitively, considered it to be wrong.

The writer here managed to really put a reader into a moral dilemma, creating perfect conditions for accepting the utilitarian approach, which in its basic form advocates for increasing overall happiness (pleasure or well-being), and minimizing suffering. Why would it not, a reader comes to question himself, be morally acceptable to kill an old, rich, woman, who is near the end of her life, who is an unlikeable, evil person (which "helps" a lot in coming to conclusions against her favor), and a merciless usurer, to add to that all. On the other hand we have a poor student, who could, with the money obtained through the act of killing, finish his studies and help his mother and sister (and most probably many others), who are likewise in a difficult material situation. The assumption that it would bring more well-being than suffering is a cornerstone of utilitarian philosophy, and that what is morally right, or wrong, is to be judged according to that premise. So it seems that the killing of the old woman in this case, according, at least, to the core principles of utilitarianism, would be morally permissible – i.e. moral.

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[40] Dostoevsky: Crime and Punishment, pp.126-127.

This (increasing happiness/decreasing suffering) is a classical position of utilitarianism, which was revolutionary in the period of time when it was first clearly articulated (18th century). It advocated, for example, for the abolition of slavery and death sentences, decriminalization of homosexuality and it even promoted animal rights, which for that time was rather progressive. It was, however, by no means immune to criticism, and Dostoyevsky, who was against utilitarianism, tried to picture what could happen and how little human life would be of value, if Christian morality were to be replaced. Some problems utilitarians face can come to light by using thought experiments. One, more modern and very popular objection to utilitarianism, is if we imagined five patients who would be saved if they got organs they desperately need. There is one person who is a suitable organ donor for all the five persons in question, and according to the utilitarian principle, the action which would produce the most good in this case is if the donor should be killed and his organs harvested. This is a valid objection to this basic form of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is, however, not just one line of thought, but it developed into various branches, and came up with some solid answers in its defense. In this example, it could be argued that the immediate consequence would indeed imply that we should kill this one person and save the lives of others, however, if we considered some other, more distant consequences, which would ensue because of this act (lack of trust in doctors and medical institutions, fear for one's life), it could be argued that letting the donor live would be actually better.[41] The point being here is that the consequences determine what is good and bad and not the act itself. This line of thinking where the consequences of a particular action play an essential role is known as consequentialism (of which utilitarianism is a part). It is in direct opposition to deontology, a form of ethical theory, where the morality of the action is not determined by its consequences, but rather it is determined based on the act itself, and whether or not these acts are in accordance with the normative rules it is based upon. For us deontology is of importance inasmuch as it concerns religious morality, which is a form of deontology. Religious morality is based on a set of rules (do not kill, do not worship anyone but Allah, do not eat pork…), which if broken, would be regarded as a bad, immoral act. In other words, we have a rough equation of following the rules = moral act, not following the rules = immoral act. A form of deontology is also, besides religious ethics, Kant's categorical imperative, according to which a moral act comes from the principle: "*Handle nur nach derjenigen Maxime, durch die du zugleich wollen kannst, daß sie ein*

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[41] More on utilitarianism and its defense against some common objections is to be found in Singer & Lazari-Radek: Utilitarianism.

allgemeines Gesetz werde."[42] This would imply that before doing any action I should always ask myself if I would like - or more precise if it makes sense to will - that my particular action should become implemented by all. If I am about to throw a cigarette butt on the street, I should ask myself if I want everyone to throw cigarettes butts on the street or if I treat my employers badly (or people in general), I should ask myself if this is how I want people to treat each other. It is clear that all moral principles so far seek universalization, and it is indeed, a common element to all moral principles, they seek to be accepted not just in a particular situation or among one nation or another, but to be always and universally applicable. Norbert Hoerster puts it like this:

> "*Jede Moral besteht aus Normen – aus Normen, die erstens eine bestimmte Verallgemeinerung beinhalten und zweitens mit den Anspruch, allgemein zustimmungfähig zu sein, verbunden sind.*"[43]

Coming back to our example from the beginning, Kantian categorical imperative would demand from us to not kill the old lady, as we could not wish without contradiction (without breaking the laws of logic) for the killing of old people to become a universal act. It is not just against Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative (stated above), but also against his principle, according to which you should not treat people only as a means but also as an end.[44] What is meant here "as an end" is entities with their own autonomy and wishes. If the sole purpose of my killing is to fulfill my needs (or the needs of other), as is the case with Raskolnikov, I would treat my victim not as an end itself, but rather as a pure means. Kant bases his moral judgments on ourselves, i.e. on our ability to reason, which can be compared to mathematical facts, in a sense that it is not just true now, but it is true in all circumstances, it is not just true in this moment, but it will be true tomorrow, in seven days, next year, and for all eternity… It is similar to religious morality as said, as it follows a set of rules, but it is different from it when we look at where it stems from, as Kant sees our reason and logic as sufficient faculties from which we are able to derive our moral reasoning. Religious morality, on the other hand, places God, or some other entity that is not human, as a place of origin for morality. Another difference between Kantian categorical imperative and religious morality (in our case Islam), is that whereas categorical imperative is absolute, it demands us to act in a specific way always, Islamic ethics is rather more flexible and permits some deviation from

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[42] Kant: Grundlegung, p.45.
[43] Hoerster: Moral, p.11.
[44] For more information on Kant's moral philosophy see Horn: Einführung in die Moralphilosophie, chapter "Kants Moralphilosophie", pp.160-173.

the general rule. We can take the example of lying. Although Islam admonishes lying and views it as a major sin, there are some instances where lying is allowed. It is narrated that the prophet Muhammad said: *"It is not lawful to lie except in three cases: Something the man tells his wife to please her, to lie during war, and to lie in order to bring peace between the people."* (Al-Ǧāmiʾ at-Tirmiḏī 1939, grade: ṣaḥīḥ).

Coming back to the term "religious morality", it is just a broad term used for any type of ethical conduct whose morality (their "goodness" or "badness") is framed and determined according to a specific religion. It is clear, that it cannot be one such framework that is universal and the same for all religions, as the number of religions - and with it, moralities – is numbered in thousands. What is moral is then determined by that what our god (or gods) demands from us. Throughout history, this has led to some appalling practices (suffice to say - child sacrifice), and some of it, more or less appalling continue to this day. Kant's morality, religious morality, and even utilitarianism (although it may seem as counter-intuitive as what is moral changes from situation to situation) are usually understood as a form of objective morality, objective meaning here that they are detached from personal opinion, unchangeable, existing in their own realms – be it contingent on god, reason, or some other thing.

The theories described here – utilitarianism (i.e. consequentialism), deontology, and religious morality – besides describing what good and bad is, or what morality is at all (metaethical theory) - offer us a sort of guideline on how to live morally. We can treat them as a form of a book in which we should take a look every time we found ourselves in a situation we do not know how we should best behave. When they are used in the latter sense they are called normative ethical theories, and besides the aforementioned ones (consequentialism and deontology), there exists also one more major normative ethical theory - virtue ethics. Virtue ethics has its origins in Ancient Greece, where the morality of an action is based on the moral character of a person (virtues) - i.e. we should behave how an ideally virtuous person would behave. We could take the situation of helping the elderly as an example to make a clearer picture of these three theories. Consequentialists would probably say that helping elderly people is good because it produces more pleasure than suffering, Kantians (as a form of deontology) would say that it is good because we could all wish for such an action to become a universal law and proponents of virtue ethics would approve such an action as it is a form of action that a virtuous person would do. Virtue ethics is important in our context as it is one of the pillars Islamic morality rests upon. First and foremost here we think of the sunna, i.e. the acts and sayings of the prophet Muhammad. Muslims take their prophet as an ultimate moral

example, as an embodiment of the highest moral virtues such as honesty, courage, forgiveness, and justice, among others, and conduct themselves according to them, seeking to emulate him. How the prophet Muhammad acted or would have acted in a specific situation is an essential part of Islamic morality (ʾaḫlāq). Together with instruction given in the Quran, which Muhammad integrated and exemplified perfectly, it is the indeed the cornerstone of morality for Muslims.[45]

On the other hand, we have something called metaethics, something less practical and more abstract than normative ethics. It is concerned with questions such as what is good and bad in themselves, does morality exist at all, is it subjective or objective, etc. Two major branches of metaethics are cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Non-cognitivism claims in essence that talking about any actions as being morally true or false is nonsensical; so for example according to non-cognitivism lying would be neither true nor false morally, or indeed any other action. Cognitivism is the opposite. As we are concerned here with religious morality and with a form of morality that supports the view that there are moral statements which true or false, we will only take a closer look at cognitivism and disregard non-cognitivism altogether. The biggest divide in cognitivism is the one between those people, who consider morality to be objectively true or false (objectivism or realism), and those who think that morality can only be subjectively true or false (subjectivism or antirealism). The majority of people, at least guided by their gut feelings, fall in the former category, as people tend to think that pedophilia, infanticide, or unnecessary affliction of suffering is morally reprehensible not just according to our view and society, but that it is intrinsically wrong and should be perceived as such at any given time. Subjectivism, however, says that the thing that makes our action wrong or right, is basically our opinion of the act. If we believe that an action is right, then this would make this action right, i.e. moral, and vice-versa. It should be clear why this view, which seems counter-intuitive and disturbing, is not the one most regular people, or ethicists, ascribe to. Schick puts it like this: "*Despite its popularity, there are probably fewer subjectivists among professional ethicists than there are creationists among professional biologists.*"[46] In the same group as subjectivism falls cultural relativism, which is essentially subjectivism raised to the level of society, where society is the judge of right and wrong. What seemingly speaks for societal relativism is the observable fact, that what we deem moral or immoral changes across cultures. For example, female genital mutilation is still practiced in

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[45] Apart from the Quran and sunna, some scholars point out that the third most important aspect of the Islamic ethics is the practice of the salaf. Cf. Ansari: Islamic Ethics, p.82.
[46] Schick: Morality, p.32.

many African countries, and its practice is not considered morally reprehensible in the cultures which implement it, but on the contrary, it is encouraged, as it stands as a sign of chastity and honor. But, again, for many people it is not only immoral, it is evil. The same could be said of cannibalism or infanticide (in such extreme cases as the killing of deformed children in ancient Greece or the killing of female children among some ancient Arab tribes). What may come as a surprise is that Divine Command Theory (DCT) – basically the view that whatever god commands is right - has in metaethics traditionally been ascribed to the same group as the subjectivism/realism, i.e. the group that there are no objective truths outsides one person's (in this case god's) or society's believes. Here is god nothing more than a person or entity who ordered for us what is right and wrong, and in that sense it is

subjective. One further objection that could further help us illustrate the subjectivity of DCT is the famous example from the Bible (and Quran 37:100-108) when God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac[47]. When this was commanded it suddenly became morally permissible for Abraham to do this, normally an immoral act, and although the sacrifice did not eventually happen, it could prompt us to think that morality, which relies on God, can be haphazard and hence totally subjective. It is obviously different from cultural and individual relativism, in the sense that it seeks the degree of universalization of morality, which is just not there in the cultural and individual relativism. In this

"Abraham, I am Allah, your Lord... I want you to kill Ishmael.", 14/92

aspect it is objective, as it goes beyond what I (as an individual) would accept as moral or the society I belong to, but is at the same time subjective as it relies on commands, which could be, theoretically, changed. The thought that God could, at any moment, change his mind, so to say, to command, for example, that affliction of unnecessary suffering or killing is now allowed, was and is understandable disturbing for many theologians and religious people. While Ashʿari scholars were simply ready to accept that this could be the case, some other lines of thought (Mutazilites) discarded it as such and accentuated the role of reason in such cases, suggesting that some moral truths are capable of reaching by reason alone (which raises the problem of the Euthyphro Dilemma, which would imply that morality is somehow

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[47] Whereas the Bible says that Isaac was to be sacrificed, in Islam the dominant view is that it was Ishmael.

independent of god, which is a major problem as it allows for their opponents to base their morality on the objective ground, without the need to resort to some divine force). Ashʾaris, in the end, won[48], and some forms of DCT continued to be important among metaethical theories in Islamic ethics until the present day. Some modern scholars such as Hourani and Attār are critical of traditional DCT, seeing it as incompatible with Islam and its morality. Essentially they are of the opinion that the Quranic language already implies the existence of the objective morality, as speaking about values such as justice, goodness, honesty and similar, logically presupposes the existence of objective morality.[49] Others tried to find a middle path, suggesting that Gods nature and His commands cannot be separated and dislocated, but that there are one thing – and God being intrinsically good, God cannot be something else than good, as it is His nature[50] (importantly this does not say that God is, therefore, not omnipotent – i.e. that He cannot do acts which are against His nature - rather it falls in the realm of logical impossibilities such as the one of square circle and married bachelor). This seems to say that God's commands cannot be arbitrary, as His nature is not arbitrary. Here is very important to distinguish between normative and metaethical DCT, as one should not discern that they are one and the same thing. Where in normative DCT our main goal is the following and submission to god's commands, in metaethics, what is the subject of question, among other things, is the nature of good, is it intrinsic to god or not – and these two are two separate subjects. Mark Murphy writes:

> *"The thesis that God must be obeyed is a normative claim, not a metaethical claim: and so there would be no merit to the charge that affirmation of divine authority commits one to an untenable divine command metaethics."[51]*

In the following chapters, I will be more focused on the normative side of the Islamic DCT, as it is, I would say, the form of morality which is usually understood when speaking of morally good or bad actions, as the question of morality in everyday use is, of course, more practical and more based on the obedience to god's commands, without dwelling on the question of language, and what does good actually mean or refers to.

Bearing that all in mind, we have also the division between naturalism and non-naturalism. Naturalism is in our case important, as it is here that we can find utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue as metaethical branches. It should come as no surprise that they are branches in

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[48] See Hourani: Theories of value, p.271.
[49] See Al-Attār: Divine Command Theory; Hourani: Ethical Presuppositions.
[50] See Tzortzis: Euthyphro's Dilemma.
[51] Murphy: Divine Authority, p.6.

normative ethics also, as every normative ethics seeks to justify their views in metaethics. When we speak of naturalism what is meant by that is that "*moral terms, concepts, or properties are ultimately definable in terms of facts about the natural world*"[52], in other words, it is possible for morality as such to be derived from nature, physical world without having to resort to some non-natural force or entity (god, for example). Non-naturalism is, of course, the opposite, as it supports the view that moral properties are not reducible to natural properties and today it is most usually linked to G.E.Moore. As our goal is the examination of the objections of the Magazine against Islamic morality, the theory of non-naturalism will also not be further elaborated.
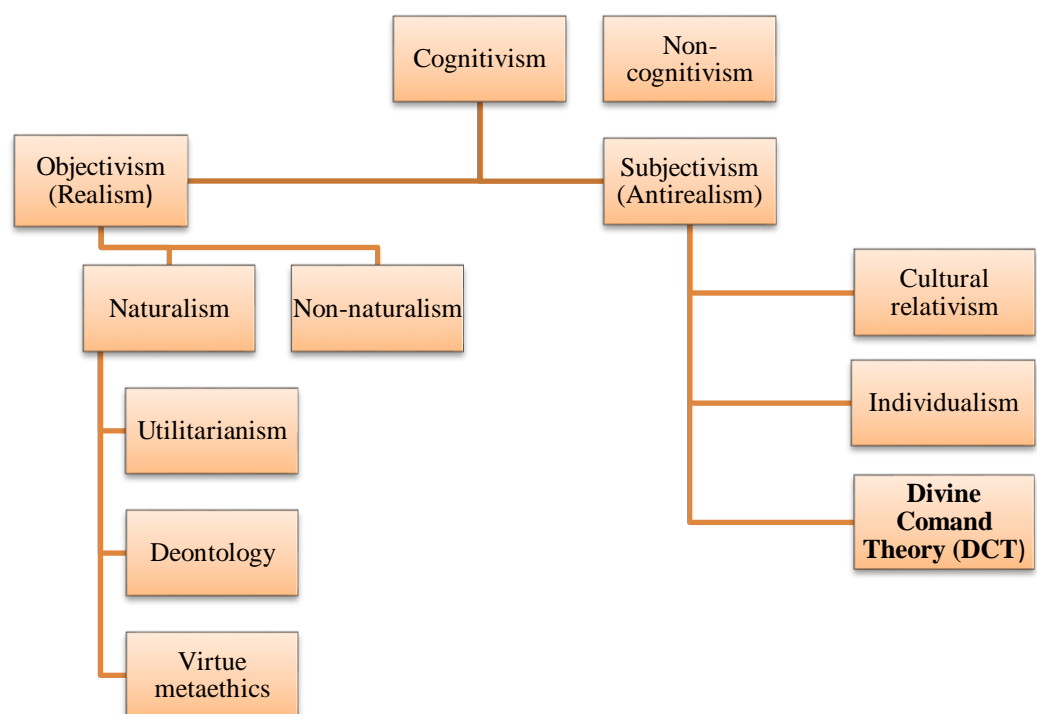
Metaethical chart and classification of relevant (for us) branches within[53]

We saw some types of morality Islam advocates, but what about the Magazine? Being critical of the morality Islam submits to, what is the type of morality they would replace it with? Firstly, it should be said that it is not very obvious where the Magazine stands concerning metaethics or normative ethics, and rather than explaining their ethical position they are more

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[52] Encyclopaedia Britannica: "Ethical Naturalism", https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethical-naturalism, last access: 24.06.2023.

[53] Loosely based on Miller: Metaethics. The chart presented here is vastly simplified, and does not contain many important metaethical theories such as error theory, emotivism, intuitionism, etc.

focused on disproving Islamic morality. Nonetheless, they allude to their stance on morality on several occasions. Firstly, it is clear that the origin of morality, according to their view, is not god, rather they see it as a product of evolution, as a sort of a useful concept that helped us survive and thrive. The origins of morality are to be sought not in god (Islamic God, in this case, as they seem to deem Him antithetical to morality at times), but in ourselves, inside our human nature, tracking it back thousand and hundreds of thousands of years in the past, and ever further, where morality is to be found in our animal, primitive beginnings. Morality is thus seen as a human product that changes and evolves with humans, which came about to facilitate our lives, something we could compare with planes and cars, or with the concept of money. Their view of morality is rather pragmatic:

> *"The emergence of these moral motives can be traced back to social evolutionary reasons that are understandable in the primitive human group… such as do not steal, do not kill, love, defend others in the tribe and so on. The topic goes beyond these basic values, to the likes of: do not lie, do not cheat, do not betray, be honest (in dealing) with money and honor others."* (3/25)

> *"What would happen if we started killing, robbing, and raping each other? Is it possible for a society to live and prosper in this chaos and violence? Was it to be a community in the first place? Isn't society a form of the small family that expanded over time? Is it possible for any family to exist if its members do not possess any form of a basic system of solidarity that preserves their survival and the survival of the family and society in which they are located?"* (5/23)

This all suggests that the writers of the Magazine, largely, advocate for a type of morality known as evolutionary ethics (in further text EE). EE, of course, owns its name to the process of evolution, described by Charles Darwin in the 19th century. The Magazine mentions his following saying to support the view of how morality could have arisen from the evolution: "*Any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man.*" (3/10). Compared to other metaethical and normative theories in ethics we mentioned in some more detail (utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics), EE (be it in metaethics, normative ethics, or descriptive ethics) is, of course, younger. Maybe surprisingly but Darwin was not the main proponent of EE, rather Herbert Spencer and Ernst Haeckel were the first ones who academically tried to tie ethics and evolution in their writings towards the end of the 19th century[54], and, in general, it remains one of the most discussed views in ethics. As EE rests

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[54] See Nitecki: Evolutionary Ethics, p.3

upon the assumption that morality and evolution are inseparable, and as it further rests on the fact that humans as a species evolved – which is a biological, natural process - it falls under a kind of metaethical naturalism. It seems that the Magazine is simply offering an alternative to Islamic morality, an explanation of how morality could have evolved without God, which is basically *descriptive ethics*, without trying to resort to metaethical questions of morality language or true or falls statements, at least explicitly, and surely not trying to advocate normative EE, i.e. to imply how we should behave based on human evolution.

The Magazine places at the core of morality our ability to experience happiness and suffering. They seem to suggest that our moral behavior, however complex it may seem, is ultimately reducible to our undeniable biological tendency to avoid pain and seek happiness and well-being. All of our morality is then but an extension of these two basic impulses.

> *"From the instincts of happiness and pain - through human societal development - the concepts of interest and harm spring forth. What makes us happy as individuals and supports our survival and the survival of our offspring we call "interest", and what hurts us as individuals and threatens our survival and the survival of our offspring we call "harm". From the concepts of interest and harm - through human intellectual development - the moral values of good and evil stemmed: what achieves the interest of society we call 'good', and what goes against the interest of society we call 'evil'."* (17/25)

The first thing that catches our attention and can be raised as an objection against such a view, is that this view seems to allude that what is morally good is somehow tied to our benefit, or the benefit of our group. This, of course, is not how we understand morality today, and indeed it appears that exactly the opposite should be the case, that the right action is the one which not only does not benefit us, but is often to our disadvantage. If we donate money to a charity, we tend to see it as a good deed, as a moral act, but it clearly does not benefit us (except, maybe, for the fact that we feel good about it), if we help someone with, let's say, moving furniture in a new apartment, it does not benefit us directly in any way, rather it takes from us a couple of hours we could use to do something more pleasing to us. Morality as we like to think about it, is not then tied to benefit, and benefit, actually, seems to denigrate it. The Magazine is, however, aware of the implicit problem that the word benefit and interest could have on morality, and emphasizes that benefits and interests played decisive roles in the birth of moral awareness of humankind, should, however, not be understood as the main motive behind every moral action or decision. It simply postulates how morality could have appeared in humans, without implying that the benefit should play any role in ethics. This, once again, is not a normative theory of ethics, but a descriptive one.

"However, we emphasize once again that we do not say that the link between morals and interests is the conscious "motive" behind every moral action necessarily, but rather we say that the link between morals and interests is the biological "explanation" for the very existence of morals as an unconscious instinct."(17/30)

As we will concentrate on moral fallacies in Islam from the Magazine's perspective, we will try not to dwell too much on the type of morality the Magazine adheres to as, again, the focus will be on the Islamic morality and some presumable issues with it. However, it should be noted here that EE, in general, does not come without problems. The critics of EE have pointed out that their proponents face the same is/ought problem (Hume's law), as many other theories in ethics, i.e. the impermissibility of the act of inferring that we *ought to* behave in a certain manner, just because something is, as a state of fact (for example, we shouldn't conclude from the fact the people eat meat, that eating meat should be done). Further, another criticism goes, it is difficult to see how such concepts as altruism could emerge solely based on our nature in evolutionary terms, as it is something that goes against an individual and his chances of survival. Here is quite often mentioned the example of Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest, who, while being a prisoner in Auschwitz voluntarily offered to take a place of a man who was going to be starved to death, although he was not chosen and could have (presumable) survived otherwise. Theists think that such a type of altruism and sacrifice is only possible through objective morality and cannot be explained otherwise.

5.2. (IM)MORALITY OF ATHEISTS

It is quite common among Muslims to act as if Islam and its followers are the sole heralds of morality, laying claim to a sort of morality monopole. Morality, according to them, is not to be thought of outside Islam, or indeed unable to be thought of, except as contingent on God – Allah. If they grant that morality can be also manifested in people who are not Muslims, let's say atheists, then it is not because of their moral values acquired through reasoning or

Morality seller: 13/11

upbringing, but rather because of the reasons that at the basis of their morality lies God. *Fiṭra,*

as it is called in Arabic, a form of intuition that governs our moral reasoning, is the reason for it, and its source is God. The existence of moral intuition is unquestionable, as we seem to *know*, in most cases, what is right or wrong, just based on our inner feelings. While *fiṭra*, according to Muslims, is bestowed from us from God, for the vast majority of atheists, the intuition of right and wrong is given to us through evolution. For atheists, this does not and should not imply that what we intuit for being wrong is actually always wrong. Intuition can guide us, but to a certain degree, where it reaches its limits, reason takes on.

It is far too often mentioned in Muslim discourse on morality, that atheists having no objective morality and being left only with volatile subjective morality, are morally inferior. And how could they be with no objective morality? Videos of Peter Singer, Lawrence Krauss, or other atheists in which they seem to suggest that such actions as zoophilia or incest[55], if mutually agreed to, are not necessarily morally wrong, are often put forward as an argument for atheists' immorality. Although it is true that they do not seem to see anything wrong with that conclusion, it cannot be said that they are philosophically inconsistent (at least Singer, as a utilitarian). The Magazine, however, would not go that far as to try to morally justify morally peculiar actions, such as incest and zoophilia, but are rather explicit in the rejection of them.

> *"If we need books, gods, and prophets to explain to us that practicing* **incest** *[*emphasis added*] and capturing the women of neighboring countries, invading them, enslaving them, and killing a person is wrong we are simply beings of no morals at all, but rather human monsters who believe that religion is the only barrier that prevents us from practicing the vices that we have in our fantasies."(5/26)*

Whatever the case may be, the next step, which is usually deduced from this, i.e. that for atheists is then everything permissible (killing, pedophilia, rape…), is a logical fallacy and obviously wrong. Killing and rape, for example, are on entirely different ends of well-being (which most utilitarianism use as their main tool for measuring morality), and being actions that endanger our well-being to the highest degree, are morally impermissible.

> "*What prevents you from having sex with your mother and sister? Why don't you steal as long as there is no accountability or supervision? Why don't you kill people as long as there is no reckoning or punishment? These questions make me nauseous and feel contempt for the questioner, he does not steal, does not sleep with his mother, and does not kill only because his book told him that."(1/7)*

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[55] See "Atheism and Bestiality – Atheist Peter Singer", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pG01ASbgyM, see also "Objective Morality | Mohammed Hijab", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SavRyeG5luM (38:18 – 18:58).

I think that the term "objective" and "subjective" is, as used in everyday speech, largely misused or wrongly understood. Usually, in religious circles, the word objective is tied to god, and everything else is subjective. Subjective, always wandering, not having an anchor, a place to cling to, and being distanced from god, carries an implication to, in fact, be immoral. It is almost as if it is unworthy of the term morality. It is no surprise then why, looked as such, it has negative connotations (as illustrated above). If we would grant this and accept this classification – it would be justifiable to regard subjective morality as such, and similarly it would be hard to see how something so evasive and changing could be called morality at all. This would be, however, an unjustly simplification of the matter. I think it would be much more preferable and closer to the truth if we introduced a third category (in this context) of morality – intersubjective morality[56]. People do not change so quickly and easily their moral principles religious people would want to imply with the term "subjective", which would then be similar to our thoughts and feelings, which appear suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, and just like that, vanish. Obviously this is not the case with morality as we usually understand it.

Could we compare the existence of objective morality with the existence of intrinsic purpose in life in a theistic worldview? The life of an atheist, theists love to mention, is without god devoid of intrinsic value, it is an empty shell, simply - a rather sad life. Our purpose, they say, is our submission to him and his worship. May well be. Although I can grant the part that atheists' lives are without intrinsic purpose, I would not accept the claim which would suggest that life without god is sad or without any purpose. Maybe intrinsic purpose may not exist, but it doesn't follow that some purpose does not exist, or that it is impossible without the first one (intrinsic one). Similarly, we can regard morality existing, maybe not intrinsically, as predicated on god, but within us, nonetheless, formed and maintained by from us - for us. Intersubjective morality rests upon the idea that individuals and societies value certain things and agree mutually that their violation can (and usually does) cause harm. If we then agree on this first premise – whatever it may be (usually well-being) – we then can build intersubjective (in a sense objective!) morality. In other words, although the first premise is essentially subjective (one may ask why should we value good, why should we value well-

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[56] Hoerster Norbert in his book "Wie lässt sich Moral begründen", in chapter 7, uses the term intersubjective (intersubjektiv), to show how moral norms can be based intersubjectively predicated on clarified (aufgeklärt) interests of almost all people.

being?), by the virtue of individuals and societies agreeing among each other that they value and respect this first premise, we can create an essentially objective moral system.

5.3. ISLAM AND MORALITY

Morality is an important part of Islam, furthermore an essential element, without which, in fact, there is no Islam as such. Muslims rely on three pillars to establish something called Islamic morality (ʾaḫlāq). They are:

- The Quran
- Hadiths of the prophet Muhammad, i.e. the sunna
- Our moral intuition – *fiṭra*[57]

The Quran is the fundamental scriptural source of morality, offering us guidance and instruction to guide a moral life, it further provides us with the knowledge of what morality is, how we gained our moral intuition (*fiṭra*), and the importance of following the Prophet as an embodiment of morality. A large portion of what is to be regarded as moral comes from His commands. The commands such as the ones of not committing adultery (17:32), honoring our parents (17:23), keeping our promises (2:177), not gambling, not consuming alcohol and intoxicants (5:90), not eating pork (5:90), paying zakat (73:20), and similar. He also, however, commanded us not to engage in homosexuality (29:29), which we will discuss in the next chapter.

Hadiths of the prophet Muhammad, serve as a sort of illustration of how to implement the commandments mentioned in the Quran. Muhammad, far from being just a messenger of God, serves as a perfect example of a proper conduct. Although confirming his human nature (18:110), the Quran emphasizes his moral superiority ("And you are truly ˹a man˺ of outstanding character, 68:4), and calls for believers to follow his example (33:21). In Sufism, in particular, the idea of Muhammad's greatness is brought to its peak, with the idea of "*al-insān al-kāmil*" (the Perfect Being) serving as a goal for every human being to strive to. Sufis, such as Al-Ǧīlī and Ibn ʿArabī, were among the most famous scholars who, writing in a language permeated with mysticism and spirituality, advocated the idea of the Perfect Being.

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[57] Here I will use it in a more narrow sense, as fiṭra is usually understood as a sort of predisposition to have knowledge of Allah, in its broadest sense. For more nuanced meaning of the word see Yasien Mohamed: "The Interpretation of fiṭrah", published in the Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol.34(2), pp.129-151.

This all shows how highly Muhammad was and is seen in Islam, and his influence on the sphere of morality can hardly be overestimated.

When it comes to *fiṭra*, as already said, we will interpret it here primarily as a moral guide inbuilt into every human. When we speak of good and right, they do not represent just some random words for us, but we feel them too, just as we have feelings of innate inclination to avoid affliction of unnecessary suffering, to abhor incest, to strive towards justice and avoid injustice, and similar. This all happens without recourse to any scripture or prophet, which, however, should not be understood as if being enough by itself – from the Muslim perspective. This innate feeling every human is born with is, in essence, *fiṭra*. For example, the prophet Muhammad said: "*Every child is born but upon fiṭra.*" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2658e, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī 1385), and it serves as an evidence for Muslims, that every man, no matter where he is born, is predisposed to have some basic foundation for morality, which in order to be complete needs revelation and sunna. Often is that what is "natural", equated with moral, and that which is "unnatural" with immoral. For example, any act of same-sex intercourse or, indeed any sexual intercourse outside male-female intercourse, is not rarely among Muslims (and many other religions), equated with unnatural and hence sinful, immoral. This line of thinking is called "appeal to nature" and is a fallacy which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

6. HOMOSEXUALITY IN ISLAM
{ Well, I say that Homosexuality is not just a form of Sex , it is a form of Love. }
Christopher Hitchens (16/9)

Homosexuality[58] is Islamically wrong, and that is no secret. Even if homosexuality in Islam were a "normal" occurrence, it would still be wrong to practice it, as it would be a form of illicit sexual intercourse (*zināʾ*). However, homosexuality is not regarded as normal in Islam and there are a couple of reasons, often repeated, which try to reason out why homosexually is morally wrong. Homosexuality itself was never really the main object of my interest, nor did I pay much heed to it, rather it started becoming intriguing to me only in junction with morality, or better said - immorality. I was raised, much like most Muslims (without being

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[58] When speaking of homosexuality, I will, unless stated otherwise, speak of male homosexuality, as this is the type of sexual interaction meant in the Quran and hadiths.

one myself) in an environment that looked to homosexual acts, let's say, not so favorably, and often with a dose of pity (more for the family of the individual, than the individual himself). Having thought some time about the matter, I asked myself why is that we - by "we" meaning the society of which I was a member – thought of that kind of sexual intercourse as immoral and the other one, heterosexual, without the aura of taboo surrounding it and without immoral implications (generally). Firstly, sex in general, is a slippery slope for morality; one has to know when, with whom, and under which circumstances to have intercourse if one wants to avoid the risk of being labeled as immoral. It is difficult in the Balkans, and it is even more difficult in the Middle East.

> *"In the Middle East, after society embraced the idea that sex is the measure of morality, this idea intensified over the generations." (5/25)*

Surely, two answers would stand out and serve generally as a "defense" of heterosexuality and an attack on the other. The first one is a plain statement that homosexuality is not natural and the other one is that it is religiously forbidden. This is very similar, identical more so, with Muslims' sentiment on the subject (being raised a Christian this should not come as a big surprise). It should be said, however, that this resort to unnaturalness is traditionally more of a Christian thing than Islamic, as throughout the Islamic history homoerotic sentiment was not so uncommon, rather could be encountered quite overtly in Islamic poetry (romantic poetry especially), dream books, adab, legal and medical literature.[59] Besides these two responses, another thing which, so it seemed to me, clarified the difference of societal opinion on the subject, was a much more direct, and much less cognitive - intuition. I would, and I am sure many raised in a similar milieu, have a persistent impression that somehow homosexual acts are just wrong. I ceased to have this kind of thinking rather early, having seen how illogical and flawed these explanations were in fact, and based and kept alive by a feeling shaped by culture and society, which is in itself a shaky ground to build morality on. Having said that, I will try, with the help of the Magazine, to examine and show for fallacious these three most common arguments (DCT, intuition, and appeal to nature), which are usually put forward against homosexuality by Muslims.

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[59] See Schmidtke: Homoeroticism, p.261.

6.1. APPEAL TO NATURE

It is often said, especially amongst modern Islamic popular dāʿīs[60] (those who engage in dawah), that homosexuality is not a natural order of things, but similar to certain "psychological needs", like an alcohol or drug addiction, it is a state which is to be subdued and triumphed over, much like others forms of tests we are challenged with, as in the end, according to the Islamic belief, this life is but a trial. The term itself (for homosexuality in Arabic) contains the notion that homosexuality is not natural, but something more likely to be included in the category of deformation or mental sickness.

> *"Homosexuals are in Arab countries often falsely described as sodomites (aš-šawwāḏḏ ǧinsiyyan[61]) in order to force us not to accept them or sympathize with them and their cause in obtaining their rights as equal citizens with rights and duties." (6/19)*

The first objection to the "appeal to nature" argument is that it is not clear enough. What do we mean exactly when we say that homosexuality is unnatural? How do we define natural? If we just assume that everything that occurs in nature is natural, and homosexuality does occur in nature, then it is a natural occurrence (it appears not just among humans, but examples of homosexual behavior are numerous among animals as well). This occurrence of homosexuality in animals may seem to be often neglected by Muslims, which is nevertheless understandable, given that humans are elevated above animals according to Islam, and take a special position in God's eyes, thus, they have no problem saying that the human and animal nature is different and cannot be compared (and also should not be compared) and that the animal nature doesn't say anything among the human nature. This is, of course, different from more secular thought, which regards animals and humans as far more similar, sharing similar traits and behaviors (such as homosexuality), and even deserving of same "rights"[62] than it is the case with major religions. Usually, in Islam, the inclination towards opposite sex is taken as a sign of being "human", or simply behaving in agreement with our nature, our *fiṭra*. For

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[60] See "Why is Homosexuality Condemned in Islam? – Islamic Ruling on Gay Marriages and Homosexuality" - Sheikh Assim Al Hakeem, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9e4G58N4eg (1:15); "ḫuṭūrat aš-šuḏūḏ al-ǧinsiyya - ʿŪṯmān al-Ḥamīs" (The Danger of Homosexuality), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uUJoUNrxfI, "Why is Homosexuality Condemned in Islam? - Dr Zakir Naik", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16u7ro_HMxY (3:40-4:00).

[61] It is a term with negative connotation, comming from šāḏḏ meaning anormal, irregular, aberrant, pervert. The other term, the most used one and more sensitive, being al-ǧinsiya al-miṯliya (something like: of the same sex).

[62] For example, Peter Singer in his book from 1975 "Animal Liberation" advocated for some animal "rights", specifically their right not to be killed, bases on our shared ability to suffer and experience pain.

example, on a famous Islamic site, Islamweb, as an answer to a man who is upset about his homosexual tendencies, it is written: *"And God created man so that the male tends to the female, and the female to the male, and whoever deviates from this principle is outside the fitrah."*[63] What is natural or unnatural can also be viewed from a teleological point of view, i.e. in terms of the end goal a particular action, or behavior (here sexual intercourse) serves. Muslims may have in mind when they say "unnatural" the idea of this behavior as not conforming to our purpose (as species), i.e. procreation, or even such an action which is not done by the vast majority of people. This, however, just raises more questions, as, for example, the question why is that which does not conform with the goal of procreation automatically characterized as immoral can be asked and it would not take long before this argument would prove itself weak, also from the Islamic perspective, as there is, Islamically, no problem with the use of contraception (which is, of course, in contrast with procreation goals, and it would not be labeled, by any means, as something immoral.) If we take the latter (the idea that something is unnatural because a majority of people do not do it), the question, why would then not all actions, which are done just by a small fraction of people, be labeled as immoral, arises. Hoerster, for example, mentions people who play cembalo or read philosophical books, and asks why it is not that we do not find anything morally condemnable in those actions, which are also "unnatural", in a sense that they are done by a rather small number of people.[64] The matter of reproduction is also addressed in the Magazine:

> *"Even if we concede, for argument's sake, the absurd argument that homosexuality threatens the extinction of the human race, this in turn does not confer the moral right to deprive homosexuals of sexual pleasure."* (15/46)

If we, however, understand homosexuality as a mental state, or a phase which can be somehow altered, then we are implicitly saying that homosexuality is indeed a type of sickness and people should aim to treat it and hopefully heal it, and this is, indeed, the most prevailing opinion among Muslims.

> *"Homosexuals are often accused by those who oppose their rights of being mentally ill, and that homosexuality is a mental illness. Do others have the right to prosecute, kill, or persecute the mentally ill, as happens to homosexuals, even by claiming that they are mentally ill?"* (15/47)

There are innumerable examples of Islamic scholars (or at least people who purport themselves to be such), who seek reasons for homosexuality in evil schemings of sheytans,

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[63] See Islamweb: Causes of Homosexuality.
[64] See Hoerster: Moral, p.27

sly plots of jinns, insufficient dhikr of Allah, bad company, or simply see it as an illness, a chronic disease. For example, a famous Islamic site in Bosnia N-UM, as an answer to a question posted by a homosexual, who saw his "situation" as a form of siḥr (a form of magic through which evil forces can influence an individual), and asked for advice on how to cure it, the N-UM site answered: "*You have indeed been tried with a grievous temptation. Through practice, it has been shown that the disease of homosexuality can also come from the jinn […] It has been proven that homosexuality is a disease and if a believer falls into that temptation, he is obliged to seek treatment. Today it can be treated by a psychiatrist.*"[65]

Sometimes Muslims, wanting to illustrate the weakness of the logic used by homosexuals, i.e. that they act upon their nature, try to compare this desire (under the presumption that this desire is not in their control), juxtaposing homosexuality with pedophilia, meaning by it that pedophiles could use the same logic and be in a sense innocent of their crimes. In other words, they could say that they act upon their nature and that they cannot do anything against that (just like the "claim" of homosexuals that they act upon their nature and have no control over it). This, although at first sight having some merit to it (as their desires, in both these groups, indeed seem to be entrenched in them, and out of their control), completely neglects the fact that in one case immeasurable harm is being done to the other person and in other not. Hence, it is fallacious to compare these two. The well-being of a person may not be the central point around which Islamic morality revolves, but it is, nevertheless, its important part.

The Magazine addressed a few times the questions of whether homosexuality is a choice or disease, however, the two chapters I will list below stand out. Firstly, we should elaborate the terms "choice" and "disease". If it is a choice, then we can speak of an agent who choices (or not) to be homosexual, and is, thus, accountable for his decision. However, it is hard to begin thinking of sexual orientation as a choice in the same category as gambling, lying, or stealing, and it would be equally hard to think of a person who simply chooses to become a homosexual, as it would be hard to imagine a heterosexual person who just chooses to be homosexual (not merely to act, but to be). On the other hand, if it is taken as a disease, and think of it as some malicious virus, or a mental disease (as it is most often depicted), then, firstly we would have to concede that it is not a choice, and secondly that it seems not to bear the same sort of moral agency to it as it is with the choice, i.e. we seem not to hold them morally accountable in the same degree as if they opted for it. It would be as if we were holding a schizophrenic person morally accountable for his disorder, or a person who suffers

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[65] See N-UM: Can Jinn Be the Cause of Homosexuality?

from depression or anxiety. In the chapter dedicated to homosexuality and whether homosexuality is a choice, an author speaks against this claim, writing that the reasons for homosexuality (or any other sexual orientation) are various and complex, and cannot be attributed to one cause.

> "*Although a lot of research has given the possibility that the cause is genetic, hormonal, social, or cultural, there is no specific or major cause for any of the sexual orientations. Many believe that nature and nurture both play a role; Almost all people experience little or no awareness of their choice of sexual orientation. This shows that often neither homosexuals nor even heterosexuals have a hand in choosing their sexual orientation, but the whole issue is biological and environmental.*" (16/6-7)
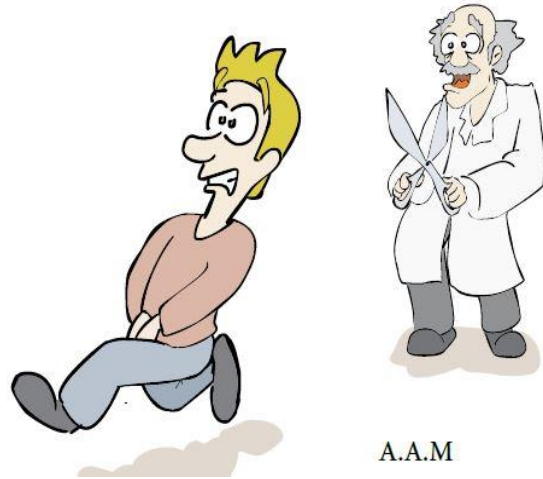
On two occasions the subject of homosexuality as a disease is addressed, and both times is APA (American Psychiatric Association) mentioned as having erased homosexuality from their list of mental diseases, pointing out that "*heterosexual behavior and homosexual behavior are both natural forms of human sexuality*" (16/8; similarly formulated also in 18/115).

It seems that at least from both the appeal-to-nature point of view, and looking at homosexuality as a mental disease, regard of homosexuality as immoral is erroneous and not very convincing. It would appear that Muslims must eventually agree that homosexuality is immoral because God says so, and not because it is unnatural or a disease. This leads us to the next section and the divine command theory.

6.2. MORALITY AND COMMANDS

There is an array of different commands which Muslims comply with, and their obeying or not plays an essential role to what degree a Muslim is regarded as upright and devout. Their violation does not only distance an individual from the fold of Islam but often carries a moral and social stigma with it. It does not take much to come to some basic principles or rudimentary commands all Muslims, and many non-Muslims, are familiar with - praying five times a day, fasting, not drinking alcohol and not consuming pork, no sexual intercourse before marriage, male circumcision, compulsory wearing of hijab for women, giving zakah, and the above-mentioned prohibition of homosexual intercourse, are just some of them. Behind most of them we can see some reasoning, why it would make sense to stick to such

commands (especially this becomes clear in the case with core Islamic – and indeed many other religious and non-religious- beliefs and values, as not to kill or to lie if not for a good sufficient reason), but for some commands it is hard to pinpoint an exact reason why they are imposed on us, or to see the wisdom behind them. For example, one could ask why is pork in particular, and not mutton, or beef prohibited? What is that which is inherently wrong in pork, and not to be found in other types of meat. What is inherently wrong in keeping one's foreskin and not deciding to circumcise it - or to return to the object of our discussion in the previous section – what is inherently wrong with homosexuality to such degree, that its practice leads one to Hell? Muslims, of course, do offer some answers to

A.A.M

Circumcision: 18/112

these questions, but the answers are mostly unconvincing or vague in such a manner that it is hard to see why this particular act (circumcision, not eating pork or heterosexuality), and not the other one (eating beef, being not circumcised, homosexuality), is favored to such a degree. Ultimately, it all boils down to the DCT argument, i.e. because God commanded so. It may be, a Muslim would say, that for us some of God's commands may appear unclear or even unreasonable, but it does not mean that they are indeed unclear or unreasonable, it just means that our ability to comprehend and see through is not the same as God's, and what is more normal than that? It may seem that some of His commands appear to be evil, as it was with His command, which we mentioned earlier, for Abraham to sacrifice his own son, but in the end, we come to see it, it was not evil, but it was Good. We are limited in our knowledge, we are limited in time and by time, we are also limited by that which we know - in short we are just not able to see the whole picture, as a Muslim may say. On the other side atheists, and the Magazine as we come to see, usually purport that certain commands which God commanded to us are just plainly wrong and immoral, and God, who commands such things, cannot be viewed as a benevolent being then, but exactly the opposite, as a vile, malicious autocrat who orders things not because of their goodness for people, but becomes he simply wills it, without, so it seems, paying heed to its intrinsic goodness. This view is also the view of the Magazine:

"Ethics from a religious perspective is to follow the teachings of religion only. If your religion calls for the killing of an apostate, then killing an innocent person is considered a moral act, and you will be rewarded for it by the supernatural being called God." (18/9)

The biggest philosophical problem for DCT is the Euthyphro dilemma (muʿḍila yūṯīfrū) and in the Magazine it is discussed in 17/19. It goes, somewhat changed (as in Plato's original work the word is of piousness), like this: *Is good good because god commands it, or does god commands it because it is good*? This dilemma seems to represent a problem for a religious believer as if that what god commands automatically (just by the virtue of god choosing it) becomes good, it implies a rather shaky and arbitrary morality, in which things that are normally considered immoral could become moral, simply by god commanding it (as in the story of Abraham).

In the second case, god himself then, far from being morality itself, succumbs to some basic moral principles, which are hence not emanating from himself but are outside of him. If god commands something because it is good, then it means that god is but an entity that recognizes the good, and distributes it, or not, according to his whim, to the people. It would imply that good exists independent of god, i.e. that we do not need him to determine what is moral or immoral, what is good or not. The author of the article, nicknamed Moussa Eightyzz, firstly asks which god is meant:

Choose your religion: 1/33

"The first question that comes to mind when talking about religious ethics is:
"What kind of religion is meant?" Is the morality of Islam the same as the morality of Christianity, the morality of Judaism, the morality of Hinduism, the morality of Buddhism, the morality of Zoroastrianism, and the morality of Baha'i faith…?"(17/15)

This is a common objection to a sort of objective morality, as claimed by different religions. It is clear, of course, that there cannot be the talk of any objective, or absolute form of morality (al-ʾaḫlāq al-muṭlaqa) if we are to take all religions into consideration. No Muslim, however, claims that objective morality exists based on all religions (as it would be illogical and obviously wrong), but based on Islam, which is for them the only true one. Many religions share some basic values, but differ in all sorts of things, such as in the view

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of our moral obligations, sexuality, the idea of this life and the afterlife, and what is being prohibited and what allowed. Homosexuality, for example, didn't seem to upset greatly Greek or Roman gods. In Hinduism, it is a far more complex matter, without being entirely clear or elaborated, whereas in Abrahamic religions it was overtly condemned and prohibited. The question of why Islam is the only "true one" religion, and why wouldn't this be claimed of any other religion, will not be discussed here, and this claim will be taken as such, for the purposes of this paper.

Having said that, if we take God's commands in Islam as the only relevant ones, we can further regard them, not just as commands, but as a form of moral obligations we ought to do. By doing so we come into the sphere of deontology (see section 5.1.), as deontology, as a normative ethical theory, rests upon our obligations/duties we should fulfill (this obligation/duty can be imposed on us by reason alone, or, in this case, God's commands.) It would be, however, wrong to say that refraining from the homosexual act is only wrong deontologically - in the Islamic sense – but it would also be wrong from the perspective of virtue ethics, as to act homosexually would not be among the virtues of some "virtuous person" in the 7th century, or more specifically, it would not be something the prophet Muhammad (the example of moral conduct among Muslims) would do. The issue is that it was not just something that he would not do, but that he condemned and deplored such behavior. Among the virtues of a Muslim, is to be obedient to God and to the prophet, and that, of course, includes God's commands and prophet Muhammad's sayings. To what extent is submission and obedience central to the Islamic thought, is evident from the name Islam itself, which literally means submission (to God).

> "*The DCT is interesting in that, in contrast with most other theories of ethical action, it emphasizes obedience or submission as a central virtue—not obedience in general, of course, but to God and perhaps to God's representatives. The idea of moral autonomy, of determining the right course of action using one's reason, is not emphasized.*"[66]

Does it mean that we just ought to let ourselves be guided by some invisible entity, even if it goes again our innate feelings (which homosexuals could say), or seemingly even against our capability to reason? Are God's commands brought to us in terms with reason or in spite of reason, or, we may ask, are there some less obvious, obscure grounds, which may, at first sight, seem illogical, but are, eventually, reasonable and understandable, even for us, humans. We will take a look at those commands and hadiths which seemed to have

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[66] Morgan: Ethics Without Religion.

cemented enmity and aversion towards homosexuality, not just from the inception of Islam, but, if Islam is true, for eternity.

The Quran: Most clear evidence in the Quran of homosexuality being regarded as a sin and a shameful, immoral act comes from the story of the prophet Lut, which is iterated several times throughout the Quran. "*And ˈrememberˈ when Lot scolded ˈthe men ofˈ his people, ˈsaying,ˈ "Do you commit a shameful deed that no man has ever done before? You lust after men instead of women! You are certainly transgressors."* (7:80-81) Or very similarly: "*Why do you ˈmenˈ lust after fellow men, leaving the wives that your Lord has created for you? In fact, you are a transgressing people*." (26:165-166). Likewise verses are also found in 27:54-58, 29:28-31 and 11:79. Mohammed Hijab, a famous YouTuber and dāʿi with 734,000 subscribers as of April 2023, in his video, which he made as a comment to Humza Yousaf, now the first Minister of Scotland, who said in an interview that he does not think gay sex is a sin, says: „ *kufr ʾakbar, yuḫriǧ ṣāḥibuhu min al-milla, something that takes somebody out of the religion of Islam. […] You cannot be a Muslim and say that at the same time. He is negating many verses, and a plethora, a multiplicity of different aḥādīṯ in the sunna. This takes you out of the religion of Islam*."[67] He then continues reciting the Quran 7:80-81 pointing out that it is an act that had not been done by anyone before the people of the prophet Lut, and that reprimand, i.e. prohibition, of homosexual acts is "*clear, crystal clear, cut-throat*." As an objection to the claim, that homosexual acts were a sort of innovation of Lut's people, the objection that there is simply no scientific evidence to support such a claim, could be raised. It is hard to find a culture that has not to some extent, at least marginally, mentioned homosexuality, albeit typically in a negative sense. Even some of the earliest written sources from Mesopotamia, mention some sort of homosexual behavior[68], which seems to go in contradiction with the aforementioned Quranic claim.

Hadiths: It is worthy to mention that the two most authentic books of hadiths, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, do not explicitly mention homosexuality and that all hadith-based judgments (i.e. prohibition of homosexuality) come from other hadith-books, which are somewhat less authentic but still highly esteemed. For example in Sunan Abū Dawūd, a hadith is narrated which is used as evidence for some of the harshest rulings when it comes to

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[67] Mohammed Hijab: "Is Hamza Yousaf Muslim?", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cjP5LEDohA&t=189s
[68] See Nissinen: Homosexuals in Mesopotamian Literature.

the punishment which awaits homosexuals: "*Whoever you find doing as the people of Lot did (i.e. homosexuality), kill the one who does it and the one to whom it is done.* " (38:4447). The same hadith appears in Ṣaḥīḥ at-Tirmiḏī (3:15:1456) and in Sunan Ibn Māǧa (3:20:2561). It is usually graded as ḥasan (second highest grade) but some, such as al-ʾAlbānī, have graded it ṣaḥīḥ (the highest grade). In a similar vein, a hadith collected by Mālik bin ʾAnas (the founder of the Maliki school) calls for the stoning of homosexuals: *"Malik related to me that he asked Ibn Shihab about someone who committed sodomy. Ibn Shihab said, "He is to be stoned, whether or not he is muhsan."[69]* (al-Muwaṭṭaʾ 41:11) When it comes to the authenticity of Al-Muwaṭṭaʾ, it is considered highly trustworthy, as for example aš-Šāfiʿī, the founder of the Shafiʿi school, described it as the most accurate book on the face of the earth after the Quran.[70] These are the most important hadiths in this context and most clear in its verdict. Traditionally, the consensus of Islamic scholars (ʾiǧmāʿ) was that the homosexual act deserves the death penalty, the question was only how – by stoning, pushing from a high place, burning, or similar.[71] The Magazine, of course, is critical of these brutal punishments and the depiction of homosexuality as a disease.

> *"Then you have only two options. Either you go back to your shell, Al-Jazeera channel, and your holy books that call for burning, stoning, or slaughtering these damned infidels, or you accept the wonderful life as it is and believe what modern science has reached that homosexuality or differences in sexual orientation is not a disease, but rather a natural thing that exists in the human race and in all other mammals."* (6/17)

6.3. ISLAM SUPPORTS HOMOSEXUALITY?

> *"The question here is: Isn't it the most important thing that we can start with defining morals, based on justice and following a unified human approach? For example: to the same extent that we reject it axiomatically to say: It is not permissible for a black-skinned person to do this but for a white person it is permissible, or vice versa. Just like that we should deplore the double standards of morality between the sexes.*" (12/4)

Although the author in the Magazine primarily talks about the difference between men and women, I do not think it would be far-stretched or out of the spirit of the Magazine, if we extended it to encompass other sexual orientations also, homosexuals in this case. New

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[69] Meaning no matter if he is married or not.
[70] See Dutton: Original Islam, p.16.
[71] For more details concerning punishment for homosexuals, see: "The Punishment For Homosexuality", https://islamqa.info/en/answers/38622/the-punishment-for-homosexuality, last access: 04.04.2023.

approaches to the reading and interpretation of the Quran have emerged to include groups of people who have been traditionally neglected, marginalized, or even persecuted and killed throughout the Islamic history. These new interpretations which are allegedly ethically superior, more inclusive, permeated with all-encompassing God-love, and in every case more up-to-date, seek to take the place of traditionally more stern, rigid interpretations, that they deem outdated and ultimately false.

In relatively recent times, in the last decade in particular, books and articles which tried to harmonize homosexuality (and other sexual orientations) and Islam, started to appear. Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed quite recently, in 2019, saw the Quran, in contrast opposition to vast majority of Muslims, as supporting homosexuals and transgenders. The evidence of this he saw by interpreting verses in a "slightly" different matter than usual, as when for example word "*šākila*" in 17:84 (*Everyone acts in their own way [šākila]. But your Lord knows best whose way is rightly guided.*), came to be understood as "innermost nature"[72]. The implication is, of course, to show that God created us with certain predispositions, a certain nature that is unchangeable, and that it would be unreasonable and contradictory of a *loving* God, to create a being with a fixed nature and demand later to act against it. Similarly, he interprets verse 2:256 (*There is no compulsion in religion),* more broadly than usually understood, taking the verse to mean that compulsion in this instance is not just designating compulsion in religion (which is a traditional explanation) but rather should also be understood as compulsion in sexuality. He says: "*Forcing an individual to renounce their sexuality as well as all forms of earthly love amounts to compulsion.*"[73] Interpreting the story of the prophet Lut (7:80-84), the author continuing in the following pages, is dismissive of the claim that the actions which are mentioned as "abominable" (*fāhiša*) are homosexual acts, but believes that the act of unconsenting sexual act is what is to be understood here, as the story of the prophet Lut speaks of the people of Sodom, who attack and sexually harass travelers, among others. The author is adamant that not homosexuality per se, but sexual intercourse between men (who are not exclusively homosexual), including lust, coercion, and the intention to belittle the "recipient", is what is tried to be conveyed by the abovementioned verses.[74] Surprisingly, it is resorted to a peculiar hadith - Ṣaḥīḥ Buḫārī 5105[75] – in order to defend consensual homosexual intercourse, which rather than going in favor of his cause, raises even greater

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[72] See Zahed: Homosexuality, p.20.
[73] See ibid., p.22.
[74] See ibid., p.27.
[75] The hadith in question is quite long, so I will only point out to the most relevant part – "If a person commits homosexuality with a boy, then the mother of that boy is unlawful for him to marry."

questions and dilemmas of pederasty. All in all, the impression is that the author tries to carefully choose love-evoking Quranic verses, search for metaphorical meanings of the verse where the literal meaning is in too strong of a contrast with his views, to search for an alternative meaning of specific words, or try to expand or limit its meaning, as needed. Similarly Scott Kugle, another author who tries to reconcile homosexuality with Islam, in his attempt to connect these two notions (Islam and homosexuality) seems to look partially to Ibn Ḥazm and his more lenient interpretation of the story of Lut, who although accepting homosexuality as a crime, does not uphold the view of homosexuality deserving a punishment equivalent to "adultery or heterosexual fornication (*zinaʾ*)", and rather than the purpose of the story being to condemn homosexuality actions, as majority of exegetes purported, the story stressed "*the infidelity of his tribe and how they rejected Lut's prophet-hood and not sexuality.*"[76] Furthermore, by pointing towards the verses which condemn oppression[77], such as 4:75 (*And what is it with you? You do not fight in the cause of Allah and for oppressed…*), and by homosexuals being oppressed throughout the history, seems to allude that such treatment is in contrast with God's command, and rather than fighting and condemning them, heterosexual Muslims should, in fact, work in their favor, and help them, being an oppressed group. Analogous to this, every oppressed group, irrelevant of the degree of its oppression, can use the same argument and we can come to a rather inane conclusion that every Islamic sect, or identity group, every person who is in some sense "oppressed" by Islam (drunkards, gamblers or atheists) has the same right to ask for the identical treatment – i.e. that Muslims should struggle on behalf of them.

These new takes on looking back and reexamining the Quran are received among the majority of Muslims with an overall non-acceptance and derision, as they see it as corrupting of their holy book and an attempt to squeeze in certain values where there are not existent, or even worse, where there are clear verses which speak in their opposition. Not only the majority of Muslims, but the Magazine itself seems to look at these attempts with suspicion:

> "*I must point out that there is currently a debate that "the work of Lot's people" is not about homosexuality, but I do not extrapolate from this controversy except attempts to correct the religion after it has been made clear what is right from wrong, in this case." (18/ 115)*

Furthermore, one of the most noticeable mistakes, at least I share this opinion, which the authors who support the view of Islam and homosexuality being in accord, make, is that they

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[76] Kugle: Homosexuality in Islam, pp.76-77.
[77] See ibid., p.61.

use the "context argument" somewhat haphazardly, or rather only when context would seem to indicate that tradition anti-homosexual interpretation is wrong (as is the case with the story of the prophet Lut) but seem to disregard it when the context goes against their favor (as it is the case with "the oppressed", who are no other than Muslims who stayed in Makkah due to various reasons and who were mistreated by non-Muslims). Although largely disagreeing with the authors on their interpretation of hadiths and the Quran, I do agree with one. I do think that the interpretation which would accommodate and include homosexuals and doesn't regard their acts as abominable, sinful, or deserving of eternal fire, is a more moral, more righteous, and, in the end, more god-like one. The author points to this ethical component himself:

*"Lesbian, gay, and transgender Muslims approach the Qur'an with a dual strategy of resistance and renewal. They resist previous interpretations, but advocate on behalf of new interpretation that is arguably better – more accurate, more insightful, or **more ethical** [emphasis added by me] – than previous interpretations."*[78]

6.4. IS INTUITION A SUITABLE BASIS FOR MORALITY?

It is indisputable that our intuition plays a significant role in the forming of our moral judgments, maybe even greater than many of us realize. If we are to just briefly reflect on that what we can define as our morals, our view of right and wrong, we would quickly realize that we are actually creatures of emotion and passion, and not as, how we maybe sometimes like to boast or think of ourselves, creatures of reason and argument. What is meant by intuition here is a form of knowledge, immediate knowledge to be more precise, which does not require reason (but can be rationalized, of course, and is in fact mostly so). Haidt poses a model in his articles from 2001, called *social intuitionist model*, which tries to describe how humans reach their moral judgment, claiming that intuition and not moral reasoning is the one forming our view of morality, and that "*moral reasoning is usually a post hoc construction, generated after a judgment has been reached.*"[79] He takes our intuition on the topic of incest as an example. We feel a strong aversion towards incest, which we try to rationalize after the initial feeling of aversion has emerged, and not vice versa. To demonstrate this he runs an experiment. In Haidt's experiment, constructed in such a manner to seemingly avoid

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[78] Kugle: Homosexuality in Islam, p.61.
[79] Haidt: Social Intuitionist Approach, p.814.

reasonable aversion to such an act (protection is used, sex is consensual, there is no harm being inflicted, it stays completely between the two individuals, etc.), the reader is lead to think that although no good enough reasoning against the act is offered, a persisting feeling of repulse hinges, and the moral judgment – immoral - stays. In other words, although no convincing enough reason against incest is offered, we still tend to consider incest as immoral, meaning that humans rely more on emotions and intuition than on reason and arguments in most cases and that reasoning of the judgment comes as a supplement, a form of support to the initial feeling - intuition (the incest case as described by Haidt illustrates this, and to stay on our track, the same could apply to homosexuality). It is important to point out that Haidt merely describes how moral judgments may work, and not that he poses a normative method of moral conduct, i.e. he does not say that is how we ought to behave - *it is not a normative ethical theory.*

Without wanting to suggest any moral judgment on this particular Haidt's case, as it would derail us from our case, I used it wanting merely to illustrate the process of moral reasoning in the case of homosexuality among Muslims, who rely on moral intuition and not reasoning or arguments per se. A common objection would be also that legalizing homosexuality or allowing it in any form, would lead to the consideration of legalizing even more controversial acts as the one described above, i.e. incest, or sex with animals. Haidt, answering in an interview to the question, dismisses the analogy:

> "*Five percent of people cannot live full happy lives if homosexuality is outlawed. If 5 percent of people could not live full happy lives without having sex with their siblings, or with sheep, then we'd have a difficult moral problem on our hands. But we don't. Very few people fall into either category. So legalizing homosexuality is not the first step on a slippery slope to legalizing everything.*"[80]

In Islam intuition (*ḥads*[81]) is seen as complementary to our reason and intellect, and by no means in opposition to them, as is sometimes regarded in Western philosophy.[82] Intuition (if not corrupted) and reason in Islam can be viewed as two faculties, which may be different in their manner of obtaining knowledge, are, however, mutually supportive and work for the

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[80] See Sommers: An Interview.

[81] Al-Maʿāni online dictionary defines ḥads as "perceiving something directly without relying on previous experience", Hans Wehr translates it as „intuition". Fiṭra, on the other hand, is defined by al-Maʿāni as "readiness to judge and distinguish between truth and falsehood", and by Hans-Wehr as a natural inclination. I will translate ḥads as intuition for the sake of simplicity, as I think that both these words (ḥads and fiṭra) in the moral context at least, are used interchangeably.

[82] For more details on the correlation between intellect and intuition in Islam see Nasr: Intellect and Intuition.

same goal, to understand the world and recognize certain truths, and by doing so, to ultimately be closer to God. Even in Islamic circles, caution is urged when discussing the role of intuition in ethics, with some prominent philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rušd distancing themselves from moral intuitionism and turned towards a *"more practical and dialectical view of ethics."*[83]

To illustrate the somewhat erratic nature of our intuition and to exemplify its very close link with cultures, we do not need to look far or to think too abstractly or philosophically, we can simply name some everyday occurrences such as child labor, shaking hands with the opposite sex, genital mutilation, (non) eating certain food, and similar practices which trigger intuitive repulsive feelings in certain people and societies, but in others not. Moreover, it is accepted with both hands and encouraged. It is difficult from such instances to extrapolate any "pure" intuitions, those which are not influenced by the culture we are a part of, and it seems that such examples of "pure" intuitions are rather to be found in the biological realm (we could maybe think of fear – but we would be talking of instincts then), than it is the case with the moral realm.

The Magazine, in the 17th and 18th issues, touches on the topic of intuition, or more precisely on the unreliability of it for the real, objective understanding of the world, although acknowledging its omnipresence and impact it played historically, not just when it comes to the ubiquitous role in our everyday lives (among others, morality), but also the role it played in more exact sciences like physics and astronomy.

> *"Human history has been full of the process of liberating us from the illusions of innate intuition. By placing those illusions between the anvil of empirical science and the hammer of intellect, as a rule, we can say that they do not hold well."* (17/140)

> *"Innate intuition is too weak to bear that any argument should be based on it whatsoever."* (18/84)

Islam, of course, acknowledges the role cultures play in the shaping of one's intuitions and this is attested in numerous hadiths. At the same time, it emphasizes the role of reason and critical thinking, to which intuition is ultimately subjected to in many instances. The case of homosexuality, I think, falls in the category of moral "truths" (in its objective, or intersubjective sense in our cases), which are not to be determined through intuition, as it is culturally determined and hence relative, but through logic and reason. Taking into

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[83] Bouhafa: Dialectics of Ethics, p.26.

consideration all that is written above, I think it would be fallacious to take intuition as a sole argument for determining morally right, or wrong, behavior.

7. AFTERLIFE

Nowadays it is hard to find a person that is not, at least to some extent, familiar with a fairy-tale-like idea of heaven, with its green valleys, an unavoidable crystal blue river, maybe a splendid, high mountain somewhere in the back, with lots of juicy and always-ripe fruits, where there are only beautiful people and likewise beautiful divine creatures, with its overall more than a highly pleasant and enticing atmosphere, or its antithetical picture of dark and sinister hell, which is predominately envisioned as a black barren land filled with all sort of imaginable fires and blazes, jammed with distorted faces of sinners from unrelenting torment, accompanied with their never-ending screams or some similar unappetizing scenery imbued in us not just be its lively description in the Bible and Quran, but also movies, book illustrations, cartoons, artistic images…Maybe somewhere deep in the heart of Africa or Papua New Guinea, on some faraway island forgotten by humanity, or maybe somewhere up high in the mountains, maybe there we can find humans who do not have any clear representation of the afterlife, no heaven for the goods, no hell for the wicked, just tranquil, boring nothingness - or something very close to nothing. And this thought is rather interesting. And such people indeed exist. There are tribes where the afterlife plays no role, where death except being the cessation of existence, is nothing more, no new life afterward, no reincarnation, no torment, no anything. Just a state similar to the one in which we were before birth, a simple non-existence. African tribes are famous for their honoring of ancestors and many of them believe that after death they continue to exist together with their ancestors and to exhibit significant influence on the alive ones. However, the hunter-gatherer tribe of Hadza, which lives in Tanzania, does not have a concept of an afterlife. When someone dies, they believe that the body simply rots, i.e. vanishes and that it (the vanishing of the body) is the very end of the person. With the burial the social and spiritual existence of the person simply ends.[84] Such an image of an afterlife, however, seems to be rare now, as it was rare for the past several thousand years, as the first writing sources left to us – written in Mesopotamia

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[84] See Bond: Death and Afterlife, pp.5-6.

– also attest that humans wondered and described how an afterlife could look like. We will see that this description is drastically different from Hell or Heaven with which most of us are familiar.

We will see that the concept of an afterlife and in our case Hell (for I will speak of Hell predominately), as it is represented in Christianity and Islam, did not arise overnight in the mind of an individual (or God), nor that is bereft of predecessor ideas. Just like so many other concepts, it has its history, its murky beginnings, influences, evolution…We will see that the idea of Hell as such came to be because of the various cultures and religions in the Near East and Mediterranean which throughout centuries amalgamated and left their fingerprints both in the divine Heaven and the devilish Hell. When we speak of those cultures that influenced the creation of Hell we think foremost of Jewish, Greek, Persian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cultures.

Many ancient cultures did not have the distinction between hell and heaven as such, and rather than going to hell if conducting badly or to heaven if conducting well and god(s)-pleasing, people went to another realm which is predominately described as dark, gloomy, monotonous and lifeless, quite literarily, with the persons dwelling there being rather creatures more similar to shadows, devoid of any real-life forces or thoughts, condemned to perpetual aimless wandering. It was not a place meant for the wicked, it was not a place meant for the virtuous - it was a place meant for the dead. For us, now, this conception of an afterlife seems unfair as we presuppose the existence of justice. Where is divine justice if there is only one place for all people, no matter what they used to do, no matter the extent of their atrocities, and no matter the extent of their good deeds. This will, however, come later, most prominently with the rise of the so-called apocalyptic genre in the 2nd and 1st century BC and the first centuries of Christianity, which is tied with the emergence of omnibenevolent God. Without god who is just and good, there is no dire need for heaven and hell, without god, there is no moral problem which the non-existence of some sort of afterlife place, entails.

Afterlife in early cultures was merely a place to be avoided, and as such in strong contrast with Islamic and Christian teachings that emphasized the ephemeral nature of this world and the beginning of "real life" (in the case of Heaven, of course), not before death, but only after. In the epic of Gilgamesh written in the second millennium BCE, the depiction of the afterlife as envisioned in Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BCE, is given:

He seized me, drove me down to the dark house,
dwelling of Erkalla's god,
To the house which those who enter cannot leave,
On the road where travelling is one way only,
To the house where those who stay are deprived of light,
Where dust is their food, and clay their bread.
They are clothed like birds, with feathers,
And they see no light, and they dwell in darkness.[85]

From the verses above it is clear that the place described is a place in which no reasonable human being would want to spend his time. It is a damp, "dark house" where there is no light whatsoever, where people eat dust and clay to satisfy their hunger, a place of no return where people "travel one way only". Still, an idyllic place compared to Hell.

In Ancient Egypt, in contrast to Mesopotamia, they had something similar to heaven and hell. Firstly, they believed that the soul continues to live after death, in the afterlife, a life that is fairly similar to the one enjoyed before death.[86] However, for this new-old life the soul needed a body, this is the main reason why mummification was such an important matter for ancient Egyptians. They preserved the body as meticulously as possible and placed food and drinks with the deceased, together with other objects he might need. This reminded me of a custom, now Christianized, in Serbia and Bosnia, left from pagan times, where every year for All Soul's Day (We call it Zadušnice), people eat and drink in the cemetery. Namely, it is believed that food and drinks consumed there, are shared with the souls of the deceased, and accordingly, food should be rich and diverse. Furthermore, it is common to see walking in the cemetery, a cup of coffee, or a biscuit left on monuments for the dead to "consume". Ancient Egyptians believed that in the afterlife the deceased underwent a journey and that at the end of the journey, the god of the afterlife Osiris would judge the individual based on his conducts in worldly life. The morality on which judgment is based is not at all foreign to our modern understanding – not to commit injustice or harm to another person, not to oppress the poor, and similar.[87] If Osiris is satisfied with the deeds of the deceased, he would be let into the "Field of Rushes" were he would be granted a plot of land to sustain himself. However, if Osiris is not satisfied, Ammit, a creature, which is one-third lion, one-third hippopotamus, and one-third crocodile, would devour him.[88] In later periods many corporal and spiritual

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[85] Ehrman: Heaven and Hell, pp.31-32.
[86] See Murnane: Ancient Egyptian, p.37.
[87] See Vorgrimler: Geschichte der Hölle, p.36.
[88] See Murnane: Ancient Egypt, p.43

punishments started to take place in the description of the afterlife, and came to dominate the picture of hell.[89]

What is interesting is the depiction of soul weighing (also mentioned in the Magazine, 17/13), done by Osiris in order to judge the deceased, where the heart of the person is placed on a scale against a feather – a symbol of justice. It is hard not to think about the Islamic notion of scaling, to which every person will be subjected on the day of resurrection, where his good and bad deeds will be weighed. In the

Trial of the dead: 17/13

Quran, there are many allusions to scaling and weighting (wazana), and scale (mizān), as an object, as, for example, in the following verse: *"And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all. And if there is [even] the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We as accountant."* (21:47)

Zoroastrianism is another religion whose influence on Islam is hardly to be disputed. The Magazine often refers to Zoroastrianism when talking about religions, especially Islam, that took many elements from Zoroastrianism and incorporated them, becoming their essential parts. Such elements are, for example, the punishment for adulterers, thieves, and other criminals, similarities in prayers, the principle of zakah, etc. – but also, the depictions of the afterlife. In Zoroastrianism, it is believed that when a person dies the soul leaves the body (the existence of something which continues to live after death, we can call it a soul, is almost ubiquitous among religions and cultures discussed here). The soul then passes across the so-called Chinvat Bridge, which is known as aṣ-ṣirāṭ (bridge, path) in Islam. The similarities are worth noting.

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[89] See Vorgrimler: Geschichte der Hölle, p.36.

"On the Day of Judgment, according to the sources, everyone will pass over the Bridge of Judgment extended over Hell and leading to Paradise. The fortunate ones will see the bridge as a wide path, while the miserable ones will see it as narrow as a hair and as sharp as a sword. Their feet will slip on it, and they will fall into the fire of Hell. All of this was mentioned before 3000 years, i.e. before Christianity and Judaism." (7/45)

In Islam the bridge in question is not mentioned in the Quran, however, it is mentioned in hadiths. It is understood, as described above, as a narrow bridge beneath which blazing fires rage. On the Day of Resurrection, according to the Islamic belief, the ones who are sinful will fall into the fire, while the righteous ones will cross the bridge at a pace that is proportional to their good deeds in worldly life.[90] In Zoroastrianism the image of hell and heaven was subject to change over time, with their depiction becoming more elaborate in later periods. Hell, in particular, became more detailed and cruel, with a picturesque portrayal of designated punishments for certain crimes conducted by demons, and it increasingly got to be "more real" and frightening place, turning into an actual torture house, rather than a dark, vague pit, as "hell" firstly envisioned.[91] The history of the afterlife in Zoroastrianism is far too complex to be discussed here, however, the existence of "House of Songs" and "House of Lies", i.e. heaven and hell respectively, is noteworthy, especially for the lack of such concepts in Mesopotamian and Jewish tradition.

The conception of the afterlife in Judaism is interesting in the sense that there is almost no such concept. In contrast to the Egyptian, Zoroastrian, or Greek afterlife which was rather interesting and sometimes even adventurous, Jews had a rather dull idea of the afterlife. Similar to the Mesopotamian tradition afterlife in the Jewish tradition was one (as there was no traditional hell/heaven distinction). This afterlife was described as dark and deep, similar to a pit or an abysmal grave. It was known as Sheol. Only much later, towards the very end of the Old Testament, and influenced by the tragic historical events which affected the Jewish people, the thought of individual resurrection and reward of the ones who believed in God and obeyed his commands seeps into the Jewish thought.[92] Surely the lack of justice in their previous concept of the afterlife also must have played a role. Rather than painstakingly describing heaven and hell, the Jews were much more interested in worldly life and conducting themselves, an afterlife seemingly playing no or a rather minor role. With the progress of time, a more righteous, more fair picture (at least according to our modern

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[90] See Islam: as-Sirat.
[91] A good overview of the history of development and the depiction of hell in Zoroastrianism can be found in the article written by Michael Strausberg: "Hell in Zoroastrian History", Numen 56, 217–253.
[92] See Ehrman: Heaven and Hell, p.14.

understanding) of an afterworld emerged. In the genre known as apocalyptic literature – a type of literature concerned with eschatology, progress is noticed. In late Jewish writings, The Book of Daniel, The Book of Enoch, and Psalms of Solomon, the idea that the righteous one will be rewarded and the wicked punished, is put forward.[93] At first timidly, punishment of the wicked is restricted to annihilation, whereas only later in Christian texts (such as Apocalypse of Peter) the punishment of the wicked is extended to be an everlasting torment, as we know it today.

The last description of an afterlife I will touch upon is the Greek one. In Ancient Greece it was believed, as it was described in Homer's Odyssey, that the place where most deceased go is a dark realm governed by Hades, the God of the underworld. It is understood as below earth, as joyless and devoid of light, and to a great extent resembles the Mesopotamian and Jewish notion of an afterlife. It was a place meant for all people, except for individuals who had family ties with gods who would be sent to Elysian Fields (heaven), or the especially wicked ones, who were sentenced to ever-lasting torture in Tartarus (the lower part of the underworld); a famous example being Sisyphus, destined to roll a boulder for eternity for the crime of cheating death twice, apparently one of the most nefarious acts one can do. In later periods, in the Classical (500-323 BCE) and Hellenistic periods (323-30 BCE) more divergence of paths which an individual can be faced, developed, especially eschatological elements were increasingly weaved into stories, hell becoming more intricate and gruesome and moral implications gaining more influence.[94] The description of heaven – Elysian Fields – was very similar to the Islamic and Christian Heaven. It got mostly described as somewhere on the edge of the known world (location, however, changed from author to author), somewhere far away from mortal eyes, where, at first, only the most valiant and most prominent heroes resided, later, however, it would become open to all righteous people. As described in the beginnings, when Elysian Fields were only restricted to a few chosen ones, I could not but think about Valinor, a place where Valars (beings similar to angels) and elves live as portrayed by J.R.R. Tolkien in his The Lords of The Rings, as Valinor was just like Elysian Fields, somewhere on the far west, on the sole edge of the world, and just like Elysian Fields restricted to chosen few, and just like Elysian Fields a place of astounding beauty. This blessed land was described by the Greeks as a meadow, where the deceased enjoy horseback riding and gymnastics, dice games, and lute playing (activities important to Greeks). It was

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[93] See ibid., p.111.
[94] See Encyclopaedia Britannica: "Hades, Greek Mythology", https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hades-Greek-mythology, last access: 30.06.2023.

also said to be blooming with red roses, shaded by incense trees, heavy with golden fruits hanging overhead.[95]

What can be concluded from the different cultures we took a look at, is that almost ubiquitously what happens is that a change in moral paradigm is noticed, that a more urgent need for justice was being advanced. The picture of the afterlife as it was, was not - and could not be - in congruence with the type of god that was emerging. How can, after all, god be just if a person who, let's say, kept me his slave, mutilated, and killed me at the end, when I was no longer of use to him - if such a person will be, after all, sharing with me the same desolate place, the same tasteless food, the same boring existence? Surely, something must be awry with this idea of an afterlife. Although the image of a god who judges people based on their actions, indeed, appears more moral, more just to us, we will come to see that it is not without its problems.
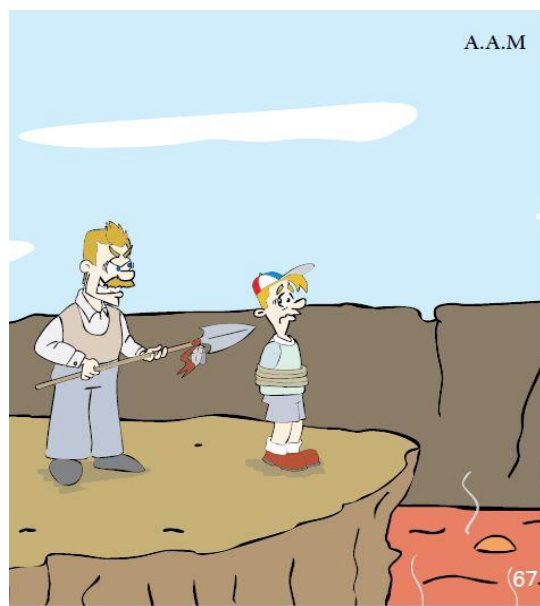
7.1. ISLAMIC HELL

With all the examples of hell and heaven mentioned (and there is a plethora of other cultures sharing similar afterlife qualms and fears I could have brought up), I aimed to show that there is nothing divine and extraordinary in the Islamic narration of the afterlife, but rather that it is human, maybe too human. Creating a sort of introduction, which will hopefully help to place Islamic Hell (from now on I would like to concentrate on Hell, specifically) on a historical line, we will turn our attention to how the Quran and hadiths described this place, leaving for the most part the question of morality for the next chapter.

There are many words used throughout the Quran to refer to Hell – "*ğahannam*", "*saʿīr*", "*nār*", "*ğaḥīm*", "*saqar*", to name a few. *Ğahannam*, maybe the most common word for Hell in the Quran, has a deep and interesting history. The Magazine mentions the etymology of the word on two occasions (10/67 and 9/105).

> *"We also find in the Old Testament a mention of the Valley of Gehenna or Hinnom, which is located outside the ancient city of Jerusalem, where the people used to sacrifice their children and burn them as an offering to the god Baal and the god Moloch."* (10/67)

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[95] See Kerenyi: Mythologie, p.224.

Some sources speak, however, of Gehenna as a sort of dumping ground, where rubbish was burnt. Be as it may, because of its association with fire and burning, it came to denote a place where the sinful will be burnt and tormented for eternity. Eternity is an important characteristic of Islamic Hell and represents one of the biggest moral problems for the Magazine. The eternity of punishment in Hell is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran, leaving little space for discussion. One example will suffice: "*They will be desperate to get out of the Fire but they will never be able to. And they will suffer an everlasting punishment.*" (5:37). Interestingly, some denominations in Christianity, among others, Universalists (who believe that God, being Loving and Caring, will, in the end, save all people), and some Protestants, such as Seventh-day Adventists (who believe that the wicked will be simple destroyed, annihilated rather than subjected to perpetual torments), believe that view of Hell as being eternal is a blatant moral discrepancy and, ultimately, erroneous. Similar tendencies, albeit marginal, are to be observed also among some Muslims. However, Sunni Islam view on this subject nowadays is clear – Hell is eternal.[96] We will not dwell here on the subject of what does Quran or hadiths "really" say, but we will examine the traditional Sunni view as such, the view that is held by the vast majority of Muslim – the view with which the Magazine has the most problem, i.e. the view of the eternity of Hell.

Gehenna - Child Sacrifice: 10/67

We can, without any exaggeration or sarcasm, say that Islamic Hell reached, together with hell in Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, the sole peak of creativity and ingenuity when it comes to punishments humans are put through for their misconducts. In a sense, it is difficult to imagine a crueler place to be in.

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[96] There are reasons, however, to believe that the non-eternity of Hell has been given serious thought throughout Islamic history. Non-eternity of Hell was (is) especially popular when it comes to the question of believing Muslims, who, for one reason or another, ended up in Hell. Building on verses such as 15:43-44, describing Hell as having seven gates, some scholars concluded that this means that there are seven layers of Hell, each for different crimes, believing Muslims being in the most mild one, and being saved from it after some time. Other verses are used to argue for the non-eternity of Hell such as 11:107, which, however, would also assume the non-eternity of Heaven. For more detail see Smith & Haddad: Death and Resurrection, pp. 92-97.

- *"Surely those who reject Our signs, We will cast them into the Fire. Whenever their skin is burnt completely, We will replace it so they will ˹constantly˺ taste the punishment. Indeed, Allah is Almighty, All-Wise."*" (4:56)
- *As for the disbelievers, garments of Fire will be cut out for them and boiling water will be poured over their heads / Melting whatever is in their bellies, along with their skin / And awaiting them are maces of iron. / Whenever they try to escape from Hell—out of anguish—they will be forced back into it, ˹and will be told,˺ "Taste the torment of burning!"* (22:19-22)
- *When shackles will be around their necks and chains ˹on their legs˺. They will be dragged / Through boiling water, then burned in the Fire ˹as fuel˺* (40:72).

Types of tortures even inquisitors would not be ashamed of. The cruelty of these punishments is surprising, and it is even more surprising if we take into consideration that these punishments are brought into existence by a being associated with benevolent attributes such as Forgiving and All-merciful. This dire afterlife picture is reinforced by numerous hadiths. In one such hadith, it is made clear that the harshest sufferings are even beyond human imagination, considering that the mildest punishment would be the punishment of a person under "*whose arch of the feet a smoldering ember will be placed so that his brain will boil because of it."* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī 6561)

There are a couple of problems that arise with this Islamic idea of Hell. First of all, it is questionable if such unrelenting, merciless punishments are justifiable even for the most gruesome of crimes a person can commit. This is a well-known problem of "infinite punishment for finite crime", i.e. how can we make sense of the issue that ever-lasting punishments are destined for crimes (and consequences of the crimes) which are, in their essence, temporally limited. Even if we granted that such measures are justifiable for certain crimes, the problem is that the Islamic ruling is not limited to the most severe crimes (or, at least, what the majority of us would interpret as "most severe") but is extended to include more "trivial" crimes such as witchcraft, practice of homosexuality and disbelief (trivial according to atheists, of course). Disbelief is apparently such a heinous crime that even the parents of the prophet ended in Hell because of it (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 203). Disbelief is not only condemned by explicit prohibition and warning ("*Who among My creatures does more wrong than one who is reminded of the signs of Allah then turns away from them?*" - 18:57) but its detriments and impermissibility are often mentioned through Quranic stories. In one such story – the story of Khidr, a person of great wisdom, and Moses – Khidr kills a young boy because of his troublesome character. Namely, the reason Khidr gives for killing the boy is that he would cause, in the future, his parents to become disbelievers - "*And as for the boy, his*

parents were ˈtrueˋ believers, and we feared that he would pressure them into defiance and disbelief." (18:80). The only way we can make sense of this type of reasoning is if we try to think of disbelief in God, as equivalent to Him to the most severe crimes humans have committed throughout history. To think along the lines of God being infinitely good, omnipotent, and omniscient. The mistrust we then express, by not believing is, hence, infinitely bad, and deserving of infinite punishment. To think of disbelief in god-like terms and not in human ones. This, nevertheless, to many atheists, and even most believers, still *seems* morally wrong, but is it really?

7.2. HELL AND MORALITY

The existence of hell, as described in the chapter concerning the history of hell, seems more morally satisfying if we granted that there is some divine being or divine justice, than its non-existence. We can look at the existence of hell from two perspectives, it is, simply put, either because a divine, moral, being exists and the existence of hell would compensate for the existence of evil, or we could look at the existence of hell as a form of human development and projection of human sentiments, desires, moral apparatus, and sense of justice. The second option is more likely for the Magazine.

> *"How do you say to me that there is no Heaven and Hell? Does it mean that the unjust will escape punishment for their deeds? Does it mean that the oppressed will die without getting their rights back? Analysis: I desire for the oppressed to have their rights restored and for the oppressor to be held accountable. The conclusion: There must be a day for that to happen."* (6/42)

Even if we concluded that the existence of hell is a prerequisite for there to be justice, it nonetheless seems that Islamic God has maybe been too eager in his attempts, and seemingly crossed some lines. Had Hell stayed a transitory station humans entered to be punished for their misdeeds, to be purified and eventually leave, there would be far less moral problems, or at least not of such nature that came to arise with the Islamic concept of Hell. But, as we know, it did not. Not only did He punish all those deserving some punishment (according, also, to our moral intuitions), he went on to prolong the punishment to those that never end, and not only for those who were obviously deserving of *some* punishment, but also for those whose crimes are much less obvious - if at all existent. And this obviousness is a problem.

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"A trivial sin (assuming it is a sin) in a limited life... is matched by an enormous punishment (the maximum torment) for an unlimited period (forever and ever). It is very clear that this punishment is not fair." (1/35)

The problem, of course, with the infinite punishment for disbelief is that there just seems to be too much of a discrepancy between the crime and the punishment. We humans love to satisfy our innate feeling of justice. Not just humans, gods, I would say, too. Quran and the Bible mention the principle of "an eye for an eye "and "a tooth for a tooth", the same is the case with the Code of Hammurabi. Maybe it is not so important whether the Quran or the Bible were influenced by Hamurabi's law or if the laws were whispered to Hamurabi by god(s), the important thing is that these feelings of justice and the urge to oppose injustice is both shared between humans and the divine. How are we then to explain the eternal punishment for finite crimes? Besides the line of thinking mentioned above (that the crime of disbelief must be somehow equal of most severe crimes and, hence, deserving of Hell) another defense put forward is that of the perpetuity of crimes in Hell, i.e. the assumption that crimes committed on this world will be forever perpetuated by the wicked in Hell. This forever-sinning idea is also reinforced by the Quran (6:28) and is a common answer to the problem, both from Islamic and Christian apologetics. For example, Mahmoud Mostafa, advocating this line of thought said: "*Their sinning is an innate and enduring attribute of their psyche and not a momentary slip in the context of some exceptional life circumstance.*"[97] The assumption that crimes will be committed again and again, without paying heed to relentless sufferings is hard to grasp. We can try thinking of extreme murderers to attempt to make some sense of this. It is not rare of an occurrence that many such murderers, after having been released from jail, commit crimes again, and it indeed, seems that they would always do it if they only had an opportunity. The analogy is, however, amiss. Even if we conceded that criminals would always do the same (although it is very questionable if they would indeed opt to do the crime again considering that tortures in Hell, as so often repeated, are permanent and incomparable with prison punishment), it does not imply that disbelievers would do the same – i.e. that they would continue to commit the same "crime". It seems absurd to assume that disbelievers would continue to exert the same disbelief after having witnessed the tortures of Hell, angels, rising from the dead, God... The sole reason for having ended in Hell, their disbelief, would at the very beginning, with their rising from the dead, be rendered ludicrous and mistaken, as they would, of course, realize how deluded they were. Therefore, to compare disbelief to

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[97] Mohmoud: Dialogue, p.39.

committing murders (as one of the examples), basing the logic of the eternal Hell on their continual sinning, is, to say the least, unsatisfactory. Disbelief, however, is *the sin,* it is the sin above all sins in Islam and this is what disturbs the Magazine.

> *"This torment is not intended for murderers and criminals, rather, it is dedicated to everyone who did not acknowledge the prophecy of Muhammad, nothing more and nothing less! If a person is non-religious or an atheist (the one who doesn't believe in God), and he does righteous deeds and benefits humankind greatly…all these good deeds will not help him and he will be thrown into Fire…why? Because he is not a Muslim." (1/30)*

On the other hand, the thought of a group of people enjoying themselves completely while another group of people is being tortured in the very same moments, tortures of immense scale and proportion, is disturbing. This is also a problem pointed out by David Hart in his critique of an eternal Hell.[98] It would not be disturbing if it weren't God's kingdom, perfect order, how it only *should* be, which is what religions claim they have – the best possible system. It seems to me, however, that something is taken for Heaven's perfection, as such. It is then nothing more than a continuation of the worldly life, with a group of people simply choosing to be (or made be) blatantly ignorant of other people's sufferings, or even worse choosing to rejoice in the sufferings of other people. It is difficult to envision a profound enjoyment in Heaven while having the knowledge that certain individuals, perhaps even members of your own family, are destined to be stuck in Hell for eternity. If the answer is that they will not have such knowledge in the first place, then this state of happiness is a state resembling the mix of high of drugs and targeted amnesia, most memories being ripped apart from us, rendering this type of heaven unintelligible. This is also one of the objections raised by Thomas Talbott (although targeting Christian God, I do not think it would be any different for the Islamic God). The thought of a loving God, for him, who seemingly could have done more to save such individuals from never-ending torments, is indicative of the type of mercy such a God possesses, of impossibility for us then to love such being in entirety, and illogicality of such view overall: "*Here, it seems, is yet another impossibility: I cannot both love my daughter as myself and love (or worship wholeheartedly) a God whom I believe to have done less than he could to save her from a life of misery and torment.*"[99]

Let's take a deeper look at some arguments on why Hell as described in Islam is morally problematic.

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[98] See Hart: The Obscenity of Eternal Hell.
[99] Talbott: Providence, p.239.

The reasoning behind infinite punishment for sinning against an infinitely great being (Islamic God) is flawed, because *the problem here is that according to classical theism, God cannot be harmed.*[100] In the core of the Islamic belief lays the premise that God is beyond psychical or physical afflictions and exalted above such damaging limitations on His character. The concept of pain, harm, or suffering, and their ability to influence God in any way seems incongruent with Islam. To say that something infinitely can harm such being is contradicting His sole attributes and would assume his vulnerability, which would be impermissible Islamically.

If we would say, on the other hand, that the reason for sinners (and therein disbelievers) being in Hell is their stubbornness, i.e. their forever-doing of the same wicked acts they used to do or their profound inability to change the course of their acts, then it raises at least two further questions (even if we granted that all those in Hell would *actually* continue to sin, which we did not). Firstly, the question of why would God in the first place create a being for whom He knows will end up in Hell for eternity, not because of his acts per se, but for his incapacity to change, who just like the word implies would not be capable, i.e. it would be impossible for him to have acted differently. The verdict of eternal punishment would be, of course, in His capability and in congruence with an omnipotent God, however, it would hardly be commensurate with His attribute – Most Merciful. A standard theistic defense of the proposition that asserts that God should not have created a person for whom He knows will suffer in Hell is the free will argument. God made people free to choose, this quality of theirs – to choose freely – is a higher good, even if this meant that some people will inevitably end up in Hell. A world in which free will exists, according to theists, is a better world than if the ability to make choices did not exist, even if it means spending the eternity in Hell. In the end, it is *their* free will and *their* choice, so it is not God per se who brought that on them, it was their actions, it was them, and God is, in that case, just a being who allows it. However, such a God could be called Good, or Merciful, only if we would redefine the word "good", so that it does not rule out cruelty.[101]

Nevertheless, God's Mercy is a ubiquitous element in the Quran, and there cannot, of course, be any talk of God's cruelty as per Islam. It would be a contradiction in terms. For example, the story of a man who kills 100 people and then repents before his death, and goes to Heaven, is often told to illustrate God's immense mercy and to show that no matter how grave

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[100] Buckareff & Plug: Hell, p.134.
[101] Adams: The Problem of Hell, p.317.

a sin is, albeit not shirk and disbelief, if we repent, it will be forgiven.[102] Some questions are, however, looming here. The notion that we ought to repent is built upon the presumption that we realize the sin and have a guilty conscious because of the evil-doing, conditionally speaking. It is not clear to me that such presumption exists in regard to disbelief. There also cannot be any talk of the same degree of harmfulness at all, not towards humans or God. If we said that disbelief is a sin because God said so, apart from circular reasoning which comes with such a claim, it is also problematic because it would open the question of Euthyphro's dilemma, which we previously discussed (see section 6.2.) If God prohibited people, under the threat of Hell, from entering a house with their left foot, would then this act, if done, be morally reprehensible and deserving of eternal punishment, or would this make God's commands gratuitous at best, or unreasonable and unjust at worst? Because of reasons concerning eternal Hell, or reasons which are seemingly in apparent contrast with the word mercy (predominately the problem of evil), the Magazine is rather skeptical that God and absolute mercy can ever be congruent:

> *"You see them [the religious, added by me] earnestly asserting that God is Merciful and Just, yet turning a blind eye to the famines, destruction, and poverty that occur under the very presence of God, with no fault on the part of those affected. You witness them declaring that God is Loving, yet consigning them to a pit of flaming torment and unparalleled punishment, even if they were righteous, simply because they did not believe in Him due to a lack of evidence, according to their perception. It must be a severely twisted way of thinking if one fails to recognize the contradiction here." (9/89)*

When it comes to the question of human intellectual capabilities, humans are often not *fully* aware of all the implications their actions could or will cause, and although this does not and should not exempt them from some sort of punishment, their punishment should also be congruent to the extent of their capabilities to understand all the implication of their acts. Even in our judiciary nowadays people who are severely impaired cognitively are not liable for their crimes in the same manner cognitively sound individuals are. This would be, I think, analogous to disbelief and an eternal punishment. Atheists are, if you will, handicapped, in this regard and profoundly not able to understand the extent of harm (if we grant that there is any) of their disbelief. This is also one of the arguments M.M. Adams puts forward in regard of the problem of eternal Hell. She says that „*agent responsibility is diminished in proportion to his or her unavoidable inability to conceive of the relevant dimensions of the action and its consequences, and I draw the conclusion that human agents cannot be fully responsible for*

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the horrendous consequences of their actions."[103] Similarly, Kershnar argues that the decision to continue wrongdoing in Hell would be irrational. He says that the inability to learn or to grasp the measures of our consequences is the characteristic of our finite life and would not apply in the infinite realm. If we assumed that an individual would, despite being constantly tormented, continue to wrong, then this would assume that such an individual would be either cognitively impaired or "*unable to control which desires get translated into actions*"[104]. In either case, such an individual should not be morally culpable as he lacks the basic characteristics to make him such, reason and volition.

Another problem is being pointed out by Buckareff and Plug. The problem is that there seems to be circular reasoning for such raison d'etre of eternal Hell as described in Islam (and Christianity) – that is, as a space for perpetual punishing of sinners, and a showcase of celestial justice. What is meant by this is the reasoning that the moral justification for Hell is the existence of Hell, i.e. Hell is created to punish individuals who continue to wrong therein – "*Hell is needed because hell exists*."[105] In other words, if Hell had not been created with such eternal characteristics there would not be eternal criminals or eternal disbelievers. Kershnar gives an analogy of the system of Hell by comparing it to a school principal who sets the punishment for the student who causes a fight, by ordering that the janitor of the school should maltreat, out of proportion (Kershnar uses the word sodomize), the student who caused the fight. The point being made is that this principal is then the cause of additional suffering (even if the students were the ones making decisions and made themselves liable for it) and would then partly be responsible for the circle of suffering, especially if the punishment is disproportion to the act.[106] This is, of course, only applicable if we assume that the punishment is not in line with the crime.

Another objection that can be raised with the view that both most evil criminals and disbelievers will face the same infinite punishment besides, of course, the problem itself – infinite torments, is the assumption that these two are equal. Getting into Hell, generally, would premise that earthy life in both these instances is essentially a life wasted. It conflates two completely different categories, belief and acts into one and the same, which is not just intuitively wrong, but seems unreasonable and illogical. If the question is why it is intuitively wrong, then it takes no more than to reflect on our senses and emotions on such a question, and we would quickly establish, if done honestly, that this equation is injust. As said before,

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[103] Adams: The Problem of Hell, p.310.
[104] Kershnar: The Injustice of Hell, p.116.
[105] Buckareff, Plug: Hell, p.135.
[106] See Kershnar: The Injustice of Hell, p.106.

intuition in itself is not necessarily equal to the truth, however, it may be indicative of it. Another important note here is that the intuition as mentioned here is in the context of intuitions that were granted to us by God, it is not the case that we take an intuition as understood in the evolutionary scenario and apply it to a theistic frame. No, the case here is that intuitions work in a frame set by God. When it comes to reasonableness, I think it is unreasonable to compare the two, as the amount of harm that is done in one and the other case is irrational to compare. Firstly it is irrational because we established that harm to God is non-existent (as He cannot be harmed) and secondly the amount of evidence that would suggest that God does not exist (and be a disbeliever) and the evidence that would suggest that murder is not morally wrong (and become a murderer), is, I think, incomparable.

If all arguments in support of the eternal Hell from a believer do not seem to convince the other side, the option of God's unintelligibility always comes in handy. However, saying that God is unknowable or that his morality and the sense of justice are somehow incomprehensible to our limited mind is not satisfactory and it is hard to imagine anyone go whom we would give such freedom except from God. If we imagine a human (any human, may he also be just moderately virtuous), who would act in the same way we ascribe certain actions to God, it would be pretty clear that such actions would be under attack and critique, and the person proclaiming them would not be confronted with approval or silence, as it is the case with God, but with anger and denial, at very least. Why are we then seemingly not able to do the same thing with God? Why are we not able to apply the same human morality – the only one we are able to comprehend – to God?

> *"The last remaining escape is that this is fair, but we don't know how. And it is a wisdom that God knows and we do not know! However, this is a very weak escape and can mean anything."* (1/35)

The above-mentioned arguments are mostly, as the reader will notice, objections to Christian God and the concept of eternal Hell as depicted in the Bible. I included those arguments as I think that these arguments are utterly pertinent to the Islamic concept of Hell, if not even more. Whereas Christians can say that the Bible is Godly inspired, and not the literal word of God (and hence can have more room for interpretations), this is not applicable to the Quran. The Quran is the literal word of God, and because of that, exempted from human errors.

7.3. SOME VIEWS ON THE ETERNAL HELL IN SUNNI ISLAM

The focus until now was more on the arguments against the eternity of Hell in general, without dwelling too much on views Sunni scholars held. Although the view of the eternity of Hell is widely spread in both Sunni and Shia Islam, it seems that Sunni scholars were/are much more rigid when it comes to holding the view of the eternity of Hell than it is the case with Shiites, and especially Sufis.[107] This is also the case nowadays, as it was in the past. Besides the Quranic verses mentioned previously, the Sunni traditional view of the eternity of Hell is supported by the consensus of Islamic scholars (ʾiğmaʿ), to which is given far more importance than it is the case with the Shia Islam. The consensus of Islamic scholars in Sunni Islam on whether unbelievers will go to Hell forever is rather clear – they will.[108]

Nevertheless, the thought of an eternal punishment was and is troubling for Islamic scholars. Some tried to interpret the word for eternity (ḫulūd) and its versions (such as ḫālidūn, ḫālidīn, ḫālid, ḫālidan) mentioned in context with Hell (2:39, 2:217, 9:63, 43:74…) as meaning a long period of time, maybe even unimaginably long, but, they claim, not indefinite. However, such an interpretation of the word "ḫulūd" is wrong, and that, in my opinion, primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the word comes in the context with some other words that support the view of Hell's eternity, for example that their punishment will not be lightened or be granted respite (2:165, 3:88…). Furthermore, the word "ḫulūd" and its derivations are sometimes accompanied by the adverb "abadan", used to reinforce and amplify the meaning (4:169, 33:65, 72:23…), leaving little space for discussion (in translations of the verses it is usually translated as *forever and ever*). Another important thing to point out, if not the most important of all, is that the same word is used to describe the afterlife in Heaven (11:23, 46:14, 3:136, 5:85, 9:89…) - and few would argue that the existence of Heaven is temporally limited. To argue that the same word is used in one meaning in reference to Heaven, and something different in reference to Hell, is not very feasible.

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[107] An interesting article named "Reconciling Divine Justice with Eternal Punishment: An Analysis of 3 Responses from the Shi'i Tradition", which speaks of some views of Sufi and Shiite scholars, including Ibn ʿArabī, Mullā Ṣadrā, Ayatollah Ğaʿfar Subḥānī, among others, can be found on the following site: https://iqraonline.net/reconciling-divine-justice-with-eternal-punishment-an-analysis-of-3-responses-from-the-shii-tradition/#_ftnref2.

[108] See Hoover: Islamic Universalism, p.181. The author enlisted some Sunni Islamic scholars (Faḫr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, Al-Qurṭubī, al-ʾĪğī…), and their consensus: "*The Muslims have reached a consensus that the unbelievers will abide in the Fire forever; their chastisement will not be cut off.*"

Contrary to the majority Sunni view of the eternity of Hell, Ibn Taymiyya did not believe in the eternity of Hell and considered it irreconcilable with divine Goodness and Mercy. He writes in his work "*A Response to Those Who Assert Annihilation of Heaven and Hell*":

> "*[The punishment of] those who are subject to torture by fire, and purge themselves from that evil, would be deemed reasonable by Divine Wisdom – similar to the wisdom found in earthly suffering. This way, evil that would eventually cease would be created. However, the creation of souls, who do evil things in this world and subsequently experience nothing but misery in the next one, is a contradiction. It is a contradiction, here apparent more than anywhere else, the contradiction of Divine Wisdom and Mercy.*"[109]

Arguments that spurred Ibn Taymiyya to reevaluate the standard Sunni view of the time, are then the same ones that we mentioned previously, the inability to reconcile eternal punishment with God's attributes, i.e. His Mercy and His Wisdom. Ibn Taymiyya does not restrict himself to theological arguments but uses textual evidence, i.e. Quranic verses to bolster his claims. When supporting the view of the eternity of Heaven, but perishability of Hell, he adduces as evidence verses such as 38:54, that talk about how provisions in Heaven will not be exhausted (p.52). Similarly the verses such as 6:128 where is *illā mā šāʾ Allāh* (except for what Allah wills) added, after saying that ǧīnn and their supporters will spend the eternity in Hell (*ḫālidīn fiha*), is good enough evidence for Ibn Taymiyya in favor of his position (p.57), as it seems to suggest that, if God wills, Hell can (and will) come to an end. Besides this, he goes to cite some prominent persons among salafs, who seemingly support the view that Hell is not eternal (pp. 53-56). Ibn Taymiyya thought that only the consensus of the first three generations (as-*salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*) is acceptable, and several claims he found among the first three generations, which are interpreted as suggesting the view against the eternal Hell, contributed to his breaking part with this classical Sunni doctrine. Hoover writes that Ibn Taymiyya, by raising such questions in the first place, hence, is breaking the rules of classical Sunni hermeneutics, as, Hoover continues, consensus had already been reached.[110] Ibn Qayyim, who was a student of Ibn Taymiyya, held the same views on the annihilation of Hell as his master, and writes on this subject in several of his works, most famously in "*Remedy for Those who Question on Matters Concerning Divine Decree, Predestination, Wisdom and Causality*" and "*Spurring Souls on to the Realms of Joy*". He follows in the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyya adducing in support of his views more or less the same arguments we mentioned for Ibn Taymiyya. Furthermore, he writes in his work "*Spurring Souls on the Realms of Joy*", that eternal punishment is essentially pointless and that there cannot be any gain intrinsically

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[109] Ibn Taymiyya: al-Radd, pp.82-83. Translated by me.
[110] See Hoover: Islamic Universalism, p.187.

in it for God. Punishment is only meaningful and useful insofar as it produces something good, something that serves higher purposes. Ibn Qayyim tended towards thinking that just punishment should be a form of remedy, and eternal punishment being the opposite of that is, then, not just, and hence not God-like.[111] Important is to note that both Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya defend the view that Hell is existent only for a finite amount of time, not just for Muslims who had done atrocious acts (and was a much more common view) but, interestingly, for all, disbelievers included.

In 1991 American scholar Nuh Ha Mim Keller translates the work of the 14th-century prominent scholar Ibn an-Naqīb al-Miṣrī "*Reliance of the Traveler*", one of the best works (according to the translator) in Shafiʾi jurisprudence. This book, luckily for us, contains a chapter called "*The Eternity of Paradise and Hell*" (*Baqāʾ al-ğanna wa-n-nār*).[112] In this chapter the translator, after briefly mentioning that there is no disagreement on this subject (the subject of eternity of Hell and Heaven), carries on to translate two Sunni scholars Abū Manṣūr al-Baġdādī and Taqī ad-Dīn as-Subkī, and their opinion on this subject. Al-Baġdādī said:

> "*The scholars of Ahl al-Sunna and all the previous righteous of the Muslim Community are in unanimous agreement (ijma') that paradise and hell are eternal, and that the bliss of the inhabitants of paradise and the torment of unbelievers in hell will endure forever.*"[113]

As-Subkī said:

> "*The faith of Muslims is that paradise and hell do not perish. Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm having transmitted scholarly consensus (ijma') on this point and on the fact that whoever denies it is an unbeliever (kafir) by scholarly consensus. And there is no doubt of this, for it is necessarily known (def: fl.3(N)) as part of the religion of Islam, and proof after proof bears it out.*"[114]

As-Subkī then adduces evidence from the Quran (65 relevant verses) and then goes on to mention several hadiths that support the eternity of Heaven, and, more importantly for us, the eternity of Hell. Here we will not quote them for the sake of brevity (those interested can take a look at pages 996 and 997), however, I will touch upon something more relevant and interesting for us in this context. As-Subkī says that he had "*come across a work about hell perishing by one of the people of the present era*" (p.997), and although he does not mention specifically who this person was, it becomes apparent that the person in question is none other

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[111] See ibid., p.190.
[112] See Al-Misrī: Reliance of the Traveller. Relevant pages are 995-1002. All translations are from Nuh Al Mim Keller.
[113] Ibid., p.995.
[114] Ibid., p.995.

than Ibn Taymiyya and his aforementioned work "*A Response to Those Who Assert Annihilation of Heaven and Hell.*" As-Subkī then objects to all the arguments Ibn Taymiyya puts forward in favor of the non-eternity of Hell (pp.999-1002). He criticizes the authenticity of the hadiths on which Ibn Taymiyya bases his claims, considering them ḍaʿīf (weak), and even if granted that some of them could be authentic, as-Subkī says that the escape from Hell, if possible, is possible only for Muslims (p.999). Furthermore, in answer to Ibn Taymiyya's argument from God's Mercy, as-Subkī does not have a straightforward answer, rather he simply responds that eternity of Hell is something no one before "this man", claimed: "*So we do not know of anyone who has made the statement this man has, which entails leaving Islam, because of the knowledge afforded by the sheer amount of the evidence against it.*" (p.1001)

All things considered, we can say that the vast majority of Sunni Islamic scholars held the view that both Hell and Heaven are, indeed, eternal. Nevertheless, there are some scholars whose views, however marginal they were, dared to challenge the prevailing dogmas and morality of them, even for the price of being labeled heretics and disbelievers, or even for the price of imprisonment and their lives (as is the case with Ibn Taymiyya). One such view is the view on immorality of eternal Hell and its incompatibility with God's Mercy.

7.4. FEAR OF PUNISHMENT

In Bosnia, we still have a lot of superstitions. Some still believe (in villages predominately) that we should not wash the laundry on some specific days (no one knows why), or that we, for example, should not whistle in the house for fear of summoning mice and rats. There are many more similar superstitions, most of them harmless, some not. When I was growing up, I and other kids used to be told not to drink coffee for the fear of growing tails (!), or not to destroy swallow nests for someone could die in our family if done so. Now, of course, I can only look back with a smile and disbelief at what I used to believe in, but at that moment when I was a boy, I was not smiling, I profoundly feared. The thought of an additional body part starting to grow from my coccyx stayed strangely vivid and frightening in my childish mind. Once, when I really did destroy a swallow nest I was disturbed for the several following days – someone will die in my family, I could not help but keep thinking. I do not think it is much different from the fear of the eternal Fire.

The idea of the eternal Hell would also, for many atheists and the Magazine, not be much dissimilar from superstition, if we took superstition to mean a form of irrational belief or, indeed, fear with no anchorage in reality. This would, of course, not be classified as such by religions since the eternal Fire is for them, as we saw, part of reality. Nevertheless, it is questionable, as per Magazine, to what extent we can consider morally virtuous the instillment of such kind of fear in adults, let alone children.

وما أدراك ما الحطمة

"And what will make you realize what the Crusher is?" (104:5), 7/32.

"It is the first thing that drips fear and terror into the soul of the child (who is tabula rasa), and invades his mind, imposing itself. […] How else are they to accept those horrible images that are preserved in their brains and their innocent childish hearts, which are [i.e. the images, added by me] the first thing that aims to frighten people and threaten them with a fire that engulfs them with a burning flame? Is it good to plant such ideas in young souls?" (7/32)

The American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg in the second half of the last century famously put forward a theory of moral development in which he differentiated between three main stages of moral development (moral reasoning) in human life.[115] Particularly by implementing experiments that contain moral dilemmas on participants and looking at moral reasoning behind the participants' answers, Kohlberg divided moral development in pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional stages.

1) **Pre-conventional stage**: If the moral reasoning behind an act is directly tied with punishment or reward, without taking into consideration anything other than that, be it a relationship or consequences inside family, group, or society, then such behavior is – according to Kohlberg – in stage one, the stage of moral development associated with children under the age of nine. (p.172)

2) **Conventional stage**: Here the moral reasoning is based on society, social relationships, and authority (law). (Ibid.) If we were to link it with the moral theories discussed in previous chapters, we could say it resembles moral relativism, as the moral value is inextricably tied with society and what society deems moral or not.

3) **Post-conventional**: At this stage person's moral reasoning is marked by the complete awareness of ethical rules imposed by society. However, a person's

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[115] See Kohlberg: Moral Development.

moral decisions are not based on society as such, rather, they are based on moral principles that transcend public agreement and can, or not, concur with it. (p.173)

The first stage, pre-conventional, is of particular interest to us in this context, as it maps pretty well on the type of moral reasoning some religious people succumb to, even in their adult periods of life. It is in fact no different than my Bosnian superstition when I was a child. If the only thing preventing an individual from doing something (be it destroying swallow nests, fasting, taking drugs, or committing adultery) is the fear of punishment (or in the opposite case, hope for reward), without taking into consideration societal norms, or without using some higher moral principles, than such actions are on the level of a child who is in the inception of moral reasoning.

> *"Why is God always associated with fear in our upbringing? We are supposed to fear Him, be terrified of Him, and avoid committing sins because He will burn us in Hell." (8/79)*

> *"Is it possible to find another way to encourage or discourage doing something without resorting to persuasion through rewards and fear?" (15/15)*

Of course, I do not want to say that Muslims, or most majority of religious people in general, belong to the first group, however, it is without a doubt that the line of thinking - I will not do this because I will be punished (end up in Hell), or I will do it because I will get a reward (be in Paradise) is still present both in religious and irreligious people. Most religious people will have to agree that reward and punishment alone are weak grounds to build on morality. In fact, there cannot be talk of morality as such in those cases.

> *"In general, we will find that religion has trivialized the concept of ethics by directly linking it to rewards and associating its avoidance with punishment […] Which indicates that religion does not give morals, but rather laws." (7/82)*

> *"Morality is a voluntary and benevolent act that should not be pursued for the sake of reward, nor should its absence be feared as punishment." (7/82)*

As alluded to by the last quote, morality is only possible when there is a choice to be made. With an eternal Fire, such a choice simply does not exist. Or should we say that such a choice exists but that such "choice" is by its nature deceitful. The choice of doing something which God prohibited or ending up in Hell, if done so, is the same as if we would do something which goes against our will, by the virtue of a gun being pointed at our head. Having said that,

the idea of Hell is a rather genius idea to keep people refraining from certain acts that are deemed reprehensible according to certain religions or to keep its followers inside its fold, as per some religions, primarily Islam. However, ingenious as it may be it should not imply that it is equally ethical.

"Are they being emotionally blackmailed into following one religion and not another?"(10/60)

Simon Cottee interviews ex-Muslims in his book „*When Muslims Leave Islam*" and asks for the reasons for their apostasy. Many of the interviewees mentioned the ethical problems of Hell as their main reason for leaving their faith. Besides the ethical qualms which arise in reconciling God's benevolence with God's punishment (i.e. Hell), the interviewees often speak of psychological problems they used to face in their childhood if they would do something which is Islamically prohibited (ḥarām) - however harmless it seemed to some (eating non-halāl food, listening to music, dressing inappropriately) - or even if they would just start doubting something, where the doubt alone in something which is established as true in Islam, is the reason enough for the fear of Hell.[116] Cottee recaps by saying that it is "*no wonder that for many respondents the process of doubting was deeply unnerving, raising fears of terrible suffering and torture in the hereafter.*"[117] Marilyn Adams also, when talking about benefits of universalism and advantages it offers in contrast to traditional concept of the Christian Hell, is critical of eternal damnation, among other reasons, also because it "*produces despair that masquerades as skepticism, rebellion, and unbelief.*"[118] The Magazine goes even further, comparing those who suffer under the idea of eternal Fire to neurotic persons.

"And you will find it in any sect or religion that has entered the souls of its adherents and planted in their minds a fear of torment in the pits of their graves, and the horrors of a day that they call "the Hour" (as-sāʿa) and an eternal Fire (ğaḥīm) that they call "Hell" (ğahannam). This is a neurotic personality by definition." (9/87)

When the fear is too big, too deeply rooted to be controllable, when your every decision is in the very beginning dictated by the fear itself and steered by it, then it is, indeed, a psychological problem one is facing. There is also a name for the fear of Hell, it is called stygiophobia or hadephobia. I think that this kind of fear can never be rational, nor good, no

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[116] See Cottee: Apostates, p.60.
[117] See ibid., p.61.
[118] Adams: The Problem of Hell, p.325.

matter what the ultimate goal is, be it a deterrent from, for the most part, unimportant acts, or from what we universally accept as objectively (objectively in the sense of intra-subjectively) bad (theft, cheating, killing). I would say it is bad not only because of the negative impact it can have on a person or on the quality of life in general, but also because it is morally deficient. I say deficient, for the reason that the fear is inextricably linked with our actions, in the sense that actions resulting from such a phobia, with such fear, are, it seems to me, less worth morally.

A genuinely morally righteous deed should not arise from any fear; in fact, this fear distorts the deed, diminishes it, crushes it, and one could even say that it completely negates it. What I find particularly troubling in the connection with the concept of eternal Hell is not only the difficulty in reconciliation between the notions of an eternal punishment and divine love, but also the severing, at its very roots, of any inclination towards doubt. It is difficult for me to see genuine benefit and divine providence in preventing questions about the existence of God, the existence of prophets, angels, and the jinn, and precluding that which may arise from those questions, from possible doubts. That seems to be the greatest sin, to use religious vocabulary, associated with the concept of eternal Hell – not allowing any doubt and questioning, or at very least, not truly.

8. MUHAMMAD AND AISHA

The two moral problems dealt with so far, the problem of eternal Hell and homosexuality are undoubtedly difficult and serious issues that cast doubt and question the superiority of Islamic values. None of those two problems, however, had Muhammad as the center of their criticism (although he was far from being spared by them), who, of course, is one of the pillars and bearers of Islamic values, and Islam in general. However, the third main problem that we will deal with in this paper has in the center of its criticism Muhammad and his personality, and this criticism is equally serious and, if accurate, one of the stumbling stones, could be said even boulders, on the supposed pristine, flawless path of Islamic morality. Of course, we are talking about the marriage and its consummation between Muhammad and Aisha.

There are numerous accusations by the Magazine against the allegedly unblemished character of Muhammad as portrayed in Islam, going from accusations against his military campaigns,

treatment of war slaves (allowance of slavery in general), treatment of Jewish tribes (primarily Banu Qurayza), to seemingly unreasonable hostility against some animals (dogs, crows, scorpions, and mice), and other more or less serious accusation on his account. However, the most interesting and controversial one is the accusation of his marriage to Aisha when she was six, and his consummation of it when she was nine years old. Indeed, this act of Muhammad gained special importance and popularity, particularly in the last decades and came to be one of the most repeated and preferred allegations against Islamic morality, not just by atheists and secular circles, but also by the members of other religious dominations. The reason for this attack is rather obvious as we nowadays do not find it socially nor morally acceptable for grown, adult males to have intercourse with pubescent girls, nor do we generally tolerate this even for boys in their adolescent years. To what extent was it even socially acceptable in the past is not entirely clear, however, the age of the individuals as well as the age gap between them has, and does play an important part in how people perceive and accept the matter. The case of Muhammad and Aisha is not straightforward nor unchallenged as one would think, as there are some Islamic scholars who reject all hadiths altogether that speak of Aisha's age and put forward certain claims in favor of Aisha being much older in the moment of the marriage and its consummation than it is usually believed. This view will be dealt with in section 8.2., after we have gotten to know the majority view and some relevant hadiths, which help us understand the problem that emerges here.

8.1. MAJORITY VIEW

The majority of Sunni Muslim scholars agreed in the past, and continue to agree now, that Aisha was either six or seven years old when she got married to Muhammad and that she was either nine or ten years old when the marriage was consummated. Muhammad would be around 50, i.e. 53 years old when this happened. Various sources are used as evidence for these claims, foremost hadiths. We will of course not go into unnecessary troubles of enlisting every piece of evidence there is, however, some of the most used and relevant for us will be mentioned here. The evidence that will be enlisted here all come from one of the six major hadith books in Sunni Islam – all highly esteemed among Muslims - where Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, however, take a special place. It can be often heard that for many traditional Muslims these two hadiths books are, after the Quran, the most authentic scriptural sources. The hadiths in question are:

- Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī: 3894, 3896, 5133, 5134, 5158.
- Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 1422c, 1422d.
- Sunan an-Nasāʾī: 3255, 3256, 3257, 3258.
- Abū Dāwūd: 4933.
- Ibn Māǧa: 1876.

Several of the hadiths above are very similar in their length and form, and all of the hadiths mentioned contain some information about Aisha's age at the moment of marriage and its consummation. We will cite just one of these hadiths, to get a more clear picture of their content:

> "*Prophet (ﷺ) married her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old, and then she remained with him for nine years (i.e., untill his death).*" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī 5133)

Similar is said in historical chronicles, one of them being aṭ-Ṭabarī's "Tarīḫ aṭ-Ṭabarī" where he says that the Prophet Muhammad married Aisha three years before the hijra (622 CE), after the death of his wife Khadija, when Aisha was six years old.[119] In the same vein Shafi scholar Ibn al-Munḏir in the 10th century writes that scholars are in agreement that fathers can marry their young, virgin daughter if she is suitable for it, i.e. marriage, saying that the evidence for this is the hadith narrated by Aisha[120] (what is alluded to here is the hadith where Aisha herself explicitly states her age in the moment of marriage and its consummation). Jonathan Brown said in his Facebook post from 2018; "*People, I would love it if this hadith were weak. That would make everyone's life easier. But this hadith is incredibly widely transmitted.*"[121] In a Youtube videos Brown also says that he does not find evidence (see the section below) against the generally accepted narrative convincing "at all".[122]

The highest Islamic authority in Bosnia and its neighboring region "Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegowina", confirms, unsurprisingly, this narrative, claiming there is nothing wrong with the marriage at all, given the context of time, and bearing in mind that by having married Aisha at such a young age, the opportunity for Aisha to learn and incorporate the

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[119] See aṭ-Ṭabarī: Tarīḫ aṭ-Ṭabarī, p.398.
[120] See Ibn al-Munḏir: Al-ʾIšrāf, p.19.
[121] Brown, Jonathan, https://www.facebook.com/jonathanacbrown/posts/10156584464609850?comment_id=101565857
[122] Brown, Jonathan: "Why are you agitated about the Age of Hazrat Aysha?", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsYk-tRp9jk&t=32s

teachings of Islam from a young age had be created, making it possible for her to later become one of the most productive and fertile persons to proliferate the teachings of Islam.[123] Instances like these are countless, and a brief search on the internet on any acclaimed Islamic website will give you the same or similar answer. What is more interesting is the opposing view which we will take a look at in the next section.

8.2. MINORITY VIEW

Up until the 20th century[124] it seems as if there were no works, neither Islamic nor non-Islamic that denied the authenticity of the earliest Islamic sources on this subject or even dared something as to criticize the traditional narrative as depicted above. This is especially true for some of the earliest Islamic writings. For example neither Ibn Kaṯīr in his work "*al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyya*", nor Ibn Ḥazm in his "*Ḥuǧǧat al-Widāʿ*", nor Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in his "*al-Istīʿāb*" mentioned something which would contradict the traditional narrative, rather they are unanimous that they are not familiar with anyone who would disagree on this matter.[125] However, in relatively recent times, particularly in the last couple of decades, some scholars emerged who dared to cast doubt on some of the most established Islamic sources (such as the hadiths from al-Buḫārī and Muslim) and more precisely, to challenge the traditional narrative of Aisha's age. One of them is Adnan Ibrahīm, an Austro-Palestinian Islamic scholar, who claims that Aisha was between 18 and 22 years old at the time of the marriage and consummation, rather than being between the age six to ten.[126] The evidence Ibrahim puts forward is the same as many other scholars who tried to rebut the traditional narrative. The main reasons are as follows[127]:

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[123] See Halilovic: Muhammed.

[124] In a youtube video Jonathan Brown mentions the year 1905 and the book by David Morgoliouth "*Mohammad and the Rise of Islam*", as the first mention of Aisha's age in order to denigrate the Prophet, https://youtu.be/WsYk-tRp9jk?t=337. See also Jonathan Brown: Misquoting Muhammad, p.244. In the article named "*Aisha (ra): The Case for an Older Age in Sunni Hadith Scholarship*" on the Yaqeen website, the author Arnold Yasin Mol, points out that the age of Aisha was never a problem before the 20th century, https://app.yaqeen.io/read/paper/aisha-ra-the-case-for-an-older-age-in-sunni-hadith-scholarship.

[125] See Anonymous: The Age of Aisha (ra).

[126] See Ibrahim, Adnan: "Did the prophet (Mohammed) marry a 9 year old child?", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGOyEt5szM0

[127] The reasons enlisted below are the arguments mentioned by Ibrahim Adnan in his youtube video, however, the same arguments are repeated by many other scholars. See also T.O. Shavanas, and his article "Aisha's age: The Myth of a Proverbial Wedding Exposed", https://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_151_200/ayesha_age_the_myth_of__a_prover.htm.

1) All narrations that specify the age of Aisha are narrated through Hišām bin ʿUrwa (680-763), who is said to have narrated these hadiths in the last stages of his life, when his memory started to weaken.

2) Aisha's saying that she was a young girl (ǧāriya) when the surah al-Qamar was revealed. Based on the assumption by some Islamic sources that this surah was revealed somewhere around 616 (although there are different opinions) and considering that Aisha used the word ǧāriya (which is, according to Ibrahim Adnan used for a girl of around 11-12 years), then all this would imply that Aisha must have been much older than it is traditionally believed.

3) On the basis that ʾAsmāʾ, Aisha's sister, was ten years older than Aisha. As ʾAsmāʾ was born 27 years before hijra (i.e. 595 CE), this would place the birth of Aisha at around 605 CE, i.e. years before the usual narrative. There are also some other, similar, inferences based on the year of ʾAsmāʾ's death.

4) Age of Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet. It is claimed that Fāṭima was born when the prophet was 35 years old and that Aisha was five years younger (meaning that she was born around 610 CE). According to this calculation, Aisha would then be 12 years old when the marriage was consummated.

5) Hadiths that talk about Aisha participating in the battle of Badr and Uhud (which happened in 624 and 625, respectively). She would be too young to participate in them, hence she must have been much older than previously thought.

To some of these questions, Ǧibrīl Fuʾād Ḥaddād, Islamic scholar and muḥaddiṯ (hadith expert), gives rather satisfactory answers, some, however, are left unanswered.[128]

Modern Syrian hadith scholar Ṣalāḥ ad-Din al-ʾIdlibī, also criticized the traditional narrative as there is some evidence, above-mentioned (and some other that are not addressed by Ḥaddād), that contradict it, and as we only have Aisha's words, in contrast to all the evidence against it, he concludes that the hadith narrated by Aisha, although having a sound chain of narrators, are nonetheless misleading as Aisha was "*mistaken due to the fact that she made that statement in her old age.*"[129]

One of the most recent and comprehensive works on this matter is J.J. Little's doctoral thesis from 2022. Using isnad-cum-matn analysis (ICMA, a form of analysis that uses both text (matn) and isnad (chain of narration) to trace the traditional history of a hadith), he made the

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[128] See Ḥaddād: A Dialogue.
[129] Hawramani: Hadith Scholar.

conclusion that the narrative of Aisha's marriage at such a young age is a fabrication created by Hišām bin ʿUrwa, during his stay in Iraq, "*probably as a response to proto Šīʿī polemics and hostility towards ʿĀʾišah*".[130] He pointed out to the relatively late emergence of written hadiths as such, their proliferation beginning only after the middle of the 8th century (p.22), i.e. more than 100 years after the death of the Prophet, and to a strange silence by other extra-hadith sources that predate hadith books (such as biographical and legal works), which is enough to treat controversial hadiths in question skeptically (p.32). Hence, based on his analysis, Little concludes that "*the hadith of ʿĀʾišah's marriage to Muḥammad as a child is likely an 8th-Century polemical creation*", however, he was careful enough to point out that "*there is currently no way to know for sure*" when it comes to Aisha's age in the moment of marriage and its consummation (p.325).

8.3. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ethical problem with child marriage today is that we came to agree that child marriage is ethically problematic on various levels.

> "*There are things that the Prophet did, according to what we have received from him from the books, that are not considered ethical in our time, such as his marriage to Aisha, who was nine years old.*" (7/55)

The moral questionability of such a partnership seems to exponentially increase with the rise in the age gap between the two individuals. As Muhammad was in his 50s, according to the traditional narrative, when he married Aisha, those who raise the issue of such a marriage are even more aggravated by this matter. The Magazine is, expectably, critical of Muhammad in this regard, deeming his act as morally deficient:

> "*Finally, the question that arises is: what is the moral level of a person who needs a perfect religion that comes from heaven to know that raping a nine-year-old girl is immoral?*" (5/26)

The Magazine, at least in its first 25 issues, does not mention that there are certain opinions that set Aisha's age as being older (in some cases much older) than six (or nine), nor that

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[130] Little: Hadith, p.2.

some scholars reject hadiths that speak of Aisha's age entirely. The hadiths that speak of Aisha's age are taken as axiomatically true, the way, it should be said, they are taken by the vast majority of Muslims. The criticism of the Magazine is based on the assumption that these hadiths are genuine and hence the events depicted. However, the criticism is not only restricted to the content of the hadiths but also targets all those who defend the view, i.e. it targets Islam apologetics.

Islam apologetics often allude to the fact that in many cultures (including Western cultures, as these attacks stem predominately from them), child marriage was not uncommon nor socially condemnable.[131] In the 17th issue of the Magazine, the author under the pseudonym "Hunger mind", analysis the five volume work of the Egyptian writer ʿĀʾiša Abd ar-Raḥmān (1913-1998), named "*Kitāb tarāǧim sayyidāt bayt al-nubuwwa*" (*Book of Biographies of the Women of the Prophet's Household*), in which the writer tries, among other things, to explain and justify the acts of the Prophet by placing it in its historical context, i.e. that the practice of marrying young girls was not uncommon in the Arab world. As the answer to such defense, the Magazine comments:

> "*What is meant here is the principle itself, which is that the prevailing and followed custom in that era is for young girls to marry. There is no room to measure the understanding of our current age and project it onto the understanding of an era that has passed more than a thousand and four hundred years. This, however, raises signs of doubt and uncertainty in the fundamental argument of Islam, that it is suitable for every time and place.*"(17/64)

The objection raised in the last sentence is a reasonable one. Even if we said that such practices were indeed common in the past and that most people did not find anything objectionable with them, this should not imply that such behavior is in fact moral, or a type of behavior that should be universally accepted. Islamic morality should be universal and unbound by place and time. To accept that a certain action was at some point in time deemed moral but now is not, is to hold the view of moral relativism, which of course contradicts objective moral values purported by Islam. The same would apply if we said that owning a human being was moral in the USA 200 years ago, but now it somehow is not, that killing people for ritual sacrifice was acceptable, but now it is not, that lying for personal gain is now immoral, but in the future it will not be, etc. Similarly, the same Egyptian author is the subject of criticism in the 22nd issue of the Magazine, where she mentions that child marriages are not

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[131] See Mohd, et al: Islamic Discourse, p.100; Jonathan Brown: Misquoting Muhammad pp.244-245.

restricted to the Arab world, but were, and still are widespread, in Asia, as well in some countries of eastern Europe, or in the remote mountainous areas of the United States (22/46). Although it is true that child marriage is still practiced in Eastern Europe and especially Asia, the biggest problem by far, percentually, is faced by African countries. As per website Girls not Brides, 17 of top 20 countries with the highest percentage of child marriage are African countries[132], where religious affiliation does not seem to play a decisive role, as both majority Muslim and Christian countries face the same problem.

That child marriage represent a moral issue has become apparent to many modern Islamic scholars: "*The problems of child marriage are not only medical but also ethical and legal.*"[133]- says Yasmin Amin, who is opposed to the generally accepted view about Aisha's age, claiming that the supposed age "*contradicts historical information found in the heritage books.*"[134]

It can be argued that the mere existence of such hadiths, and their general acceptance as genuine, is enough for such a practice to become if not virtuous that at least tolerated, as in the end, it may be said, it was done by the Prophet, who is $ʾuswat^{un}$ $ḥasanat^{un}$ (an excellent example, 33:21) for all Muslims. The Magazine says somewhat disdainfully and in an overgeneralizing manner:

> "*A Muslim does not mind marrying a nine-year-old girl and having sex with her.*" *(17/159)*

This is of course far from the truth, as it is simply not the case that the vast majority of Muslims do practice it, rather it would be more appropriate to say that the issue of child marriage is more cultural than religious, as can be clearly seen based on the information collected by the site mentioned above (Girls not Brides). J.J.Little is dismissive that the hadiths mentioned have any correlations on the percentage of child marriages in majority Muslim countries:

> "*In a desperate attempt to retain the claim for polemical purposes, some Islamophobes will retreat into the realm of tautology: without the marital-age hadith, there could be no instances of Muslims being motivated by the marital-age hadith to marry children. How profound: without cars, there could be no crimes involving cars; without the character of Harry Potter,*

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[132] See Girls not Brides: Top 20 countries.
[133] Amin: Minor Marriages, p.314.
[134] Ibid., p.342.

there could have been no popular book series about Harry Potter.[…] In no meaningful sense does the hadith, or the acceptance thereof, cause child marriage.”[135]

I would agree that tying child marriage exclusively to the hadiths which seem to endorse it, is not supported by evidence, however, I would not go that far say that there is no meaningful connection between the two. Objections could be raised, as it is the case with other practices which are to certain extent connected with the prophet, such as slavery, polygamy, war plunders, etc. (which are, by the way, often mentioned against Muhammad in the Magazine), that such practices, which are now morally condemned, are not just not criticized by the person who is supposed to be the highest moral instance, but they are implemented and, hence, encouraged by him.

If we were to ask why it is not moral to marry and consummate marriage with pubescent girls (in this case nine-year-olds), then it could be said that its immorality raises from several facts. According to UNICEF child marriages causes serious psychical and mental issues. It includes psychical complications of early childbirth (with a high mortality rate depending on the age), accompanied by mental issues, but also social isolation, limiting of possibilities for further self-development, risk of domestic violence, and violation of many other human rights.[136] When we have in mind that child marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18, then the hadiths in question are even more morally wrong and reprehensible in modern context. No sustainable normative ethical theory would allow for such a thing to happen, as not only does it affect the individual negatively in regards to the person's well-being, it also fails the test of universalizability. The fact that some cultures tolerated child marriage and continue to do so, should play no role in this.

Based on all said, Muslims are left with a serious dilemma. Either one can accept the authenticity of hadiths and say that there was nothing wrong with child marriages in the past, trying to rationalize the idea of nine-year-olds getting married and potentially giving birth (as a natural consequence of getting married in the Islamic context), together with all the implications which could arise from such a marriage or they can say that hadiths are authentic, however, the practice is now obsolete and we should not try to emulate practices from the long past, which would, again, leave them vulnerable to the attacks of moral relativism. The third option is to reject the hadiths and label them as inauthentic or

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[135] Little: Aisha Hadith.
[136] See Unicef: Child Marriage.

fabrications, as was done by J.J. Little. This of course does not come without its problems, as one whole tradition, which is based on hadiths, would be disputed:

> *"After all, my research calls into question not just a "sound" (ṣaḥīḥ) hadith in the Sunnī canon, but one that is "well-known and close to being massively-widespread (mašhūr wa-qarīb ʾilá al-tawātur)."*[137]

Even if we acquitted the prophet from guilt, based on the assumption that the hadiths are indeed fabricated, the same could not be said of numerous Islamic jurists who agreed that a father can marry off his minor daughter, whether with or without her consent.[138] These rulings, however, did not stay in the past, but many Islamic scholars continue to issue fatwas permitting child marriage, basing their arguments precisely on the hadiths, such as Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī 5133. One instance is a fatwa by modern Islamic scholar Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān bin ʿAbd Allāh al-Fawzān, where he allows child marriage, basing his judgment on the sunna of the prophet, concluding: *"No one has the right to legislate other than what God and His Messenger have legislated, because it is sufficient."*[139] Likewise, Brown mentions that when the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia was asked if girls under 15 could marry, he replied that Islam did not prohibit it.[140] Therefore, Little saying that in no "meaningful way" do such hadiths cause child marriages, is a blatant disregard of the plethora of similar fatwas that, if not instigated, than certainly contributed for such despicable practices to be kept alive, when they should have died out a long time ago, or should not have existed at all in the context of divine religion that envisions itself as the model of justice, mercy, and wisdom for all times. Furthermore, in another hadith told by al-Buḫārī (3895), Muhammad's marriage is also an act of divine providence. Namely, Aisha was shown to the Prophet in his dream twice on a piece of silk, where it seems that God himself encourages Muhammad to take Aisha as his wife. Muhammad seeing this as a divine revelation, says: *"If this is from Allah, it will be done."* (al-Buḫārī 7012) If we assumed that both this hadith and the hadith that speaks of marriage between Muhammad and Aisha are true, there cannot be more talk of a context-based, or culture-dependent sort of justifications, and it would indicate that God himself would approve of such sort of "union", not just in this specific case, but implicitly in all other cases, i.e. essentially forever.

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[137] Little: Aisha Hadith.
[138] See Mohd, et al.: An Islamic discourse, p.95. Similar is said by Jonathan Brown: Misquoting Muhammad, p.242.
[139] Al-Fawzān: Tazwīğ.
[140] See Brown: Misquoting Muhammad, p.241.

If the issue of child marriage were not morally problematic, Islamic apologetics would not be so keen on defending the personality of Muhammad, either by negating the hadiths or stressing the time in which the Prophet lived. Former pay the price of severely shaking the foundations of Islam as such, nevertheless, remaining morally unblemished by this issue. The latter fail to recognize that context-based defense is nothing but the buttressing of the atheistic claims that religions are nothing more than a man-made pile of words and that believers' convulsive sticking to that argument is exactly what the Magazine claims – Muhammad was far from the highest moral example, rather he was an ordinary person with his qualities and faults, and his failure (if the hadiths are right) to show his moral superiority or any trace of foresight in this regard, show exactly that.

9. CONCLUSION

Atheism in the Arab world is more active and prevalent than it is usually thought. Unfortunately, many of those who report and express their views are ostracized from their society and from their faith they are called apostates and wicked, often facing numerous consequences. The Magazine that we researched here is one of the most prominent examples of this - often passionate - atheist activity and represents a form of rebellion against Islamic values and Islam in general. These three topics that we have examined here are but a small number (in this case in the ethical field) of objections that are frequently used against Islam. Many others, which could easily have been used as well, remained unexplored. Slavery, the position of women, violence, veganism, the character of Muhammad, influences from other religions, scientific facts that go against Islam... All of these are some of the issues that are often raised and many of them were mentioned in the Magazine. The vast majority of the Magazine and numerous other topics beyond those that I covered in the first 20 (i.e. 25 issues) remain unexplored and are a possible subject of study for those interested in the topic of atheism in Islam.

Islam will have to give satisfactory answers, not only to these problems that we singled out from the Magazine, but also to numerous other problems that arise in today's time, if its goal is to prove that it is of divine origin or at least to give such an impression. As examined in this paper, I think the answers given were not sufficient. They would have been 1,400 years ago, but now, no. With ethical problems as it is facing today, not just on societal, scientific, and

ethical fronts, it also seems rather obvious to me that its origin is all but divine. With the progress of time, only more questions will come to light. Besides, we have gotten to know that there are many ethical theories that can be used as a substitute for religious morality; theories that have better answers to certain questions, or at least theories that do not require oppression of a minority, nor subjecting people to the fear of Hell, nor the ones that would justify underage marriages. Theories that are human-made but somehow, although far from being divine, manage to rival religious morality, and not rarely, exceed it.

10. ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

Morality represents one of the highest developments of the human race and, probably, one of its most distinguished and valuable traits. This paper will deal with atheism in general and its current state in the Arab world, as well as three major ethical problems against Islam raised by the Arab Atheists Magazine, an online magazine published in the Arabic language. These three problems are homosexuality, the problem of eternal Hell, and the controversial marriage and its consummation between the Islamic prophet Muhammad and Aisha. Although much is written on the topic of atheism and ethical issues in Islam, the vast majority of it stems from foreign, non-Arabic sources. This paper, however, deals with a rare occurrence of a magazine written by Arabic-speaking atheists, meant for Arabic speaking, both non-religious and religious public, and as such forms something of an anomalous occurrence in the Arab world. Building on ethical problems taken up by the Magazine we will try to look at the issues in question from both sides, atheistic and Islamic, and to determine whether Islamic morality is indeed immaculate and indispensable, as claimed.

Keywords: *Islam; Morality; Homosexuality; Eternal Hell; Child marriage*

11. ABSTRACT IN GERMAN

Die Moral stellt eine der höchsten Entwicklungen der Menschheit dar und, wahrscheinlich, eine ihrer herausragendsten sowie wertvollsten Merkmale. Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit dem Atheismus im Allgemeinen und seinem aktuellen Zustand in der arabischen Welt sowie mit drei großen ethischen Problemen, die gegen den Islam von „Arab Atheists Magazine", einer in der arabischen Sprache veröffentlichten Online-Zeitschrift, aufgeworfen wurden. Diese drei Probleme sind Homosexualität, das Problem der ewigen Hölle und die umstrittene Ehe sowie ihre Vollendung zwischen dem islamischen Propheten Muhammad und Aischa. Obwohl viel zum Thema Atheismus und ethischen Fragen im Islam geschrieben wurde, stammt der überwiegende Teil davon aus ausländischen, nichtarabischen Quellen. Diese Arbeit befasst sich jedoch mit einem seltenen Vorfall einer Zeitschrift, die von arabischsprachigen Atheisten verfasst wurde und für die arabischsprachige, sowohl nicht-religiöse als auch religiöse Öffentlichkeit bestimmt ist, und stellt als solcher eine Art anomales Vorkommnis in der arabischen Welt dar. Basierend auf den von der Zeitschrift behandelten ethischen Problemstellungen versucht diese Arbeit, die besagten Themen aus sowohl atheistischer als auch islamischer Sicht zu beleuchten und festzustellen, ob die islamische Moral tatsächlich makellos und unentbehrlich ist, wie behauptet.

Schlagwörter: *Islam; Moralität; Homosexualität; Ewige Hölle; Kinderehe*.

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