

A critical appraisal of Antony Flew’s conception of the philosophical foundations of Islam

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Abstract: Antony Flew is considered one of the most influential philosophers of religion in modern times. While many scholars have discussed and debated the merits of his critiques of Christianity and Organized Religion, few if any, have discussed the merits of his critique of Islam. This paper attempts to give a critical appraisal of Flew’s conception of the philosophical foundations of Islam. The paper contrasts Flew’s understanding of Islam with those of renowned Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Taymīya. Flew casts a sceptical shadow on God’s existence, on the Prophethood of Muhammad, on the miraculous nature of the Quran, on the Islamic conception of omnibenevolence, and on the eternity of Hell. This paper will respond to his scepticism by utilising the philosophical arguments that are prominent within the Islamic Philosophical Tradition. It is hoped this paper can show that Islamic philosophy can provide sophisticated replies to contemporary philosophical contentions.

Keywords: Antony Flew, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymīya, Ibn al-Qayyim, Islamic philosophy.

Abstrak: Antony Flew dianggap sebagai salah seorang ahli falsafah yang amat berpengaruh dalam agama pada masa kini. Walaupun ramai cerdikawan telah membincang dan mendebatkan merit-merit terhadap kritikan-kritikan beliau tentang Agama Kristian dan agama yang teratur, namun sedikit sekali yang telah membincangkan merit-merit kritiknya terhadap Islam. Kertas kerja ini cuba untuk memberikan satu kritikan penilaian terhadap pembentukan konsep

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yang diutarakan oleh Flew bagi falsafah asas-asas Islam. Kertas kerja ini juga turut membandingkan kefahaman Flew terhadap Islam dengan beberapa orang falsafah-falsafah Islam lain yang terkenal seperti Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, dan Ibn Taymiya. Flew membentuk satu bayangan skeptikal terhadap kewujudan Tuhan, kerasulan Nabi Muhammad, sifat ajaib Al-Quran, mengenai konsep muhibah (omnibenevolence), dan bagi kewujudan dan kekekalan Neraka. Kertas kerja ini akan bertindakbalas ke atas keraguan beliau dengan menggunakan perbincangan falsafah yang terkenal dalam Tradisi Falsafah Islam. Adalah diharapkan bahawa kertas kerja ini akan dapat menunjukkan bahawa falsafah Islam dapat memberikan jawapan-jawapan yang canggih terhadap pertikaian falsafah sejagat.

Kata kunci: Antony Flew, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazāli, Ibn Taymīya, Ibn al-Qayyim, Omnibenevolence, Falsafah Islam.

Introduction

Intellectuals, unlike the vulgar, do not see our multi-coloured life as a monochrome film. Their job, after all, is to think beyond the walls that confine the thoughts of the common man. Some people believe intellectuals cannot be trapped inside a framework. This view invokes an image: a wild sea whose waves toss drift wood about, and in the middle of the sea is a rock, stern, defiant, aloof. This image is nonsense. Intellectuals are not rocks; they are people. They too can be trapped inside a framework. Objectivity is not impossible, but biasness is widespread, *especially* among intellectuals.

Bertrand Russell, in 1920, went to Russia to see how the Bolsheviks were ruling. He felt Russia was “an asylum of homicidal lunatics” (cited in Ironside, 1996, p. 147). When putting his emotions into words, Russell used a comparison. “Mahommedanism and Bolshevism,” he wrote, “are practical, social, unspiritual, concerned to win the empire of this world” (Russell, 1921, p. 114).

Islam, unspiritual?

Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād said, “If the whole world was given to me, and if God permitted me to take it, I would still think it filthy” (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 1996, vol 1, p. 141). Ahmad b. Hanbal used to pray three hundred raka‘āt every day. After he was tortured in prison, he could only pray one hundred and fifty raka‘āt every day; he was nearly eighty years old. Um Ṭalq prayed four hundred raka‘āt every day. Khansā bt. Khidām fasted every day for

forty years. She cried till she became blind. She prayed till she could not stand.

These are examples of Islamic spirituality. I could give a hundred more examples before breakfast, if I wanted to. But that would not be necessary. There are hundreds of volumes written on the practice and theory of Islamic spirituality. This, however, did not dissuade the author of *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* from equating Islamic spirituality to Bolshevik non-spirituality.

Russell (1921) says that Muhammad, like Marx, would have worshiped the devil, if that would have led him to getting the keys of this world (p. 114). Quraysh did offer to give Muhammad the keys of Mecca, if he stopped preaching Islam. But Muhammad rejected the offer (Ibn Hishām, 2004, vol. 1, pp. 206-207). Russell did not judge Islam for what it is, but for what he made it out to be. Antony Flew did the same.

This paper examines Flew's article, "The Terrors of Islam" in which he misrepresents the basic tenets of Islam. This paper provides a philosophical 'correction' of his misrepresentation. Section Two of the paper deals with Ibn Sina's argument for the existence of God. Section Three touches on Al-Ghazālī's argument for the miracle of the Quran while Section Four deals with al-Ghazālī's view of the love of God. Section Five examines Ibn Taymīya's and Ibn al-Qayyim's views of the finitude of Hell and Section Six clarifies Islam's doctrine of Divine Punishment. This paper concludes on the note that the Enlightenment faithful must write about Islam after learning it, *not* before.

The argument from possibility

Flew makes assertions about the Qur'an with the confidence of a man who has mastered it. He writes:

The question whether Muhammad was a Messenger from the Mosaic God must be distinguished from the logically prior question whether there is such a sender of Messengers. The affirmative answer to that logically prior question the Koran *takes absolutely for granted* [emphasis added] (1994, p. 279).

The Quran, he says, does not give any arguments for God's existence; instead, it assumes God's existence. The reason for this, Flew says, is

that the Quran presupposes that its readers know the Bible (p.279). To truly appreciate Flew's words, I will discuss an argument used by Ibn Sina, the "Grand Master" of Islamic philosophy.

Ibn Sina used the argument from possibility (*Dalīl al-Imkān*) to prove God's existence (McGinnis, 2013). He tells us that existence is the most basic notion we know. It is so basic that partisans of existence cannot prove that there is existence. Any argument they use will beg the question. The notions of necessity and possibility share the same status as existence. There is no way of defining necessity without referring to possibility, and vice versa.

These notions, though they cannot be defined, can be *described*. For Ibn Sina, there are three categories of existence. There is the 'necessary in itself': that which exists without a cause and cannot fail to exist. There is the 'possible in itself': that which may or may not exist, depending if a cause acts on it or not. Then there is the 'possible in itself, necessary through another': that which may not exist, but exists necessarily due to a cause. The descriptions help us identify which category of existence a thing belongs to.

Ibn Sina asks us to consider the set of all possible things. He is not worried about how many members it has. Ibn Sina, a generous host, is willing to accept an infinite number of possible guests into the set.

Anything that exists is either necessary or possible. Is the set of all possible things necessary? Ibn Sina says no. And for good reasons. Let us suppose that the set is 'necessary in itself'. Any set exists due to its members. That means the set of all possible things is 'necessary through another'. To get out of the contradiction, we have to drop the supposition. A thing that is 'necessary in itself' cannot fail to exist. What will happen to the set if all its members die? It will, no doubt, commit suicide, but with no civilian casualties.

The set of all possible things is possible. The cause of the set resides either in the set itself or outside the set. Searching for the cause inside the set is like searching for the sea inside the sky. Ibn Sina shows this by taking us down Contradiction Alley.

Let us assume the cause resides in the set. This cause owes its existence to either the necessity tribe or the possibility tribe. The

necessity tribe is not in the set, because all members of the set are possible.

If a member of the set caused the set to exist, then the member will have caused itself to exist; since, it is part of the set. Cause and effect will be united as one. Christians will see a precedent for this union of opposites in Jesus Christ. This view, it must be said, is historically and logically incorrect: historically incorrect, because the incarnation of cause in effect took place before Jesus's time; logically incorrect, because such an incarnation is impossible.

The possibility tribe does not have a deity who disregards the laws of logic. It also does not have the cause of the set. The cause of the set must reside outside the set.

We expect Ibn Sina to move to the next part of the argument; he does not. Ibn Sina is a man of many virtues. He is patient, forcing himself to listen to those who believe in self-causation. He is tolerant, accepting that self-causation is not as absurd as he believes it is. He is, above all, reasonable, showing why the cause, even if it caused itself, cannot be found inside the set.

Suppose the cause caused itself. Suppose also that it resides in the set. It will exist necessarily due to itself. It will also exist in the possibility tribe. The cause is in the wrong tribe; tribesmen butcher outsiders.

The cause of the set of all possible things is outside the set. It cannot be possible, because that would mean a possible thing did not join the Global Fraternity of All Possible Things. Would a bachelor avoid joining the Global Fraternity of Bachelors? Of course not. The same goes for possible things. This means that the cause of the set is necessary. Ibn Sina says that the Necessary Existence *is* God.

Ibn Sina's argument requires little intellectual commitment. You do not need to believe that an actual infinite is impossible. You do not need to believe that our universe began at some point. You do not need to believe that our universe is the only universe that exists. You do not need to believe that there is order in our universe. You do not need to believe that there is design in nature. You do not need to believe that morals are universal. You do not need to believe that miracles are possible. You need to believe this: *something exists*.

Ibn Sina found the argument from possibility in the Qur’anic story of Ibrahim and his people (Ibn Sina, 1958, vol. 3, pp. 532-533). Ibrahim called his people to a simple message: worship the One True God. His people believed the heavenly bodies were gods. Ibrahim debated the issue of God with his people. He refuted their beliefs by pointing out that the heavenly bodies were possible. He told them that all possible things were in need of a Necessary Existence to sustain them; the Necessary Existence is external to the totality of all possible things; the Necessary Existence is one. His people could not refute him. They abandoned trying to rationally justify their beliefs; instead, they claimed that the safer option was to follow their pagan heritage. Ibrahim replied that the safer option was accepting the argument’s conclusion, and abandoning their false beliefs. The Qur’an ends the story by praising Ibrahim for using the argument (Qur’an 6:76-83).

Flew, in the second part of his article, says that the Qur’an does not give arguments for God’s existence. He then, at the end of his article, criticises the Qur’an, because it “proceeds immediately from visible facts to their Invisible Cause”. He quotes the character Topsy, from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a novel, as if she were a logician, to show that God does not exist.

The failed literary challenge

The Qur’an, Flew wrote, “is, surely, calculated to inspire fear, indeed abject terror, rather than love” (p. 276). That’s why, Flew argued, Al-Ghazālī used Pascal’s Wager to scare Muslims into submission (p. 277). The image of priests and mullahs barking about hell is an atheist favourite. To the credit of atheists, it is a funny image. Only a religious bigot will deny that it is funny, or that it reflects reality, the reality of atheist frivolity, that is.

Anyone who has read Al-Ghazālī knows that he rarely used the *argument from hellfire-and-brimstone* in philosophical disputes. He was bestowed the title “Proof Of Islam”. Clearly to get this honour he had to do more than just bark about hell, for both the sane and the silly can do it well.

Al-Ghazālī studied logic and philosophy under al-Juwayni. Al-Ghazālī wrote a book and presented it to his teacher. “Oh Abu Hāmid!” Al-Juwayni said, “You have buried me while I am still alive. You should

have waited till I died to write this book” (cited in Ghazāli, 1994, p. 11). The student had surely eclipsed the teacher.

“Doubts”, Al-Ghazāli said, “leads to truth. He who does not doubt, does not think; he who does not think, does not see; he who does not see remains blind and misguided” (1964, p. 409). Al-Ghazāli used methodic doubt in his quest for certainty, more than five hundred years before Descartes did the same in a stove-heated room.

The seeker of truth should equip himself with the tool of logic. It is as essential as the sky diver’s parachute. Without logic, Al-Ghazāli says, the seeker “would not know the difference between the unsound argument and the sound one, and between the strong argument and the weak one” (1990, p. 26). Al-Ghazāli provided an argument for God’s existence. It is in vogue. It is called the *Kalam* cosmological argument (Craig, 1979; Craig & Sinclair, 2012). He also gave an argument regarding the prophethood of Muhammad (Al-Ghazāli, 2008, pp. 266-269). It is not in vogue. I call it the *Failed Literary Challenge* argument.

The Pagans of Arabia asked Muhammad to prove his prophethood. He issued a challenge: it was beyond human ability to compose the Qur’an. If the doubters doubted it, then they should compose three lines similar to the Qur’an (10:38; 108: 1-3). If they could, then he should be exposed as a fake. If they could not, then they had to accept his prophethood. Muhammad was confident that no one would meet his challenge. He proclaimed that all the men on earth, and all the spirits in the sky, could not compose three lines similar to the Qur’an (17:88).

Al-Ghazāli argues that we know that Muhammad made this challenge because of the recurrent reports that say so. Doubting these recurrent reports is equal to believing that a legion of cats conspired to keep silent. It is not logically impossible, of course, that a legion of cats *did* conspire to keep silent. But anyone who has owned cats knows that such a feline conspiracy has never occurred.

The Arabs were lovers of language. They filled the desert with the sound of poetry. They chose the seven best poems from the past, wrote them in golden ink, and hung them on the walls of the Ka’ba (Ibn ‘Abd Rabba, vol. 6, p. 103). To them, language *was* life. And here was Muhammad stepping on their life, belittling their heritage. How they would show him!

However, many people were accepting Muhammad's message. The ruling class in Mecca found their power waning as the weeks passed. Even their sons joined Muhammad. Mecca's image as the centre of pagan worship was crumbling. If it were to crumble completely, Mecca would lose its political and economic power.

The people of Medina asked Muhammad to become their leader. He accepted. Muhammad used his new powers to cripple the Meccan economy. He closed the Meccan trade routes near Medina and made political pacts with other tribes. He successfully defended Medina against the Meccan army. His movement was a military force to be feared. Mecca wasn't the sole "superpower" in Arabia anymore; its monopoly was gone. There was competition and it was losing.

The Meccans used all the weapons they had to try to defeat Muhammad. They knew that Muhammad was more than just a man: *he was an idea*. If they destroyed the idea, they would destroy him. They concentrated all their efforts into making Muslims abandon Islam. They tortured their sons, only ending the torture, if their sons abandoned Islam. Many of their sons, despite the torture, retained Islam. The easiest path to destroy Islam was to expose Muhammad as a fake. To do that, the Meccans had to face Muhammad's challenge.

Poets boasted about their eloquence. They would challenge people to outwit their poetry. This challenge, when answered, led to literary disputes between the poets and their rivals. Because of the love the Arabs have for language, these disputes became famous. There was no literary dispute between Muhammad and the Meccans, because the Meccans did not face his challenge. They did not face his challenge, because they *could not* face his challenge.

A person in peril, if he has the ability to save himself, *will* try to save himself. Al-Ghazāli said this reaction is a necessary one. There is no reason to doubt him, and every reason to believe him. When a person is in peril, his survival mechanism takes over. He can run for miles without resting, walk for days without eating, stay up for nights without sleeping. If a person is in peril, but does not try to save himself, it would mean he does not have the ability to save himself. If a bulldog attacked a man, and if he did not try to run, then he is brain dead, or the like.

Powerful emotions, of course, can turn off the survival mechanism. That is why the Golden Gate Bridge is a good place for sightseeing. But we can dismiss suicidal intent from the man who got attacked by a bulldog and did not try to run. People who commit suicide look for a painless death, a shot in the head, or a drug overdose. Their suicidal intent will vanish as soon as a bulldog bites their legs. *That* should get their survival mechanism started! If the man who got attacked by a bulldog was suicidal, he would run from the bulldog, *then* shoot himself in the head, or take a drug overdose, or whatever.

The Meccans were in peril. Their world was collapsing. To discredit Muhammad, they had to compose three lines similar to the Quran. They would have composed those three lines, Al-Ghazāli says, if they could. They did not; hence, the implication is they could not.

What explains the Meccans's lack of ability to compose three lines similar to the Qur'an? Perhaps they were brain dead, though it is difficult to see how brain dead people can wage wars and scourge sons. Or maybe human beings do not have the ability to compose three lines similar to the Qur'an. This, Al-Ghazāli tells us, is the argument's conclusion.

Sceptics, no doubt, will say that the Meccans *did* face Muhammad's challenge, but that later Muslim historians erased it from the history books. If all the evidence that the Meccans faced Muhammad's challenge was erased, how do the sceptics know that the Meccans faced Muhammad's challenge in the first place?

The inimitable feature of the Qur'an, Al-Ghazāli says, is the fusion of eloquence with the unique composition of the Qur'an. Poets do compose eloquent verses, but these verses do not follow the unique composition of the Qur'an. Some people have mimicked the unique composition of the Qur'an, but their verses lack eloquence. As an example of this, Al-Ghazāli cites Musaylama. Musaylama composed the following verses: The elephant—What will explain to you what the elephant is? It has a ropy tail and a long trunk. Musaylama was mimicking Chapter 86 of the Qur'an: By the sky and the night-comer—What will explain to you what the night-comer is? The piercing star—there is a watcher over every soul . . .

We do not need Al-Ghazāli to tell us that Musaylama's verses lack eloquence, or that Arabs hoot with laughter when hearing them. Humans, al-Ghazāli says, cannot write verses that mimic the unique composition of the Qur'an *and* are eloquent. The history of Arabic literature bears this out. Sceptics may claim that the Meccans had the ability to write three verses similar to the Qur'an, but were distracted from doing so, by war and turmoil. Al-Ghazāli does not wave away the objection; he confronts it.

Composing verses, Al-Ghazāli says, is easier than waging wars. Poets can still write poetry, even if their friends are on the field. Al-Ghazāli provides an illustration: imagine a man who claims to be a prophet. This man has many enemies who would be prepared to die to see him exposed as a fake. Hence, his enemies ask him to prove his prophethood. The man sets a challenge. Tomorrow, for the whole day, he will wiggle his index finger. None of his enemies, he claims, will be able to stop him wiggling his finger, however hard they try. On the day concerned, none of the man's enemies tried to stop him. They did not try to stop him, Al-Ghazāli says, because they either did not have the physical ability to stop him, or were too distracted to do so. The absence of their physical ability to halt him, even though they could wage wars, is a miracle. Them being too distracted to stop him, even though they would die to do so, is also a miracle. Hence, Al-Ghazāli concludes that if the Meccans were distracted from composing verses, *that* is a miracle.

There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger—so goes the Muslim testimony of faith. The *Kalam* cosmological argument aims at justifying the first part of the testimony, while the *Failed Literary Challenge* argument aims at justifying the second part. Whether they succeed depends on whether they are sound or unsound. But, for my purposes, it does not matter if they are sound or unsound. What matters is this: they are *arguments*. Al-Ghazāli did not justify the testimony by referring to the health risks that a person may face after death. That is the job for insurance agents. Flew, however, gives the impression that Al-Ghazāli was nothing but an insurance agent.

The greatest love

Flew (1994) says that Allah is a “cosmic oriental despot” (p. 277). Allah's despotism causes the terrors of Islam. Flew does not tell us why Allah is qualified to be an oriental despot, but not an occidental despot.

Flew's view has been around for centuries. This viewpoint claims that Muslims worship a celestial Vlad III or a cosmic Joe Stalin. It is hard to find such a God in Al-Ghazālī's "*Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*" (2002, vol. 4, p. 272-333). I will give a few snippets from this book to show Al-Ghazālī's love of God.

The love that the poets sing of, Al-Ghazālī says, is nothing more than physical beauty. This beauty is a sack of flesh, fluids, and filth. It begins as a sperm living in a testis and ends as a corpse rotting in a hole. The eyes that see this beauty is known for poorly representing reality. God is "the eternal Beauty". The eyes that see this beauty is of the heart; they are not crippled as the eyes of the head are.

Muhammad b. Abdullah al-Baghdādi saw a young man on the roof of a building. A crowd had gathered below him. The young man said:

Whoever died from love should die like this
There is no good in love without death!

He jumped. The young man was in the grips of uncontrollable passion. "The love of God is more passionate than the love of people, because the spiritual sight is truer than the physical sight, and because the Divine Beauty is greater than any other beauty" (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, p. 324).

A pious man gave up all his wealth and lived in poverty. "What caused you to love God so much?" someone asked him. "One day," he answered, "I heard a lover speaking to his beloved. He said to her, "By God, I love you with all my heart, yet you turn your face away from me!" "If you love me," she asked, "what will you sacrifice for me?" "O' Mistress," he replied, "I will give you all that I own, then I will sacrifice my heart for you till I die." When I heard that, I said to myself, "This love is between the creation and the creation. How would the love be between the creation and the Creator?!"

The blind deny the beauty of sight. The deaf deny the beauty of sound. In the same way, those who lose their hearts deny the beauty of God. Some of the sages said, "How strange that your creations desire that which is not you! How strange that their hearts are intimate with those besides you!"

Rābi'a al-'Adawīya expressed her love of God in poetry:

I love you with two loves: a love of desire
 And a love because you are worthy of love
 As for the first love,
 It is me thinking of no one but you
 As for the second love,
 It is when you removed the veil so I could see you
 I get no praise for this love or that love
 But you get praise for this love and that love

“Pleasure follows necessarily from love, and love follows necessarily from knowledge” (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, p. 293). How can people get knowledge of God? They need to divert their heart away from this world, and direct it to Him. When they do this, they will find the greatest pleasure. “If they were given the chance to enter Paradise on earth, on condition that they give up this pleasure, they would not enter Paradise” (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, p. 291).

A person possessed by love feels no pain. Junāyd asked Sarīal-Saqaṭī, “Does the lover feel the pain of life’s hardship?” “No.” he answered. “What if a sword struck him?” Junāyd asked. “He would feel no pain,” Sarī said, “even if a sword struck him seventy times, one blow after another.” The wife of Faṭḥ al-Mūṣalī tripped and broke her toenail. She laughed. “Do you not feel any pain?” someone asked her. “The pleasure of His reward obliterated the pain,” she answered. ‘Ali b. Husaīn was praying in his house when it caught fire. He continued to pray as the fire spread. He did not notice the fire because his heart was on fire. ‘Urwa b. Zubayr needed to have his leg amputated. He ordered the doctor to cut off his leg while he prayed. ‘Urwa prostrated. The doctor sawed at his leg till he cut it off. ‘Urwa did not even whimper in pain because he was busy whispering to his Beloved. Bishr b. Ḥārith saw a man get lashed a thousand times, yet he did not cry out. “Why were you punished?” Bishr asked the man. “Because,” he answered, “I loved a woman.” “Why did not you cry?” Bishr asked. “Because,” he answered, “I was looking at her while I was getting lashed.” “Imagine,” Bishr said, “if you looked at the greatest Beloved of all!” The man screamed and died.

A person possessed with love has no space in his heart for anyone other than his Beloved. Zulaikha, the wife of Al-‘Azīz, abandoned paganism and accepted monotheism. From then on, she spent all her time worshipping God. Yūsuf married her. In the mornings, Yūsuf wanted to lay with her. She would say she is busy, but would be free

in the evenings. In the evenings, Yūsuf wanted to sleep with her. She would say she is busy, but would be free in the mornings. One day, Yūsuf asked her why she did not want to be with him. “Oh Yūsuf!”, she said, “I loved you before I knew God. Now that I know God, I love Him. My love for Him has left no room in my heart to love anyone else.”

Love of God can make a man lose his senses. Shibilī said:

My love of the Merciful has made me drunk
Have you ever seen a lover that was not drunk?

One of Al-Ghazālī’s teachers saw a man on a mountain jumping from boulder to boulder. The man was repeatedly saying, “Longing and desire made me like this.”

There are two types of people who know God: the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’. “The first thing the ‘strong’ know is God; this leads them to knowing the world.” “The first thing the ‘weak’ know is the world; this leads them to knowing God” (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, p. 293). The ‘strong’ have drowned in love and can only comprehend their Beloved. Everything else is incomprehensible.

The ‘strong’ see only God and nothing else. They know that only God truly exists. The sky with its birds, the sea with its fishes, and the earth with its beasts are God’s creation. The ‘strong’ forget about the creation, because they are focused on the Creator. They see the Creator in the creation. This is similar to when a person sees a painting and, instead of seeing paint on paper, sees the artist in the art. The whole universe is God’s art. “That is why those searching for God are like the bewildered man, in the famous adage, who was riding his donkey while searching for his donkey” (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, pp. 297-298). The ‘strong’ cannot see themselves. They can only see God. They have annihilated themselves (*fanā*). Their motto is: “We were in us, then we lost ourselves from us, then we remained without us.”

God said to Dawūd: “If those who run away from Me knew what awaits them, and My tenderness towards them, and My longing for them to abandon their sins, their longing for Me would have killed them, and their love of Me would have ripped their bodies apart. Oh Dawūd! This is My love towards those who run away from Me. Imagine My love towards those who run towards Me!”

“There is no God but Allah” is a statement of love. “It means that there is none worthy of worship or worthy of love except Him. For every object of love is an object of worship. The worshipper is shackled to it. Every lover is shackled to his Beloved” (Al-Ghazali, 2002, vol. 4, p. 292). “Whoever did not taste love will not know its secrets. The lovers have secrets greater than those I have mentioned.” “In summary, all of the religion and all the virtues are the fruits of love.”

Walt Whitman’s love poems do not speak of Atilla the Hun. If someone said they do, he would be guilty of a tasteless joke. Al-Ghazālī’s words do not speak of a cosmic Atilla the Hun. If someone said they do, he would be guilty of no better.

The end of hell

Atheists, when talking about religion, must mention Hell. It is horrible, they say, for a person to believe that his friends and family will burn in Hell. True. But it is also true that many people’s friends and family are horrible. The idea of Hell, atheists say, sucks the life out of a person. Maybe. But it also breathes life into a person. James Beattie, in his critique of Hume, said that hell was the last hope for people “scourged by the oppressor” (1805, p. 320).

Serbian soldiers, in 1992, tied an eight-month-old pregnant lady to a cross. They made her husband watch as they slit her belly and pulled the foetus out. They tried to force her husband to eat the foetus’s arm. The soldiers could not stop laughing. The husband’s only hope was that God would punish them.

Hell is bad, Flew says, because it does not comply with the “enlightenment objections to torture or other cruel and unusual punishment” (p. 277, f. 16). If Hell was a Swedish prison, Flew might not object to it. Or maybe he would. Isaac Asimov preferred the torments of Hell to the boredom of Paradise. Atheists are a hard bunch to satisfy. An All-Merciful God, Flew argues, would never send people to Hell. God is not only All-Merciful, He is also Just. If God did not punish anyone, He would be unjustly treating victims of injustice. He *must*—logically *must*—punish some people. Flew does not see it this way. He invokes Hobbes to show God’s boastfulness (p. 276). Flew rails against the idea of Hell existing eternally (p. 277). His point is an important one, but not for the reason he purports.

Famous Muslim scholars say that Hell is temporal, not eternal. Ibn Taymīya (1995) tells us that Muslim scholars hold two opinions on the eternity of Hell (p. 52). One opinion is that Hell will come to an end. The Companions of Muhammad, like ‘Umar, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Abu Hurāira, and Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudri, held this opinion (p. 53). “The people of Hell,” ‘Umar said, “will stay in Hell for a time equal to the grains of the sands of *‘Alij*, then they will be freed.” This narration, Ibn Taymīya says, is authentic. (p. 54-5)

Commenting on verse 6: 128, Ibn ‘Abbas said that God will keep the sinners in Hell for as long as He wishes (p. 57-8). If the sinners were doomed to Hell for eternity, there would be no need, in the verse, to connect their time in Hell with God’s will.

This verse refers to the disbelievers, not to the sinful Muslims (p. 58). It uses the phrase *Awliyāuhummin al-Ins* (“their adherents among mankind”). This phrase specifically refers to disbelievers (7: 27).

Ibn Mas‘ūd and Abu Hurāira said, “After the disbelievers spend a long time in Hell, there will be no one in it” (p. 61). The term for ‘long time’ is *‘Aḥqābā*. It is used in the Qur’an and refers to the disbelievers (78: 21-28). The word *Aḥqābā* is the plural of *Ḥuqbu*, which means eighty years. The Qur’an says that the disbelievers will stay in Hell for a time made up of eighty year segments. This means that they will stay in Hell for a finite amount of time.

Someone asked Hasan al-Baṣri how long the disbelievers will stay in Hell. “No one knows,” he said. This answer, Ibn Taymīya says, shows that Hell is not eternal (p. 62-3). If it was eternal, how could no one know the answer to the question?

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “God will order Hell to eat the disbelievers.” Once that happens, Hell will be empty. Ibn Mas‘ūd said, “Indeed there will come a time when the gates of Hell will be slamming open and shut; at this time no one will be in Hell.” Abu Hurāira said, “There will come a time when no one is in Hell.” Al-Sha’bī said, “From the two abodes, Hell fills up faster, and gets destroyed quicker.” That means early in the afterlife, more people enter Hell than Paradise. Hell gets destroyed; Paradise does not (pp. 69-70).

Muslim scholars who claim that Hell is eternal use four arguments. The first, they claim is that there is a consensus that Hell is eternal. The

second, is that the Qur'an says Hell is eternal. The third, they state is that the hadiths say Hell is eternal. The fourth reason, according to these scholars is that it is necessarily known in Islam that Hell is eternal.

Ibn al-Qayyim demolishes all the four arguments.

Those who say there is a consensus are wrong. Ibn al-Qayyim (1997) challenges them to find a single narration from the Companions of Muhammad saying that Hell is eternal. They cannot. Furthermore, we have narrations of the Companions of Muhammad saying that Hell is *not* eternal. So how can there be a consensus? (p. 593).

The second argument is that the Qur'an tells us that the disbelievers will "dwell forever" in Hell. There is no Qur'anic verse, Ibn al-Qayyim says, that tells us that Hell *itself* will exist forever (p. 594). The disbelievers will stay in Hell *as long as Hell exists*. They will never leave it, while the sinful Muslims will, eventually, enter Paradise. The sinful Muslims are like prisoners who were jailed and then freed. The disbelievers are like prisoners who were jailed, and then died when the prison roof fell on them (p. 594).

In reference to the third argument, the hadiths tell us that sinful Muslims will enter Paradise, after going to Hell. The disbelievers, however, will never leave Hell and never enter Paradise. They will stay in Hell as long as Hell exists. The hadiths do not say that Hell exists eternally.

Finally, in refuting the fourth argument, Ibn al-Qayyim asks how can it be necessarily known in Islam that Hell exists eternally when there is not one Qur'anic verse or hadith attesting to that? (p. 595). What *is* known necessarily is that the disbelievers will stay in Hell as long as Hell exists.

We have many reasons to believe that Hell is temporal, not eternal.

The Qur'an says that Paradise will never end (38: 49-54). The Qur'an does not say that Hell will never end. Hell's existence is conditional, whereas Paradise's existence is unconditional (11: 106-7). This shows that Hell's existence is not the same as that of Paradise's existence. The nature of Paradise and the nature of Hell are different. People who have never done any goodwill enter Paradise, by God's mercy. People who have never done any evil will never enter Hell. What

is true of one abode need not be true of the other. Just because Paradise is eternal, Ibn al-Qayyim says, it does not mean that Hell is eternal (p. 598).

“Hell was created,” Ibn al-Qayyim says, “as a warning to the believers, and as a purification for the disbelievers” (p. 599). The disbelievers will have their hearts purified by the flames of Hell, like gold being purified by fire. When the hearts of the disbelievers are purified from their disbelief, there will be no point in Hell existing. God does not arbitrarily punish man. As the Qur’an says, “Why should God make you suffer torment if you are thankful and believe in Him?” (4:147). Thus, Hell will cease to exist (p. 600-1).

God, Ibn al-Qayyim says, prefers forgiveness over punishment and mercy over anger (p. 606). His mercy causes Paradise to exist. His mercy is part of His nature. For this reason, Paradise will exist as long as God exists. Hell is a punishment from God. His punishments are related to His actions, not to His nature. That is why God is not called ‘the Punisher’. In the Qur’an, Ibn al-Qayyim says, God relates His mercy to His nature, but not His punishments to His nature (Qur’an, : 5:98, 7:167, 15:49-50). Since God’s punishment is not related to His nature, God’s punishment will not last eternally. *Ergo*, Hell will have an end (p. 609).

God always acts wisely, never frivolously (p. 611). There is wisdom in finite punishment, but no wisdom in infinite punishment. Some people say there is wisdom in infinite punishment. Such a view, Ibn al-Qayyim says, is incomprehensible (p. 612). It is as incomprehensible as a triangle-circle, or $4+4=2$, or a slice of pizza is bigger than the pizza itself.

Some people say that God creates infinite punishment, because He wants to. There is no wisdom behind it. God is God. Who are we to judge Him?

It is impossible, Ibn al-Qayyim says, for God’s actions to lack wisdom. Reason, revelation, and experience all show us that God acts wisely. Even if God acts arbitrarily, then who is to say that He will not destroy Hell? He may decide, on a whim, to destroy the damned thing. There is nothing in the Qur’an or hadiths that say He will not (p. 612). “It is not fitting,” Ibn al-Qayyim says, “for God, the Wisest of the Wise,

to create creatures that He knows He will punish eternally in Hell” (p. 614).

Muhammad said, “When God decreed the creation, He wrote in His Book with Him on His Throne: “My Mercy overcomes My Wrath”” (Bukhari, 59: 3194). Muhammad also said, “God made mercy in a hundred parts. He kept ninety-nine parts with Him, and sent one to earth. The part that came to earth causes the compassion found among creatures; it causes the mare to lift her feet out of fear that she may harm her foal” (Bukhari, 78: 6000). In the afterlife, God will give us the ninety-nine parts of His mercy. If the love we expect from our mothers is but a fraction of one-hundredth part of God’s mercy, imagine what we can expect from God when we meet Him? Muhammad said, “If the disbelievers knew the extent of God’s mercy, they would not despair of entering Paradise” (Bukhari, 81: 6469). There is no reason for us to think that God will not save the disbelievers from Hell. There is every reason to think otherwise.

Ibn Taymīya gives eight reasons for thinking Hell will cease to exist, while Ibn al-Qayyim gives twenty five reasons. I have mentioned some of them. I will not mention the rest because the point is clear. The belief that Hell is temporal, not eternal, *is* a Muslim belief. If Flew wants to highlight the “terrors of Islam,” he has to do more than just talk about the “inordinate disparity between finite offences and infinite penalties” (p. 277).

The doctrine of divine punishment

Many people are confused about the Islamic concept of Divine Punishment. I will try to clarify it. The word ‘non-Muslim’ has two meanings. It can mean either ‘not-Muslim’ or ‘disbeliever’. *Not-Muslims* are people who did not get the message of Islam, or did not understand it, or did not have time to think about it. *Disbelievers* are people who got the message of Islam, understood it, had time to think about it, then rejected it. A Catholic man living in a favela in Rio de Janeiro is not a *disbeliever*; he is a *not-Muslim*. He did not get the message of Islam; so, he could not accept it or reject it. An Arab man told a Chinese woman about Islam. He could not speak Chinese. She could not speak Arabic. They could barely speak English. The Chinese woman is not a *disbeliever*; she is a *not-Muslim*. She did not understand the message of Islam; so, she could not accept it or reject it. An agnostic

woman, in Kiev, decided to read a translation of the Qur'an. She read 5 pages a day, before going to sleep. A month after she began, she died in a car crash. She did not even finish reading half of the translation. She is not a *disbeliever*; she is a *not-Muslim*. She did not have time to think about the message of Islam; so, she could not accept it or reject it.

On the Day of Judgment, the *disbelievers* are sent to Hell. The *not-Muslims* are tested. God will take a flame from Hell and place it in front of them. He will tell them to follow His command. He will command them to jump into the fire. Those who jump into the fire will find it cool and pleasant. They have submitted to God; so, they are Muslims. Those who do not jump into the fire have rejected God's command; they are *disbelievers*. The Muslims go to Paradise; the *disbelievers* go to Hell (Abu Ya'lā, 37: 4224).

Critics of Islam say that Muslims condemn all non-Muslims to Hell. The critics are wrong. Most non-Muslims do not know what *Al-Fātiḥa* is, or when *'Asr* is, or where *Medina* is. These are things that every Muslim, the intelligent and the ignorant, knows. What most non-Muslims *do* know about Islam usually comes from sources critical of Islam. These sources state the opposite of what Muslims say.

There are three types of sins: sinning against God, sinning against others, and sinning against oneself. The first type of sin is the worst, because it is offending God who created you and kept you in existence. People who commit this type of sin will be barred from Paradise.

Sinning against others is worse than sinning against yourself. The punishment for such sins is severe. People who steal money, out of greed, will swallow an amount of fire equal to the money they stole. Their stomachs will be bloated with fire (Quran 4:10).

You have a moral obligation to treat yourself well. Harming yourself physically, or mentally, or spiritually, is sinful. It deserves punishment. People who shoot themselves in the head will, in Hell, continuously shoot themselves in the head. They will not die. They will feel the pain of every shot (Bukhari, 56: 5778).

A neo-con spent \$1000 on printing and distributing Islamophobic leaflets. A Mafia boss gave thugs \$1000 to trash a restaurant. An alcoholic drank \$1000 worth of booze and damaged his liver. What the

neo-con did was worse than what the mafia boss did. What the mafia boss did was worse than what the alcoholic did.

A person's moral status is based not on one of his actions, but on all of his actions. That is why an atheist aid worker is more virtuous than a Muslim mass murderer. The atheist saved people. The Muslim killed people. Let us suppose the atheist is a disbeliever. His punishment in Hell will be less painful and much shorter than the Muslim's punishment. When his heart is cleansed, Hell will eat him: he will cease to exist. The Muslim will still be in Hell. After the Muslim's heart is cleansed, he will, due to his belief, enter Paradise.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment waged an intellectual war on the Church. The Church had no way of defending itself. It could not use reason because its doctrines were unreasonable. It could not use revelation because its Books were contradictory. It could not use morality because its nuns were naughty. It could not use justice because its priests were tax collectors. Is it any wonder that the Church lost to the Enlightenment? The Enlightenment proclaimed that Christian teachings were absurd. The Enlightenment knew that if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$. This syllogism suggested to it the following argument: Premise One, Islamic teachings are like Christian teachings. Premise Two, Christian teachings are absurd. Conclusion, Islamic teachings are absurd. The Enlightenment did not know that its proclamation suggested the opposite: Christian teachings on Islam are absurd; hence, they should be discarded. The Church looked at Islam through the slits of a Crusader's helm. The slits were narrow, and the helm made you swing your sword at anything you see. The Enlightenment could have removed the helm and looked at Islam from a broader, non-aggressive perspective.

As it is, the Enlightenment chose to keep the helm. This explains the stark similarities between Enlightenment polemics and Christian polemics, regarding Islam. Flew says that Allah is a "cosmic oriental despot" because Christendom never had despotism, or so they say. Al-Ghazālī says that Allah is the "Eternal Beauty" that lovers love with a passion so strong that they lose themselves. Flew says that Islam is a religion of terror because that was the best response priests in the Middle-Ages could give to discredit Islam. The Enlightenment is seen

as a radical change in human thought; it was not radical enough. It did not completely break away from the Church's influence.

Antony Flew, by all standards, was a first-class philosopher. *Theology and Falsification*, a refutation of Ayer's positivism, could only have been written by a sharp-minded man. Flew defended what he thought to be the truth with all his intellectual brilliance. He was called "the world's most notorious atheist". In 2004, he announced that he believed in God. His fellow atheists mocked him, but he did not change his stance. His sincerity to the truth would have made Socrates proud.

When it came to Islam, Flew was a different man. He knew that Islam was negligible, so he neglected to study it. He could not bring himself to discard the Enlightenment framework he had, a framework that is not enlightened at all.

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