

## V. Translating Science – Comparing Religions

The preceding chapter examined the conception of early Islam as a point of reference for the reformist approaches of Khan, and eventually Hali, Ameer Ali and others. We can observe a shift from inner-Islamic debates towards a unification of Islam, as well as an extrapolation of the reconstructivist position of his early writings, towards an abstract essence of original Islam which must be recovered. This chapter will again refer to Khan's early writings in comparison to his post-1857 writings and analyse another significant change in Khan's position: his stance towards the position of reason and, by extension, science.

As illustrated in the preceding chapters, a gradual increase in the importance of reason (*'aql*) can be noticed in Khan's works. In his first period, his position towards reason was entirely rejective and denied it any legitimacy in religious matters. Khan perceives reason as a merely human faculty and thus limited in its capacity, while only revelation – and its realisation, as found in Muhammad's life – can provide access to the will of God:

According to the fundamental doctrines of Islam [*uṣūl*], it has been laid down that the people of truth evaluate the merit of any act only on the *ṣar'*. By means of ratio, this cannot be measured. Thus, anything which has been ordered in the *ṣar'* is meritorious and which has been prohibited in the *ṣar'* is vicious.<sup>1</sup>

This position experiences a significant shift in his commentary on the Bible. In the introduction, Khan again mentions a limited capacity of reason. Yet, reason is acknowledged as enabling anyone to recognise the existence of God.<sup>2</sup> In his *Essays*, Khan therefore grants reason an even higher position and declares it a crucial principle in the criticism of the *ḥadīṣ*.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter aims to discuss the rationale for this gradual increase in the importance of reason in Khan's works. Subsequently, I will scrutinise the implications of Khan's integration of reason. The basis of this scrutiny will primarily be found in texts of his last period, mostly published in the form of articles in his

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1 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. V, 408.

2 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 14. Cf. also Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 237.

3 Khan: *Essays*, 202 / Khan: *Al-Ḥuṭbāt*, 229.

journal *Tahzīb al-Ahlāq*, which was launched only shortly after his return from London in 1871. The journal was published until 1897, but was discontinued twice. Lastly, I will discuss Khan’s approach to the comparison of religions, which changed tremendously in his last period after 1870.

## 1. Science and Religion

In his article “‘Science’ and ‘Religion’: Constructing the Boundaries,” Peter Harrison argues that science was invented only in the period of 1780-1850. Before this period, he states that it is impossible to distinguish science and religion as independent entities:

So inextricably connected were the dual concerns of God and nature that it is misleading to attempt to identify various kinds of relationships between science and religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle’s work, for example, gave nature or the experiential world in general a central position in religious discourse. These texts, which were lost after the fall of the Western Roman empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, were rediscovered through Arabic translations in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, Aristotle’s appreciation of the material world resulted in a “reconsideration of how knowledge of the world related to knowledge of divine things.”<sup>5</sup> Aristotle assumes that the world is organised as a chain of causality. Every occurrence in the world can be traced back to a cause which again must be caused by another prior cause. But this assumption of a causal chain must have, according to Aristotle, a primary cause as its starting point. Christian theologians – and in particular Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), one of the most prominent representatives of natural theology – identified the Aristotelian first cause with God. Consequently, natural theology bestows the material world with a relation to God. The material world allows one to deduce divine knowledge from it. Aquinas thus perceives this conception of “science” – albeit designated as natural philosophy – as a sub-discipline of theology, as knowledge

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4 Peter Harrison: “‘Science’ and ‘Religion’: Constructing the Boundaries,” *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (2006), 86.

5 Peter Harrison: *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago, [et al.]: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 67.

of nature and the material world rather complements divine knowledge. As Harrison writes:<sup>6</sup>

The systematic study of nature, exemplified in Aristotelian natural philosophy, plays the role of science, and in that role provides premises for a natural theology – that is to say, evidence of the existence and nature of God derived from the natural world alone.<sup>7</sup>

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, this link between natural philosophy and natural theology begins to loosen. As a result of the Protestants' preference for a literal understanding of the Bible, philosophers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626) refused to interpret nature allegorically or symbolically as mirroring God. But this must not be understood as an attempt to break the link of natural philosophy with religion. Bacon rather aimed to present a genuinely Christian view on nature as purified of any foreign influences – or, in other words, “pagan philosophy.” He does not propagate a disjunction of nature from the divine sphere, but rather relocates the link:

[T]he works of God [...] do shew the omnipotency and wisdom of the maker, but not his image.<sup>8</sup>

While natural philosophy hitherto bestowed creatures with a symbolic divine meaning, nature comes to be imagined as consisting of natural laws that could be deduced only by experiment. The allegorical search for a meaning beyond the material world was replaced by nature as a self-sufficient research object. Nature increasingly acquired an independent position and was separated from the interpretation of the scripture.<sup>9</sup> The assumption of laws governing nature compensated for this apparently loosened link between the material and the divine world, for God was imagined as the creator of these laws. Thus, any natural event could always inevitably be traced back to God's activity.

Still, Harrison identifies this loosened connection as the reason for a later disjunction of natural philosophy from religion, as the equation of natural laws with the actions of God implicates a lack of distinction – so that “the operations of nature could be understood as having either divine causes, or natural causes, but not both at once.”<sup>10</sup>

Harrison recognises this development as a result of an externalisation of religion. In the aftermath of the Reformation, the interior conception of *religio* in the

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6 Ibid., 67f.

7 Ibid., 68f.

8 Francis Bacon as quoted by Ibid., 76.

9 Ibid., 77f.

10 Ibid. 80.

meaning of belief steadily ceased, as Christianity's exclusive claim for truth could no longer be sustained in the aftermath of the confessional wars. Consequently, *religio* – which was firmly identified with Christianity – lost its singularity, too, and came to be more and more reinterpreted as plural. This pluralisation of *religio* was accompanied by a reification implying a shift in the meaning of religion, which came to be perceived rather as system of belief.<sup>11</sup> Combined with the aforementioned disappearance of an allegorical reading of divine nature in natural philosophy, this understanding allowed for the new linkage of religion and natural philosophy. Nature came to be perceived as a “book” of natural theology. Thus, natural philosophy still had to be legitimised by its relation to and its utility for religion. Religion and natural philosophy were perceived as two different forms of reasoning which, nevertheless, depended on one other.<sup>12</sup>

But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Harrison observes a steady separation of natural philosophy from religion, which was most significantly illustrated by the change of nomenclature to science. Harrison recognises “the creation of a special professional identity (the scientist), the specification of a distinguishing set of methods (the scientific method), and the replacement of a traditional nomenclature” as indicators of this process, which was not fully completed until the 1870/80s.<sup>13</sup> Religion lost its legitimating position since science was no longer bound to the presumption of God as the maintainer of natural laws. For, as shown above, God and nature are equated so that God becomes interchangeable with natural laws. The previous assumption of two types of reasoning which had allowed for a legitimisation of natural philosophy, on the basis of religion's supporting role, was reversed. Science no longer depended on legitimisation from religion, but conversely claimed to offer a unique access to truth and could even serve as legitimisation for religion itself. Religion was now defined on the basis of science: “Religion was what science is not.”<sup>14</sup>

In order to solidify this newly achieved independence, the emergence of the notion of science was accompanied by the argument of a “conflict myth” between religion and science. This new notion was imagined as universal and projected on the past in order to demonstrate the inherent incompatibility of religion and science.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Ibid., 146, 187.

12 Ibid., 152, 155.

13 Ibid., 170.

14 Ibid., 187; cf. also Ibid., 169f.

15 Ibid., 171f.

There is no doubt, for instance, that Galileo was tried by the Inquisition and forced to recant the Copernican hypothesis. But to cite this as an instance of science-religion conflict is to misconstrue the context. For a start, the Catholic Church endorsed the scientific consensus of the period, which, on the basis of the available evidence, held that the earth was stationary in the middle of the cosmos. To this extent it might be better to characterize the episode as a conflict *within* science (or, more strictly, within astronomy and natural philosophy) rather than between science and religion.<sup>16</sup>

The reification and externalisation of religion firstly supported the emergence of natural philosophy as a discipline under the umbrella of a single area of knowledge with varying types of reasoning. But a simplified reading of Aristotle, which lacked an unequivocal distinction between God's action and the natural laws, aided a separation of natural laws from an inevitable acknowledgement of God, and thus paved the way for science steadily acquiring an independent position from religion. When religion lost its legitimating position for science, religion itself became dependent on science: "[...] 'religion' has now become a contrast case for modern science. Religion is what science is not: a kind of negative image of science [...]."<sup>17</sup>

### 1.1 Science Gaining Influence in Northern India

The Charta of 1813 states that the "introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British India" shall be promoted through education.<sup>18</sup> Deepak Kumar, however, notes that the Charta was not specific about "which system of science, indigenous or European, was to be preferred."<sup>19</sup> While, in the beginning, it was aimed at teaching "modern" science in Arabic or Sanskrit translations along with „indigenous" texts, this practice was abolished as a result of the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy. Kumar even comes to the conclusion that "[s]cience education thus did not fit into the exigencies of the Company Raj."<sup>20</sup>

David Lelyveld states in his *Aligarh's First Generation* that education and its adaptation to European models was a task rather conferred to Indians of the *šarīf*-culture:

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16 Ibid., 172f.

17 Ibid., S. 187.

18 Deepak Kumar: *Science and the Raj: 1857-1905* (New Delhi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 48.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 51.

Although there were certainly Englishmen committed to establishing an extensive educational system and coordinating it to the allocation of political participation, the government was extremely parsimonious in providing financial support [...]. Indians had to come up with their own motivations for creating or taking advantage of educational establishments.<sup>21</sup>

Education was thus a matter of private initiative, not of governmental intervention. In particular with regard to North India, education of a European model was restricted primarily to missionary schools, which experienced severe hostility.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the British sponsored educational institutes of North India, such as the Sanskrit College at Benares or the Delhi College, initially promoted rather traditional learning with a focus on Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. Nevertheless, all of them eventually developed English sections. In this atmosphere, a new fashion of learning developed and increasingly impacted society. Yet, Bergunder describes this shift towards the preference for European science as the impact of the colonial perspective on Indian and Muslim traditions in science. He notes a lively interest in European science during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in South Asia. Indian scholars perceived Newton's findings to be fascinating, however, they did not perceive a contradiction with their own tradition and rather viewed Newton's ideas as sharing the same fundamental basis. Bergunder describes efforts to integrate Newton's system on behalf of Indian scholars while, on the other hand, British scholars were ignorant about these endeavours. They instead sought to investigate what they presumed to be lost or decayed indigenous scientific systems.<sup>23</sup> As a result, British scholars ignored the efforts of their Indian contemporaries, who were reformulating their own traditions. British assumptions of indigenous decline fostered the assertion that the contemporary tradition in South Asia lacked any potential link to European science and denied the possibility of a combination of the two. A bifurcation was thus deduced, which culminated in the negligence of traditional scientific knowledge and a preference for European science: "[r]eal science was henceforth solely European and was perceived in contrast to Indian traditions as foreign and entirely new."<sup>24</sup>

This development was also mirrored in the curriculum of the Delhi College. It was the successor institution of the Madrasah Ghazi-ud-Din, which was founded

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21 David Lelyveld: *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 69.

22 *Ibid.*, 69f.

23 Michael Bergunder: "Die koloniale Ausgrenzung der indischen Astronomie. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von indischer Gelehrsamkeit und britischem Orientalismus in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts," in *HerStory. Historical Scholarship between South Asia and Europe*, ed. Rafael Klöber, Manju Ludwig, 130.

24 *Ibid.*, 135.

in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Madrasah developed into a prominent centre of Islamic learning, but declined by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and could not attract more than nine students in 1824. Then, in 1823, “the General Committee for Public Instruction in Calcutta called for a report from the local committees in Delhi, Agra, and some other north Indian towns on the state of the schools in their jurisdiction and for suggested measures to improve the educational standard of the population.”<sup>25</sup> The devastating conclusion drawn by the responsible representative in Delhi thus heralded the beginning of British patronage of traditional education in Delhi: the government decided to sponsor the Delhi College, the former Madrasa Ghazi-ud-Din. Instruction began in 1826.<sup>26</sup>

By 1828, the college was divided into two sections: the Oriental and the English department. One particularity of the Delhi College was its insistence on Urdu as the medium of instruction for both of its sections. Consequently, textbooks had to be written in Urdu and many texts on scientific, social, and literary subjects had to be translated. In order to transgress the borders of the college and reach as many people as possible, the college also established its own press. Monthly academic periodicals were launched in order to publish articles on science and technology, as well as news and famous literary works in translation. This made new scientific approaches and theories accessible to a larger audience. The most eminent figure in this context was Master Ramchandar, professor of mathematics at the Delhi College, who “made Western innovations in science and technology available to the literate public of North India, but also articulated an ideology of reform that involved openness to knowledge from wherever it issued.”<sup>27</sup> He published two journals, the *Favā'id an-Nāzirīn* (Benefit of the Reader) and the *Qirān as-Sa'dain* (The Meeting of the Two Auspicious Planets) – their titles indicating the respective subjects of the journals. Both journals were launched in the mid-1840s with limited readership. Margrit Pernau mentions that, in 1850, the *Favā'id* “was published in an edition of just fifty-two copies, while the *Qiran* was even down to twenty-five copies.”<sup>28</sup> Both periodicals depended heavily on British support and were discontinued in the 1850s.<sup>29</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, science steadily gained ground as a form of cultural authority. Various academic societies arose in order to distribute scientific knowledge, culminating in its increased prominence. While Bengal was the first centre of this development, North India did not lag far behind. Among these

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25 Pernau: *Ashraf into Middle Classes*, 106.

26 Ibid.

27 Gail Minault: “Master Ramchandra of Delhi College: Teacher, Journalist, and Cultural Intermediary,” *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 18 (2003), 96.

28 Pernau: *Ashraf into Middle Classes*, 117.

29 Ibid., 116f.

groups was the Aligarh Scientific Society, which Khan founded in 1864, promoted science through the translation of English textbooks in Urdu in order to surmount Muslims' political weakness in the aftermath of the 1857 upheaval. The Aligarh movement saw Western education as a crucial means of removing this weakness.<sup>30</sup> This raises questions about Khan's shift towards a rather positive stance on both science and reason, which I will discuss in the following section.

## 2. Khan's Changing Stance Towards Reason

Khan must have been aware of the intellectual upheavals questioning the position of traditional learning, as he showed some interest in technical as well as scientific matters in the wake of his earliest writings. We learn from Troll that Khan was born in a family that showed exceptional interest in scientific and technological matters, particularly in math and physics.<sup>31</sup> Through his grandfather Farid-ud-Din, himself an outstanding mathematician, and his maternal uncle Ahmad Zain al-Abidin, Khan acquired an avid interest in mathematics. It was his uncle who perhaps also connected him to the environment of the Delhi College.<sup>32</sup>

This family background is reflected in his *Tashīl fī jar as-saqīl* (1844), wherein Khan presents a translation of an Arabic tract on the "lifting of very heavy objects, cutting of hard material, five methods of pressing and squeezing intractable matter and various methods of making and using tools for these purposes."<sup>33</sup> More importantly, in his tract titled *Qaul-i matīn dar ibtāl-i ḥarkat-i zamīn* (1848), he discusses the question of whether the earth revolves around the sun or whether the reverse is true, defending a Ptolemean worldview. This defensive stance clearly reflects Khan's awareness of the newly introduced position of modern science: "*Qaul-i matīn* mirrors the restless questioning which the teaching of the new sciences in the Government Colleges of Agra, Benares and Delhi, and its spread through educational books and periodicals, aroused among the educated of Upper India at that time."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, his *Qaul* also demonstrates Khan's entrenchment and erudition in Greek and Muslim philosophy, as his defence is based

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30 Gyan Prakash: *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 60f.

31 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 146.

32 *Ibid.*, 146f.

33 <http://www.sirsyedtoday.org/books/default.aspx?cid=64>

34 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 147f.



on Aristotelian arguments discussing the possibility of the movement of the earth from the perspective of inherent forces:

[A]ny assumed movement of the earth would have to be conceived of as being naturally inherent (*tab'ī*) and as such could only be rectilinear. If the earth moves, it has to be postulated that there exists in it a power to move it (*qūwat-i muḥarrīkah*).<sup>35</sup>

But, irrespective of his keen interest in scientific and technical matters, Khan had an openly hostile stance towards reason in religious matters, as has been discussed above. In his view, neither reason nor experience were allowed access to religion.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.1 Reason & Nature in *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*

This attitude changed significantly with his publication of *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible* (1862). As mentioned prior, Khan dismissed the assertion of reason as providing further insight than the existence of God. However, a closer examination of Khan's commentary reveals that reason now acquires – at least in one instance – more importance in connection with religious scriptures. In discussing the question of “whether the successive courses of darkness and light were only twelve hours long [at the time shortly after creation],” Khan remarks on the specific character of the time of creation, as God directly intervened:

[T]hese nights and days were not the effects of such causes as produce those of our own time. They were effected [*sic*] by God Himself without any other apparent cause.<sup>37</sup>

Khan therefore strictly distinguishes the period of creation from “our own time.” While the former is governed directly by God's actions, the latter can be viewed according to an established *law of nature*. Nature is thus imagined as a part of God's creation, ruled by a law as established by God. The law of nature is, hence, a subsequent product of God's creation, not yet governing the period preceding its

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35 Ibid., 148.

36 Both concepts, *'aql* and *tajribah*, appear already in Khan's *Rāh-i sunnat*, yet with distinctive denial to their reliability. Perhaps one might read this as a first instance of an awareness of and response to a European understanding of science. Both concepts will obtain a central position in Khan's conception of science in his later texts, cf. Chapter 7.

37 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. II, 491f.

establishment. Thus, Khan perceives the law of nature as part of God's creation, without however ascribing it a position independent of God. On this basis, he can dismiss the charge of an inconformity between nature and God's revelation, as the law of nature cannot be applied to the time of creation. While Khan proposes a distinction between nature and revelation, he also notes that both are the creation of God and, thus, cannot contradict each other:

We acknowledge that Nature [*necar*\*<sup>38</sup>] is the Work of God [*hudā kā kām*\*], and Revelation his Word [*hudā kā kalām*\*]; that no discrepancy should ever occur between them for as much as both proceed from the same Source.<sup>39</sup>

This is perhaps the first instance in Khan's work where the concepts of a Work and a Word of God appear. He perceives them as being related to one another through their origination from God so that a contradiction is inherently denied. While this concept gains crucial importance in Khan's last period, he does not fully integrate it into his Biblical commentary. He instead merely utilises it here as a marginal note to affirm this point. Nonetheless, it heralds a significant shift in his approach to the position of reason in religious matters – when compared with his first period and with a strict separation of religious and scientific issues. In Khan's commentary on the Bible, this dichotomy begins to fade and reason – via his reference to nature and the laws of nature – is permitted access to a religious argument. A rational position (in contrast to a revealed position) can thus be utilised as affirmation.

In the following section, I will examine what made Khan change his stance. An important indication can be found in his terminology: strikingly, Khan uses the English *nature* untranslated as *necar* in the Urdu column of his bilingual commentary. He does not state any reason for why he did not use an Urdu equivalent – for example, *qudrat*. Nevertheless, this demonstrates two implications: first, the idea of nature as the Word of God is derived from an English source and, secondly, it was adopted untranslated, as Khan perceived the underlying concept as exceeding a potential equivalent in Urdu. In order to clarify this divergence and unequivocal meaning, Khan employs the English original.

Troll observes significant parallels between Khan's approach and John H. Pratt's *Scripture and Science not at Variance* (1856), which Khan frequently quotes in his commentary. Pratt (1809-71) joined the East India Company as chaplain in 1838 and became Archdeacon of Calcutta in 1850. He worked simultaneously as a mathematician on problems of geodesy. In his *Scripture and Science*,

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38 \* indicating the Urdu equivalents in the parallel Urdu translation.

39 Ibid., 492.

he takes up a position against the thesis of a conflict between science and religion, and in his introduction states:

The assertion, not unfrequently made, that the discoveries of Science are opposed to the declarations of Holy Scripture, is as mischievous as it is false [...].<sup>40</sup>

In order to assert this thesis, Pratt has to apply an interpretive approach to the Bible, which does not insist on traditional exegesis:

[I]t is *impossible* that Scripture can, when rightly interpreted, be at variance with the Works of the Divine Hand; and that therefore, if difficulties remain at any time not cleared up, they must arise from our ignorance, or from hasty interpretation either of the phenomenon before us or of the language of the Sacred Record.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, any inconformity between science and the Bible must be ascribed to a human incapability of understanding the real intent of the scripture. Only the adaptation of the interpretation permits us to reconcile the alleged variance and inconsistency, for:

The Book of Nature and the Word of God emanate from the same infallible Author, and therefore cannot be at variance. But man is a fallible interpreter; and by mistaking one or both of these Divine Records, he forces them too often into unnatural conflict.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, Khan, and Pratt before him, make a distinction between nature and revelation. Both elements, however, are viewed as sharing the same origin, so that any inconsistency between nature and revelation must be ascribed to human fallibility. Strikingly, they also share the perception of nature as a source for gaining knowledge about God. Nature and its investigation through science can thus be consulted as a corrective measure to revise and readjust interpretations of revelation.

With respect to Khan's commentary on the Bible, Troll states that Khan was initially only interested in finding a solution for obvious contradictions between the Bible and new scientific perspectives. This effort focusses on Copernican thought, which Khan acknowledges since the composition of his commentary:

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40 John Henry Pratt: *Scripture and Science not at Variance: With Remarks on the Historical Character, Plenary Inspiration, and Surpassing Importance, of the Earlier Chapters of Genesis* (London: Hatchards, Picadilly, 1871), 1.

41 *Ibid.*, 6.

42 *Ibid.*, 10.

Once Sir Sayyid bowed to the Copernican revolution it became impossible to avoid a reassessment of the customary interpretation of many revealed passages. So from *Tabayīn al-kalām* onwards, Sir Sayyid practices the principles of interpretation by which he can resolve apparent discrepancies between the evidence of the text and the results of modern science.<sup>43</sup>

This interpretative approach heralds Khan's abandonment of literal interpretation, which is fully developed only in his response to William Muir, as has been discussed in Chapter 3. Still Khan applies this approach in his commentary only with regard to the Bible and no other scripture.

In the introduction to the second volume of his commentary, Khan elucidates this interpretative approach: in the first instance, he rejects the assertion that the Pentateuch is perceived as "a narrative invented by Moses," and, furthermore, "that even none of these accounts must be considered in the allegorical sense."<sup>44</sup> Instead, Khan insists that some aspects of the Bible are of an allegorical character, even though, as he writes:

It is a standard principle with us Mohomedans to take a word in the strictest original and literal meaning which can possibly be derived from it; but we are at liberty to deviate from it, when the mode of expression used in the subject or some other circumstance may reasonably suggest that the real literal meaning of a word is not to be followed, but, on the contrary, what suits the sense of the subject. Such a meaning of a word is termed metaphorical [...].<sup>45</sup>

Khan argues that limited human capacity required such a mode of expression in the divine scriptures, so that their universal implications would be graspable for any man. Moreover, this ability to grasp the meaning of the scriptures was present irrespective of his individual capability, his time period, or his stage of learning:

The doctrines which they [i.e. the prophets] taught, were so new and strange to us, that we had never dreamed of them before. Further those doctrines were of so mysterious and sublime a nature, that it was beyond the capacity of man to comprehend them and to reach to their real truth.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Khan argues, reminiscent again of Pratt, that words of revelation which apparently seem to contradict the results of modern science must not be perceived as a defect in revelation, but rather as the wrong interpretation:

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43 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 154f.

44 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. II, 456.

45 Ibid., 456f.

46 Ibid., 457.

[S]uch words which seem to be opposite and contradictory in the sense conveyed by them when judged by the light of modern improvements in learning and discoveries in science, have much more led to their bewilderment and perplexity. But, on the other hand, the same light of advanced learning likewise shows use, that the fault lies in our own finite and imperfect capacities to comprehend the meaning of the words of God, and not that there is anything defective in those words intrinsically which prevents us from understanding them rightly.<sup>47</sup>

Khan then proceeds to argue that the interpretation of divine scriptures requires continual adjustment and adaption according to the steady progression of science:

Some self-approving philosophers tauntingly say, that it would not be wise for us to ignore the formerly adopted meanings of the words of God in consequence of the late progress in science, [...] lest it may happen that the future progress in science might hereafter prove something still more damaging, and thus force us again to change our currently received interpretation [...]. [N]o matter what progress be made in our learning, yet whatever we will earnestly consider and reflect over its pages it will always be found in perfect harmony with the truth; and if we are unable to see clearly the existence of this harmony, it is the defect of our own understanding [...].<sup>48</sup>

Khan therefore assumes a continuous progression of science. Scientific perspectives, which were recognised at his time, are not perceived as final conclusions. In fact, once recognised, scientific findings may be contradicted by later results. Nevertheless, Khan is not discouraged by this continuous shift of scientific opinion. Instead, he acknowledges the necessity of also taking up an interpretive approach to divine scriptures in order to reveal their universal message. Apparent contradictions between science and scripture are solved through an allegorical reading. Scripture thus becomes fluid, flexible, and is subjected to continuous adjustment. Khan thus views new scientific results as a means toward gaining a deeper understanding of the divine message. This perspective is provided through Pratt's distinction of the Work and the Word of God and their relationship to one another.

Science, as a distinct discipline independent of religious legitimation, as Harrison has argued, must have been transferred to South Asian society through its promotion by British supported institutions and journals. As a result, the thesis of the conflict between science and religion also seems to have been transferred. Nevertheless, this thesis was not a generally acknowledged fact in Europe. Authors like Pratt aimed at propagating a consistency and conformity between science and religion: they referred to the old tradition of natural religion, which assumed the

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47 Ibid., 459.

48 Ibid., 461.

common attribution of revelation and nature to the same origin: God. Yet, this approach concedes a reverse order with science gaining the position of referential corrective: the interpretation of the scriptures therefore becomes adaptable to scientific findings. Science has to be acknowledged as directive in order to maintain the assertion of its conformity with revelation.

This assertion remains limited to the interpretation of the Bible in Khan's commentary and is developed only in his subsequent texts. In the following passage, I will discuss his application of this assertion to Islamic sources. In particular, the Quran will be of crucial interest, as Muslim belief in its verbatim inspiration by God poses the significant difficulty in terms of its adaptability.

### 3. Translating Science

Khan's *Essays* can be described as a turning point in his position towards reason and science in religious matters. From this time forward, he begins to apply the above described interpretative approach to Islam. In Chapter 3, I have already discussed Khan's utilisation of critical historiography to implement an adaptable view of Islamic sources. In the following passage, I will discuss this shift through the lens of reason and science.

In the preface of his *Essays*, Khan states that the abundance of religions requires a test to determine "the truth, or [...] the falsity of various religions."<sup>49</sup> Khan recognises a rational principle as a means of verification:

That true principle, as far as man's intellectual powers enable him to discover, is no other than Nature [...].<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, Khan does not follow up on this assertion either in the preface or in the biography itself. Only in his 1884 *Lakkar Islām par* (Lecture on Islam) does he resume and further develop these ideas:

When somebody wants to corroborate or affirm the truth of his religion, be it Islam, Christianity or Hinduism, he must first prove its truth. To argue that this and this person is without any doubt holy, and that we believe in the word of this holy person, is not sufficient for establishing the truth of that religion because such a statement remains the realm of mere belief. [...] Every member of a religion holds the

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49 Khan: *Essays*, v.

50 Ibid.

same firm belief in his religion as any member of another religion in his. [...] Given this state of affairs one must offer the reason for preferring the one to the other and one must be able to give a reason that satisfies, which is not based on some belief [only] [...]. [I]n order to arrive at the truth it is necessary that we discover a criterion (*mi 'yār*) and establish a touchstone which is related to all religions in the same manner and by which we can prove our religion or belief to be true.<sup>51</sup>

Khan discerns the necessity of identifying the one single true religion among the different existing faiths. Religions must be compared and their claims to truth must be tested according to an objective criterion. Khan distinguishes between two levels of conviction: the first is mere belief, which can be described as internal. Arguments on this level are merely based on personal conviction, and thus cannot be referred to for identifying true religion, as “[e]very member of a religion holds the same firm belief in his religion as any member of another religion in his.”<sup>52</sup> Khan states that arguments will inevitably be circular within the discourse of the respective religion and lack a mutual basis of argumentation with other religions. Furthermore, this mutual basis is the factor that could allow for the transcendence of the inner discourse. Arguments of the internal level are incompatible for transcending convictions and beliefs, as they inherently include a truth claim, which unavoidably collides with other truth claims.

Khan realises this difficulty and comes to the conclusion that religions must be tested from an external perspective:

I shall not state my ideas precisely as a Muslim [...]. At this moment I shall adopt a way of speaking which a third person would employ in explaining the principles and tenets of Islam to people who have doubts about Islam or its principles.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, as it were, the internal level of belief and conviction cannot be a basis for the search for the true religion. Instead, Khan attempts to establish a mutually accepted criterion (*mi 'yār*) that can transcend the inner discourses and serve as a *tertium comparationis* between the different religions. Khan recognises nature (*ne-car*) as this universal criterion and states that the true religion can be identified by its rational verifiability and its conformity with nature (*ne-car*):

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51 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 315f.

52 Ibid., 315.

53 Ibid., 315.

Thus the only criterion for the truth of the religions which are present before us is whether the religion [in question] is in correspondence with the natural disposition of man, or with *nature* (*fiṭrat-i insānī yā nēcar kē muṭābiq*).<sup>54</sup>

At another place in his *Lekcar*, Khan interlaces *necar* with reason (*‘aql*), the latter perhaps being the faculty investigating in *necar*:<sup>55</sup>

[P]roofs by simply adducing revealed texts without rational argument (*manqūlī* as against *ma‘qūlī*) will not do, because the doubter in religion, or the religious, will not accept such. Rather, it will be necessary to explain them in a manner corresponding with reason, *nature* or human nature so that the mind of the other person will be satisfied.<sup>56</sup>

This emphasis on Khan’s use of an antithesis of *ma‘qūlāt* (“rational” sciences of Greek philosophy and *‘ilm al-kalām*<sup>57</sup>) in contrast to *manqūlāt* (traditional sciences based on the revealed texts and the *ḥadīṣ*) is an addition by Troll which does not appear in the original. Yet, Troll does not get things wrong in this addition: Khan here expresses his reluctance, or at least his disinterest, in parsing the subtle differences between legal scholars on the basis of merely inner-Islamic sources. Instead, his focus is on a much more urgent topic – the encounter, first, the conflicting truth-claims of other religions and, second, with science. In order to view religions from an external perspective, transcending the various incompatible and incommensurable internal discourses, Khan feels compelled to abandon exclusionary truth claims and accept an external criterion deemed to be neutral. This second level can be described as comparative in addition to external. According to Khan, it foremost addresses outsiders or doubters of Islam.<sup>58</sup>

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54 Ibid., 316.

55 Khan’s use of *‘aql* in his *Lekcar* is highly inconsistent, with two contradictory notions being used in the same speech. The intended notion is only ascertainable in its context: on the one hand, *‘aql* is used in composition with analogy (*‘aqlī aur qiyāsi*), referring to the methodology and epistemology of Greek philosophy and, thus, applied in a negative sense. In this use, *‘aql* is contrasted against the methodology of modern science characterised by experience and observation (*tajribah aur mušāhadah*) (see Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 312 / Khan: *Safar-nāmah-i Panjāb*, 192). On the other hand, *‘aql*, as used in relation to contemporary philosophy (*is zamāne kī ḥikmat va falsafah*), i.e. natural science, rather implies the faculty to gain knowledge based on the observational principles of science (see Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 329, Khan: *Safar-nāmah-i Panjāb*, 203; cf. also Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 234). Khan, however, does not give any definition of this latter concept of *‘aql*. Cf. Chapter 7 for an attempt at excavating a definition of *‘aql* from Khan’s explanations on epistemology.

56 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 329.

57 Cf. Chapter 6.

58 Ibid., 315.



### 3.1 Equalising Concepts

Khan aims to utilise nature as a means to establish comparability between the different religions. The otherwise incompatible discourses are grounded on a mutual basis of commensurability, in Khan's view. The mutually conflicting and incompatible truth claims of the internal discourses are thus bypassed by a translation in rational terms. This rational perspective provides a basis for comparability which itself allows Khan to identify the true religion on the basis of the central criterion of reason and nature.

Khan's work takes up this translative approach in two ways: on the one hand, he presents Islamic concepts and practices in terms of their intention and concordance with nature and reason, while on the other hand, he develops a terminology which attempts to link Islam with the discourse of science. In the following section, I will first discuss the second aspect of Khan's approach and analyse its implications for his conception of Islam.

In his terminological redefinition, Khan rejects the thesis of conflict between science and religion. He therefore demonstrates the inherent conformity of Islam and science by equating English terms with Islamic terminology. This process is accompanied by the merging of concepts associated with these terms, which results in an extension of their meaning. The central terms to be discussed in this context are *necar*, *fiṭrat*, and *qudrat*. *Necar* is the phonetic transcription of the English "nature" in Arabic script. *Fiṭrat*, derived from the Arabic *fiṭra*, is used in Arabic to signify the inner nature of man for which he was created by God, as in the following *ḥadīth*:

Its [i.e. *fiṭra*'s] theologically important usage is in the saying of Muḥammad, 'Every infant is born according to the *fiṭra* ('*ala 'l-fiṭra* ; i.e., Allāh's kind or way of creating; 'on God's plan' [...]); then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.'<sup>59</sup>

This meaning corresponds with the common usage in Urdu.<sup>60</sup> However, *qudrat*, as derived from the Arabic *qudra*, is used in Urdu with the meaning of nature in the sense of "*Natura naturans*."<sup>61</sup>

In his last period, Khan uses these three terms, in particular *necar* and *fiṭrat*, synonymously – and regularly exchanges one for another. Quite frequently, he explicitly *synonymises* these three terms but does so in different ways. Sometimes

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59 *EI*, "fiṭra."

60 Platts: *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English*, 782.

61 *Ibid.*, 788; Khan: *Essays*, v.

they are aligned by conjunctions, as in “*necar ya 'nī qudrat aur fītrat*,”<sup>62</sup> “nature, i.e. *qudrat* and *fītrat*”; or “*fītrat yā necar yā qānūn-i qudrat*,”<sup>63</sup> “*fītrat* or *necar* or the law of nature (*qudrat*).” Sometimes, one word is described as the translation for another, such as in “*necar jis ko ḥudā ne fītrat kahā*,”<sup>64</sup> “nature which God called *fītrat*.” In the first cases, the terms are *synonymised* with markers like “and” or “or,” which indicates an active creation of a formerly unestablished synonymy between these concepts. Khan mostly links the terms with the conjunction *yā* (or) or introduces an alternative term with *ya 'nī* (that is); *aur* (and) is used occasionally to connect Urdu words, yet not in linking English words with those in Urdu, as in “*necar ya 'nī qudrat aur fītrat*”, “nature, i.e. *qudrat* and *fītrat*.”

Khan suggests the interchangeability of the conjoined words and, in fact, actively defines a synonymy. The overarching term is *necar*, which transcends its possible Urdu equivalents, *qudrat* and *fītrat*. Thus, Khan represents *necar* with both Urdu equivalents in order to cover its entire semantic field. However, in other instances such as “*necar jis ko ḥudā ne fītrat kahā*”, *fītrat* seems to replace this holistic description and is presented instead as a sufficient equivalent for the entire semantic field of *necar*. When Khan speaks of “*necar ya 'nī fītrat aur qudrat*”, the convergence of *qudrat* and *fītrat* under the single term *necar* is still obvious. But the phrase “*fītrat yā necar yā qānūn-i qudrat*” presupposes a full equivalence of *necar* and *fītrat* and dismisses the former distinction.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Khan merges *fītrat* with *necar* and integrates the latter’s surplus meaning. He includes the surplus meaning of the apparent synonym in the space of meaning of the initial term: *fītrat* is not restricted to the inner nature (of man), but is instead merged with the *natura naturans* of *qudrat*:

[W]hen we say *Nature*, we must not be understood to mean *Natura naturans* of the atheistical school, but only that *tout ensemble* of organic and inorganic existences, the production of [...] God [...].<sup>66</sup>

This extension of meaning allows Khan to present a crucial reinterpretation of a Quranic verse. When Khan translates the Arabic *fītra* as *necar*, the extended concept of *fītrat* is projected onto the Quran. In a translation of a quranic verse, he thus translates *fītrat Allāh* as *necar ḥudā kā*:

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62 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. I, 13.

63 Ibid, Vol III, 242

64 Ibid., 17.

65 Furthermore, it is possible to imagine that the meaning of *necar* might have been extended to comparison to nature, as well. Thus, *necar* is perhaps not identical with nature. But this requires further scrutiny which cannot be provided within the scope of this project.

66 Khan: *Essays*, v.

Arabic:

Fa'aqim wajhaka li-d-dīni ḥanīfan fiṭrata Allāhi allatī faṭara an-nāsa 'alaihā lā tabdīla liḥalqī Allāhi dālika ad-dīnu al-qayyimu wa-lākinna akṭara an-nāsi lā ya'lamūna. (30:30)

English translation of the Qur'ān:

So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion [*dīn*]. This is the natural disposition [*fiṭra*] God instilled in mankind – there is no altering God's creation – and this is the right religion [*dīn*], though most people do not realize it.<sup>67</sup>

Khan's Urdu translation:

Sīdhā kar apnā muḥ ḥālīṣ dīn ke līye jo necar ḥudā ka hai jis par logoṅ ko banāya hai, ḥudā kī paidā'īṣ meṅ kuch tabdīl nahiṅ hai. Yehī mustaḥkim dīn hai, va-lekin akṣar log nahīṅ jānte.<sup>68</sup>

Translation of Khan's Urdu translation:

Turn your face to the pure *dīn* which is the nature [*necar*] of God according to which He created man [lit. people], there is no change in God's creation. This is the stable/firm *dīn*, but most people do not know.

Quite strikingly, Khan translates *necar* as an equivalent for the Arabic *fiṭra*, while a translation with the Urdu equivalent *fiṭrat* would have seemed more likely. Thus, Khan transfers his equivalisation of *fiṭrat* and *necar* to the Arabic *fiṭra*. In his explanation of this verse, Khan extends the meaning of the Arabic *fiṭra* – the inner nature of man (as given in the English translation) – by implying a broader meaning of *necar* as equally signifying inner and outer nature. According to Khan, God names Himself as a *necarī* here (*ḥud apne ko necarī kahta hai*).<sup>69</sup> Hence, Khan does not read *fiṭrat Allah/necar ḥudā kā* as *genitivus qualitatis* in the sense of God's disposition, but rather as *genitivus auctoris*, implying the meaning of nature as a creation of God. This *necar*, encompassing man's inner nature as well as his outer nature, is true religion (*dīn*). Man is created in conformity with this religion: his inner nature as well as outer nature conform to *dīn*.<sup>70</sup>

67 Abdel Haleem: *The Qur'an*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258.

68 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol XV, 147.

69 Ibid., 147.

70 Cf. Nayyar: *Urdū adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, 146

In the following clause, *necar* is described as immutable, for God does not change his creation (*ḥudā kī paidā'īs meṅ kuch tabdīl nahīṅ hai*). By employing *necar*, Khan interprets this constancy and immutability in God's creation with reference not only to the inner nature of man but equally to outer nature, too: neither inner nor outer nature are therefore subject to change. Both are perennially organised according to God's initial creation. On this foundation, Khan bases his assertion of an unchanging world order created by God, which is described as *qānūn-i qudrat* or *lā āf necar* (law of nature).

While the English translation implies only an immutable inner nature of man, Khan's Urdu translation encompasses the outer nature, as well. As a result of merging *fiṭrat* with *necar*, God's unchanging, eternal order in the creation (of man) is extended to outer nature. Thus, God has not only established the order in which he created man, but rather the order structuring the whole universe. Khan describes this world order as *dīn* (*yehī mustahkim dīn hai*), which creates one more equivalency – between *dīn* and *necar*.

Khan creates a long chain of equivalency between *fiṭrat*, *necar*, *qudrat*, *qānūn-i qudrat* or *lā āf necar*, and, lastly, *dīn*. All of these terms denote the world's eternal order, however, with slightly varying nuance. In particular, *dīn* has been discussed in the previous chapters in a significantly different context. In the following discussion, I will examine the implications of this last equivalisation of the concept of *dīn*.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the vast field of meaning *dīn* has in Arabic. Still, in Khan's case, the English translation of *dīn* as "religion" is far too simplistic. As has been discussed above, Khan conceives of *dīn* as an abstract concept of religion. The different religions (*mazhab*) present in the world are perceived as manifestations of the eternal *dīn*, but in a deviated form: the various prophets brought their law codes (*ṣarī'at*), but none of these codes remained in their original form. These deviated forms of an originally universal message constitute the present religions – with the exception of Islam: Islam as the last message was sent to restore these deviated messages into a universal form.<sup>71</sup>

With Khan's integration of *dīn* in his chain of equivalency with *necar*, law of nature, etc., the term *dīn* additively obtains the meaning of eternal world order, that is the law of nature according to which God has created the world. But how does Khan link the abstract concept of religion with the idea of an eternal world order under the same umbrella category of *dīn*?

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71 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 16f.

### 3.2 Integrating Science in Islam

The equating of *fiṭrat* with *necar* extends and broadens the human nature of *fiṭrat* to the *natura naturans* of *qudrat*, too. Through this extension of meaning in the above quoted Quranic verse, Khan argues that God created a law of nature. Occurrences in nature are thus not attributed to God's immediate and active intervention, but rather according to a God-created, eternal order. For Khan, nature therefore acquires an independent – albeit inseparable – position from God. Natural laws are acknowledged as a scientific entity. This breaks from (traditionally) the most common view in Islam, that of Ashari<sup>72</sup> theology: the occurrence of rain, for example, would be perceived as an active intervention of God. Khan, however, introduces the law of nature as a mediating phenomenon: God's direct action is restricted to His role as maintainer of the once-established, eternal order and its laws. Consequently, events like rain are no longer imagined as God's action, but rather as being in accordance with the laws of nature.

On this basis, Khan rejects the assertion of a conflict between religion and science:

Those who imagine science [*necar al sā'ins*] and religion [*mazhab*] as contradictory and antithetical [*muqabil aur mutazād*] are misguided and errant. In fact, religion and science consider entirely different issues, which are mutually unrelated. Thus, both cannot be mutually contradictory and antithetical.<sup>73</sup>

He thus denies the conflict thesis and argues that science and religion rather concern separate spheres. Hence, they do not clash but rather complement each other. On the basis of this acknowledgment of natural laws, then, Khan develops the assertion of an unbroken chain of cause and occurrence: every occurrence in the world is preceded by a cause. There can be no occurrence without any cause. The whole world consists of such chains of causes (*'illat*) and caused occurrences (*ma'lūl*):

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<sup>72</sup> Asharism is the most prominent theological school of Islam and was a compromise between the positions of the Qadariyya and the Jabiriyya. The former emphasised man's free will (*qadar*) while the latter stressed God's omniscience, which rather implied the pre-determination of man's fortune. Ashari theology was shaped as a *via media* between these positions: God has a conveying position in human action. Only through His intervention and mediation can man act.

<sup>73</sup> Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 281.

A reason [*'illat*] is never, on no account, separate from its effected occurrence [*ma'lūl*], nor is an effect from its reason. According to this procedure, any occurrence in the world is effected and this is called *fiṭrat* or *necar* or *qānūn-i qudrat*.<sup>74</sup>

Khan further argues that all of these chains must have an origin – a point of departure, so to speak. At the beginning, there must be a reason of reasons (*'illat al-'ilal*) which sets the chains in motion. Khan describes this as the “*Causa causarum*, that is, God.”<sup>75</sup> The acceptance of a creator is thus viewed as a natural as well as rational insight that no one can deny. God’s existence does not clash with the belief in scientific natural laws, but is rather its logical result. Khan aims to rationally demonstrate the acknowledgment of God’s existence with undeniable evidence.<sup>76</sup>

Anything that exists is the effect [*ma'lūl*] of a [preceding] reason [*'illat*] and this reason is the effect of another [preceding] reason and this chain keeps on going. But from the perspective of *necar*, such a chain must come to an end in reason of reasons [*'illat al-'ilal*], which is proven by the *lā āf necar* itself [...].<sup>77</sup>

And:

Someone or other is the Creator or the Final Cause of or the Cause of causes of all existing things. Allah is His name. [...] [S]ince we find every single thing to be caused by a cause how can we fail to consider the sum of these very things to be caused by some Cause of causes?<sup>78</sup>

Khan consequently aims to rationalise belief, and religion in general, by detaching it from supernaturality: religion is therefore entirely in concordance with reason and nature. It does not evade but is rather firmly grounded on rational arguments, for nature and its law are viewed – again, much in reminiscence of Pratt – as *vark āf Gāḍ* (work of God) which cannot contradict *ḥudā kā kalām* (i.e. the Quran), as both share the same origin. Science and religion are distinguished as separate spheres which are linked through the creation of God, thus ruling out the charge of contradiction.<sup>79</sup>

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74 Ibid., 241f.

75 Khan: *Essays*, v.

76 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 298, 302f.

77 Ibid., 303.

78 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 258.

79 Khan: *Tafsīr al-Qur`ān*, 6. Akshay Kumar Dutt (1820-86) argues also in a very similar vein. He was a prominent exponent of the Brahmo Samaj, a Hindu reform movement founded in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy, which propagated a monotheistic Hinduism and emphasised science and reason as characteristics of the “authentic” Hinduism, freed of the

The most famous case by which Khan exemplifies this assertion is his understanding of the *du`ā*, an informal type of prayer in Islam. In his pamphlet *Ad-du`ā` va al-istijābah* (1892), Khan doubts that prayers are answered by God (*istijābah*). He rather conceives of *du`ā* as a means to maintain a relationship between man and God. But those prayers are neither answered by God nor do they change the run of events. Khan imagines *du`ā* merely as a way to calm oneself.<sup>80</sup>

Khan thus presents a rationalised interpretation of traditional Islamic belief which is completely detached of any supernatural powers and rejects a contradiction between the spheres of religion and science. Religion is thus positioned on the same level as science, and a distinction between the natural and the supernatural is relinquished. Instead, both spheres have to argue on the basis of the natural, i.e. experiential and observational knowledge. The previously vertical distinction between the natural (science) and the supernatural (religion) is turned to a horizontal distinction on the natural level. Hence, there are no truly distinct types of knowledge, but rather one body of knowledge which is approached in different ways:

The assertion that religious service [*ibādat*] in the field of knowledge can be conducted only by studying religious knowledge [*‘ulūm-i dīnīyah*] has entrenched itself in the hearts of the Muslims. To study or teach any other type of knowledge [...] cannot be called religious service and, thus, will not be rewarded [by God] [*savāb*]. [...] To only have religious knowledge, is *per se* neither religious service nor will it be rewarded. Rather the intention [*nīyat*] to apply knowledge for religious purposes allows one to term its studying as a religious service and worth of [divine]

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excesses found in its present status. Dutt's approach perhaps most expressly integrates rational arguments in his idea of Hinduism within the Brahma context. His argument to a great extent resembles Khan's approach when asserts that "[...] God resembled that of the eighteenth-century deists who saw the Almighty as the supreme watchmaker. Only an Absolute Being could possibly conceive something as intricately complex in its interrelationship between parts and whole as the clock-like earth. The world was therefore neither accidental in its creation nor purposeless in its operation. One can understand God's plan by discovering the laws of nature, which show how all things are harmoniously interrelated, and this knowledge can be used to improve human relationships and bring the kingdom of God on earth" (David Kopf: *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 50). In his perspective, science and the study of the natural laws mirror "God's scripture," which "reveal[s] the total harmonious interrelatedness of the universal elements" (Ibid., 50). Much reminiscent of Khan, Dutt propagates the acknowledgment of God's existence as a rational insight based on the argument of a God-created world order which inevitably points to its creator. Cf. Ibid., 43f, 50; Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 338.

80 Khan: *Ad-Du`ā` va al-istijābah* (Āgrah: *Mufīd-i Ām*, 1892?), 4, 7f.

reward. [...] [S]uch knowledge which we call worldly knowledge [*'ulūm-i duniyavī*], if it is taught properly, serves to strengthen the faith and is a medium to increase the love and acquaintance of God.<sup>81</sup>

Consequently, it is quite reasonable if, in this respect, we include this type of knowledge in the realm of religious knowledge.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Khan doubts a strict distinction between religious and scientific – or in his words worldly – knowledge. Although he does not discard a complete distinction between these two spheres of knowledge, he primarily views them as differing approaches to a unified knowledge: the creation of God. For Khan, science acquires an assistive position for religion, strengthening an individual's faith rather than fostering doubts. The contradiction between science and religion, which was Khan's point of departure, is thus transformed into an interwoven relationship. On the one hand, religion is *rationalised* and thus divested of its former supernatural arguments, which results in the necessity for religion to utilise the same evidence as science. Consequently, on the other hand, science is *sacralised* as an aid to religion. Reason becomes the central source of arguments for both spheres, for Khan perceives faith without comprehension as worthless. Hence, religion does not lay outside the realm of reason, but relies on the same observational type of knowledge as science.<sup>83</sup>

For Khan, science is thus integrated as an inherent aspect of Islam: the convergence of *fiṭrat* with *necar* allows him to identify in the Quran a natural order (i.e. the laws of nature) created by God. This permits him to present his interpretation as nothing else but the restoration of pure and unadulterated Islam (*theṭh Islām*).<sup>84</sup>

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81 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. I, 147f.

82 Ibid., 150.

83 Khan, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 6.

84 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 277f.



Science is subordinated as a sub-category of *dīn*.<sup>85</sup> The whole discourse of science is presented as part of Islam.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.3 Naturalising Immediate Knowledge

Another of Khan's crucial, rationalising interpretations reveals some hints about his conception of *fiṭrat*. With reference to al-Ghazali's *Al-Maḏnūn bih 'alā ḡair*

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85 In his *Urdū adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, Nayyar summarises Khan's work as an attempt to balance this feeling of being torn between a nostalgia for the lost past and the upheavals of the colonial situation, being torn between old and new learning, and between religion and science. Nayyar recognises Khan as the first one to discern this conflict and propose a solution. According to Nayyar, Khan presented both conflicting tendencies as strictly separate spheres. Yet, his thought shows crucial inconsistencies and contradictions in this respect, as Nayyar argues: "Sir Saiyid himself several times does not maintain the delimitation between both [spheres] and blurs the borders" (Nayyar: *Urdū adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, 144).

Can what Nayyar describes here as a contradiction in Khan's thought and as a manifestation of his inner conflict (*duhrā šu 'ūr*), not instead be understood as a deliberative inconsistency? In the first instance, Khan strictly distinguishes science and religion in two distinct spheres, whereas on closer observation, *dīn* appears as an umbrella category, reshaped by his attempt to be consistent with science. In other words, science is integrated as a sub-category of religion, while this interpretation of religion itself can neither evade its dependency on science. Khan aims to reintroduce the superiority of science. Yet, in being recognised, this thesis has to refer to the hegemonic discourse of science. Thus, Khan is not inconsistent in his argument but rather has to balance two contradicting discourses. Cf. Nayyar: *Urdū adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, 137, 144, 147.

86 Efforts to describe miracles, such as the Prophet's night journey (*mi'rāj*) or the splitting of the moon, as allegorical – or at least in conformity with the course of nature – are already present in Shah Waliullah's work. He argues that the working of miracles is no necessary attribute to approving the truth of a prophet and his message: "Besides, various so-called 'miracles' that are thought to be occurrences infringing upon the customary course of things, turn out to be normal phenomena when observed more closely" (Johannes Marinus Simon Baljon: *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī, 1703-1762* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 105). He argues that the normal course of nature is neither disturbed nor interrupted: "You should know that when God in His rule of the world displays a breach in the course of nature, He nevertheless does this within the framework of the customary sequence of natural events, however unstable this may be. On this account breaches in the course of nature still have slight natural causes. It is as if these natural causes are always there whenever God's decree is executed" (Ibid., 105).

From this perspective, Khan's interpretations appear less radical in their outlook to some extent. Still, Khan goes a step further and not only argues away miracles, but even aims to integrate the effect of any metaphysical element in a rational framework.

*ahlih* (The Mysteries of the Human Soul<sup>87</sup>), for example, Khan presents an interpretation of punishment (*'iqāb*) and reward (*ṣavāb*) which is not physical, but an effect on the soul. This on the soul is thus duly integrated into the order of causal chains. Just as deeds have an effect in the world, in the same way they also affect the constitution of the soul (*rūh*). This argument seems to be, at first glance, not of any further interest, as it fits into Khan's project of rationalising supernatural claims, hence, the validity of the hereafter. Yet, one might also read this as a continuation of his assertion of a synthesis between *shariat* and *ṭarīqat*. Both concepts are perceived as interdependent, with the outer law exerting its impact on inner injunctions. Thus, Khan perceives an individual's conduct to be mirrored in its impact on his soul.<sup>88</sup>

However, Khan bases this rationalisation on a text by al-Ghazali wherein the latter presents highly speculative metaphysical claims. He describes the soul as an indivisible entity, thus denying the existence of an individual soul. Rather, man's individual soul is conceived of as a part of the Universal Soul. This link of the individual man with the Divine allows the soul to recognise "its Creator and His attributes through itself and its attributes unaided by senses."<sup>89</sup> Khan, who was

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87 An English translation of this text is available online. However, the parts Khan quotes and translates in his article could not be identified in the translation. It is unclear whether this passage could not be identified due to any abridgements or a different interpretation in the English translation. Shibli quotes the same part in his biography and study of al-Ghazali's thought, and in a wording much reminiscent of Khan's: Shibli Nomani: *Al-Ġazālī: ya 'nī Imām Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Ġazālī kī savānih-i 'umrī* (Kānpūr: Nāmī Pres, 1901), 168.

88 Cf. Chapter 1.

89 Ghazali: *Mysteries of the Human Soul*, <http://www.ghazali.org/works/soul.htm>. Troll describes a reminiscent understanding advocated by Khan's mother, Aziz an-Nisa Begum, who had a significant impact on him. In adherence to her Sufi master, Shah Ghulam Ali (1743-1824), who was a famous Shaikh of the Naqshbandi order, she took a strong stance against any kind of mediation, "advocating the soul's direct contact with God. 'God alone should be approached in everything, then He will do what He pleases to do,' she used to say" (Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 30; unfortunately, Troll does not give any reference for this assertion). In his *Change and Continuity in Indian Sūfism*, Thomas Dahnhardt states with regard to *rūh*: "[Mankind] is endowed with a composite nature consisting of a spiritual or 'heavenly' (*rūhānī*) and a physical or 'earthen' (*jismānī*), element. Man thereby participates in the formal creation of Allāh (*al-khalq*), represented by the clay, while maintaining a close link with the informal, purely transcendent dimension of his Creator (*al-Khāliq*) through the infusion of the spirit (*al-rūh*) into the physical frame" (Thomas Dahnhardt: *Change and Continuity in Indian Sūfism: a Naqshbandi-Mujaddidī Branch in the Hindu Environment* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2002), 113f.). Hence, Dahnhardt argues that, in Naqshbandi thought, *rūh* is assumed to be of Divine origin, and thus maintains an integral link between man and God.

Shah Ghulam Ali was the successor of Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan, who strongly emphasised the doctrine of *vahdat aš-ṣuhūd* of Sirhindi, as they saw themselves as his legitimate

obviously acquainted with this text, seems to transfer this idea to his concept of *fiṭrat* as man's inner guide which is implanted in him in a universally uniform model<sup>90</sup> and connects him to the universal *dīn*, as he implies in the discussed Quranic verse ("Turn your face to the pure *dīn* which is the nature [*necar*] of God according to which He created man"). Khan more clearly formulates this idea when he states that "this *fiṭrat-i insānī* [human nature] has been called by God [literally: the lawgiver, *ṣāri* ] as guidance [*hidāyat*]"<sup>91</sup>. With regard to this point, he writes:

Many people are born by nature [*az rū-i fiṭrat ke*] as right-minded so that they trust in a true thing [*sīdhī aur saccī bāt*] and do not require any proof to believe in it. Although they are not familiar with this matter, their true, immediate knowledge [*vajdān*] testifies its truth.<sup>92</sup>

*Fiṭrat* therefore acquires the position of an indestructible link to the Divine, maintaining the natural and undoubtable acknowledgment of God, independent of rational or empirical proof. Thus, Abraham's insight into God's existence is described as the recognition of his own *fiṭrat*.<sup>93</sup> The acknowledgment of God's existence is described as a natural act (*amr-i ṭib ṭ*), while the possibility of denying His existence is described as impossible.<sup>94</sup> Because Khan conceives of human nature as a God-given disposition, he maintains – despite his emphasis on reason and inductive knowledge – man's access to a source of immediate knowledge.<sup>95</sup>

Khan's concept of *fiṭrat* thus combines two approaches to knowledge. On the one hand, he perceives human nature as a God-given disposition which mirrors God in man and allows for immediate access to Divine knowledge. This seems to be an adaption of al-Ghazali's concept of *rūḥ*. On the other hand, *fiṭrat* is extended with the meaning of *natura naturans* by equating it with *necar*. This linkage allows

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heirs. Both attacked vehemently superstitious practices such as the use of amulets. Cf. Perna: *Ashraf into Middle Classes*, 39-41; Robinson: *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 29.

90 Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. XIII, 248f.

91 Ibid., 104.

92 Ibid., 104.

93 Ibid., 391.

94 To deny God's existence is described merely as the denial to prove His existence rationally. One cannot deny God's existence, but only the existence of a proof for His existence; cf. Khan, *Maqālāt*, Vol. XIII, 18.

95 Khan even goes so far as to naturalise revelation and inspiration (*vahy* or *ilhām*) as a natural disposition in man, which is present, however, in varying degrees: "As other faculties are present in man, in the same way the faculty of inspiration [*vahy aur ilhām*] is present in man. [...] In the one person [one faculty is] more [present] and in the other less. In the same way, the faculty of inspiration is absent in some, in the other less, in the other more and in another even more present" (Khan, *Maqālāt*, Vol. XIII, 388).

Khan to equally establish outer nature as a mirror of God's nature permitting insights into Divine knowledge. Chapter 7, I will further discuss the extent to which 'aql can be perceived as a merely inductive access path to knowledge or whether it is equally permeated with deductive aspects.

This link between the inner and the outer nature under the umbrella of Khan's reading of *dīn* resembles Sufi views on the whole of reality: the concept of *vaḥdat al-vujūd* – commonly related to Ibn al-Arabi's position, although not termed by him in this way – assumes the unity of Being and finds a concise expression in the Persian phrase, *hamah ūst*: "All is He." This monistic perspective assumes that God is the only existence. The entirety of creation is merely an illusion disclosing its unity with God. When this doctrine gained great popularity during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) in Mughal India, Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) countered this perspective with his concept of *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd*. In his view, the pantheistic perspective of *vaḥdat al-vujūd* violated the doctrine of *tauḥīd* and the transcendency of God, as God's unity was not sustained if all creation was equalised with God. He stated that a correct interpretation of this matter does not imply an equation of God with His creation, but rather a witnessing (*šuhūd*) of God through His creation. Creation was perceived as a mere mirror of God, maintaining, however, a clear distinction between both: "he felt it necessary to insist that seeing God in all things goes back to the viewer and does not offer a final explanation of the nature of reality."<sup>96</sup> The idea of *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd* became popular in the Naqshbandi Sufi order to which Khan was related through his family, while the *vaḥdat al-vujūd* remained prominent in the other great Sufi orders of South Asia, namely the Qadiri and Chishti orders.<sup>97</sup>

Khan's concept of *necar* seems to refer to the *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd* with respect to his perception of nature as mirroring God. As we have seen, Khan interprets the investigation of natural laws as a means to strengthen and verify religious beliefs.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the tracing back of causal chains in nature culminates in the necessary inference of God's existence as well as His unity. Nature is, for Khan, a mirror of God's *dīn*. While the idea of *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd* mirrors God's existence only from a top-down perspective, Khan furthermore assumes the possibility of inductive knowledge by means of nature, allowing for bottom-up insights.

Khan occasionally refers to the distinction between *vaḥdat al-vujūd* and *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd*, without, however, taking a particular stance. Thus, he was undoubtedly acquainted with these concepts. Whether his concept of *necar* is, however, a reinterpretation of *vaḥdat aš-šuhūd* must remain mere speculation, as he does not refer

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96 *EI*: "waḥdat al-shuhūd."

97 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 31; Robinson: *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 41.

98 Khan, *Maqālāt*, Vol. I, 147-150.

to this progression in his elucidations on *necar* or *dīn*. Yet, resemblances cannot be denied.

#### 4. Comparing Religions

I introduced the preceding discussion of the integration of science in Islam with Khan's acknowledgment of a universal standard allowing for the transcendence of mere, incommensurable opinions or beliefs. Perhaps this can be read as an estrangement from his own position, as expressed in his *Mohomedan Commentary*: his approach was rather apologetic and, as clarified previously in this study, Islam is presumed to be the single true religion. Conversely, Khan perceives Christianity and other religions to be mere adulterations of an originally divine message. In his last period, after the publication of his *Essays*, Khan realised that such an apologetic approach could not persuade others to abandon a counter-discourse, as two incommensurable ontologies inevitably clash. This is because both include an inherent truth claim which cannot be conveyed from one to the other ontology and nor can it be verified, as the arguments work only within their respective ontology. Mere beliefs and opinions thus collide without a means of verification.

Khan therefore argued for the acknowledgment of nature as a universal and 'natural' criterion to create a commensurability between otherwise incommensurable ontologies: only that religion which is in entire conformity with nature and reason can be identified as the single true faith. For Khan, religion, being equally the creation of God as nature, must fit in with natural dispositions of man and, thus, be rationally comprehensible from a scientific perspective as well. In order to test these requirements, Khan set out to translate Islamic concepts and practices into rational and scientific terms, as I have demonstrated using the example of his *Ad-Du'ā' va al-istijābah*. Khan expanded this project to a commentary on the Quran in his unfinished, seven-volume *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1880-1904), wherein he aimed to present a rationalised interpretation.

In the following discussion, I will analyse Khan's claim that reason, nature, and science, taken together, constitute a neutral and universal criterion. I will discuss the principle of comparison in order to demonstrate its implications for Khan's claim of neutrality.

Khan presumes *dīn* as a universal concept that precedes the manifestation of its elements. When Khan extends *dīn* to a dual meaning as (1) an abstract, immaterial

concept of religion overarching the various messages (*shariat*) as well as (2) the material creation, he introduces nature as both a secondary sphere of knowledge and an additional aspect of *dīn*. Nature as well as its investigation through science become an essential part of Islamic piety. But, is *dīn*, in fact, a universal concept? Can it be observed as preceding its elements?

A closer look into the principles of Khan's *Tafsīr* raises doubts about his claim. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Ibn Rushd, he adopts a principle of interpretation which implicitly negates the possibility of an inconsistency between the Quran and the observation of nature and its laws:

Ibn Rushd has established an extremely acceptable, reasonable and true rule. He says with full conviction that whatever can be proved with evidence but appears to contradict the religious law [*šar'*], this [i.e. the Quran] must be interpreted according to the principles of interpretation in Arabic [...].<sup>99</sup>

Khan presupposes the Quran as divine revelation while contradictions with nature are ascribed only to misinterpretations by men. Islam and the Quran are not examined on the allegedly neutral *tertium comparationis*, however. Their coherency is anticipated and inconsistency is negated in advance. Rather, Islam's inherent consistency with nature is generalised as a principle of interpretation. The *tertium comparationis* therefore loses its character of an objective point of reference and is instead integrated as a subcategory within Khan's terminology. Thus, *dīn* does not represent any prior truth by which religions are measured. It is inextricably linked to Islam, representing the presupposed truth.

As has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, Bergunder describes comparison as inevitably based on the fixation of a particular point of reference which is abstracted as a concept: he thus negates a universality of concepts. Concepts are rather perceived as a subsequent abstraction of a prototype. Only this abstraction defines a field of similar elements which can then be compared – however, always in relation to the prototype:

[T]he point of comparison usually has a privileged relationship to one of the two or more elements that are to be compared, and the other is predicated on that relationship. [...] if the general term A', which serves as the point of comparison, is only an abstraction of element A, then A is the prototype for A'. Prior to the comparison, B (or C, D, etc.) must be declared similar to A via A' in order to make the comparison possible.<sup>100</sup>

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99 Ibid., Vol. III: 253.

100 Bergunder: "Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity," 37.

The establishment of a field of similarity is perceived as a merely contingent link, which fundamentally depends on the choice of the particular point of comparison. This point of comparison is subsequently generalised in order to maintain the field of similarity via a general concept.

For Khan, though, *dīn* is both the generalised and universalised form of Islam. The abstract concept of *dīn* fundamentally depends on Islam as a point of reference. This approach covertly anticipates the search for the true religion and merely provides evidence for this uncontested claim by reinterpreting the Quran in a rationalised fashion, ruling out the mere possibility of an inconsistency between science/nature/reason and Islam. The argument is circular, as the assertion to be proved is inherently integrated in the approach.

Khan perceives nature and its investigation through science to be a mere subordinate category of the universal *dīn*, while Islam is presupposed as its prototype by principle of interpretation. The Quran is thus anticipated as divine revelation and Islam is indisputably presupposed as the single true religion. It is not that *dīn* constitutes Islam as its element, but that *dīn* is, in fact, defined through an abstraction of Islam. Islam is the prior category while *dīn* is its mere projection. The general concept of religion is therefore a derivative of Islam in Khan's model. The conception of *dīn* changes with the critique Khan aims to answer in his reinterpretation of Islam. Thus, in integrating science as a mere subordinate category, Khan can emphasise religion's consistency with science. Both spheres are linked through the umbrella category of *dīn* as two sides of the same coin. This guarantees religion's conformity with science.

This subordination and integration of the allegedly universal *tertium comparationis* problematises Khan's claim of establishing a neutral basis for the comparison of religions. In fact, Islam serves as the prototype for the definition of the general concept of religion. Science is integrated as an additional aspect of the conception of Islam. Other religions, however, are compared not on the basis of a neutral *tertium comparationis*, but rather on Khan's conception of religion (*dīn*), which, however, is merely a projection of Islam.

Halbfass describes a strategy very reminiscent of Khan's in "Neo-Hindu" reformist approaches, wherein "dharma [...] serve[s] as [translation] for, but also as [a device] of self-assertion against, the Western<sup>101</sup> concepts of religion and philosophy."<sup>102</sup> Hinduism therefore becomes the point of departure for a transformed notion of religion. *Dīn* or *dharam*, pretending to be mere translations or equivalents to religion, put forwards a notion of religion extrapolated respectively from Islam or Hinduism. On the example of Vivekananda, Halbfass thus states:

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101 Cf. Chapter 2 for a problematisation of Halbfass's terminology.

102 Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 219.

Vivekananda preaches universal tolerance and openness, the harmony of the religions, and the synthesis of East and West. Yet at the same time, he finds in this program the essential confirmation and fulfillment of his own tradition – of the Hinduism identified with the Vedānta – which he considers to be not just a particular religion, but rather religion per se.<sup>103</sup>

The particular religion of Hinduism is thus elevated as a touchstone of the abstract concept of the universal *dharma*. In a similar vein, Harder describes Bankim's approach in presenting the superiority of Hinduism:

Bankim's approach was, to put it in another way, caught up between two different procedures, an inductive and a deductive one: the results to be inferred from the text could also be deduced from various preconceptions regarding essential Hinduism; his *dharma* is an *a priori* construction. Bankim was in the contradictory situation that while moving towards a goal or a *demonstrandum*, he had to claim that this goal had already been reached long ago, i.e. that it was already a *demonstratum*.<sup>104</sup>

The appropriated concept of religion, be it that which is seen in *dīn* or *dharma*, allows for an extrapolation of the respective, particular religion. That said, it is entangled with the concept of religion to which the particular author was confronting through European critique. The critique is therefore projected in an inverse vein upon one's own tradition, culminating in a reinterpretation that serves as a response to counter and refute the critique. In the second step, this reinterpretation is extrapolated as a universal concept of religion, and as a result of the adaption of the inversed critique, *dīn* and *dharma* respectively occupy crucial elements of the critics' concepts of religion, but link it to their particular traditions.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we see that an increasing inclination towards nature, science, and reason can be observed in the subsequent periods of Khan's work. Due to a British exertion of influence in educational institutions in North India, particularly at the Delhi College, European science discourse gradually gained importance in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to its educational efforts, the college furthermore supported the publication of periodicals, aiming at a broader dissemination of science.

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103 Vivekananda as quoted by Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 238.

104 Harder: *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 238.



Due to his familial background, Khan showed a keen interest in technical and scientific issues, even from his earliest writings. However, with his *Mohomedan Commentary*, Khan reflects upon the impact of European science on matters of theology. Khan not only substitutes his Ptolemean perspective for the Copernican, but also finds it necessary to reject the conflict thesis between science and religion as a side effect of this shift. Initially only confronted with a contradiction of the Bible with this shifted worldview, Khan gradually developed an interpretative approach – first to the Bible and subsequently also to the Quran. While, in his *Essays*, this interpretative approach was primarily based on critical historiography, his subsequent texts show an increasing emphasis on nature, science, and reason. This approach is backed up by a reference to the tradition of natural religion, which he came to know through Pratt's *Scripture and Science not at Variance*.

Khan further distinguishes between the Work and Word of God, which cannot contradict each other, for both are the creation of God: any apparent contradiction can be traced back to a misreading of scripture. The latter is thus opened to interpretation, transcending its fixation to a verbatim reading. He distinguishes between two spheres, the Work and Word of God, nature and divine message, which are nonetheless conjoined under the umbrella of *dīn*. The latter experiences a tremendous extension of meaning in the course of his writings. While the *dīn* of Khan's *Mohomedan Commentary* is conceived of as the single, abstract religion which found its expression in various prophetic laws, his later texts invest *dīn* with a second meaning: nature is integrated as another aspect of *dīn*. Nature and science, and reason along with them, are incorporated as another sphere of knowledge and aid in the affirmation of religious beliefs. Science is sacralised as another access path to the knowledge of divine creation, while religion, i.e. the Word of God, is rationalised, as it has to relate to science in order to demonstrate its conformity with nature, the Work of God.

By means of a concealed process of equating the English term nature with the Urdu/Arabic *fīṭrat*, Khan projects this terminological integration onto the Quran and thus identifies science as purely Islamic (*theṭ Islām*). The emphasis on natural religion and the conflation of the distinct spheres of science and religion under the shared umbrella of *dīn* also enable Khan to link Islam with the discourse of science, reinforcing it as pure Islam. The interpretation of the Quran becomes fluent and has to adapt to recent results of science.

On this basis, Khan develops an approach for the comparison of religions in his *Lakcar āf Islām*. After concluding that an apologetic approach cannot convince an opponent, as opinions and beliefs in separate ontologies are incommensurable, he transcends these ontological limitations through a comparative approach with a universal criterion: nature. In order to establish commensurability and identify the

single true religion standing in full conformity with nature and science, he translates Islamic theology in rational terms. Thus rationalised, religion is deprived of supernatural claims. It has to argue on the same rational basis as science.

Khan thus attempts to establish an objective meta-level approach through nature and science. That said, his interpretation of the Quran nonetheless raises questions about his claim of the neutrality and universality of his criterion, for conformity between the Quran and science is anticipated as per the principle. The Quran is presupposed as the truly divine message, while Islam is indisputably presumed to be the single true religion. The apparently prior category of *dīn* is revealed as a projection of the prototype of Islam, and the apparently neutral criterion, nature, is integrated as its mere subcategory. Khan's meta-level of comparison therefore turns out to be an inherent presupposition of Islam.

In establishing Islam as *dīn*'s prototype, Khan presents a transformed and re-interpreted concept of religion, as well as science, for he acknowledges crucial aspects of both discourses. While he haltingly accepts science and religion as distinct types of knowledge, the latter is restricted first and foremost to moral issues, thus the two spheres do not clash.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Khan does not accept the thesis of conflict, which he evades through his roach to natural religion, namely through his overarching concept of *dīn*.

In his analysis of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism, Martin Fuchs describes a similar process of translation with the concept of *third idiom*:

The participants undertake what can be called a "translation" of their claims and concerns into a new or "third idiom", which ideally is not owned by any one side and may even have previously been out of use or unfamiliar to the sides concerned, but which at the same time seems accessible for both sides. The idea of a third idiom is to overrule and replace the prevalent dominant language or ideology, using as an alternative platform not one's own local idiom but an idiom that transcends the two conflicted sides or discourses and provides space for both.<sup>106</sup>

The *third idiom* is a language that allows one to create commensurability without entirely adopting the dominant discourse. Likewise, Khan adapts prior theological discourse on natural religion and integrates it into Islam in order to create a link with science. The dominant discourse is acknowledged, without, however, entirely adopting its inherent implications. The concept of religion Khan proposes through his *dīn* is a tremendous transformation of the discourses he was confronted with

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<sup>105</sup> Bergunder: "'Religion' and 'Science' within a Global Religious History," *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 16 (2016): 113f.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Fuchs: "Reaching Out, or, Nobody Exists in one Context Only: Society as Translation," *Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 30f.

through the Christian mission and science. In accepting these dominant presumptions, Khan can re-signify them by establishing clear links to Islam.

In Khan's thought, Christianity loses its paradigmatic character for the category of religion. As Harrison writes, it held the position of "the paradigmatic religion because the 'other religions' were constructed in its image."<sup>107</sup> Religion is thus a contingent construction reified on the basis of an exemplary particular. Thus, Christianity is inextricably related to "religion" as its exemplar in colonialist thought, while other religions are construed on its particular principles.<sup>108</sup> Khan remodels this conception of religion: he translates and thus integrates Islam in its reification. By relating the concept of religion, or rather *dīn*, to nature, science and reason – allegedly neutral and universal instances – Khan can substitute Christianity with Islam as the paradigmatic religion. He thus presumes the *tertium comparationis* of nature to be an inherent aspect of his conception of Islam. The dichotomy between science and religion is thus resolved and Islam is presented as the true religion.

In sum, Khan seizes the concept of religion from European colonialists and reshapes it as *dīn* on the basis of Islam. However, Islam experiences a tremendous adaption to science in the process. Khan thus continues his project of essentialising Islam into a dynamic entity which first could be observed in his commentary of the Bible becoming more prominent in his response to Muir. Herein, Khan presents the Quran as a source for dynamically interpreting Islam. In the present chapter, we see that Khan's project is eventually also reflected in an expansion of his terminology: *dīn* is added a second, parallel layer in response to the critique of science. The following chapter will discuss a parallel effort in tackling this critique, which questions the nature of science and its relation to Islam.

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107 Harrison: "'Science' and 'Religion': Constructing the Boundaries," 98.

108 For example, Chapter 3 discussed one of Muir's points of critique of Islam, which states: "a barrier [that] has been interposed against the reception of Christianity." (Muir: *The Life of Mahomet*, Vol. IV: 321) Muir evaluates Islam with reference to Christianity, presupposing the latter's superiority. His entire critique is based on a comparison, taking Christianity as the indisputable point of reference.

