The first service that one owes to others... consists in listening to them...

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

OU Religious Studies
STUDENT JOURNAL

www.ou.edu/religiousstudies

VOL V • MMXI
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DR. DAVID VISHANOFF**  
iv

**Nushuz in Marriage**  
**TREVOR CLARK, EDITOR**  
1

**Jesus the Essene**  
**CHASE THORNHILL**  
18

**Jews and American Politics**  
**SARA CICCOLARI-MICALDI**  
37

**The Problem of Evil or the Problem of Good?**  
57

**An Analysis of Augustine and the Problem of Evil**  
**EMILY POWELL, THOMPSON AWARD WINNER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND WRITING**  
72

**Indonesia and the Jombang Model of Islam**  
**WHITNEY PATTERSON, THOMPSON AWARD WINNER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND WRITING**  
92

**Cheyenne Religion and Animism**  
**KAITLIN S. MARTIN**  
102

**Acknowledgment**  
102

**Author Biographies**  
103
texts, analyzing data, formulating arguments, and using previous scholarship. Even without further training in religious studies, those students who decide to enter other fields such as health, law, politics, or non-profit work, do so with a healthy immunity to shallow generalizations and one-dimensional arguments, because they have been stretched to think about religious people in rich, nuanced, and multidimensional ways. Each of the following papers illustrates one or several of the many dimensions of religion that students explore in OU’s Religious Studies Program.

Jacob Neusner once characterized Religious Studies as “the exegesis of exegesis”—that is, the study and interpretation of how religious people study and interpret their own experiences, histories, practices, and texts. Trevor Clark’s essay is just that. First he offers his own careful and well-argued exegesis of a single word (nushuz, high-handedness) in two verses of the Qur’an. Such close reading and analysis of sacred texts is one of the fundamental skills of religious studies. An even more important task of religious studies, however, is understanding how religious people themselves interpret their own scriptures. Trevor therefore compares his own exegesis with that of a modern Muslim scholar, Khaled Abou El Fadl. By comparing these two interpretations of this one Qur’anic word, Trevor is able to formulate a general thesis about the process of interpretation itself: interpretation changes with time, place, and changing values, but hermeneutics—the science of interpretation—allows religious people to continue to regard their beliefs as grounded in scripture, even as those beliefs change. This kind of general conclusion about how religious people function—how they do what religious people do, which is above all to interpret things—is just as important a part of Religious Studies as is the skill of carefully interpreting particular texts.

Chase Thornhill’s essay illustrates a different scholarly project: the delicate task of constructing a coherent historical picture out of fragmentary data. We have textual evidence about Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Essenes, but no direct evidence about their historical relationship, so imagining what that relationship might have been requires formulating a hypothesis and then testing that hypothesis against the available data. The hypothesis (or assumption) that has dominated historical scholar-
ship on Jesus is that he had no direct connection to the Essenes. Chase
does what historical scholars do; he questions the prevailing assumption,
finds some suggestive evidence of Jesus’ and John the Baptist’s affinity
with Essene values, and then tests the alternative hypothesis that John the
Baptist and Jesus were Essenes. The hypothesis does not entirely fit the
evidence, so Chase modifies the hypothesis to posit that Jesus eventually
left the Essene community, and this modification allows him to account
for known disagreements between Jesus and the Essenes. The result is not
a conclusive argument; it would take many years of specialized training
to formulate an argument that would prove convincing to the guild of
New Testament scholarship. But the method that Chase employs is a good
illustration of the process that even the most advanced historians are compelled to follow: finding chinks in an old narrative, imagining a new one,
and then painstakingly reexamining the available evidence to see whether
it can be made to fit that new narrative better than the old one. This is,
inevitably, a tentative process of trial, error, and revision; but it is one of
the fundamental intellectual processes of the history of religions.

Sara Ciccolari-Micaldi’s essay is a very different kind of history. She does not try to reconstruct the story of Jewish participation in American politics; she tells it, relying on the work of previous scholars, so that she can explain it. She does not propose or defend any single explanation; instead, her creative contribution is to show just how many different factors were at work in that story: the particular history and experiences of the Jews as a minority in the U.S. and abroad, the psychological impact of those experiences, economic and social factors, theological principles, and Biblical narratives such as the story of Esther. Her essay is not so much a scholarly argument as it is a blending of scholarly perspectives, combining history, psychology, economics, sociology, theology, data on political participation, and her own interview with a Jewish leader. A purely disciplinary approach would have emphasized one kind of explanation, relying on one kind of data such as voting records or economic data. Sara’s paper demonstrates the value of a Religious Studies program that encourages interdisciplinary thinking and opens students’ imaginations to multiple kinds of explanations and interpretations.

Emily Powell’s essay, by contrast, is the epitome of a rigorous argument, but it takes place entirely within the parameters of a single scholarly discourse: the philosophy of religion. Emily analyzes terms, states premises, advances and evaluates arguments, and then reframes the whole question she is trying to answer—the problem of evil—within the larger question of how there can be good and evil in the first place. She does not pursue her argument to its end: for that, she would have to allow an atheist an opportunity to propose an explanation of how there could be a standard of good and evil without there being a God. But she does carefully and methodically displace the argument from one question—how can there be both evil and a good God—to another: how can there be evil at all if there is no God? This kind of argument is the bread and butter of the rather specialized discipline of the philosophy of religion. It bears little relation to the history of religions: Emily touches upon a chronological development in Augustine’s thought, but leaves aside the whole history of Christian and Western philosophical thought about the problem of evil. She does not take into account the psychological dimensions of the problem of evil, or the history of the Holocaust and its psychological effects on people, as Sara’s paper did. But within the confines of philosophical discourse, Emily moves a mountain.

Whitney Patterson’s essay makes an argument in an entirely different arena: the arena of contemporary politics and public policy. She offers a richly documented portrait of an Indonesian Islamic movement that is at once conservative, pluralistic, and democratically inclined; but this depiction is not itself her scholarly contribution. For this descriptive work Whitney marshals and organizes the work of other scholars. Her own argument is prescriptive: she proposes that rather than attempting to find and support secular or liberal Westernized Islamic groups as an antidote to radical Islamic movements, Western governments and non-governmental organizations should recognize that traditional religious identity provides a sense of security that makes radicalization unnecessary, and that such a traditional identity can be perfectly compatible with the Western ideals of representative government and cultural and religious tolerance. Whitney’s essay demonstrates that a complex understanding of the dynamics of religious identity, and nuanced examinations of particular
religious movements—both of which are essential to the academic study of religions—lead to practical as well as academic conclusions. Religious Studies can shed valuable light on the moral, political, and civilizational dilemmas that our society faces in relating to a religiously plural world. Religious Studies prepares students not just for philosophical argument, historical understanding, and textual interpretation, but also for moral engagement in the public sphere.

Finally, Kaitlin Martin’s paper is about the very question of how the study of religions is and should be conducted. Her summaries of Cheyenne and typical animistic beliefs and practices are not the real object of her paper; they are just the examples with which she thinks about the basic problem of how religious studies scholars compare and classify data. Is it useful and proper to classify Cheyenne religion as an instance of animism? Kaitlin recognizes that the terms we use, the comparisons we make, and the way we classify our data, all have moral implications. They have an impact on the people we study. Therefore, she does not simply ask whether classifying Cheyenne religion as a form of animism is useful to the scholar of religion; she asks whether it is useful to the Cheyenne people themselves. She concludes that it can be beneficial to them, despite the inadequacies of the comparison between Cheyenne religion and animism—inadequacies which plague all comparisons and classifications in the study of religions. This methodological self-consciousness, and this concern for the ethics of how we construct our knowledge of other people, is and must remain a hallmark of OU’s Religious Studies graduates.

This is what Religious Studies students do at OU: through the wide range of courses they take, with faculty in multiple disciplines working from a variety of perspectives, they learn to think, know, and argue in multiple ways, and ultimately come to understand human beings and their religions in ways a single discipline could never afford. An interdisciplinary program we are, and will remain, because it is precisely the diversity of approaches taken in these papers that constitutes the strength of an education in Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a society as “the aggregate of persons living together in a community, esp. one having shared customs, laws, and institutions.” The smallest units of a society that still maintain these properties – community, custom, moral regulation, hierarchy, and structure – are the marriage and family units. As such, one can glean a great deal about a particular culture by observing norms for marriage within the family units that comprise the given society. This is similar to the geneticist’s ability to grasp the blueprint of one’s entire body from the DNA found in a single cell.

The “cell” this paper will slice into is that of marriage in Islamic society. The particular region of that cell this paper with focus on is rebelliousness or high-handedness (nushuz) in marriage. The reason for this is to try to understand what a discussion on nushuz will reveal about how gender is perceived in Islamic society and how, over the course of time and space, those perceptions are transformed.

Before moving on to that analysis, it is important to note that the “Islamic society” referenced above does not exist as some homogenous constituency of all Muslims. Marriage norms differ widely from region to region for the simple reason that culture varies. As Islam expands through Muslim migration and conversion, it moves into nations
with preexisting perceptions of gender, and some of those perceptions are taken up and continued in the Muslim communities formed in those regions. Marriage norms also differ from time to time when internal movements and external influences cause a culture to evolve. The result of these processes is that Islam is totally homogenous in neither the cultural norms that accompany it nor in their manifestations as law. As one scholar recently put it, "Sharia is not something fixed in a book somewhere," rather, "Islamic legal theory... is designed so as to ensure that Muslims will never be stuck with a rule that no longer fits their culture’s norms or their most deeply held values."

That being said, many Muslims view Islam and Islamic law as exactly the opposite: a fixed ideology to which culture should be conformed; the same standards set forth in the Qur’an are present in law manuals like Ahmad ibn Naqib’s *Reliance of the Traveller*. This is the classic picture of Islamic Law – a tree growing naturally from its roots: the Qur’an, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, *ijma* (consensus), and *qiyas* (analogy). This picture is probably true in a number of instances, but is not always the case. When believers are unaware of the tensions between their own worldview and the texts from which their worldview is purportedly constructed, an unconscious departure in value from the texts occurs while the claim of fidelity to those treasured texts remains. In other instances, when modern Muslims become aware of personal value conflicts with the sources of Islamic Law, they can be placed in a hard spot, developing complex theories of Islamic legal theory or Qur’anic hermeneutics to justify their departure from traditional values.

What is true of our case study, marriage, and particularly rebellion in marriage, remains to be seen. To understand how the concept of *nushuz* has fared through the centuries, we can begin with an analysis of the pertinent Qur’anic texts, which means we will analyze how rebelliousness in marriage was viewed in the society of the Prophet himself insomuch as the Qur’an reflects that society’s values. This paper ends with a discussion of how one modern scholar, Khaled Abou El Fadl, wrestles with the meaning of *nushuz* in the Qur’an. As shall be seen, his interpretation differs dramatically from my own. If my analysis of the Qur’an is shown to be more likely than Abou El Fadl’s, his work will then be treated as an example of modern departure from Qur’anic values, and this paper will discuss the possible motivations behind his interpretation of *nushuz*, and what those might teach us about Islam in a broader sense.

---

*Nushuz in the Qur’an*

*Nushuz* comes from the root *nashaza*, which appears in four places in the Qur’an: twice in sura 58, and twice in sura 4. In those two suras it takes two forms: *unshuz* and *nushuz* respectively. *Unshuz* has the positive connotation of being raised up – “God will raise up, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge” (58:11). *Nushuz*, however, casts people in the negative light of being “rebellious” or “high-handed.” As stated, this form is found in two places in the Qur’an; both are in sura 4, and both deal with marriage. Interestingly enough, one verse deals with *nushuz* committed by the wife, and the other deals with *nushuz* on the part of the husband. This is very convenient, as it allows us to compare and contrast the responsibilities and rights particular to husbands and wives, an analysis from which we can hopefully grasp at least a part of the Qur’an’s understanding of gender. Abdel Haleem translates the verses as follows:

“Husbands should take good care of their wives, with [the bounties] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence. If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them” (4:34).

“If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do good and are mindful of God, He is well aware of all that you do” (4:128).

The first observation drawn from these texts is that both husbands and wives are capable of committing *nushuz* toward each other. In a paper concerned with gender relations and Islam, this would seem to point toward a conclusion of egality. Whether one translates *nushuz* as “high-handedness” or “rebelliousness,” the suppositions remain the same: both spouses are held to a moral standard and both are able to deviate from it. If we become overexcited in our progressivism, we could argue that because both are held accountable to a moral standard, men and women stand in equality on a moral plane and
answer to a criterion that exists outside of their relationship (both spouses are held equally accountable to God’s paradigm which He places upon them) or within their relationship (marriage partners agree to a single standard binding them both).

The flaw in this progressive hypothesis is that it assumes marriage partners are answerable to the same moral standard—an easy conclusion to draw considering that the same word is used to describe each transgression. The capacity of each to rebel against a moral obligation does not necessarily mean, however, that they rebel against the same standard. If we adopt the “God-paradigm” model touched on in the previous paragraph, it is possible that God would place different moral obligations on husbands and wives. Different standards are even possible if we adopt the “partner-agreement” model, for spouses could be able to place different expectations on each other. Thus, aspirations to egalitarianism cannot advance with surety beyond the point of acknowledging that both men and women are moral agents. Whether or not these moral agents function on the same moral plane depends upon the nature of the moral standard(s) to which they are answerable. The nature of the standard(s) to which husbands and wives are held accountable can be identified by observing both actual transgressions called nushuz and the consequences which each spouse faces when nushuz is committed. As it appears first in sura 4, we can proceed to talk first about a wife’s committing nushuz.

Sura 4:34 does not explicitly state what qualifies as nushuz on the part of the wife. That being said, inferences can be made from the surrounding text. According to Abdel Haleem, wives of whom high-handedness is feared are to be reminded of “the teachings of God.” That phrase is actually absent in the Arabic text, though the admonition for husbands to “remind” their wives is not. In view of that, we can observe that a wife’s nushuz is in some way related to forgetting, though what they are forgetting is not clear. In the sentence prior to the one concerned with nushuz, the Prophet tells his audience that “righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence.” Perhaps there is an unspoken contrast between these righteous women and those rebellious women. Presumably, the Prophet is talking about a wife’s sexual availability—she is to be chaste while her husband is gone, that is, unavailable to the eyes and arms of other men; in this way she “guards what God would have her guard in her husband’s absence.” There could be other things entrusted to a wife to guard, but this seems the most natural interpretation given the explicit sex-_contract nature of marriage, a point underscored in

Kecia Ali’s Sexual Ethics and Islam. A wife’s nushuz, then, would be primarily concerned with her chastity (unavailability to other men) and perhaps by implication her sexual availability to her husband. This does not exclude other forms of disobedience and disrespect from being considered forms of nushuz; it only demonstrates that the predominant concern could be sexual. It will be interesting to see if this holds true for the male form of rebellion.

In sura 4:128, the Prophet gives this ruling about a husband’s nushuz: “If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness...” In this verse nushuz appears alongside allegations of alienation, and both are feared by a wife. It is probable that these two are related, the “or” which joins them functioning more to pull together similar ideas and less to differentiate between different ones. If that is the case, determining the kind of alienation referred to in 4:128 could shed some light on the actions which constitute a man’s “high-handedness” in marriage.

In light of the discussion about a wife’s nushuz, it might be thought that this alienation is also primarily sexual. The husband does not visit his wife; he does not see to her sexual fulfillment. There are discussions about a wife’s sexual fulfillment in jurists’ rulings and certainly in modern commentary like Kecia Ali’s work, but this does not seem to be the case in this particular instance. In 4:128, the cause of a wife’s alienation is her husband’s selfishness, as intimated by the latter half of the verse, and she is recompensed for her husband’s alienation and the possibly ensuing divorce “out of God’s plenty” (4:130). God’s plenty is most definitely not a sexual reference, but rather seems to bespeak financial provision. An economic lens also makes sense of the man’s “selfishness,” which would then be akin to greed.

This passage of the Qur’an, then, does not seem to be interested much in a woman’s sexual fulfillment. This interpretation is bolstered by the larger context of sura 4, in which interpersonal justice is understood to a large degree economically. Men are told to “give orphans their property” and “give women their bridal gift upon marriage” (4:2, 4). “Women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave” (4:7). If men “wish to enjoy women through

---

Those who find Ali’s arguments unconvincing should note that this paper does not so much build off of Ali’s work but rather toward it, independently, from the text of the Qur’an here analyzed.
marriage,” they must “give them their bride-gift” (4:24). “Husbands should take good care of their wives... with what they spend out of their own money” (4:34). The prophet’s audience is not to be “miserly” (4:37). Justice is portrayed as the proper stewardship of people’s assets (4:58). When the people ask for a ruling about women, God replies with a verse about giving financial shares to those (orphans) one marries (4:127). Given this context, and the fact that “high-handedness” and “alienation” are tied in 4:128, a husband’s nushuz towards his wife appears to be mostly concerned with his neglecting to support her financially.

If this analysis is correct, the natures of the actual transgressions constituting nushuz in a marriage setting differ starkly along lines of gender. The female nushuz is primarily concerned with sexual behavior and the male with financial. This supports Ali’s argument that Islamic marriage has generally been understood as a kind of contract in which men pay for exclusive sexual access to a woman. If this analysis is correct, we can expect men and women to face different kinds of consequences when guilty of nushuz. If this hypothesis is borne out by the evidence, there would be a strong argument for men and women existing on different moral planes. And if that is the case, at least one remaining question would be “is one plane higher than the other?” For now, we turn to the nature of the consequences each spouse faces after committing nushuz.

When men are found guilty of nushuz toward their wives, the Qur’an is mysteriously silent about the ramifications of their actions. It says “If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best.” No recourse for the wife is here presented. They are encouraged to come to a “peaceful settlement,” but no process is illustrated or even mentioned. Perhaps that settlement is reached by petitioning to others in the community, as is common in many societies. That being said, it seems to be the case that she cannot accomplish any meaningful change in the neglect she suffers without the collaboration of her neglector: they should come to a peaceful settlement, not her. And they should come toward a peaceful settlement, taking steps together, as opposed to her bringing him to a peaceful settlement. And they must come to a peaceful settlement; there doesn’t seem to be a recommendation to punish the violator of peace (though almost certainly there were societal mechanisms to do just that; yet even so, it was society that punished, not her).

On the other hand, when a wife perpetrates nushuz against her husband, he takes an active role in her discipline. “If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them... then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them.” The man is given a progressive series of punishments to administer toward his wife in the case of nushuz, culminating in the admonition to “hit them.” The word for “hit” is from daraba. Some Muslim apologists argue that this should be interpreted as a form of gentleness. Husbands should touch their wives as with a feather or a toothpick; that is, they should softly woo their wives back to obedience. This is fairly nonsense. In the Qur’an, daraba is often used to speak of beating out a path or “striking a similitude” (which means making a parable or example); however, when the word is used toward people, it is violent. Interestingly, it is often used of unbelievers or things associated with unbelief. Abraham “struck them [the idols] with his right arm” (37:93). When members of the Prophet’s community met disbelievers in battle, they were to “strike them in the neck” (47:4). “When the angels take the souls of the disbelievers... they strike their faces and backs” (8:50). Sura 4:34, then, makes it clear that a husband can physically discipline his wife. Granted, this is not before reminders and cold-shoulder tactics, but even these facts point toward an inherent inequality between genders. The husband is not only the 1) Victim; he is also the 2) Educator, and 3) Disciplinarian. Furthermore, a wife’s infringement against his rights shares some color with the sin of unbelief, at least through the connotation daraba absorbs from its other appearances in the Qur’an. This correlation to unbelief becomes even more explicit if one accepts Abdel Haleem’s editorial addition to 4:34 that rebellious wives need to be reminded of “the teachings of God.” A man’s nushuz has no such hue.

This analysis demonstrates that there is a clear distinction between the moral planes in which women and men operate. Although the same word, nushuz, is used to describe infractions from each partner of a marriage relationship, different actions constitute each spouse’s rebellion and each face different consequences. Furthermore, this analysis opens the door for an argument that the planes are not simply separate, but inherently unequal. The Islamic God is one who speaks; this is the essential meaning of Qur’an. He reminds. He punishes. On a lesser scale, the Prophet as head of the society speaks what was given to him. He reminds. He arbitrates justice. On a still lesser scale, in the “cell” of society, the husband occupies the same role. Sura 4 frames a husband as his wife’s teacher, reminder, and sometimes her punisher; as such, the role of the husband is in some sense akin to God’s interaction with the world. This is emphatically not the case with the wife.
The Qur’anic treatment of *nushuz* in marriage reveals how it views men and women differently. They exist on separate moral planes, obligated before God to fulfill different needs toward their spouses. A wife is primarily to be sexually available to her husband and unavailable to others. A husband is to support his wife. Failure on his part may possibly lead to him facing the rebuke of others (probably males) in the community; the wife is portrayed as mostly passive in this process (though that may not reflect social reality; consider Ziba Mir-Hosseini’s *Marriage on Trial: a Study of Islamic Family Law*). *Nushuz* on the wife’s part results in her being disciplined by her husband through reminders, neglect, and corporal punishment. On the radical edge, one could claim that such dissimilarity illustrates a pattern not just of role differences but of essential discrepancy in spiritual significance. Although one may reject this more pointed conclusion, there remains overwhelming evidence that (at least in the verses analyzed here) the Qur’an views men and women differently in a way that at least appears to place women somehow beneath men.

**Nushuz through the Eyes of Abou El Fadl**

Khaled Abou El Fadl, author of *Speaking in God’s Name* and *Conference of the Books*, among other works, disagrees with my analysis of *nushuz*. To understand how, we can follow Abou El Fadl’s thinking as he describes what constitutes a wife’s *nushuz*, the consequences she faces for such a transgression, and then the same two components as they pertain to a husband.

He writes, “the jurists, God bless and forgive them... said that *nushuz*, in the case of a wife, means disobedience, and in the case of a husband, means a grave and known sin (*fahisha mubina*).” Abou El Fadl finds these interpretations wanting, first in their view of a wife’s *nushuz*. He quotes a hadith, saying:

“It is reported that the Prophet in his final pilgrimage proclaimed, ‘O people, I command you to treat women with kindness for they are your support. You have no other rights over them unless they commit a grave and known sin (*fahisha mubina*). If they do, abandon them in beds and beat them lightly, but if they comply do not transgress against them.”

In this hadith, the punishment for *fahisha mubina* sounds very similar to the prescribed treatment for rebellious wives (wives guilty of *nushuz*) in sura 4:34. Abou El Fadl argues that the Prophet used the two words synonymously in this context, and therefore that “*nushuz* means a *fahisha mubina*,” which itself is a type of sexual lewdness. The result is that a husband should not discipline his wife for minor disobedience or disrespect, because neither of those are examples of grave sexual sin. Abou El Fadl and I agree on the point that a wife’s *nushuz* is primarily sexual (he might say exclusively sexual). That being said, whereas I concluded that a wife’s obligation to be chaste was also a hint toward her being sexually available to her husband, Abou El Fadl does not speculate beyond the point that *nushuz* is an immoral act committed by the wife. He would not say that good sexual behavior (i.e. availability to husbands) being omitted would constitute *nushuz*, and in that we differ slightly.

A stark difference in our interpretations of a wife’s *nushuz* is found in the consequences for her actions. Sura 4:34 prescribes that one “remind them... then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them.” I understand this to be addressed to husbands, assigning them the role of reminder and punisher, with the eventual ramifications being that Islamic marriage was hierarchical, and placed men over women in a moral sense. Abou El Fadl disagrees, writing that perhaps “4:34 is not addressed to husbands at all but to the state... Nothing in 4:34 necessitates that the remedy be in private hands, for history and creation have shown that when it comes to punishment husbands are hardly the ones to be trusted.” Another alternative he offers is that 4:34 could be “stating a rule of proportionality. Admonishment is the normal rule, but if a wife resorts to abandonment, she could be abandoned, and if she strikes her husband, she could be struck...” With both of these explanations, Abou El Fadl tries to promote a picture of marriage as a partnership framed in equality, which he believes the rest of the Qur’an demands. He asks,

“Considering our knowledge of men, do you see a reason for God to entrust husbands with the administration of equitable beatings? God informs us that the purpose of marriage is to find friendship, tranquility, and mercy (30:21, 7:189). Is this consistent with an empowerment to administer a beating?”

---

He also appeals to the standard of merciful matrimony evidenced in the Sunna. “Did you ever hear of a single occasion where the Prophet struck one of his wives? Even more, the Prophet is reported to have said that the worst of you are those who beat their wives.”9

When it comes to the nushuz of a husband, Abou El Fadl states, “4:128 and 4:34 are not remedial complements. Therefore, the fact that the hadith of the Prophet quoted above might bear weight on the meaning of nushuz in 4:34 does not necessitate the hadith’s extension to 4:128.10 As such, we should not assume that a man’s nushuz is sexual immorality of some sort. What then would a man’s rebellion be then? He writes, “Many jurists thought that the nushuz of 4:34 (for women) means arrogance or aloofness and the nushuz of 4:128 (for men) means a lewd sin. I believe that because of the Prophet’s hadith, if anything, it is exactly the opposite.”11 His interpretation of a husband’s high-handedness agrees with my own in the sense that a man’s nushuz is not primarily sexual. I concluded that nushuz is primarily the neglect of financial support, but Abou El Fadl’s stance is broader, being constituted of “arrogance or aloofness”.

Abou El Fadl argues that the consequences a husband faces after committing nushuz are not specified by 4:128, for “all [it] says is that there is no harm in reaching a compromise if it is to avoid a divorce. There is nothing in 4:128 that says husbands may not be punished...”12 He argues that it was already the custom in pre-Islamic Arabia to give criminal punishment for men. The reason women are specified as able to receive punishment could be “the extension of the rule to a category otherwise presumed not to be covered.”13 If this is true, the Qur’an may not be putting men and women on such unequal footing as I have argued.

One of the reasons Abou El Fadl and I arrive at different conclusions (for Abou El Fadl, “tentative resolutions,”14), is because we have operated with different perspectives. In my analysis of the Qur’an, I focused exclusively on the text of the Qur’an in hopes that it would speak for itself, lending its textual context toward its own interpretation. This does, however, have the unfortunate consequence of treating the Qur’an as existing in a vacuum, with the Prophet’s society constructed ex nihilo out of its words alone. For his part, Abou El Fadl rightly views the Qur’an as a recitation given to a pre-existing society and assumes that some of that society’s characteristics were preserved in the Prophetic community. This represents a classic tension of hermeneutics: how do we know what a text means apart from its originating community, and how do we reconstruct a picture of the community apart from the text? After reflection, it is clear that Abou El Fadl’s approach to the Qur’an holds a great deal of value. It also fits with the phenomenon described in the introduction that “some of those [pre-existing cultural] perceptions are taken up in the Muslim communities formed in those regions.” If this statement was true concerning the propagation of Islam, it makes sense to assume the same as regards its origin. Adopting Abou El Fadl’s paradigm raises some questions to my previous analysis of nushuz and demands greater depth in interpretation. It does not, however, necessitate that one agree with Abou El Fadl in asserting the Qur’anic view of marriage ought to be understood as egalitarian; that decision must be made after weighing our disparate views.

Contest of Views

Abou El Fadl and I agree that a woman’s nushuz is primarily sexual, though I went further in speculating than he. Our primary disagreement on this subject is over the consequences a married woman faces for her rebellion. Whereas I understand a wife’s judge and punisher to be her husband, he offers two alternatives: 1) justice could be dealt proportionally between them both, and 2) the verse could be addressed to the state.

He argues that the first alternative is akin to what happens in the case of banditry as described in sura 5:33.15 Abdel Haleem translates that verse as follows:

“Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter...”

9Ibid.
10Ibid., p. 174.
11Ibid.
12Ibid.
13Ibid., p. 175.
Abou El Fadl references the practice of cutting off a hand as punishment for thievery and extends the “eye for an eye” idea to the context of marriage. “Admonishment is the normal rule, but... if she strikes her husband, she could be struck.” I think this interpretation is wanting for a number of reasons. First, 5:33 makes no mention of marriage. Second, even if we accept 5:33 as instituting a theory of justice as proportioned, sura 4 asserts (as outlined above) a theory of justice linked strongly to proper management of financial resources, and part of that financial management includes unequal distribution of resources between genders in the case of inheritance (see 4:11, 176). In general, men receive more. If in the case of finances justice is manifest through the unequal treatment of men and women, why would we assume a rule of proportionality between the genders in the case of marriage? Third, there is no mention of a wife’s punishing her husband in 4:34 or anywhere in the surrounding text. Finally, arguing “if she strikes her husband, she could be struck” might make sense if a wife’s nushuz was comprised of striking, but both Abou El Fadl and I agree that in 4:34 nushuz is a sexual infraction.

Abou El Fadl’s second alternative, that 4:34 could be addressed to the state, is more than a stretch. His argument is suspended by three threads, first that “nothing in 4:34 necessitates that the remedy be in private hands,” second that “history and creation have shown that when it comes to punishment husbands are hardly the ones to be trusted,” and third that the Qur’an and Sunna indicate a “marriage full of tranquility and kindness or a divorce restrained by justice and kindness.” In response to the first thread, I respond that husbands are explicitly addressed – “If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them... then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them” (4:34). Perhaps one could argue that “you” and “your” refer to the collective Muslim community, and therefore “your wives” could be taken as “the wives among you.” This interpretation would make women accountable to the Islamic community in general, as opposed to her husband in particular. The argument fails, though, when we observe the punishments that are to be administered. Only a husband would be able to neglect his wife when he goes to bed. There is no reason to switch the agent of action as one moves from one stage of punishment to the next; therefore, it makes sense that the husband would also be the agent to “hit them.”

As to Abou El Fadl’s argument concerning history and creation, an appeal to the nature of men, I would only say that it is possible the Prophet and his community did not see men as Abou El Fadl does. Instead, they may have understood creation oppositely, as instituting a form of male-headship (despite egalitarian interpretations of 4:1). This view of creation is not at all absent from the other Abrahamic traditions. Furthermore, let us recall the the lack of textual evidence supporting a state-directed interpretation of 4:34. The same argument, that Abou El Fadl and the Prophet do not share similar visions of human nature, also addresses his final thread of support, that the Qur’an and Sunna advocate a tranquil, kind, just marriage. In the case of 4:34, in which the wife has already disturbed the tranquility of marriage through committing nushuz, it may be that the Prophet did not consider it unkind for a husband to administer justice in the form of a beating. In that case, the Qur’an and Sunna’s statements about kindness do not rule out striking in marriage. After these brief observations, it seems that the more likely interpretation of the consequences for a wife’s nushuz is that her punishment, including corporal punishment, is to be administered by her husband.

My treatment of Abou El Fadl’s analysis of 4:128 is much shorter. We agree that a husband’s nushuz is not sexual, but actually has to do with his selfishness. I limited the scope of a husband’s injustice to the financial sphere, though Abou El Fadl included arrogance and aloofness. These differences are relatively unimportant for the discussion at hand, for the real issue is once again the consequences facing the one who has committed nushuz. I argued that a husband was not held accountable in the same way as his wife, which bespeaks inequality. Abou El Fadl ventured that the community did not need to be told to prosecute men, as men were already held accountable to the community in pre-Islamic Arabia. Singling out the women as being “punishable” could have been merely to include them in this accountability.

The strength of Abou El Fadl’s answer lies in reasoning that “since men were already being held accountable, there would be no reason to reiterate that in sura 4.” That potency of that argument is diminished some when it is realized that men in fact are singled out as objects of punishment in sura 4:16. Granted, this verse is referencing a lewd act committed between two men, a sin the gravity of which

---

11Ibid., p. 173.
could have merited its reiteration (or, if not previously outlawed in pre-Islamic Arabia, may have warranted being outlawed here). But even if the omission of the consequences faced by men implies an already present system of communal accountability, the fact remains that a husband’s accountability is to the community, whereas—if one accepts my arguments concerning a wife’s nushuz—a married woman is held answerable to (and punishable by) her husband.

As a result, as concerns nushuz, the Qur’an depicts men and women as existing on moral planes that are not only different but unequal. The husband and his wife are both held accountable, the husband to the community and the wife to her husband, who possesses the ability to discipline her with reminding, conjugal neglect, and corporal punishment. The relationship between the moral planes on which the husband and wife operate is hierarchical, with the wife’s plane existing beneath that of her husband.

As has been seen, Abou El Fadl disagrees with this hierarchical model. Although we agree on a basic level about what constitutes nushuz both on the part of the wife and the husband, stark differences emerge when we address the consequences of their high-handedness. I have argued that my interpretation of those consequences more accurately reflects what the Qur’an originally meant when addressing nushuz. If this is correct, instead of relaying what was meant when the Prophet recited 4:34 and 4:128, Abou El Fadl’s work actually contains a modern understanding of nushuz and its consequences that are inherently tied to modern understandings of gender.

The cause for this evolution seems simple: Abou El Fadl believes that wife-beating is morally wrong, and that men and women are equally valuable moral agents. I have painted this as departing from perceptions of gender native to the Qur’an, but Abou El Fadl does not agree. Rather, he admits to departing only from the perception of gender present in the Islamic juristic tradition. In Conference of the Books, he lays out a case for why such deviation ought to be encouraged in Islamic legal discourse. He asserts that there are absolute moral values—the protection of life and mind—and derivative moral values—freedom and dignity. Derivative moral values arise from the necessity to uphold absolute values. Society pursues absolute values in part by its pursuit of derivative values, which Abou El Fadl acknowledges as being “historically contingent,” meaning that different societies have different ideas about what constitutes freedom and dignity, and therefore protect life and mind in different ways.19 As perceptions of dignity change, so do the means of upholding life and mind. This is pertinent to the discussion of nushuz and marriage, as he writes,

“...A resort to violence, in this stage of human development, tends to undermine a person’s dignity, and this undermines a person’s integrity of honor and mind. The fact that beating one’s wife was perceived by earlier authorities to be consistent with the absolute moral values of honor and mind does not bind me or you in any way.”20

When presented with the case of wife beating, Abou El Fadl is thrust into a “long moral pause,” the result of which should be to “probe the tradition and precedent” which troubles him.21 With this philosophical framework, Abou El Fadl introduces a sort of legal theory that allows him to depart from previous juristic rulings on nushuz and its consequences, in particular wife-beating.

**Conclusion**

Using nushuz in Islamic marriage as a lens through which to reflect upon Islam as a whole, this paper has shown that, like all religious traditions, Islam changes over time. What is unique to Islam are the particular ways such evolution is justified. Khaled Abou El Fadl’s arguments, for instance, are intelligent, passionate, and sophisticated. They are also bold, sometimes directly challenging certain hadith and contradicting rulings embedded within the Islamic legal tradition (which we both agree is more harsh toward wives than the Qur’an, see for example Ahmad ibn Naqib’s treatment of nushuz in Reliance of the Traveller, a classic manual of Islamic law). However, there seems to be something inauthentic about Abou El Fadl’s method based in an almost dogmatic reluctance to read immorality (in the instance of nushuz, wife-beating) into the Qur’an. Instead, he quarantines more negative aspects of Islamic gender distinction to the legal tradition that developed years after the Qur’an’s recitation, and then progresses past those negativities using legal theory and

---

19Ibid., pp. 182-183.
20Ibid., p. 183.
21Ibid.
hermeneutics. By categorizing misogyny as a byproduct of the Islamic legal tradition and then distancing himself from the conclusions of that tradition, Abou El Fadl effectively distances himself from what I have argued are perceptions of gender found in the Qur'an. This can be seen as an example of the phenomenon described in the introduction—a demonstration that Islam is a religion having values that change with time, place, and other influences, while the desire for those values to be in agreement with the sources by which Muslims identify themselves, most importantly the Qur'an, remains perennial.

Bibliography


JESUS THE ESSENE

Introduction

What are we to do with the lost years of Jesus? If one is looking for answers of certainty, they will not be found. The unfortunate reality is that those years are lost and we will never know what really happened for almost thirty years of Jesus' life. Nonetheless, many scholars have attempted this feat. Some purport that Jesus traveled to the East and learned the teachings of eastern traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Others argue that he grew up just like any other Jewish peasant in rural Galilee. Other theories have arisen, but none have gained significant popularity.

There are also scholars who entertain a different, and somewhat unique, notion: that Jesus was involved with an Essene community such as Khirbet Qumran. Novelist Christopher Moore, in his book Lamb, playfully suggests that Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, was an Essene and that Jesus interacted with them for much of his childhood. But the theory of Essene interaction in Jesus' lost years is not confined to the pages of fiction. David Flusser, for instance, argues seriously that the ethics and theology of Jesus greatly resemble that of the Essenes, indicating his involvement in the Essene community during the early years of his life. Although this paper approaches the subject independent of Flusser's work, it is a similar hypothesis that is here raised and, as will be seen, a similar conclusion drawn: that Jesus interacted heavily with the Essenes is a possibility bordering likelihood.

For many reasons, the idea of Jesus' intimate affiliation with an Essene community is unpalatable to many scholars and lay people alike. Perhaps it does not fit with the common view that Jesus would owe much of his own worldview to a group so odd. Consider Bart D. Ehrman's synopsis of the desert-dwelling group:

"Believing that the Jews of Jerusalem had gone astray, these Essenes chose to start their own community, in which they could keep the Mosaic Law rigorously and maintain their own ritual purity in the wilderness. They did so fully expecting the apocalypse of the end of time to be imminent. When it came, there would be a final battle between the forces of good and evil, the children of light and the children of darkness. The battle would climax with the triumph of God and the entry of his children into the blessed Kingdom."

And yet, for all their oddity, there are reasons to conclude that the Essenes had a significant impact on Jesus' life. And while not all of those reasons can be enumerated in this paper, we can focus on three main areas of Jesus' life and teaching that support both Flusser's thesis and my own: Jesus' relationship with John the Baptist, his view of the Kingdom of God, and his approach to Jewish Law. Throughout these

---


three samples, we shall also see the theme of apocalypticism arising—a theme particularly important to the Essene community. That these three areas indicate a strong tie between Jesus and the Essene community by no means indicates that they were the only group to influence Jesus, and, in fact, the differences between Jesus and the Essenes are only too plentiful. As such, this paper will analyze the significance of some of those differences toward its conclusion, and hopefully arrive at the understanding that the differences between Jesus and the Essenes are more evidence for a union that once existed and was dissolved than for the absence of such a relationship in the first place. Before exploring that possibility, however, we must lay a foundation illustrating the plausibility of Jesus being strongly influenced by the Essene community, which begins by looking at Jesus’s relationship with John the Baptist.

**John the Baptist**

That Jesus and John the Baptist related in close terms is explicitly stated in all of the gospels. Consider the synoptic statement “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” And although the Baptism narrative is absent from the Gospel of John, Jesus and John the Baptist are still shown as interacting on the banks of the Jordan River (John 1). These independent attestations are compelling reasons to accept Jesus’ baptism as historical fact. Furthermore, the event fits the ‘Criterion of Dissimilarity’. As Ehrman argues, Jesus being baptized by John illustrated a type of submission on behalf of Jesus. It is unlikely that early Christians would want to display someone as having authority over Jesus, and therefore it is likely that the written event is also an historical one.

The connection between Jesus and John the Baptist is important because, based on the baptism narratives, there is very good evidence to conclude that John the Baptist was influenced by the Essene community, possibly even a member at one point. We can turn to Matthew 3:1-9 as a starting point:

---

*Mark 1:9, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).*


Within this text, one can see clues of an Essene influence upon John through his theological proclamations, his ascetic lifestyle, and his practice of baptism, and we can consider these in turn.

First, his extreme eschatological message emphasizes a coming judgment that should prepare for primarily through ritual cleansing and repentance. Like John, the Essenes were a very apocalyptic group and greatly emphasized eschatology in their message. John, here, most nearly represents an Essene apocalypticism because in comparison to more militant apocalyptic groups of the time like the Zealots, John’s expectation of the coming judgment relies purely upon God’s judgment rather than humans overthrowing oppressive powers. In comparing John with the Essenes, John Hutchinson writes that “[t]his common theme of the coming Day of the Lord accompanied by the wrath of God as a judgment on Israel’s sin is..."
certainly at the heart of both of these movements." It is also interesting to note that John held a particular disdain for the Pharisees and Sadducees, two Jewish groups that the Essenes also heavily opposed. Admittedly, there could be other influences on John’s apocalypticism. However, John’s interaction with the Essenes is a plausible explanation for why he held such views, and possibly the best explanation for his apocalypticism and his interaction here with the Pharisees and Sadducees, especially when we consider other parts of John’s life, most notably his ascetic lifestyle and practice of baptism.

Not only was John’s message reminiscent of Essene ideology, but his lifestyle also resembled that of the Essenes, at least to a greater degree than it resembled any other group of the time. John lived partially removed from society, abiding in the wilderness and preaching from riversides. This social asceticism is somewhat reminiscent of the behavior of the Essenes, who (by and large) withdrew altogether from interaction with their peers. That John interacted with people at all could be considered evidence against my thesis, or as evidence that John was not an Essene, at least in full membership, during the time this passage is referring to. I think the second explanation becomes more likely as we continue to explore other areas of John’s asceticism. John’s diet of locusts and honey, for instance, is a minimalist sustenance; in a similar vein, the Essenes’ ascetic lifestyle also included a strict diet of kosher food and minimal eating. This being said, James Kelhoffer points out that John’s eating of locusts is not unusual and does not point to an Essene trait uniquely. Rather, he says “[t] hat locust-eating was a common practice is documented by copious materials...” While this may be true, that John had a very restrictive diet (and a Jewish one at that) seems to fall in line with Essene practices.

---


---

But even if John was an Essene, or influenced by Essene teachings and practices, why would this lead us to believe Jesus experienced a similar influence? Is it simply that he opted to be baptized by the wilderness prophet, as did many first century Jews, or are there indications of a more personal, distinctly Essenic tie between the two figures? The personal element is certainly present in the gospels, illustrated through ties of purported kinship and Jesus mourning John’s death. Not only is a personal element preserved in the gospel narratives, there are also elements of the Essenes present, particularly when observing Jesus’ baptism.

---

3Hutchinson, p. 192.
First, Jesus’ baptism is significant because it portrays Jesus as being familiar with the ritual of baptism and its meaning. This would lead one to assume that Jesus had interacted with John before, or with another baptism group, perhaps the Essenes. Second, there is a question of authority between these two at the time of the ritual, for, according to Matthew, John deems himself unworthy to baptize Jesus. However, in light of the early Christian conviction of Jesus being Lord, it is possible that this is a Matthean addition inserted to downplay the issue of John having authority over Jesus. That Jesus would have seen John as an authority over him and possibly a teacher is consistent with the Essene practices. The Essenes at Qumran appealed to the authority of the “Teacher of Righteousness” as the authority on interpretation of the Torah and as the true heir as the High Priest because of his Zadokite lineage.10 Because of this, they established a hierarchy based upon those who understood the true teachings of the Torah. The Teacher of Righteousness was at the top of this hierarchy. It may be that the baptismal story demonstrates John’s authority over Jesus’ based upon his knowledge of the Torah and Essene teachings. It is not that Jesus saw John as the Teacher of Righteousness, but rather that Jesus’ relationship with John reflected the same type of hierarchical relationship that existed in the Qumran community. That Jesus and John’s relationship was of this nature plausibly explains their mutual interaction with the community at Qumran. Ultimately, if Jesus knew John, recognized his authority as a teacher, and was familiar with the practice of baptism and John’s message, it follows that Jesus would have known that John interacted with the Essenes (if one accepts that hypothesis), perhaps interacting with them himself. It is probable that he knew and interacted with the community, and possibly even considered membership with John.

Until now, this paper has argued that John the Baptist was somehow affiliated with the Essene community, and that Jesus was familiar with them through him. In such a case, Jesus’ interaction with the community was, practically speaking, indirect. That the community directly influenced Jesus is harder to illustrate, but can be done by observing two of the most important aspects of Jesus’ teaching: the Kingdom of God and the Law.


The Kingdom of God

In discussing the Kingdom of God, the primary connection between Jesus’ theology and that of the Essenes is the theme of apocalypticism. Eschatological belief was central to Essene theology, so much so that they based their communal life and scriptural interpretation around their belief in a coming judgment. Now, there were many other groups that were fueled by the flame of apocalypticism – many other groups that could have influenced Jesus, so why contend that it was the Essenes in particular that influenced Jesus? Using Jesus’ apocalypticism as support for his interaction with the Essene community only holds water if there are elements of his apocalypticism that are explicitly Essene. The question becomes: did Jesus hold beliefs about the coming kingdom and judgment similar to the Essenes? The answer to this question requires a detailed analysis of the nature of Jesus’ apocalypticism and his teachings on the Kingdom of God.

Bart Ehrman believes that everything about Jesus was apocalyptic; he was born into and was influenced by an apocalyptic context within Second Temple Judaism; he began his ministry apocalyptically through his association with John the Baptist; even the legacy that existed immediately after his death was apocalyptic, of which Ehrman uses to point to the continuity of apocalypticism throughout his life and teachings.11 Ultimately, because of all these influences, we are compelled to see Jesus as an apocalyptic. The Kingdom of God was the central aspect of Jesus apocalyptic teachings, most other aspects of his teaching revolving around this notion.

E.P. Sanders argued that there were two main ways that Jews would have seen the Kingdom: the first is that it is a transcendent realm separate from earth, and will stay that way for eternity; the second is that it is a transcendent realm now, but will come to earth in the future where God will rule over all.12

11Ehrman, p. 137.
Sanders said that, based upon scripture, there are six possible formulations of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the Kingdom of God. The first two are the same as the two views dominant in Judaism mentioned above. The third is very similar to the second, but was more a description of how the Kingdom of God would be established on earth. Sanders described that it would be a cosmic event where, “the Son of Man and angels will come, accompanied by heavenly signs.”

The fourth view is that the Kingdom of God is sometime in the future, but other than this is very vague. The fifth is that the Kingdom of God is a “special realm on earth...that exists in and side by side with normal human society.” The sixth and final view says that the Kingdom of God is present in Jesus’ own words and ministry. The task now is to sort through these to figure out what the historical figure of Jesus would have actually thought.

Sanders argued that the historical Jesus thought that the Kingdom of God was a transcendent realm that would come to earth based solely on the power and work of God, rather than on the effort of humans. This in itself is very similar to the Essenes, especially when comparing their theology to other apocalyptic groups like the Zealots, who believed they could actively initiate the coming of the Kingdom of God. In this light, Jesus would see his ministry as preparing people for the coming kingdom, rather than ushering the kingdom in. Moreover, Jesus’ self-understanding as Preparer could be indicative of another role Jesus saw himself fulfilling: that of the Messiah.

The gospel accounts clearly show that Jesus saw himself as the Messiah in some way, though this is often credited to the embellishing redactions of later authors. However, it is plausible to consider many of Jesus’ reflections on his own role and that of the Son of Man as actually historical when approaching the text with understanding that Jesus could have been strongly influenced by Essene eschatology. To illustrate this, let us explore Matthew 11:2-6:

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’

Here, John the Baptist and his followers are portrayed as perceiving that Jesus played sort of special role, but simultaneously question whether or not Jesus was the Messiah who would usher in the Kingdom of God. If we assume John’s involvement with the Essenes, then John would, like the Essenes, believe in the coming of twoMessiahs. Sanders said that the Essenes at Qumran (whom he calls the “Dead Sea sectarians”) believed in coming of two Messiahs— one from the line of David and one from Aaron. Veselin Kesich echoes this point in more detail, writing “[b]ow much [the Essenes] were permeated by the messianic hope seems to be reflected in their expectations of two Messiahs, priestly and royal— the Messiahs of Aaron and of Israel.”

John’s question expresses his doubt of Jesus’ Messiahship. However, Jesus’ response can be seen as establishing Aaronic Messiahship, though his ministry was ultimately devoted to preparing for the Son of Man, the Davidic Messiah.

This theory, largely dependent on Jesus’ interaction with the Essenes, provides a lens through which to interpret many of Jesus’ sayings on the messianic Son of Man in a way palatable to the secular bent of modern scholarship. Throughout the last two thousand years, many people have read Jesus’ sayings about the Son of Man as referring to himself, but when one reads these sayings closely, it seems that Jesus is almost always referring to the Son of Man as though

---

1NRSV.
2Sanders, p. 185.
he exists as an independent entity. Bart Ehrman concurs: "[S]ince Christians thought Jesus was the Son of Man, it seems unlikely that they would make up a saying in such a way as to leave it in question whether he was referring to himself."18 It is clear that Jesus' sayings about the Son of Man reveal that he thought the Son of Man would come to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Thus, if Jesus saw himself as the Aaronic Messiah who would prepare the way for the Son of Man, the Davidic Messiah, who comes in connection with the Kingdom of God, then Jesus would hold to the two-Messiah theory similar to, if not the same as the Essenes.

The historical Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God were laced with apocalypticism. There is great emphasis throughout his teachings of a coming judgment that requires repentance if one's outcome is to be favorable. This kingdom will be a physical kingdom on earth brought about by God, and can only be prepared for, not actively brought about. These aspects of Jesus' theology share many similarities with the theology of the Essenes. Perhaps the strongest resemblance between the two are the ways the Messiah was understood. Believing that Jesus was strongly influenced by the Essenes gives ground to accept as historical many of the Messianic references Jesus makes in the synoptic gospels, with the understanding that he was referring sometimes to himself and at other times to a second Messiah figure. This Two-Messiah eschatology was especially strong in the Essene community. Considering all of these beliefs, it is clear that the brand of apocalypticism inherent to Jesus' view of the Kingdom of God connects him uniquely to the Essenes.

The Law

A second major arena of Jesus' theology was his view of Jewish Law, and here, too, are clues of Essene influence. The primary parallel between their approaches to the Law is that of strictness; as such, the similarity is one primarily of attitude, though in certain instances there are also intersections of actual content. The Essenes were very strict interpreters of the Law, focusing their way of life around the written

Mosaic Law alone, not including the Oral Torah like the Pharisees. This rigidity is particularly reflected in their ascetic lifestyle. Jesus' interpretation is likewise strict. Sanders goes so far to label Jesus an "idealistic perfectionist", especially in "substantial portions of the Sermon on the Mount."19 Take, for instance, Matthew 5:31-32:

'It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."20

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, commonly called the "Antitheses," Jesus recalls several laws to his audience's mind and interprets them more conservatively than they have been taught. Consider another passage, also about marriage, from Matthew 19:12:

His disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'21

These passages together capture Jesus' conservative view on marriage and apparent advocacy of celibacy, even to the point of self-castration. Here, Jesus' conservative scriptural interpretation in regards to marriage and becoming a eunuch demonstrates remarkable resemblance to the Essene way of life, of which celibacy seems to have been a common practice. Simon Joseph writes that while the evidence found at Qumran does not support an entirely celibate community, it was definitely

18Ehrman, p. 135
19NRSV.
20NRSV.
a common practice, as Philo, Pliny, and Josephus claimed in their writings. Thus, Jesus’ view on the Law in these examples parallel Essene views in both attitude and content.

Yet in other ways, Jesus’ view of the Law reflects a Pharisaic understanding. In general, it seems that rather than opposing the theology and message of the Pharisees, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for ignoring the more important aspects of the law (see Matthew 23). As an Essene, Jesus would have criticized the Pharisees primarily for using the Oral Torah at all, for the Essenes rejected this and believed they had the exact interpretation of the Law. But instead, he deploys the Oral Torah in a different way. It could be that Jesus is using the method of the Pharisees (Oral Torah) to arrive at an Essene-colored interpretation of the Law (given the conservative nature of the Antitheses, specifically the passages on marriage). However, Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is not always conservative. Sanders argues that Jesus was “not given to censure but to encouragement; he was not judgmental but compassionate and lenient; he was not puritanical but joyous and celebratory. Yet he was also a perfectionist.” Therefore, this perfection was focused on mercy and compassion, of which Jesus called his disciples to employ in God-like fashion, which seems on face to be askew to the Essenes’ perspective.

Other persons, however, have argued that Jesus’ relation to the Law was not as much an adding to, and perfection of it, but rather a selective view of the Law. John Meier says, “The real enigma is how Jesus can at one and the same time affirm the Law as the given, as the normative expression of God’s will for Israel, and yet in a few individual cases or legal areas (e.g., divorce and oaths) teach and enjoin what is contrary to the Law, simply on his own authority.” Meier highlights the fact that Jesus prioritized certain aspects of the Law over others. While Jesus could have rejected certain aspects of cultural laws, he seems to prioritize laws that relate to ethical interaction with other people. Ehrman even says, “The supreme importance of love is probably what led Jesus to minimize the importance of other aspects of the Law that other Jewish teachers emphasized.”

Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is in some ways consistent with the conservative view of the Law held by the Essenes. However, Jesus seems to interpret scripture using the same method as the Pharisees, a method which the Essenes rejected. As well, Jesus does not interpret the Law strictly in every instance, often times emphasizing love and compassion over strict adherence to the Law. All of this one could see as evidence against the hypothesis that the Essenes influenced Jesus. However, another, perhaps better, explanation for these discrepancies is not that Jesus and the Essenes never interacted, but rather their interaction was significant but temporary, eventually leading to a split due to their disagreement on fundamental theological issues.

The Split

For what reasons would Jesus break from the Essenes, and what textual evidence do we have to support such a break? There is no outright statement that Jesus was ever affiliated with the Essene community, though I have argued that there are more than enough clues in the gospels that he did. Furthermore, there is no declaration of Jesus distancing himself or breaking away from the apocalyptic group; at least, there is no outright description of such an event. Nevertheless, there are specific reasons why Jesus would have split from a community like the Essenes at Qumran. Although we do not know many of the circumstances, it is reasonable from what we know of Jesus’ beliefs to think that he would have differed from the Essenes on both the exclusivity of their religious community and their dogmatic devotion to maintaining ritual purity.

Interestingly enough, these and other reasons run parallel to a significant event in Jesus life – the beginning of his ministry, the wilderness experience. Understanding Jesus’ wilderness experience...
as a loose parable for Jesus’ break with the Essenes, while to some degree is a creative exercise in imagining his split from the Essenes, could have major implications if it is correct. Such an approach is not unheard of. When Kesich argued that Jesus was critical of the isolation and exclusiveness of the Essenes, causing him to reject the community, he pointed to the parable of the Great Banquet (in which the poor and maimed persons in the community were invited to a great banquet, a metaphor for the future Kingdom of God) as evidence for his claim. “The Essenes according to their regulations would exclude from their community all those with physical defects. It is quite possible that Jesus had them in mind, as well as other exclusive groups, when he told this parable.”39 This theory seems to be supported by the very nature of Jesus’ ministry. Throughout the three years when he was travelling and teaching, Jesus is portrayed as constantly interacting with the outcasts of society. In a similar vein - with some liberty and a bit tongue in cheek - I want to use the wilderness narrative as a means of discussing Jesus’ split with the Essenes, perhaps concluding that the connection is more solid than I have suggested, more like a hard metaphor than a present-day simile drawn for the sake of easy understanding.

In the wilderness narrative, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit after his baptism. Knowing the geography of the area, it is very reasonable to assume that Qumran was considered part of the “wilderness,” just west of Jerusalem in a very rural area by the Dead Sea, an idea that Ehrman affirms as well.28 In this wilderness, Jesus is subjected to three temptations, each of which can be seen as metaphors for a possible encounter with the Essenes after his baptism.

In the first temptation, Jesus is commanded by the devil to turn stones into bread. Jesus’ response, “It is written: One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, NRSV), can be seen as Jesus’ rejection of the overly ascetic lifestyle of the Essenes, insofar as they prevent one from following what Jesus thought to be God’s most important commandments.29

As a second temptation, Jesus is taken to the Pinnacle of the Temple and told to jump off. If he is the Son of God, then the prophecy that angels will come and save him will come true. This temptation is very interesting in terms of Jesus’ relation to the Essenes. First, if Jesus did come to believe that he was divinely Messianic in some sense, this could lead him to leave the Essene community and embark upon a larger journey, which only offers more support for the theory that Jesus saw himself as the first of two Messiahs. This temptation could therefore be a metaphor for the Essenes frustration with Jesus leaving the community because of his new-found calling. Second, we know that the Essenes held anti-Temple views, primarily because there was not a Levite in the position of high priest. The significance of where Jesus is tempted could be a metaphor for the Essenes’ argument with Jesus about the corruption of the Temple. Here it is interesting to note that the pinnacle of the temple is the far southwest corner of the Temple – the closest part of the temple to Qumran.

To analyze the third temptation, we must observe both the setting and the style of temptation in the text:

[T]he devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’30

In regards to setting, Jesus is said to have been brought up to “a very high mountain.” In the Qumran settlement, there is a watchtower roughly two stories high that was used to watch for potential invading enemies from the North. The “mountain” spoken of in verse eight could be a reference to this tower from which a person could have easily seen for miles. As for the style of temptation – that of power and authority – could be a later Christian polemic against the Essenes, characterizing them as persons wanting power. It may be that Jesus greatly excelled within the Essene community and the leaders could see potential leadership of the community in his future. Thus, this offering of the “kingdoms of the world” to Jesus could really be seen as a plea to keep him in the community.

39Kesich, p. 23.
38Ehrman, p. 113
31Refer to my comments earlier in the section on Jesus and the law. Jesus seems to have prioritized those laws that emphasized right relationship with other people.
30Matthew 4:8-9, NRSV.
Conclusion

When looking at the historical Jesus, it seems that many of his teachings and life circumstances provide evidence that point to involvement with the Essene community at Qumran. His interaction with John the Baptist and his teachings on the Kingdom of God seem to agree very closely with those of the Essenes. His interpretation of the Law in some ways seems to reflect Essene practices, and in other ways contradict them. When these similarities and differences are seen together, the best explanation may be the argument that Jesus was strongly influenced by the Essenes at some point in his life, but in his later years departed from them due to stronger personal conviction. To creatively explain this split, one may look to the temptation narratives as providing reasons for his break with the Essenes after his baptism. Now, I understand that this argument is far from complete, and perhaps raises more questions and objections than it answers. For instance: Could Jesus' apocalypticism - so different from that of the Sadducees - owe much of its flavor to a group like the Pharisees, or to some generic Jewish eschatology, or to Jesus' personal study, instead of to a group like the Essenes? Were the Baptist's wilderness actions indicative of the asceticism and apocalypticism of the Essenes, or merely of the normal role for an abnormal occupation - that of a prophet? Much remains to be said on the subject. Whether or not Jesus was an Essene or was influenced by Essenes in the lost years of his life remains to be decided. Ultimately, though, if one does consider my hypothesis legitimate, it would be unreasonable to think that Jesus could have been an Essene his entire life. The portrait we receive of him in the gospels cements this fact. And perhaps it is these years - the years that are known - which should captivate the lion's share of scholarship on the historical Jesus.

Bibliography


Sanders, E. P. The Historical Figure of Jesus. London: Allen Lane, 1993. Print.
"For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support." These powerful words, written by George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, established the principle of tolerance in America. Jews had been living in a state of oppression in Europe for centuries. Christendom had viewed them as nonbelievers, as heretics, and as the killers of Jesus Christ. The United States was a haven of freedom, the new Promised Land.

As Jews settled in the United States, migrating in especially large numbers between the 1880s and the 1940s, they acquired unique voting patterns and methods of political activism. Scholars have developed many theories of religion in America; however, the Jewish vote has never been fully explained by the various empirical theories, as articulated by Robert Fowler, Allen Hertzke, Laura Olson,
and Kevin Den Dulk. Culture wars, secularization, culture shift, civil religion, unconventional partners, populism, market— all of these theses are inadequate in explaining the unique patterns of Jewish political involvement.²

Jewish political involvement in the United States can be explained more fully by their unique history, and treatment by the rest of the world. Starting with the founding of the America, one can see how Jewish political attitudes and opinions were shaped and remained fairly constant throughout American history.

In the late 1700s, Jews constituted a tiny percentage of the American electorate. The two political parties at the time were the Federalists and the Jeffersonians. The Federalists advocated for a strong central government, and were very elitist in their attitudes toward suffrage. They were also deeply suspicious of immigrants, passing the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts. Lastly, the Federalists were much more comfortable with legislating morality, and believed that the government should interfere to create a virtuous citizenry, thus creating what are known as “blue laws.”³

Opposite the Federalists were the Jeffersonians, who were deeply suspicious of governmental power. They believed that the institutions closer to the people should govern them, leading them to support strong states’ rights. Jeffersonians were more welcoming of immigrants, and were more democratic in their views on suffrage. More importantly, however, was the fact that Jeffersonians did not support the idea of legislating morality. In fact, Jeffersonians advocated a very strict “wall of separation” between church and state. Thomas Jefferson himself was not a religious man, contrary to Alexander Hamilton or John Adams.⁴

⁵Ibid, p. 145.

In their early history in the United States, Jews flocked to the party that supported more religious freedom and opposed legislating morality. This is so because throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and up until the modern era, Jews lived under Christendom. Europe was entirely Christian, and the Church and State were fused together. In fact, Jews had not lived in a Jewish state since the age of the Roman Empire.⁵

This long history under Christendom, during which Jews were not treated as equals but merely “tolerated” in the better times or actively persecuted in the worse times, has created an inherent opposition to public religion. Naomi Cohen said, “Jewish opposition to public religion rested on the assumption that religion meant Christianity.”⁶ For a very long time, this had been true. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 marked the first opportunity for Jewish self-government since the Great Diaspora, almost 2000 years ago.

This defensive mentality continued throughout American history, past the colonial and post-revolutionary era to the dawn of the Democratic Party in the 1820s. During this time period, America was divided between Whigs and Democrats. Whigs were similar to Federalists in many ways, comfortable with legislating morality, and containing streaks of nativist sentiment. Democrats, led by Andrew Jackson, favored expanding suffrage, and worked hard to accommodate immigrants, especially Roman Catholics, who had been ostracized in American society and branded as “foreign papists.” Not surprisingly, Jews voted strongly for Democrats; 82 of the 35 Jewish politicians during this time period were Democrats.⁷

The Civil War era saw a reshuffling of American political alignments based on geography. Northerners voted Republican; Southerners, Democratic. The Jewish vote also shifted based on this geographical realignment; the Jewish vote was divided fairly evenly between

⁷Ibid, p. 35.
⁸Forman, p. 146.
Democrats and Republicans. Also, during this time, Jews were migrating in record numbers to the United States. New York City, in particular, witnessed an explosion; between 1860 and 1890, the Jewish population grew from 35,000 to 195,000.8

During the period of GOP dominance, from post-Reconstruction until the Depression, the Jewish vote was fairly unstable. Jews were still migrating in massive numbers to the United States. The older Jews still kept their Civil War allegiances, but the recently naturalized immigrants were more fickle. They split their vote between Democrats and Republicans, but a fairly large percentage of their vote went to the American Socialist Party. The Socialist platform must have appealed to poor immigrants at a time when the forces of progressivism and conservativism were battling each other within the Republican Party, with conservativism ultimately triumphing, and the Democratic Party seemed to be taken over by agrarian appeals for free silver. Jews were a very urban population, and the rural tone of the Democrats, especially as articulated by William Jennings Bryan, did not appeal to them.9

The Depression is a very significant marker in the history of the Jewish vote. It solidified the allegiance of the Jews to the Democrats, where it has remained since then. Democrats became the party of progressive reform, economic regulation, and support of the common man. Even as the New Deal coalition began to decay nationally in the 1950s and 1960s, the Jewish vote stayed constantly Democratic.10

Roosevelt’s New Deal marked a transformative change in the government’s role toward social welfare policies. In the 19th century, no party had supported a strong role for economic regulation by the government. When FDR broke this long-standing tradition, Jews, along with most Americans, were poor and suffering greatly during the Depression, and greatly welcomed this new approach. Even after World War II, when Jews became one of the most educated and wealthy groups in America, their party allegiances did not change.11

In the 1940s, perhaps one of the most traumatic events in all of Jewish history occurred: the Holocaust. Six million Jews were executed simply because they were Jews. Jews in America were shocked. In the United States, they were fully participating citizens, reaping the benefits of their labor and living the American Dream. This horrific ordeal heightened an awareness for American Jews that had been fermenting for some time: the fate of their co-religionists around the world. This concern had been ongoing since the turn of the 20th century, when the American Jewish Committee lobbied and called attention to the pogroms in Russia, a systematic governmental persecution of Jews. In previous decades, the United States had largely adopted a policy of isolationism. However, when FDR began openly opposing Hitler’s Nazi Germany, and agitating for war, Jews flocked to his side. In all truthfulness, FDR’s willingness to oppose Nazi Germany probably stemmed more from Hitler’s aggressive expansionist nature and Churchill’s persuasion to support the war than a desire to combat anti-Semitism. However, this approach was far better than the Republican alternative: staunch isolationism. After World War II, in 1948, the state of Israel was formed, and quickly recognized by President Harry S. Truman, a Democrat. Not surprisingly, this act further cemented Jewish loyalties to the Democratic Party.12

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the Jewish vote remained comfortably with the Democratic Party, but never in the 80-90% pluralities seen with FDR. The low point of Jewish political support for Democrats came with Jimmy Carter, who garnered only 45% of the Jewish vote. Carter’s presidency presided over economic troubles, a troubled relationship with the Israeli government, and the hostage crisis. Also, in 1980, Independent candidate John Anderson ran for the presidency, thus siphoning off Jewish votes from Carter.13

In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, Jewish votes for the Democratic Party have soared back to 80% and above pluralities. Why is this so? Scholars have identified the emergence of the Christian Right as a major factor in precipitating this further shift in voting. In

---

8Ibid, pp. 147-149.
9Ibid, pp. 150-152.
11Ibid, p. 159.
12Ibid, pp. 155-156.
13Ibid, p. 156.
many ways, the Christian Right embodies the greatest fear of Jewish Americans: the reestablishment of Christianity as the state religion. Here, the culture wars thesis becomes relevant. As the Christian Right gained political power, Jews tirelessly fought them. In the culture wars thesis, the Christian Right is on one side, and the Jews are on the other. There is no agreement between the two. The Christian Right then married its cause to the Republican Party in the 1980s, further driving Jews into the Democratic camp.  

Jews have always favored a Jeffersonian interpretation of the First Amendment, a separationist view of the relationship between church and state. They see this view as having far more support in the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. Republicans have expended much effort recently to prizewake the Jewish vote from the Democrats by trumpeting their unconditional support for Israel. However, this strategy has not been very effective. While Jews certainly do care about their co-religionists abroad, they fear the Evangelical Christian portion of the Republican Party too much to vote for them.

This strong trend of secularism within the Jewish community is a defense mechanism against what it sees as the dominating religious culture:

Throughout the Jewish sojourn in America, the Jews have been a people who have always remained most cognizant of their minority status . . . Jews have consistently viewed themselves as part of an out-group in American society.

The large majority of the American population, roughly 75%, belongs to a Christian denomination. While America may not be a Christian nation, it is a nation inhabited mostly by professing Christians.

It is not difficult to understand why Jews feel like the "out" group. Consequently, they are drawn to the Democratic Party, which has been the "out" group party for quite some time. Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, the Democratic Party has always championed the "underdog." In its infancy, the Democratic Party supported universal white male suffrage, a radical notion at the time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the progressives, who were later swallowed up by the Democratic Party, were instrumental in passing the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Recent voting data, specifically the 2008 elections, give the African-American vote, the Jewish vote, the gay/lesbian vote, the Latino vote, the Asian vote, and the Muslim vote all to the Democratic Party.

In summary, four strong sentiments prevail amongst American Jews: secularism, support for co-religionists, support of social welfare policies, and a strong outsider status. Translated into political terms, these sentiments equate to opposition of legislating morality of any kind, supporting Israel, supporting the welfare state, and championing civil liberties of minorities. Given the history of the Jewish people, it is clear why they oppose the Christian Right, support Israel, and fight for minorities. However, what is not quite so understandable is their support of the welfare state.

"Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans," quipped Milton Himmelfarb, a sociographer of the American Jewry. Indeed this seems to be the case. Jews are among the most educated and wealthy members of the population. Fifty-eight percent of Jewish Americans hold a college diploma; only twenty-two percent of non-Jews do. Thirty-seven percent of Jewish Americans earn over $85,000; only thirteen percent of non-Jews do. It seems logical that Jews would benefit economically by embracing conservatism. It would mean lower taxes and less government regulation on business. Why then do Jews adopt economic policies that appear to disadvantage them?

---

Footnotes:

18Forman, p. 160
Part of the answer lies in Jewish theology, which contains a very strong social justice component. This social justice mission can be summed up into one phrase: tikkun olam, which means “to mend the world.” The Talmud stresses the importance of creating a just society through the law. This notion, combined with the Jewish emphasis on scholarly learning, lends itself very well to the Democratic notion that experts and government authorities, who are well-educated people, ought to use their unique positions to plan and guide society in a more just direction. In addition, Jewish commitment to education lends itself to a fierce defense of intellectual freedom and civil liberties.22

Tzedakah is another core Jewish religious value, translated as charity. Again, Jews have no reservations about the government taking it upon itself to exercise these values. Legislating charity and social justice is not the same as legislating morality.23

Theological reasons alone, however, cannot explain the propensity of the Jewish vote toward social justice. Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, a Jewish Washington lobby, articulated the reason behind this propensity extremely well:

In the sobering wake of the Holocaust, we came to understand and believe that good people must never stand idly by while others are oppressed, persecuted, and victimized... This historical imperative translated into the widespread belief that we Jews will never be safe, never secure, as long as we live in a world or society in which any group can be the victim of persecution, oppression, discrimination, or deprivation. Social justice involvement thereby became a matter not only of Jewish morality and values but of Jewish self-interest as well, thus strengthening our communal commitment to social justice.24

22Greenberg, p. 164.
23Ibid, pp. 164-165.

This “historical imperative” that Saperstein discusses is what Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Holocaust, has dedicated his entire life’s work to. Wiesel calls it “memory and responsibility.” The Holocaust was the worst act of anti-Semitism in history, and it only occurred about seventy years ago. However, people are already beginning to forget. Wiesel feels that it is his responsibility as a survivor to keep the memory alive to prevent future generations from suffering what he suffered. “To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time... For the youth of tomorrow, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want his past to become their future.”25

Some scholars have posited that this feeling of fear and insecurity has been the driving factor in the Jewish vote, not an overwhelming compassionate concern for the fate of the poor in society. After all, many other religions place a strong emphasis on social justice, charity, and helping the poor, yet their voting patterns do not reflect their doctrine. Stephen D. Issacs, a scholar of Jewish political activism makes the claim that “the Jew in America may be motivated not so much by Isaiah’s ancient call to ‘seek justice and relieve the oppressed’ beating a tattoo inside his subconscious as he is by the fear of a tattoo on his forearm.”26

This audacious claim may not be far from the truth. Issacs points out that, as far back as the 1870s, politicians have been appealing to the “insecure, frightened Jewish vote,” denouncing acts of anti-Semitism around the world, but not taking any actions to change them. In fact, Issacs points out, FDR’s opposition to Nazi Germany had precious little to do with saving the Jews from the concentration camps. American aerial reconnaissance had located Auschwitz, but American bombers were forbidden to liberate it until Hitler’s demise.27

Jews have also proven, as an ethnic group, to be very distrustful of other people. The National Opinion Research Center for Dr. Melvin Kohn of the National Institute of Mental Health conducted a survey in which they assessed various white ethnic groups’ levels of trust and distrust in other people. Plus 4 meant most trusting; minus 4, least trusting. When
pooled, Jews leapt off the charts as intrinsically distrustful of their fellow man, with a score of -3.106. All other white ethnic groups, Irish Catholics, German Protestants, Italian Catholics, and many others, were all in the positive range, with the lowest score among them being 0.242.28

Marvin Schick, an orthodox Jewish political scientist, stated:

We’re all familiar, intellectually and even emotionally, with what three hundred years of slavery have done to the black soul and spirit. Well, think of what two thousand years of being murdered for the simple crime of being Jewish have done to the Jews? It has done something to them. It has made them angry, tired, distrustful of other people – and for good reason, often.29

The study by Dr. Kohn is rather dated, over thirty years old. Certainly, some of this distrustful feeling has dissipated as Jews have become more integrated into the broader American culture, namely by intermarrying in higher rates with non-Jews. However, there still is incredible solidarity among Jews on this historical feeling, of being the “out” group in the world. Another interesting fact can be seen among Jewish voters. On the gradient of liberalism, highly educated, wealthy Jews are at the top; middle-class or lower-class Jews tend to be slightly less liberal. This is a paradox. Within the rest of American society, the pattern is reversed – why?30

Jewish elites simply have more knowledge. A college education opens one’s eyes to the fact that anti-Semitism has increased in the world in the past century, rather than diminished. This problem is not so much manifested in America, but in Europe. The pogroms in Russia, the Dreyfus affair in France, and the brutal persecutions of Stalin and Hitler – all of these events have occurred since the beginning of the twentieth century. Anti-Semitism has reared its head more openly in the world.31

Consequently, American Jews see liberalism as a way to combat this. Liberalism, to an American Jew, means support for minorities’ civil rights, equal economic opportunities, and a strict separation of church and state. Lucy Dawidowicz, a prominent Jewish historian, has written:

The Jewish experience in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires established even more emphatically what Jews had learned in Western Europe: that the political right was at best conservative, avowedly Christian and committed to the preservation of ancient privileges; it could, and often did, become reactionary and anti-Semitic.32

No one would go so far as to claim that the modern Republican Party is anti-Semitic. It loudly proclaims its unconditional support for the state of Israel. However, it does seem to embody the “avowedly Christian” aspect, and somewhat support the “preservation of ancient privileges,” both of which are very troublesome to most Jews.33, 34

It has been established through polling data, surveys, and other political science methods that Jews are consistently liberal and vote with the Democratic Party. However, they constitute only a small percentage of the electorate, a measly 2%. Why do politicians spend so much time courting the Jewish vote?

There is no doubt that Jewish political lobbies are among the strongest in Washington. They are well connected, well funded, and their leaders are politically savvy and well educated. All these ingredients make for a strong political influence. Yet there are other groups that have these characteristics, and are not nearly as successful, such as the various Christian Right organizations. What explains this disparity in political success?

29Ibid.
30Ibid, pp. 149-150
31Ibid, pp. 150-151.
32Ibid, p. 158.
33Ibid.
34Forman, p. 160.
Greenberg and Wald attribute this disproportionate influence to Jewish “overparticipation” in politics. They vote in higher numbers, contribute more money to campaigns, and engage in social activism significantly more than non-Jewish Americans. Why do they do this? Greenberg and Wald posit that their higher levels of political participation stem from the fact that Jews generally are of a higher social and economic class than most Americans. With more resources comes more participation.35

Conversely, Stephen D. Isaacs, Elie Wiesel, and Rabbi David Saperstein all point to a different reason: Jews feel an obligation to overparticipate due to their historical treatment. Whether they vote out of fear or out of a sense of “memory and responsibility” is ambiguous. Most Jews do not see anti-Semitism as a major problem in the United States, but rather, in the rest of the world. Rabbi Wernick, a Rabbi of Wichita, KS, stated, “There are latent pockets of anti-Semitism in America, but so what? There’s anti-black, anti-gay feeling as well. However, I do see anti-Semitism as a problem in England, in France, in Scandinavia, in Latin America. There is definitely a rise of anti-Semitism.”36

Regardless of the reasons why Jews overparticipate, the fact remains that they do. When asked about his personal political involvement, Wernick, who leads the Hebrew Congregation, a Conservative Jewish synagogue, stated, “I’m not very politically involved.” When further pressed, he detailed his political activities, which included testifying in front of the state legislature to protect the privacy of religious conversations between a congregation member and himself, performing clandestine circumcisions in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and forming Concerned Jewish Citizens of Wichita, a local group that raises awareness of anti-Semitic activity around the community. This level of involvement is far superior than that of the average American, for whom political involvement consists of voting on Election Day. Clearly, Jews hold themselves to a very high standard of political participation, one that is unseen in any other minority.

group. They expect to be “major players” in the political game, perhaps explaining their high levels of scholastic and monetary achievement, which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.37

However, Jews are cognizant of their minority status, and their activists and politicians understand that in order to achieve anything in the American political system, full of checks and balances designed to frustrate power, one needs to form coalitions. Coalitions send a powerful message to lawmakers, especially alliances between unlikely partners, otherwise known as “strange bedfellow” alliances.

Jews often form alliances with women’s groups and liberal Protestants on reproductive and gay rights. Social justice issues result in coalitions with women’s groups, liberal Protestants, and Catholics. However, Jews’ most powerful ally in ensuring the fate of their co-religionists is a very unlikely one indeed: Evangelical Christians. Possessed of a very strong Zionist fervor, Evangelicals within the Republican Party constantly fight for Israel’s interests, granting them large amounts of foreign aid and military equipment.38

Evangelicals base their support for Israel on theological reasons, especially dispensationalist and millennialist theology. The modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of a prophetic vision, in which God’s covenant with Abraham is honored, and the Chosen People (the Jews) receive the Promised Land. This is a sign of Jesus’ Second Coming, of Armageddon, when the Jews will convert to the one, true faith.39

Jews are aware of Evangelical efforts to convert them to Christianity, and many internally resent it. In addition, Jews abhor the Evangelical efforts to impose what they see as “Christian morality” on America, thus trampling their separatist view of the First Amendment. However, Jewish political elites have realized the advantages of this alliance for the sake of Israel, and grasped the opportunity. Now, the staunchest

35Ibid.
37Ibid. pp. 140-142.
supporters of Israel come not from the Left, but from the Right.40

Jewish political leaders and lobbyists have learned the art of realpolitik, especially in regards to Israel. Rabbi Wernick articulated this very well by saying:

We take help wherever we can get it. At times, the Left are our friends. At other times, the Right are our friends. We go where our friends are. Up until the 60s and 70s, we aligned ourselves with the Left. The Right wanted to convert us, the Right told us we were going to hell, the whole business. So the Left were the liberal guys. After 1973, it started to shift a little bit... so now who’s for Israel? The Right, the extreme Right, the Fundamentalists, those with whom we can’t agree religiously on anything. So when they said this to Ben-Gurion [the first prime minister of Israel], ‘Why are you accepting help from the Right? All they want to do is convert you,’ he said, ‘When the guy comes back, I’ll join.’41

Jewish political leaders have become very skilled at making their interests known. However, unlike most other political groups, such as the various Christian Right or Left lobbies, they do not make their case to the public. Grassroots support is only effective to a degree. Jewish leaders make their cases to the elites, to the government. In explaining this phenomenon, Rabbi Wernick mentioned a specific Bible story: the story of Esther. Esther, a Jew, became the queen of a Persian king. By cleverly interceding on her people’s behalf, Esther averted a massive slaughter of the Jewish people.

“That has been the success of the Jewish people throughout the ages. Throughout the Middle Ages, when the Jews found themselves under Christendom, there was always the Jew in the court, who had the ear of the king. With the Muslims, there was always a vizier, a

40Ibid. pp. 142-145.
41Ibid.
42Wernick.
In examining Jewish voting patterns and behavior, one can see that when Jews step into the voting booth, a powerful historical perspective, theological doctrines of justice and charity, and a sense of fear influence them. No normative theory fully explains this; however, James Davidson Hunter, in his book, To Change the World, alludes to the reasons why Jews have been able to so successfully utilize the political system. Jews have infiltrated all levels of society, especially the highest class: the governing class. Jews are the most overrepresented group in Congress, making up 8.4% of the House and Senate, while constituting less than 2% of the American electorate. Jews have penetrated the broader American culture, where they have focused their efforts. This lies in stark contrast to Evangelicals, who have created a thriving subculture replete with books, movies, and music. However, this culture is inhabited and consumed solely by Evangelicals, creating a bubble. Thus, no real change will be ever attained if those in the main culture do not share that belief.\(^{46, 47}\)

In a broader sense, Jewish political involvement rests on a uniquely American foundation. In no other country were Jews so broadly accepted as the United States. In no other country was there an immediate separation between church and state. No other country in modern history began as a nation of immigrants. This gave Jews a feeling that they could wield political power, and not just be content with avoiding persecution. This newfound opportunity created educated, skillful, and confident leaders. They exemplify the concept of *chutzpah*, defined as “nervy, outrageous audacity.”\(^{48}\) One cannot be timid in the world of politics; one has to act with authority.

A prime example of this leadership style is Michael Horowitz. An agitator for global human rights, Horowitz skillfully brought together Jews and Evangelicals to pressure Congress into legislating on human trafficking, the Sudan campaign, and religious freedom. He is described as “brash, blunt, bombastic, supremely confident, relentless in political pursuit.”\(^{49}\) By not emphasizing human rights as a Jewish issue, or as an Evangelical issue, this coalition was able to achieve broad, sweeping reforms. Much of this success can be attributed to Horowitz’s skillful, strategic, and bold leadership – his *chutzpah*.

Another very influential Jewish leader is Rabbi David Saperstein. He is the leader of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, a Washington lobby. He also served in President Obama’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the only rabbi to ever do so. He was listed as one of America’s most influential Jewish rabbis by Newsweek’s annual report.\(^{50}\)

Leaders such as Horowitz and Saperstein thrive in the American system, where everybody has an opportunity to rise to the top of the political heap. This truly reflects the American mentality, one without prejudice or hindrances toward any group. By separating church and state, the Founding Fathers prevented the discrimination and violence that ravaged Europe. All religious groups, racial groups, political groups, and any other group, with the right strategy and resources, can attain power and influence. This egalitarian mentality is so different from everywhere else in the world, where connections and personal favors count for far more than education and resources.

Jews, so used to the old model of persecution and discrimination, found in America something that still has no equal around the world: an open and free society where everybody is given opportunities. By employing an effective strategy of political and cultural change spearheaded by capable, savvy leaders, Jews have made their footprint in American politics in a way that is unparalleled in any other nation.

In the late 18th century, when the United States was barely formed, Washington’s letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, did not reflect reality. Only a small percentage of the population (land-owning, white, Protestant males) had suffrage; certain

---


\(^{47}\) Fowler, et. al., pp. 179, 189-192.


\(^{49}\) Ibid, p. 146.

religious groups (Catholics) were barred from holding political office; and most significantly, an entire racial group, African-Americans, was enslaved. In the two hundred years since then, America has transformed. Although many would argue that America has many more strides to take in that direction, this brief look at Jewish involvement in American politics demonstrates that at least one important step has been made in ensuring that the United States “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

Bibliography


Wernick, Nissim [Rabbi]. Personal Interview. 8 April 2011.


EMILY POWELL

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL OR THE PROBLEM OF GOOD?
AN ANALYSIS OF AUGUSTINE AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Many years ago, the philosopher Epicurus questioned, "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" In this short string of questions, Epicurus captured one of the greatest quandaries not only of philosophy and theology, but of humanity and life itself. One need not look far to discover that there is something terribly wrong with the world. From the murder of Abel to the Holocaust to the attacks on September 11, its history is riddled with accounts of atrocity. It is for evidence such as this that the theists are called to give an account. They must answer the dilemma of how an all good, all knowing, all powerful God could possibly allow such a thing as evil to exist in His creation.

It was to this end that St. Augustine endeavored. Augustine developed what is called the free will theodicy. This notion of man's free will has become central to much of Christian theology. For Augustine, it is the avenue by which he believes he is able to keep God from being morally responsible for the evil in the world. While this
view has been adopted by many, others have found serious fault with it. Indeed, it seems that Augustine himself grew increasingly dissatisfied with it. In this paper, I will examine Fred Berthold’s arguments against the theodicy as well as T.D.J. Chappell’s arguments in support of Augustine, which reveal his frustrations with his own theodicy and his changing approach to the problem of evil. I will also argue that Chappell’s analysis makes a stronger case for Augustine and provides solutions to problems posed by Berthold, though it by no means provides a complete answer to the problem of evil. In order to show this, I will first present Augustine’s proposed free will solution. Then, I will examine the counterargument posed by Berthold followed by the response of Chappell. Finally, I will conclude by making my own comments on the problem of evil in general, arguing that a complete theodicy is not attainable, yet the existence or problem of evil, rather than indicating that there is no God, strongly indicates that there is a God.

It is precisely the apparent contradiction between evil’s existence and God’s attributes that St. Augustine attempted to resolve. In order to show that a wholly good, omnipotent, and omniscient God and evil are, in fact, compatible, he formulated his free will theodicy. Augustine suggests that God has a good reason for allowing evil into His creation - the free will of humanity. If God had created humans without free will, they would be nothing but automatons and their actions would morally insignificant and worthless. Not only that, but the weight of responsibility for all the evil in the world would ultimately fall on God’s shoulders. Humans, lacking free will, could not reasonably be held accountable for their actions. So God, their creator, would be the culprit. This would certainly not be a desirable state of affairs. Thus, Augustine reasons, God gave humanity free will in order that their actions would, in fact, have significance.¹ The added bonus of this is that humans, and not God, then become responsible for the moral evil in the world. Augustine believes that free will is worth the price of evil because “an errant horse is better than a stone that cannot err because it has neither motion nor feeling of its own. So


a creature which sins by its own free will is more excellent than one which cannot sin because it has no free will.”² Ultimately, he sees a world with free will and evil as more valuable than a world with no free will and no evil.

Now that I have presented Augustine’s theodicy, I will present and evaluate some arguments for both sides. While the free will theodicy has become central to Christian theology, there are those who think it has some serious flaws. One such person is Fred Berthold Jr. Berthold gives the theodicy a fair examination, but ultimately concludes that it cannot stand. He begins his analysis by outlining Augustine’s definition and use of the will. Augustine does not view the will as something separate from a person, but that “along with memory and understanding it constitutes the triune faculty of the human mind.”³ The will is not caused by anything within a person, but rather is part of a person, an essential characteristic of humanity. Since he views the will as a part of the self, Augustine understands the will as functioning according to habits and desires of the self. So, he believes that “in order to will something positively, we must be moved by a positive affec­tion.”⁴ That is, the will is not exercised unless it is enticed. Also, Augustine sees the will as necessarily free and thinks that “it makes no sense to say that voluntas is not free, for a person’s willing is his voluntary life.”⁵ God created the will in this way precisely so that man’s will would be freely directed towards Himself by love or “enticement” of the affections. However, as seen in the story of the Fall, man’s will was enticed by other things and directed away from God. According to Berthold, this is Augustine’s definition and use of the will upon which his theodicy hinges.

As Berthold points out, this definition of the free will leads to more questions for Augustine to answer in order for his theodicy to function. Adam possessed free will, but what about the rest of mankind who now live with the consequences of Adam and Eve’s

³Ibid., p. 526.
⁴Ibid., p. 527.
failure? Berthold points out that Augustine thinks "that fallen men have been ‘abandoned’ by God." Before the Fall, Adam had the choice of directing his will toward the good or toward the evil, both being there to entice Him. After the Fall, God has, in a sense, withdrawn Himself. This makes it seem that Augustine is saying that mankind now no longer has free choice, a puzzling idea since Augustine’s theodicy relies on the very notion of the free choice of mankind. Indeed, Augustine almost seems to be contradicting himself by saying that "it was by the evil use of free will that man destroyed both it and himself...so when man by his own free will sinned, then sin became victorious over him, and the freedom of the will was lost." This implies that man now has no choice but to sin and does not really have a free will. If this is what Augustine means, he has a problem, "for it is essential to his theology that post-Adamic humans be held morally responsible for their sin, and, as we have seen, this would not be the case unless they sinned with free will." As Berthold points out, this is problematic if these post-Adamic humans have no choice but to sin.

According to Berthold, Augustine’s solution to this problem is that “God simply abandons the sinner, which removes from him those enticements ‘from above’ in response to which his love might carry him towards God.” So, man is still free in the sense that they are voluntarily choosing their actions. They are just no longer “wooed” by God. Berthold does not seem to find this a satisfactory solution as God has, by withdrawing his “divine enticement,” caused them to no longer have even the choice of directing their will toward the good. Augustine admits that man is not free to not sin, but also that “we choose the evil voluntarily. The evil inclinations are truly ours, and we are not coerced by an external agent.” This is supposed to explain how man is still morally responsible for evil. Though they are no longer free to not sin in the way that Adam was, their actions are still from within themselves. This absolves God from responsibility as His abandonment of mankind was His just punishment for the Fall.

However, Berthold does not think this helps solve the problem for Augustine because “it is hard to see how the individual can even will the good in his condition of having been abandoned to his sinful self.” Augustine is placed in a precarious position between claiming that mankind is free - and therefore - responsible and also claiming that mankind is not free to not sin. It is hard for Berthold and others to see how Augustine reconciles these claims, finding it very difficult to avoid the conclusion that, on Augustine’s analysis, we do not possess free will. It is irrelevant that the evil desires are within us for we are overmastered by them.”

Furthermore, not only does Berthold reject Augustine’s explanation of the free will of fallen man, but he also fails to see how Augustine can explain how man fell in the first place. Adam was not subject to the kind of “overmastering desires” that men are now. He was free in a fuller sense, being free to not sin and also was supposed to be created with an upright intellect and will. So, for Berthold, “the crucial question with regard to the pre-fallen Adam has to do with his state of knowledge, for as we have seen Augustine holds that one cannot act with free will in the absence of knowledge.” It is puzzling how Adam, living in a perfect creation and being a perfect specimen of creation, having knowledge of God as well as the enticements from above, could possibly freely choose to reject those superior enticements for the inferior. Augustine must provide an answer to this puzzle in order for his theology to be successful. The crux of the matter is whether or not Adam was created with full knowledge or wisdom. For “if the first man was created wise, why has he been seduced? If he was created foolish, how is God to escape being held to be the author of vice?”

Augustine attempts to explain this by saying that Adam was somewhere between being wise and foolish, meaning that, like an infant, he had not yet become fully wise. This is supposed to show how it was possible for him to be seduced, but it leads to yet another
problem. It seems unfair to hold Adam responsible for his decision when he “lacked the knowledge, or ‘healthy state of wisdom’, which alone could have made it possible for him to understand the alternatives before him.” Berthold argues that since Adam lacked this wisdom and knew nothing of death or evil, he could not have really understood the choice he was making. From his perspective, if God granted him full wisdom, it remains to be shown how he could have been seduced. If God did not grant him full wisdom, it is difficult to see how Adam, and not God, was responsible for that seduction. From this, Berthold concludes that “the horrendous consequences, the dreadful penalties for Adam and all subsequent human beings, seem disproportionate for an act that could not have been in any full sense deliberate.” The fact that he had free will is little consolation.

On Berthold’s account, it is certainly difficult to see how Augustine’s theodicy can still work. It seems that Augustine himself was frustrated by the very same issues and came to different conclusions about the problem of evil later in his life. It is evident that he was sensitive to these major issues and gradually shifted to a different approach to the problem of evil, perhaps even becoming an opponent of his own theodicy towards the end of his life. T.D.J. Chappell’s examination of Augustine’s modified approach reveals this. On Chappell’s view, Augustine improved his analysis of the problem of evil and provided a way of at least accounting for the possibility of the fall, the exact problem posed by Berthold and others.

Chappell begins by detailing Augustine’s own position which Chappell calls “the no-explanation account” or the NEA. He cites the City of God where Augustine claims that there is no efficient cause of the evil will and to look for it would be fruitless. There is no effect, but rather a defect. Augustine says that “to begin to will evil is this: to defect from him who supremely Is to that which is lesser...So since the causes of such defections are not efficient but deficient—as I said—to want to find them is as if someone wanted to see darkness or hear silence.” Chappell interprets this as Augustine’s NEA and believes that it explains the answer to Berthold’s question or rather, explains why it can’t be explained. The basic summary of the idea is that “to explain an action’s motivation must be to say what good that actions aims at, and cannot be to say what evil it aims at. For evil is precisely that at which intentional action does not aim.” The example Chappell gives to demonstrate this is that of someone drinking a can of paint. One might say that Joe drank the paint because he likes the taste of paint. This seems strange, but it’s still a reasonable explanation. However, to say that Joe drank the paint because it tastes awful or because it is poisonous would not be a reasonable explanation. What Chappell is getting at is that an action “can be explained only by reference to some good at which it was supposed to aim. It follows that an action which cannot be seen as aiming at any supposed good whatever cannot be explained.” The Fall, which Chappell calls a “radically bad action” is just such an action. Thus, there is no way to provide a full explanation of the Fall.

While this may at first appear to be of little help to Augustine, Chappell believes it is a key part of the theistic approach to the problem of evil. It helps to solve a problem posed by Hume. According to Hume, either evil is not really evil or God is not really good for “if human actions can be traced up, by a necessary chain, to the Deity, they can never be criminal...Or if they be criminal, we must retract the attribute of perfection, which we ascribe to the Deity.” If there really is such a “necessary chain,” Hume has a strong argument. However, if the Fall is what the NEA says it is, a radically bad action that can have no explanation, it is possible for the chain to be broken and God to be found innocent. Indeed, this is what Chappell argues, claiming that “the apologetical point of the NEA is to break Hume’s ‘necessary chain.” The idea is that an action that is so bad cannot be fully explained and therefore, cannot fit into the normal pattern of causation.
So, it cannot be traced to God because “the point of the NEA is just that, in case of a radically bad action, there is no ‘continued chain of necessary causes.’ The existence of at least one such action is precisely what breaks the chain.” The Fall is that one action and because of the NEA, Chappell believes that Augustine can avoid Hume’s impasse.

Chappell then turns to another impasse. It is the very question to which Berthold did not think Augustine provided a satisfactory answer. Chappell refers to this as Augustine’s Dilemma, or AD, for Augustine himself pondered the problem of how “‘if the first man was created wise, why was he misled? And if he was created foolish, how can God not be the cause of vice, since folly is the greatest of the vices?’” As Berthold showed, it seems that Augustine’s earlier answer, that Adam was neither wise nor foolish, but somewhere in between, only exacerbates the problem. Chappell recognizes this too. He sees Augustine’s early solution as only leading to a reformulation of AD which ultimately concerns the question of Adam’s moral perfection. With that in mind, the dilemma now runs as follows:

1) Adam was created by God, but fell by his own error.

2) God must have created Adam either morally perfect or morally imperfect.

3) If he was created morally perfect, by definition, he would not have fallen.

4) If he was created morally imperfect, then God, as the creator, is responsible and not Adam.

What Chappell aims to prove is that premise 3 is wrong, that there is no logical or definitional impossibility of a morally perfect being falling.

Chappell’s proposed method of showing that morally perfect beings can, in fact, fall is the Nothingness Account, or NA, which Augustine actually advocated. According to Chappell, the NA, properly understood, can solve AD as well as be compatible with the NEA. The NA comes from Augustine’s City of God where he proposes that “‘the things which [God] made are good because they are from Him, but they are mutable because they are not made from Him, but from nothing.’” Therefore, due to his creation out of nothing and subsequent mutability, Adam was morally perfect, but also able to cease being morally perfect. Chappell also recognizes that the NA does not in any way entail that it was necessary that Adam fall, but merely possible. In this way, the NA can still be compatible with the NEA for it only attempts to show the possibility of the Fall and not to give a full explanation of it. It provides a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one and “all the NEA need deny is the possibility of a complete explanation of the Fall. The defender of the NEA must reject any account which purports to give necessary and sufficient conditions of the Fall’s occurring.”

Chappell then holds that, together, the NEA and the NA can work to overcome Augustine’s Dilemma. AD suggests that a morally perfect being, by definition, could not fall while the NA shows how, in fact, it could. There can be two kinds of morally perfect beings, one such that, partaking “of God’s own nature, it is necessary morally perfect, and its moral perfection is of the kind which cannot admit of a fall; but if a being is created out of nothing by God, then although necessarily morally perfect, its moral perfection is of the kind which can admit of a fall.” Therefore, Adam, belonging to the latter category, was able to fall.

While Chappell clearly thinks this a satisfactory solution, he recognizes that critics might not be so easily appeased. Despite the reasoning of the NA, the question still remains, “so what if Adam is created out of nothing? Why shouldn’t Adam still be immune from sin?” Indeed, it is still an issue for which Augustine is called to account and Chappell thinks he can do so. According to him, the answer lies in God’s infinitude vs. Adam’s finitude. He claims that God is infinitely good while Adam is only finitely good and so, “it is a contradiction for

4Ibid., p. 872.
5Ibid., p. 873.
6Ibid., p. 873-874.
7Ibid., p. 875.
8Ibid., p. 878.
9Ibid., p. 879.
face to face, but instead, as evidenced by the set-up and ceremonies of the Temple, could only have connection with God through veils and sacrifices. Yet, God was still there and did not “abandon” them in the sense that Berthold speaks of, a total deprivation of His presence. Thus, by Augustine’s understanding of the will, it was still at least possible that their wills be freely directed toward the good.

In reference to Berthold’s second main objection, that of how it was possible for Adam to fall, Chappell’s argument provides a satisfactory answer. Berthold argued that it was not possible that Adam should fall and still be morally responsible. The nothingness account that Chappell gives provides a way to show that despite Adam’s moral perfection and goodness, it was, in fact, possible that he fall because that perfection and goodness was mutable and finite. While this does not give a full explanation of the Fall, which in fact Chappell argues is not even possible, it at least shows, contrary to Berthold’s view, that there is no logical contradiction in saying that Adam was morally perfect and yet, Adam fell. So, in that respect, Chappell’s analysis of Augustine is superior to Berthold’s. However, this in no way means that Chappell has answered all the questions or solved all the problems. It still remains to be shown why Adam fell. I am of the mind to agree with Augustine and Chappell, that this action is inexplicable and the exact motivation can never be fully known.

Now that I have examined the problem of evil and the various arguments concerning it, I will provide my own view on the issue. While I think that Augustine’s argument certainly carries weight and value, I also see where it is lacking. Obviously, as he gradually drifted away from his own theodicy, Augustine was sensitive to this as well. Just like most other theodicies, it simply cannot cover all the bases. It cannot fully and completely answer the problem of evil, allowing us to apply a “case closed” sticker and shelve the matter once and for all. Honestly, I do not think that there is a theodicy that would allow us to do so. However, I do not think this means we should quit trying. It seems to me that we should try to understand why God would allow evil and at the same time be prepared to accept that, if God is really God, there are some things we will simply not be able to fully

---

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 881.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 882.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 883.
comprehend. It is apparent that Augustine grew increasingly aware of this tension as he moved from first trying to explain the Fall, to eventually concluding that it could not be explained. Some things just have to be consigned to mystery and I think the theist can comfortably and rationally do so. This may seem a very un-philosophical view, but I shall elaborate on the reasoning behind it.

In pondering the problem of evil, I am more rationally prepared to concede that the compatibility of God’s goodness and evil is true, but cannot be fully explained than that there is no God. On the face of it, the former seems less rational, but I would argue that, at the root, the latter is far more irrational. The atheist argues that there cannot be a good God and evil. I propose that there cannot be evil without a good God. Now, this seems puzzling. To clarify, I do not mean that God causes evil or that evil is in any way entailed by God. What I do mean is that the concept of evil itself is ultimately unintelligible apart from the concept of God. As I have thought about the problem of evil and various theodicies such as Augustine’s, my instinct has been that the very fact that we do recognize evil as evil and perceive it as being such a tremendous problem, instead of disproving God, is actually evidence in support of God.

In order to support this claim, I will examine the means by which some attempt to disprove God in the hopes of digging up its roots in absurdity. The claim of the atheist is this: God does not exist because there is evil in the world and the existence of a wholly good, omniscient, and omnipotent God is logically contradictory or at least, probabilistically incompatible with the existence of evil. Notice that one of the key premises in this argument is that evil exists. This means that the atheist has witnessed evil, recognized it as evil, and claims to know that it is absolutely true that it is evil. Thus, they conclude God does not exist. However, it seems to me that if they deny God, they can no longer claim that it is absolutely true that evil is evil, the very grounds upon which they deny Him. As C.S. Lewis, a former atheist, put it, “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.” Yet, if there is no God and the universe and the lives it contains are just meaningless matters of chance, then there is no “straight line” to compare it to. Indeed, if this is the case, the atheist has no grounds for calling anything evil in the first place. For them to do so would be akin to attempting to build a building starting a foot off the ground, an utterly foolish and fruitless endeavor. Evil acts are condemned as evil because they are wrong. However, apart from a “straight line” or standard with which to support why they are wrong, the atheist cannot reasonably declare that something is wrong or evil, a necessity for their argument against the existence of God.

So, if it is true that God does not exist, the more logical conclusion actually ends up being that nothing is really truly evil. Without a standard, all we can be really said to have are private, subjective conceptions of what is good and what is evil. Indeed, this is the hallmark of the post-modern era. In an age of “tolerance” and subjective truth, the only action that can be condemned as wrong is to condemn something as wrong. There is no absolute truth though that is a very absolute kind of statement which, in order to live by, must be believed to be absolutely true. Obviously, the argument is starting to unravel. Lewis sensed this conflict within the atheist’s argument, saying, “Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust.” The problem is that if evil and justice are subjective, there is no reason why man should experience such outrage at apparently evil acts such as the Holocaust or September 11. Perhaps from Hitler’s subjective perspective, it was perfectly good and not evil to exterminate millions of people. On what grounds do we object? For the atheist, it seems that there can be none.

---

39 Ibid.
Yet, we do object. We do claim to know that such acts are evil and absolutely and inherently so. This existence and recognition of evil is an indication, not that God does not exist, but that He does. Again, Lewis seems to capture the argument better than I am able, wondering "if the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did [he], who was supposed to be part of the show, find [himself] in such violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water, because man is not a water animal: a fish would not feel wet." If we are really part of a meaningless world where nothing is really good or evil, we would not have such a profound sense of meaning or adamant belief that evil is evil, but "we should never have found out that it has no meaning just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be a word without meaning" — just as evil would be a word without meaning. Basically, the atheistic argument fails because it relies on the claim that evil is really evil, a claim that cannot be reasonably supported from an atheistic world view.

So, I sympathize with Augustine's later conclusion that the entrance of evil into the world through the Fall is ultimately inexplicable. As puzzling as this may be to the theist, he need not despair. As shown, he can quite happily and rationally say, "I do not fully comprehend how a good God allows evil, but that is okay. For, apart from God, I do not comprehend evil at all." Indeed, the atheist has not dug deep enough and uncovered the contradiction of his own belief. Perhaps, if he did, he might uncover greater questions, more astounding things to confound his "reason." For if there is an all good, all knowing, all powerful God and if humans really are guilty, the great question would be not why He should allow evil, but why He should allow us? As William Dembski concluded, "the problem of evil is part of a much larger problem, namely, how a benevolent God can restore a prodigal universe to himself. This is the problem of good, and it subsumes the problem of evil."
INDONESIA AND THE JOMBANG MODEL OF ISLAM

As the age of globalization progresses, conflict has erupted across the world between countries, ethnicities, and religions. None is as evident as the clash between the Western and Islamic worlds. Samuel Huntington presents a grim view of the conflict in his article, “Clash of Civilizations”, in which he describes the ongoing conflict as one of two mutually-exclusive civilizations. Suggesting that the problem is not emerging Muslim extremism but with Islam’s inherent incompatibility with the Western values needed for liberal democracy, he presents Islam as a univocal civilization. This thesis oversimplifies the multivocal nature of Islam - and civilizations in general - and ignores the vast variety of thought, culture, and religious practices which exist among Muslims throughout the world. As more scholars address the influence of religion in this conflict, they are describing and recommending ways to use Islam itself as a way to counteract radicalism and oppression.

In 2007, the RAND Corporation, an American organization offering analysis and solutions to contemporary political challenges, released a report entitled “Building Moderate Muslim Networks,” which addressed the need for a Muslim alternative to the spreading Islamic radicalism. Nevertheless, the RAND study treats Islam as a sterile ideology rather than a passionate religious worldview that provides a paradigm of life and morality more fundamental than political persuasions. Their recommendation to work with liberal and secular Muslims, indicating a desired distance from traditional Islamic religion, falls into the usual Western trap of religious avoidance by failing to understand the way religious values inform both political and personal opinions. Akbar Ahmed provides a richer understanding of the diversity of Islam through the models detailed in his book, Journey into Islam: the mystic, universalist, Sufi tradition or the Ajmer model; the more secular and modern Western-friendly Aligarh school; and the conservative Deoband model, which stresses both faith and reason when interacting with the world but has grown popular for its anti-West stance and concern with Islamic cultural purity. Ahmed’s research found that the Aligarh model, which he had considered the most promising approach to meeting the crisis of globalization, has lost the security of its Muslim identity increasingly reflected in the anti-West tendencies of the Deoband school. However, in his diagnosis of the ailing Aligarh, he overlooks a promising example of Islam which has already produced a democracy. The RAND study, too, only briefly touches upon the contributions of Muslim institutions in this country. This example is Indonesia.

With a Muslim population of 87% of 220 million, Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority nation, despite its location at the edge of the Islamic world. Due to its physical and cultural distance from the center of Islamic society, it has contributed little in ways of theology

---

or practice to Islam. This is unfortunate given the progress it has made toward democracy. After gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia adopted a national ideology of pluralism - expressed through the five guiding principles of Pancasila ("nationalism, internationalism, consent, social justice, and belief in God") - and a constitution splitting execute power between parliament and president. Instability and suppression of political parties under President Suharto nearly destroyed the parliamentary system and threatened the democratic government. However, since Abdurrahman Wahid became the first democratically elected president in 1999, the climate of democracy has improved in Indonesia with the strengthening of the parliament, a greater separation between the branches of power, and freer media.

This political shift did not occur due to a weak affiliation with Islam, as Huntington’s thesis might suggest. Rather, a dominant form of Indonesian Islam embraced the ideal of separation between religious and political authority, what Alfred Stepan describes as “the twin tolerations.” A prominent religious leader and president of the Nahdlatul Ulama, a traditional Muslim organization, Wahid nevertheless championed pluralism and religious freedom over an Islamic state. Despite its conservative membership and affiliation with the pesantren system of traditional Islamic boarding schools, the NU espouses a version of Islam which is oriented toward social activism rather than politically-enforced morality. This model of Islam, exemplified by Wahid and the NU, exchanges potential political privilege for the ability to organize and compete freely with other religious groups in the social sphere, illustrating Stepan’s thesis. Rather than delegating Indonesia to the footnotes of the Islamic story,

---


4 Esposito, p. 205.


6 This is the very model of Islam that both American foreign policy officials and Islamic leaders in the Middle East need to be examining. By analyzing the characteristics of this model and the conditions under which it came about, we can formulate strategies for recreating it in other parts of the world.

7 Strands of the Deoband model and the extremist Wahhabi philosophy which characterizes it have made their way into Indonesia. However, the dominant model of Islam - and the one which deserves attention - is defined by the theology of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Wahid’s leadership, and the Indonesian pesantren. Keeping with Ahmed’s trend of naming his models after influential cities, I will refer to the Indonesian model of Islam as Jombang, which is a center of Islamic learning in East Java. In addition to being the birthplace of Wahid, Jombang was home to Wahid’s father, Wahid Hasyim, who served as minister of religious affairs and helped formulate the Pancasila, and his grandfather, Hasyim Asy’ari, a pesantren founder who established the NU in 1926.10 All three men are buried in Jombang, and the location of their gravesite has become a pilgrimage destination.12

8 The Jombang model is characterized by its dynamic theology, contextualization of faith, strong socio-religious identification, use of traditional institutions, and its vision of Islam as a force of social activism. Along with an underlying Sunni theology, this model also draws on the influence of Sufism, modernist thought, and liberal leadership, creating a practical Islamic expression that is neither “conservative traditionalist nor Islamic modernist.” Following Wahid’s emphasis on “Indonesianization” over Islamization, Jombang is able to draw on the positive legacies of both Islam and Indonesian culture toward pluralist ends.14 This stress on religious and cultural commitment produces a secure, authentic identity that can stand against the Westernizing affects of globalization. Working primarily through
religious rather than political institutions (notably the pesantren system and Nahdlatul Ulama) allows the Jombang model to be cultivated without threatening religious freedom. And above all its dedication to civic society development provides a positive direction for Islamic social reform, and promotes the participation and pluralism necessary for democracy. The combination of these five qualities makes Jombang a viable model for Islamically-informed democracy, and they deserve further examination by anyone concerned with the growth of democracy in the Islamic world.

The theology of the Jombang model can be understood in part by looking at the Nahdlatul Ulama’s official religious stance. Adhering to the ahl al-sunna wa’l-jama’a (Sunni) orthodoxy of Islam,13 which NU calls “Aswaja,” it upholds the principles of tawassuth, tawazun, and i‘tidal. These principles - moderate attitude and avoidance of extremism (tawassuth); balance in all aspects of life, including between religion and reason (tawazun), and the aspiration toward harmony and social justice (i‘tidal) - are based on Quranic passages and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, the NU calls for the practice of a tolerant attitude (tasamah) toward people of different backgrounds and beliefs.14-15 In addition to hadith and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), the NU draws upon the teachings of Sufi leaders such as Al-Ghazali.16 Many pesantren leaders, including Wahid’s grandfather, have also been Sufi leaders, underlining the influence of Sufism in the Jombang model.17

But the dynamic quality of Jombang theology can best be seen in Wahid’s ideal of essentialism and the Aswaja concept of social relevance as expressed through the NU. According to Wahid, it is imperative that Muslims distinguish between Islamic doctrines that “are of essential importance to religion” and those which can change
d to reflect an evolving society.20 By employing the practice of ijtihad (“perpetual reinterpretation”), Islam can respond to “everchanging human situations.”21 The aim here is not to let secular developments dictate which doctrines are acceptable, but to transform Islam into a creative force capable of influencing the modern world. Similarly, the NU recommends that Islamic principles, such as the protection of religious freedom, life, mind, property, and marital and reproductive rights, be applied more broadly to inform decisions regarding national and international social issues.22 The dynamic quality of Islamic “social relevance” makes it suitable for dealing practically with the challenges of the modern world.

In its theology, the Jombang model can be seen as blend of Ahmed’s three models, incorporating their strongest aspects with few of their shortcomings. Jombang emphasizes a balance between faith and reason, as do both the Deoband and Aligarh models.23 Aligarh shares a similar “essentialist” understanding and aim to integrate with the modern world. However, it gives too much weight on reason and modernization, replacing too many of the essentials of faith and culture with secular Westernism, whereas Jombang remains strongly rooted in Islam. The Deoband model is the one that more closely reaches a balance between faith and reason. Despite its push for an Islamic state and negative view of modernization, it can accommodate evolving attitudes about democracy and female women’s public role,24 and can utilize modern developments such as technology to compete religiously in a global world25 Deoband is also influenced by the philosophy of Ibn Taymiyya and the principle of ijtihad,26 only Deoband follows its extremist reinterpretation by Wahhab27 while the Jombang model applies ijtihad in a more dynamic manner.28 With its

17Esposito, pp. 199-200.
18Ibid., pp. 202-203.
19Ibid., pp. 207.
22Ibid., p. 71.
23Ibid., p. 64.
24Ibid., p. 35.
25Ibid., p. 36.
26Esposito, p. 207.
dynamism, Jombang is more flexible than the Deoband's more stagnant and exclusivist Islam obsessed with ideological purity. The Ajmer model is also evident in Jombang's stress of the pluralist principles such as tolerance and in the role of Sufism in the pesantri system, but Jombang has a more practical approach to modern challenges than the otherworldly Ajmer model.

The second characteristic of the Jombang model, the contextualization of faith, refers to Wahid's call for the "Indonesianization" of Islam, or turning to the practices traditional Indonesian culture when interpreting Islamic values. He distinguishes between religious revelation, which is permanent, and the cultural context of religion, which changes over time and between countries. Traditional culture, as long as it does not contradict the teachings of Islam, can be a positive expression of Islam. On the other hand, the Arab culture at the center of the Islamic world is not necessarily positive or essential to Islam, and should not be adopted as the religion spreads. Wahid rejects the political institutionalization of Islamic law as a product of Saudi culture and "distorted historical reality." Instead, Indonesians should use the positive legacies of their own culture as a context for their faith, and encourage the cultivation of traditional culture.

The Jombang model's advocacy of pluralism and religious freedom indeed reflect Indonesian history and culture, and illustrate the way contextualization of Islam can lead to democratic values. The very geographic makeup of Indonesia lends itself to pluralism. A "crossroads" of different religious, ethnic, political, and economic influences, Indonesia is naturally "well-suited for hybridity and globality." Even after Islam spread to Indonesia, religious authorities did not enforce a monolithic vision of Islam. From the beginning there was a variety of Muslim identities and unique blends of religion and culture. In most regions, law was not based solely on Sharia but on a variety of pluralistic sources. Additionally, Islam itself has a history of separation between political and religious leaders, exemplified by the pluralism present in medieval Muslim world. This basis of pluralism in both Indonesian and Islamic culture lends credence to the tolerant teachings of Wahid and the NU.

Looking at the history of colonial and modern governmental mishandling of religion, the cultural context of Indonesia gives further explanation for the NU's stance on separation of religion from government. In colonial times, the government, trying to force Western ideas of religious "privatism" on Islam, strictly curtailed Muslim political involvement. Skeptical of political rulers, Muslim leaders turned to the villages and created networks of Islamic schools, building the "practical precedents for civic autonomy and a balance of social powers." During the struggle for independence, a split emerged between Muslim groups who believed in the necessity of an Islamic state and those who advocated a return to pluralism. This division continued under Suharto's presidency, where he manipulated the expression of political Islam and repressed oppositional parties, labeling them as deviant fundamentalist sects. While many championed an Islamic state, others criticized this political focus as narrow and an impediment to progress. Instead they called for a program of social development, "the ultimate goal [of which] should be the creation of a Muslim civil society to counterbalance the state and promote a public culture of pluralism and participation." This goal illustrates an alternative vision of Islamic society, one which is not enforced as a political ideology but one that grows naturally from the contributive efforts of Muslims in the social sphere. The equation of a Muslim civil society with a culture of pluralism conveys a model of Islam that has its roots both in Indonesian and Islamic culture, and exemplifies the method of drawing on positive historical and social legacies that Wahid refers to as "Indonesianization."

---

29Ibid., p. 206.
30Ibid., p. 206.
31Hefner, p. xvii.
33Ibid., p. 29.
34Ibid., p. 7.
36Ibid., p. 15.
37Esposito, p. 203.
38Hefner, pp. 16-17.
With this background in mind, it becomes easy to understand why the traditionalist NU supports a democratic separation of mosque and state, while the modernist Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, favors an Islamic state. At first this appears to be the reverse of typical Muslim organizations, where the modernists are the ones who advocate a secular state. However, many modernist Islamic schools of thought, including Aligarh, equate “modernism” with “Westernism.” This is not necessarily true. Modernism can more accurately be described as pluralism, and pluralism lies at the heart of traditional Indonesian-Islamic identity. Where followers of the Aligarh model might turn to outside cultures to inform their vision of modernism, the Jombang advocates a more introverted approach to “modernist” values. Indonesia, like many other Islamic societies, has a wealth of positive cultural traditions from which to draw in the search for a stable, pluralist society. Not abandoning but strengthening traditional culture and contextualizing religion, Jombang provides a method of integrating with the modern world without abandoning identity.

This leads to the third strength of the Jombang model: a secure sense of religious and cultural identity. Contextualization - as well as social action and the use of tradition institutions - is one of the means by which it is obtained, but its actualization is of critical importance. Through globalization, Western values and culture are spread imperialistically throughout the world. Many societies in the Islamic world reject Western values and culture as morally bankrupt, but are unable to stop their encroachment on native society. In a desperate attempt to return to preserve traditional identity, many people adopt hostile, conservative outlooks and political approaches. This trend can be seen in Ahmed’s book with the popularity of extremist Deoband role models, whose tough stance against the United States and call for return to Islamic purity attracts Muslims who feel angry and powerless in the face of Westernization. This is best illustrated by the hostility Ahmed discovers at Aligarh. The model known for its accommodation with Western culture, Ahmed describes them now as “losing their language, religion, and identity” and notes that the “only difference was that the students at Aligarh were hostile and those at Deoband were courteous.”

Understanding that the conservative trend is a response to threatened identity, this comparison makes sense. Those at Deoband, surrounded by conservative cultural and political Islam, are more secure in their Islamic identity than those Aligarh, who are torn between a strong, Western culture and a weakening Muslim identity. In this light, Aligarh’s defensive turn to Deoband trends is almost inevitable. However, the Jombang model avoids this trap by reinforcing authentic religious and cultural identity while seeking integration with the modern world. As Aligarh loses its identity by becoming acculturated to the West - again, mistaking modernism for Westernism rather than pluralism - it becomes vulnerable to extremist influences. Although Indonesians also reject some Western values, anti-West sentiment does not extend to democracy because they are secure enough in their Islamic and Indonesian identities to be able to draw upon the pluralistic roots of culture. This security counterattacks Deoband tendencies and protects the democratic ideals of the Jombang model.

However, Wahid warns that a pluralistic approach to Islam and the state comes with the danger that, over time, Islamic identity will acculturate to a globalized (Western, secular) society. In order to preserve an authentic identity - against a backlash - Indonesians must draw upon their Islamic and cultural heritage for inspiration; specifically, “indigenous Islamic institutions outside the modern sector, such as the traditional pesantren system, must be identified and utilized in regenerating and the Indonesian Muslim community.” Without an official state endorsement, Islamic identity must be cultivated and passed down through other means: traditional institutions. This - the use of non-state, indigenous organization to consolidate religious and cultural identity - is the fourth characteristic of the Jombang model. In Indonesia, both the pesantren and the NU are implemented to meet this ideal.

---

90Esposito, p. 203.
91Esposito, p. 208.
92Ibid.
The Nahdlatul Ulama and pesantren system have an intimate relationship. Established by pesantren leaders to preserve traditional Islamic culture from modernizing influences, one of the founders compared the two by stating, “Pesantren is small NU while NU is a big pesantren.” With a membership of 20% of Indonesia’s population and affiliation with 15,000 pesantren, the Nahdlatul Ulama is the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia. In the past the NU had been affiliated with the United Development Party (PPP), and political party that advocated for an Islamic state, but after Wahid was elected to head the organization in 1984, it broke ties with the PPP, affirmed the Pancasila as the national ideology and turned its focus toward social activism. The NU now works predominantly through pesantren - which are often the only education institutions in provided in poorer areas and for girls - to provide well-rounded, Islamic education and foster social and economic growth for Indonesians. In addition to its social activism, the most important roles these institutions play in the Jombang model are spreading the dynamic Aswaja theology, transmitting a strong Indonesian-Islamic identity, and spreading democratic practices.

By spreading the dynamic theology, traditional faith, and strong identities, traditional institutions allow the Jombang model to remain active in the social sphere without succumbing to extremist Wahhabist ideologies or resorting to political formalization of Islam. The network of “modern traditionalist” schools counteracts more conservative schools of thought, as does the traditional values and cultural identity the pesantren instill in both students and community leaders. While secular subjects are also taught at pesantren, Islamic values are developed to counterbalance what are perceived as amoral Western practices, such as capitalism. Defending itself against cultural Westernization, the NU is then free to promote democratic values based in an Islamic-Indonesian context. As the RAND study points out, “over 1,000 pesantren have participated in programs to promote values of pluralism, tolerance, and civil society,” such as one program in which students conducted campaigns to be elected for leadership positions. In these ways, Jombang serves as an excellent model of the twin tolerations. The NU understands the importance of pluralism and democracy in creating a stable, and even Islamic, society. It voluntarily dissociated itself from political Islamic groups and focused on spreading its views and values - including those of pluralism and democracy - in the social sphere.

The underlying commitment to social development and vision of Islam as a force for social activism are the final defining characteristics of the Jombang model and integrates the other four aspects. The dynamic “social relevance” quality of Islam, as promoted by the NU’s Aswaja theology, is realized through its influence in community development. By drawing upon a legacy of pluralism and a history of religious social-orientation - and by continuing the pragmatic approach of pesantren leaders in creating solutions for “secular” problems - the “Indonesianization” of Islam reinforces traditional democratic values and focus on the social sphere. The network of traditional pesantren transmit cultural and religious identity and acts as a base for educational and development programs. Receiving an Islamic education and opportunities to participate in Islamic social action further strengthens the Islamic-Indonesian identities of Muslims, and counters the encroachment of both Westernizing globalization and Islamic extremism. And finally, social development itself promotes pluralism and participation, two qualities which correlate with a stable civic society and democratic institutions.
In his article on religious freedom, Brian Grim presents a model of a “religious freedom cycle,” where religious freedom (pluralism) leads to broader religious participation, which leads to positive contributions of religion to society, which leads back to religious freedom. The Jombang model illustrates the achievement of this cycle, and for that reason alone could be looked to as a successful model of democratic Islam. The NU’s disassociation with Islamic political parties and shift to social development led to broader participation by Muslims in social development projects. Participation in these projects leads to stronger civic society for all people, not just Muslims, and in turn promotes pluralism. By providing services such as medical centers and education through pesantren, the NU helps raise the standard of living for all Indonesians and alleviates inequality. When religious or ethnic minorities are seen as prospering more than the dominant group, it can lead to persecution and violence, as happened to Indonesian Chinese populations (many of whom were also Christian) in 1997-98. However, social development which benefits all people can help stabilize society by, over the long run, leading to greater socioeconomic equality. Additionally, it encourages different religious groups to work together to solve community problems. For example, the NU collaborated with the Batak Protestant Church to aid to victims of the Mt. Merapi eruptions. By working toward common goals, people of different religious backgrounds can gain a better understanding and respect for one another, leading to a more pluralistic cultural environment and greater religious freedom.

Despite the pluralistic and democratic qualities of the Jombang model, Ahmed and the RAND study overlooked its potential. However, Ahmed’s methods might have led him to overestimate the Deoband nature of Indonesia. Ahmed conducted surveys asking respondents to identify contemporary and historical role models. A significant percentage of Indonesian respondents reported Deoband role models such as Osama bin Laden and, as Ahmed notes, “other figures who ‘stood up’ to the West.” These people might just be popular because they stand up for Islam against the West, not because Indonesians agree with their political ideologies or violent tendencies. Although the Jombang model is democratic, it is not necessarily pro-Western. As noted earlier, many Indonesians reject Western values and secular culture. But this does not make them followers of the conservative Deoband model. Furthermore, a former general chairman of the NU has noted a trend of fundamentalism in secular universities, while students of Islamic schools had more liberal values. If true, that could be explained by the likelihood that secular students are less secure in their socio-religious identities than Islamic students and therefore more likely to conform to extremist philosophies. Depending on where Ahmed conducted his surveys, this could have been a factor. Also, because Indonesia is not known for contributing to Islamic thought and because the Jombang model could be mistaken as mix of the three models, rather than a comprehensive model in and of itself, Ahmed is likely to have overlooked it.

The RAND study, although it points to Nahdiatul Ulama and the pesantren as an example of moderate Islamic networks, overall reflects a poor understanding of the conflict and the crisis within Islam. Not battle of ideologies but identities, the crisis within Islam is cultural and deeply religious. Religious identities are held more securely than political ideologies, and it would be more effective to advocate for the examination of positive models within traditional Islam than attempt to convert Muslims to more Western-friendly ideologies. The study puts too much emphasis on finding allies that are loyal to Western interests - this is not always necessary, because even countries which are democratic can disagree with the West on many important issues. Plus, since the identity crisis is caused by the globalization of Western culture, Western-friendly groups might be viewed with suspicion.


Hefner, Civil Islam, p. 6.


Esposito, p. 203.

It would be better for Islamic groups to become secure in their own religious and cultural identities - even if they may be anti-Western - if it would mean that they could adopt more pluralistic and democratic political goals. Additionally, the study fails to understand the complex and multivocal nature of Islam, as Ahmed illustrates with his three models. Instead, RAND seems to imply that Muslims exist on either end of a scale from extremist to liberal/secular. This oversimplifies the vast variety of Islamic thought that can be found in between. The Jombang model, for example, is more “conservative” and traditional, but advocates for a secular, pluralist democracy.

To conclude, I would like to offer some thoughts for recreating the conditions and characteristics of the Jombang model in other parts of the Islamic world. First, as much as activists focus on validating democratic values, they must also focus on strengthening traditional cultural and religious identity. If becoming democratic means adopting Western values, the idea will not sell with Muslims, especially who already adhere to the Deoband model. Traditional culture must be seen as a source for pluralist values and must be solidified as a defense against globalization. Islam itself also has many positive legacies and teaching on which to draw for democratic values, but they should also be seen within the context of the culture.

Second, the creation of social development programs should be encouraged or supported where they already exist. An emphasis on social renewal and activism directly and more immediately benefits local communities, whereas politically-oriented groups - while also important - tend to work more slowly and are more likely to be seen as protecting Western interests. Additionally, community involvement gives people an active way of expressing their faith and building their society; since many Muslims turn to more conservative schools of thought out of feelings of helplessness and anger, social involvement could alleviate this.

Third, madrasahs and other indigenous institutions, which are similar to pesantren, should be supported if they advocate an Islam that is committed both to pluralistic values and traditional identity, even if they are not “pro-West.” Muslims leaders should also be encouraged to use madrasahs as a base for community activism.

Fourth, the United States (through NGOs) could fund student and leadership exchanges between Indonesian pesantren and countries both within and outside of the Islamic world. Indonesia began to work with non-Middle East countries - such as Russia and Vietnam - to create student and instructor exchanges for those abroad who are interested in studying Islam. Similarly, Australia hosted a leadership training for Indonesian educational leaders in hopes of improving the quality of Islamic education. Supporting or hosting such trainings is another idea for involvement.

Fifth, more progressive Muslim leaders in the Islamic world should consider reaching out to more traditional bases. The example of Wahid and the NU shows that an organization can have more liberal leadership without requiring its constituents to abandon traditional practices and beliefs. Since large traditional bases would be easier than more liberal ones, this also might be considered as an option.

Sixth, young people should be encouraged to take leadership positions in any of the above suggestions. Wahid encouraged young leadership in the NU, stating that they would be “able to bring together the practical requirements for progress (especially the material ones) with the religious traditions which they have inherited from earlier generations.” Not only will they integrate new and old understanding, but young people will be provided an opportunity to become more active with their religion and community, preserving traditional identity.

Finally, I’d like to briefly consider Arab tribal identity, which even Ahmed seems to see as an obstacle to the adoption of pluralistic values in the Islamic world. While tribal identity is divisive and

---

61“RF cooperating in Islamic affairs with non-Middle East countries.” NU Online. (2010), (accessed December 5, 2010).  
62Indonesian Islamic education leaders lead to Australia for training.” NU Online. (2010), (accessed December 5, 2010).  
63Espostio, p. 203
produces a paradigm of “us versus them” and “balanced opposition,” it shares some conditions similar to those that produced the Jombang model in Indonesia. Although tribes are segregated and generally seem to be hostile with one another, they create a kind of natural “pluralism” and can rally together around common causes, and have a distrust of governmental authority. Also, as globalization threatens traditional identity, tribal Muslims turn to inauthentic and extremist methods of restoring honor. Ahmed quoted a tribal chief who saw, in recent violence against women, “a breakdown of the tribal system, which would never advocate dishonoring women” [66]. I believe that strengthening traditional tribal culture and emphasizing positive tribal legacies could actually alleviate tension and violence, just as securing Islamic identity guards against extremist philosophies. Tribal values of duty to one’s community and autonomy from outside authorities can potentially serve as a basis for more egalitarian ideals. Social action and community development could be seen as an expression of duty and autonomy from state government. Conceivably, these values could be broadened to the democratic ideals of citizenship and individualism, although this is more of a stretch. However, a focus on social action could open connections between tribes to work together to solve local problems, which over time might lead to a stronger value of pluralism. Like Islam, tribal culture and identity is probably not as univocal as it first seems, and there could be other customs and values with could be reinterpreted in a progressive light. Potentially, this could greatly improve tensions in the Middle East if tribal identity, rather than Islam, is really the problem.

Even if Muslims in Middle-East and rest of the world don’t look to Indonesian and the Jombang model as an “authentic” model of Islam, it is still worth investigating. By looking at it, we can better understand the characteristics which might be necessary to create more democratic models of Islam in the hot zones of the Muslim world. Also, Indonesia’s contribution might still be directly influential in the Islamic world: if Muslims see the current global conflict in terms of “us versus them,” the Jombang model is at least more “them” than “us.”

[67] Ibid.


Due to the shared characteristics, a Western Religious Studies department should recognize Cheyenne religion as a distinct type of animism. Granted, the beliefs that are not complimentary between the two are also important and must be taken into consideration. Deliberating the exact relationship between the Cheyenne tradition and animism must begin with an analysis of Cheyenne beliefs and practices, enter into a discussion on animism, and finally compare and contrast the two.

Upon entering a Religious Studies program, one of the first tools students are given to aid in understanding the world’s religions is the delineation between sacred and profane. The first step in understanding the Cheyenne, however, is to allow those lines to be blurred, without forgetting that certain aspects of the world hold a special significance or sacredness. Cheyenne religion is about life, and all aspects of life are what we would consider “spiritual” in some way. This “spirituality” connects the creatures with each other and with other elements of the created order. The concept of unity is preserved ideologically through the Cheyenne creation myth and other stories and is manifested both in the special rituals of the Cheyenne and in how they view everyday life.

The name of the Cheyenne creator is Maheo. It is said that he created the world with order and maintains it through his cosmic power that permeates all things. He is symbolized by the color blue in the sky.1 In early Cheyenne thought, the various forms of life given in the original order by Maheo were not subject to huge differences.2 Plants were understood to have a physical and a spiritual component, and were regarded with such reverence that a plant could not be used without the permission of its spirit; if a plant were physically killed or abused, then propitiation was due for the crime to such an important member of life.3 Due the spiritual nature of plants, animals that ate them were regarded as having sacred flesh, and the ingestion of animal flesh and/or plants made a human part of the plant or animal community.4

2Ibid., p. 11.
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
The spiritual component of a plant, animal, or the maiyun—powerful spirits and protectors of Maheo’s creation—could choose to “associate” with a human being. These associations were the means by which a human was specially connected with other realities in the earth and were often a key component in a person’s direction during life, and could become more severe in people with greater sensitivity and awareness. Those same people were often selected as the intellectual leaders of the Cheyenne, as awareness and experience of the unity between humans and other created things formed an essential facet of Cheyenne leadership, growing from an understanding of how Maheo created the universe. Perceiving this unity was not a privilege relegated to the elite of the Cheyenne, though. On the contrary, understanding the interplay between spirits, earth, plants, animals, and humans forms the foundation of all Cheyenne self-understanding. Life itself is maintained through the preservation of unity, a fact demonstrated in Cheyenne rituals, rites, and symbols. To illustrate this fact, we can observe the greatest examples of the aforementioned categories: the Sun Dance (a ritual), the Sacred Arrow rite (a rite), and the Sacred Hat (a religious symbol).6

The Sun Dance is a call for the life-renewing powers of the sun and serves to revive the world and all its inhabitants; the Sacred Arrow rite brings Maheo’s favor in renewing Cheyenne wholeness as a people who were chosen; and finally the Sacred Hat is a gift from Maheo that gives and attracts power to renew and sustain the buffalo—a source of food and life for the people.7 These rites and symbols were all given to prophets and the people of the Cheyenne in order to preserve harmony and the order that Maheo gave the world at its creation. In Cheyenne belief the Arrows are sacred symbols of male power and the Sacred Buffalo Hat is the symbol for female power.8 Male and female roles during ceremonies are complementary and together they engage in personal sacrifice, which reinforces the idea of supernatural unity that Maheo gave the people. Without these symbols, unity between men and women is broken and with it the fullness of what it means to be Cheyenne. With this loss, the relationship to the earth is broken and without restoration faces certain destruction.9

Spirituality and the concept of unity are not just restricted to annual rites or sacred symbols in the life of the Cheyenne. As mentioned above, religion is everywhere and permeates all things. Even simple needs, such as shelter, were given religious significance and meaning, which we can observe in detail to understand just how intentional the Cheyenne were to community the importance of unity between themselves and the rest of the world. Adrienne Santina has published articles on how even the tips of the Cheyenne were decorated with beading and symbols that marked the tipi as a sacred space, a dwelling of the chosen people. She records the covering of the tipi as being made of buffalo hide, which symbolizes life, and also that the tipi has four discs hanging from the midsection representing the sun. The poles constructing the frame of most tepees face the four cardinal directions, indicating unity with Maheo and the order of the world.10 Decorating the tepees with porcupine quills or beads was seen as a sacred task, and therefore a woman had to prove she was skilled enough before being allowed to take vows to undertake projects for family, elders, and others.11 In order to decorate her own tipi, a woman had to seek permission from the quilling/beading society’s headwoman and then hold a feast where meat taken from a kettle would be offered in the four places the discs would be placed, representing the four cardinal directions.12 These and other symbols served to bless and remind those within the tepees that Maheo has blessed the people and given order.

The importance of unity to the Cheyenne is also evidenced in how the culture mourns unity lost, as seen especially in the case of death. If Cheyenne religion cannot be separated from life, and life

---

6Ibid., p. 13.
8Ibid., p. 443.
9Ibid., p. 444.
11Ibid., p. 940.
12Ibid., p. 941.
is especially concerned with unity, death is the opposite—a result of
disunity between body and spirit which produces, at least temporarily,
the pang of loneliness. Within the Northern Cheyenne tradition,
loneliness is understood as the human condition and therefore it is
loneliness that one fears in the deaths of others.13 Life is a lonely
journey made bearable through the community of people past, present,
and future.

Anne Straus notes that the Cheyenne traditionally see a person
consisting of four parts: “two good human parts and two crazy animal
parts.”14 Death can be caused by the unconscious separation of three
of the four parts.15 After this separation, the spirit makes its way
to Se’han, the place of the dead, where they will live much as they did
upon the earth. Those who have newly arrived are reunited to their loved
ones and reside near Maheo. The Cheyenne do not have a concept of
Maheo’s judgment or eternal punishment or reward as seen in some
other religious traditions; however, it is believed that those who lead
wicked lives or commit suicide become trapped on earth or lost in the
Milky Way Galaxy on their way to Se’han.16 That does not mean that
death is the end of a spirit communing with the living tribe. The spirits
of all departed Cheyenne are still present and involved in communal life
through advice given in dreams and memories of others.17 Nevertheless,
death is said to be the hardest thing the living will endure and all within
the tribe are taught that each death should be valuable to the tribe just as
a life would be.18

While this overview of Cheyenne religious beliefs is not
exhaustive, it demonstrates how religion permeates all of life, a concept
represented by the word unity. There is unity between humans, animals,
and plants, and also between these creatures and the land which hosts
them. This unity supplies everything with a sense of sacredness.

---

13Straus, Anne S. “The Meaning of Death in Northern Cheyenne Culture.” Death, Mourning, and
2004, p. 75.
14Ibid., p. 72.
15Schlesier, p. 10.
16Powell, p. 441.
17Straus, p. 73.
18Ibid., p. 79.
19Ibid., p. 55.
1956, p. 51.
21Ibid.
22Ibid., p. 53.
23Ibid., p. 52.
24Ibid., p. 54.
25Ibid., p. 53.
26Ibid., p. 55.
Animists also have beliefs that are outside the five major beliefs. For instance, a typical belief held by many animists is encapsulated in the phrase, “Animals are people, too.” This identification of animals as persons extends into all regions of the animal kingdom; sometimes plants are capable of being persons, and even certain types of stone are qualified as being persons in the animistic world as well. For the animist, relationships are not bound to animate things; inanimate elements such as thunder and rain are capable of inspiring individuals or communicating to the group as a whole. These beliefs increase the bond of animistic peoples to the earth and the enforce idea that wholeness is present in all things if one is paying attention.

Through this very brief synopsis of basic animistic beliefs it is possible to see not only the similarities but also the differences between basic animistic beliefs and the religious beliefs of the Cheyenne. The similarities are numerous. First, the Cheyenne and animistic beliefs both agree that the relationship between human, animals and plants is one of unity. The Cheyenne regard plants and animals as having spirits that are sacred, and a human should not violate them without consent. On the other hand, the Cheyenne perspective on domesticated animals and plants is that they do not possess this spirit nature, and are thus regarded as less sacred. But for the animist, plants, animals, and even some rocks are sacred and powerful. The two traditions may disagree about the degree of sacredness inherent to certain plants and animals, but the basic concept is present and very central to life in both frameworks.

Another similarity is the belief in contemporaneous time, also understood as continual presence or communion between past, present, and future (to put it in more linear terminology). The Cheyenne who have passed onto the next life are still part of the Cheyenne community and can give advice and dreams to members of the tribe in order to participate. For the animist, ancestors and future descendants are critical in daily life and in how one is to honor both the past and the future. Again, the similarity comes in the concept, since the expression of such beliefs varies widely within religions where ceremony and rite changes from tribe to tribe and story to story.

Conceptual differences between the two begin to arise with perspectives on human relationship to the spiritual world and the purpose of ceremony. Cheyenne religion is about Maheo, the creator of all things, and his order. Their allegiance is to Maheo as a group. Animistic groups likewise view themselves in collective terms, but in respect to the spirit world see themselves as being in a struggle or a give-and-take relationship with it. Ceremony is a way of winning over the spirits in order to obtain their help. This is different than the Cheyenne view, in which Maheo has given rituals, rites, and symbols that the people utilize to obtain renewal and replenishment for the earth and for themselves. The Cheyenne do not seem to think that ceremony and rite obligate the spirit world to give a good harvest or health or prosperity. Ritual is not understood as a struggle, which is in contrast to much of animism.

After all this discussion, are the Cheyenne animists? The answer is yes and no. The two share many core qualities that can be useful for categorizing and providing a shorthand way of understanding Cheyenne beliefs, but one does not match the other perfectly. Both contain strong concepts of universal unity and sacredness, but both understand these concepts slightly differently. While the Cheyenne and animists value the earth, animal and plant life, and relationships to the past and with the spiritual realms, the two also vary in the emphasis and orientation of those beliefs. Why are these comparisons valuable? They are capable of helping Native American tribes be understood in the Western world. By saying the similarities shared by animists and the Cheyenne are enough that the Cheyenne should be labeled an animistic religious group in Western religious studies can be useful to the tribe for recording and teaching about their ways to non-Native American peoples. It may allow more respect and dialogue between the two groups, which could gain intellectual footing for the Cheyenne and other Native American tribes in the collegiate setting and wider
publishing circles. The Cheyenne have many ways of understanding and expressing how their religious beliefs permeate all of life and daily practice. The ceremonies and tipi decoration observed above are a mere fraction of how the Cheyenne keep constant reminders of how Maheo created all with order and maintains all by his cosmic power. By allowing and actively participating with the Western classification as an animistic tradition, the Cheyenne and other Native American tribes have yet another means of describing the unity and sacredness they perceive as inherent to the world. In so doing, they can gain the ear of non-Native peoples and enter the wider dialogue of religion, philosophy, and belief.

Bibliography


With gratitude we would like to acknowledge those who have made this Religious Studies Student Journal possible. Our first thank you goes to President David Boren, whose generous funding each year makes this student journal possible. Likewise, we thank our donors who give to the RELS program – those who so kindly and generously give to support the program and our students. We deeply appreciate the support of Dr. Charles Kimball, director of the Religious Studies Program. We also thank Dr. Barbara S. Boyd, who is the faculty adviser and fund raiser for the journal project each year and without whose encouragement and support the journal would not be possible. Very special thanks goes to the Religious Studies faculty, who foster the tenacious questioning and opportunity for intellectual integrity that leads to the quality of research seen in the journal year after year. We extend a sincere thank you to Dr. David Vishanoff for writing an insightful, attentive foreword for this fifth volume of the Religious Studies Student Journal. And, of course, we appreciate the students who submit their papers for competition and who edit and revise their papers in order for them to be published. Our gratitude is always for our students and their dedication to their academic and scholarly endeavors.

Trevor Clark is a senior in the Religious Studies program at the University of Oklahoma, where he has received the honors of being an Oklahoma Regents Scholar and the recipient of the 2011 RELS Cole Stephenson Junior Academic Excellence Scholarship. He has been involved with the Religious Studies Program as student editor for this journal, and has also been involved with the Baptist Student Union throughout his college career. He is passionate about Christian theology, counseling, biblical studies, writing, and learning about his diverse neighbors and how to communicate across ideological and cultural lines. Next autumn, he plans to attend graduate school, learn more about God, culture, and individuals, and practice the values of Christ's upside-down kingdom in the setting in which he finds himself.

Chase Thornhill is a senior with a major in Religious Studies and a minor in Philosophy. His academic interests are focused primarily on early Christianity, biblical studies, and philosophical theology. He was the recipient of the Rev. Larry and Gloria Angus Scholarship in Religious Studies in April 2011. Chase is currently the treasurer for the Religious Studies Club and has held other positions on the board in past years. He
is passionate about Christian theology and fostering genuine dialogue across denominational, religious, and cultural lines. Chase plans to graduate in May 2012, and, after marrying his fiancé Sarah Mitchell in June, will join her at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in the Fall of 2012.

Sara Ciccolari-Micaldi is an Honors junior with a major in Political Science and a minor in Constitutional Studies. Her academic interests are focused mainly on law, and she is particularly interested in the first amendment and the relationship between religion and state. She is a member of the Society of Fellows and the Constitutional Studies Student Association and the Pre-Law Club. She plans to attend law school upon graduation and fulfill her dream of becoming an attorney.

Emily Powell recently graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in Philosophy. She was a Regents Scholar and was also inducted into the Alpha Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. Emily was a four year member in the Pride of Oklahoma marching band; she was also heavily involved in the OU Baptist Student Union as a student leader. Her main area of interest is in Philosophy of Religion, specifically Ancient and Medieval Religious Philosophy. Her other interests include history, chemistry, and music. In the future, Emily hopes to continue her studies in order to obtain a Ph.D in Philosophy and eventually gain professorship in the same field.

Whitney Patterson is a senior with a double major in Women’s and Gender Studies, and Religious Studies. She is currently involved with the Honors Research Assistant Program, where she works with Professor David Vishanoff to research interreligious encounters. Whitney has also been a member of the LGBTQ Advisory Board for over a year. Her interests include religion, feminism, human sexuality, and social justice, and particularly the intersection of these issues. One of her specific interests is Christianity within the LGBTQ community. After she graduates in May 2012, Whitney’s plan for the future is to make a plan for the future. She would like to work with the queer community, particularly with rural or religious LGBTQ people, or in the area of reproductive justice, or in any field that works to advance social justice.

Kaitlin S. Martin graduated with her Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies with distinction in the spring of 2011, also receiving the RELS Heather Stephenson Senior Academic Excellence Scholarship award for having the highest GPA among seniors in the Religious Studies program. She was the Religious Studies Club Treasurer in 2010 and 2011. Kaitlin is interested in vampire lore, interfaith dialogue, and Christian apologetics. She is moving to St. Louis, MO with her husband, Wes, and daughter, Abigail, in January of 2012. There, she hopes to learn more about Christian history and also teach her children and her Christian peers about other religious views, how to ask discerning questions, and how to present a coherent explanation of values and beliefs. She is also interested in pursuing a nursing career after her husband finishes seminary.