Book Review

Asma Afsaruddin (Ed.), *Islam, the State, and the Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), ISBN: 978-0-230-11655-9, Hb, pp. ix+255

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The book under review, *Islam, the State, and the Political Authority* (edited by Asma Afsaruddin), is a collection of 12 essays and an "Introduction". It offers rich scholarly studies that challenge the view concerning the assumed monolithic 'Islamic State' and a single model of political authority, "theocratic caliphate", by investigating both Sunni and Shi'i political literature, and by combining both medieval and modern theories and theorists.

Part I, "Medieval Section", consists of chapters 1-6, and Part II, "Modern section" includes chapters 7-12, collectively highlight the "temporality of these discussions concerning specific aspects of the Islamic political tradition(s)". The book is broad in scope and diverse in themes, and thus is a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on the relationship between Islam and political authority.

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The central focus of *Islam, the State, and the Political Authority* – a collection of 12 essays (preceded by a 5-page "Introduction" by the editor) – is the "variegated nature of political governance and administrative practices in Islamic societies through time and their different formulations in response to historical exigencies" (p.1). As a collectivity, the book offers rich-studies, both critical and crucial, that challenge the view concerning the "assumed monolithic 'Islamic State' and a single model of political authority", a theocratic caliphate (p.5). Investigating both Sunni and Shi'i political literature, and combining both medieval and modern theories and theorists, Asma Afsaruddin (the editor) in this work underscores the "continuities and discontinuities between pre-modern and modern conceptions of the state, its authority, and its relationship with its citizenry"— thereby fostering a deeper understanding of, among others, political authority in the contemporary Muslim world (p.5).

Consisting of 6 chapters, Part I, "Medieval Section" deals with (i) the pre-modern period exploring the relation between the state as it developed in Islamic history, both in Sunni and Shi'i traditions and cultures, in which it was embedded; and (ii) interrogation the (assumed) relationship between theology and construction of political authority in the writings of philosophers and political theorists, like Al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd, and in Ikhwan al-Saffa'. In Part II, "Modern section" (chapters 7-12), the essays

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explore the continuities and discontinuities of particular pre-modern political features and traditions in the modern period and engage emerging political trends and theories. In brief, both sections highlight the "temporality of these discussions concerning specific aspects of the Islamic political tradition(s)" (p.1)

As all of these essays are significant and scholarly, in their own ways, in this review, an assessment of each, both brief and lengthy, is provided:

Based on an insightful and original analysis of relevant texts, Hayrettin Yücesoy (chapter 1, pp. 9-33) intends to tackle a particular question: the debate on the necessity of the imamate — *wujub al-imama* — in medieval Sunni thought. He reaches the conclusion that Sunni scholars "adopted scripture as their primary frame of reference", but at the same time acknowledged the "faculty of reason" towards discerning a path toward "political and social order on their own, without revelation"; and they viewed "political leadership as a social utility rather than a doctrinal principle" (pp. 27, 28).

Revolving around a debate between two "Farabian" scholars, M. Campanini and C. Butterworth – who have fundamentally opposed approaches to the thought of famous Muslim philosopher, al-Farabi (d.950) – chapters 2 (pp.35-52) and 3 (pp.53-74) provide a fascinating insights into the contested relationship between religion and politics in the pre-modern period. Campanini's aim is to study, in the light of *Kitab al-Milla,* the relationship between religion and politics and argues that al-Farabi's thought can be understood better in the light of political theology insofar as the questions of religion, politics, and philosophy are interrelated (p.39). He believes that the conception of political theology in al-Farabi represents that "religion is only a pale image of truth while philosophy alone is able to deal with truth properly" (p.49).

The goal of Butterworth's chapter – which stands in "sharp contrast" to that of Campanini, because both have "radically different understandings of what constitutes philosophy and theology as well as their components" (p.53) – is "to identify the problems with his [Campanini's] perspective and then to move to an account of Alfarabi's teaching that accords more closely with his methods and intention" (*Ibid*.). For Butterworth, in al-Farabi's schema, "Religion is merely a handmaiden to it [political philosophy], and theology is tolerated only as a necessary tool of communication" (p.54). Al-Farabi is, for Butterworth, in the end as in the beginning, "a philosopher and not a theologian", for his goal is to "introduce his readers to political philosophy rather than to political theology" (p.68).

In chapter 4, Carmella Baffioni discusses, what the title itself reveals, "Prophecy, Imamate, and Political Rule among the Ikhwan al-Safa' [Pure Brethren]" (pp.75-92), in the light of some selected passages from their *Rasa'il*, '*ilm al-siyasa* (Epistle 7), demonstrating that they do not fail to approach policy from a theoretical standpoint and that the philosophical doctrines developed in their 'encyclopedia of sciences' titled *al-Rasa'il* (Epistles) can be understood to be a functional element of their political vision" (p.75).

Through close scrutiny of decrees of appointments, Paul Walker in his essay (chapter5, pp.93-110) examines how the responsibilities of public office were conceptual during the Fatimids (rising to political power in 909 in North Africa). By this, Walker provides considerable material, "consisting of pious admonitions and exhortations, along with a few warnings against evil and corruption" (p.106).

Banan Malkawi and Tamara Sonn in chapter 6 (pp.111-127) discuss "Ibn Taymiyya on Islamic Governance". The life and thought of Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), the renowned medieval Hanbali jurist, help us in bridging the late medieval and modern worlds. In this chapter, Malkawi and Sonn present an overview of his perspectives on "Islamic governance that seeks to avoid pitfalls of selective reading" (p.112). Generally, Ibn Taymiyya is described as the main source of inspiration behind various "Islamists" thinkers and other "extremists" groups, but in this chapter, Malkawi and Sonn present him as opposite of that: a mainstream and quietist. For them, his works, when read as a comprehensive whole, are actually "quite systematic and consistent"; and his views on governance are neither innovative nor excessively traditional", but, in fact, they provide a "solid platform for constructing modes of governance that satisfy both traditional and modern needs" (see p.112).

Ibn Taymiyya does not present Islamic governance as "autocratic" (p.114), but as one in which consultation has due importance (p.116) – and he often uses the term *khilafah* (caliphate), and sometimes *imama* (imamate) and *wilaya* (governance) as well for it (p.117). Government is necessary, says Ibn Taymiyya, but the responsibilities of governance are collective and should be conducted through consultation (p.122). Thus his description of the "consultative nature of governance and of collective responsibility shares obvious features with modern notions of democratic governance" (p. 124).

By way of conclusion, Malkawi and Sonn argue that Ibn Taymiyya's views on "consultative nature of governance, shared responsibility of the community to give good counsel, the special responsibility of experts to contribute to the welfare of the community,... provide fertile ground for discussions of limited, *constitutional, and representative governance*. ... [And] his advocacy of contractual and consultative governance and prohibition of rebellion except in the most extreme cases calls into question the characterization of his *political thought as radical*" (pp.125-6; *Italics added*).

Presenting a "Critical Appraisal of Mawdudi's Thought", Asma Afsaruddin's own chapter (pp. 131-54) is primarily concerned with outlining the key features of Mawdudi's so-called "Islamic State", followed by a critique of his main ideas like theo-democracy, democratic caliphate, *al-hakimiyya* (God's sovereignty), etc. Her purpose is to "assess the credibility" of Mawdudi's theo-democracy: how "Islamic" this notion really is? or how much is it rooted in pre-modern Islamic tradition? (p.132). Mawdudi's most original – and controversial – contribution to Islamist political thought was his idea of God's sovereignty as the "politicized foundational principle of the Islamic State" (*Ibid.*) and this allows him to categorically assert that "Islamic political philosophy is completely opposed to secular western notions of democracy" (p.133). But, at the same time, it is important to mention that Mawdudi does not categorically

reject democracy; for him , Islam instead "posits a different model of democracy based on the Qur'anic concept of *khilafa*, or the 'vicegerency of humans', in relation to God", (24:55), i.e., "democratic caliphate" or "theo-democracy", which is "neither democratic nor theocratic in the western sense" (pp. 133, 34). Establishing that these concepts represent new coinage on the part of Mawdudi, Afsaruddin concludes, among others, that "Mawdudi's grand notion of *al-hakimiyya* with a fabricated Qur'anic lineage however, is meant to compensate for a lack of explicit scriptural provisions for a so-called Islamic State or government" (p.150).

Muqtedar Khan discusses the "Political Philosophy of Islamic Movements" (chapter 8, pp. 155-72) and affirms that the foundations of an Islamic political philosophy may be found within the discourse of "contemporary resurgence of Islam" (p.155). Focusing much on, what he calls, the "second-generation Islamists" (see, pp. 166, 67,69), prominent figures of which include Tunisian Rachid Ghanouchi, Iranian Muhammad Khatimi, and Turkish Necmetin Erbakan – who are trying to go beyond politics and polemics and trying to find practical and policy-oriented solutions (p.166) – Khan identifies three prominent discourse themes, considered as the constitutive pillars of Islamist philosophy, viz. *critical*, *reconstructive*, and *programmatic* (p.159). For Khan, for them, besides self-criticism and reflection, three major themes dominate their discourse: "power sharing Islam, Islam and democracy, and civil society" (p.168). Khan suggests these Islamists, in order to do better, to "follow the sequence of democracy, then Islamic society, and finally Islamic State" (p.169).

In chapter 9, presenting Indonesia and Turkey as examples/case studies, Nader Hashemi (pp.173-87) has tried overcome the "Problems of Secularism in Muslim Societies" by rethinking the relationship between "Religion and Liberal Democracy" (p.173). Hashemi has tried to answer a "paradox" – the paradox that is at the core of the debate on Islam and democracy – that "modern liberal democracy requires a form of secularism to sustain itself" (p.173). For Hashemi, in order to reconcile this paradox, the cultivation and development of a homegrown theory of 'Muslim secularism' [which is a type of political, not sociological or philosophical secularism] is needed— one which is authentically Islamic, not a western import— yet it simultaneously lends support to a functional secularity of the political system" (p.184).

In chapter 10, "Minarchist Political Islam" (pp.189-206) – which presumes that Islamic society is deliberative and offers a plurality of authentic moral choices for how people can live their lives (p.189) – Anas Malik discusses the Medina compact, *Hilf ul-Fudul*, the Ottoman *millet* system, the *sufi* jurisprudence (*tariqa*), *waqf*, *ithistan*, etc. which "provide strong roots for monarchist political Islam" (p.190). For Malik, as minarchism suggests that formal state institutions should be circumscribed and constrained and as much governance as possible should happen through institutions distinct from the central state apparatus, so it will succeed only in a secure international environment where the domestic population is highly socialized into the essential ground rules permitting freedom of association and plural governance" (see pp. 203, 4).

Mohsen Kadivar in chapter 11, "*Wilayat al-faqih* and Democracy" (pp.207-24), discusses primarily the potential convergences and divergences between *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) and democracy and offers a critique of current perspectives on the relationship between these two concepts (p.207). Kadivar believes that it is possible "to manage an Islamic society using a democratic approach", i.e., Islam as a religion can coexist with a democratic political system in a society (p.222).

In the final chapter, Andrew March (chapter 12, pp. 225-48) discusses and engages with the thought of "Anwar al-'Awlaqi against the Islamic Legal Tradition" (p.225) in the contemporary period in the context of historical legal debates among Muslim jurists about Muslim loyalty to a non-Muslim state, particularly during wartime. March, in this chapter, focuses on three main "texts", regarding the "permissibility of killing of civilians in Islamic law", a "diversionary tactic within *jihadi* discourse": Shaykh 'Abd al 'Aziz al-Jabru's "justifications of the September 11 attacks"; an "anonymous text justifying the July 7, 2005 London bombings"; and the "public utterances" of Awlaqi – the most famous "advocate of Muslim violence against western warring powers" (see p.228). By this, March draws the conclusion that 'Awlaqi and his ilk have gone against the predominant legal trend by privileging forms of reasoning that allow ends to justify the means, and thus represents a departure from classical Islamic juridico-moral reasoning. For March, 'Awlaqi's exhortations to privilege loyalty to the Muslim *ummah* is an example of the kind of "unmoored reasoning that refers to Shari'a only to sanction one's own preferred behavior, and never to constraint it" (p.243).

In sum, broad in scope, diverse in themes/issues, *Islam, the State, and the Political Authority* brings together a intriguing and fascinating collection of rich, proficient, expertly and insightful studies on political theories and theorists, concepts and institutions, convergences an divergences (continuities and discontinuities), both of medieval and modern periods. It is a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on the complex, critical and crucial relationship between Islam and political authority, and will prove very useful and helpful for those scholars and students alike who are interested in having deep insights and eager in knowing the various delicacies/complexities and trends in the Islamic political thought.

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