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Schools of Islamic Methodology

GOALS OF THIS CHAPTER

1. To distinguish between (*wāḥid*) or unitary perspective (one method working at a time) and (*tawḥīdī*) or unifying perspective (several methods working at a time) of Islamic methodology.
2. To demonstrate the importance of *tawḥīdī* methodology for integrating and uniting the various levels of methodological work, from thought about research, to research procedures and regulatory guidelines.
3. To identify the most significant defining characteristics of a number of methodological schools: the rationalist, the mystical, the empirical-scientific, and the juristic-*uṣūlī*.¹
4. To draw attention to the variety that exists within each of the Islamic methodological schools.
5. To clarify the developmental features of a number of methodological schools in Islamic history.
6. To cite examples of scholars and thinkers representative of each of the Islamic methodological schools.

INTRODUCTION

The basic thrust of this chapter is that Islamic methodology encompasses a number of different approaches and areas of interest which, despite their diversity, are united by the premises that underlie their modes of thought, research, and conduct. It is these shared premises which they appeal to in their efforts to achieve their aims, and which mark their various expressions and formulations.

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When we speak in this chapter of “methodological schools,” we are referring to the variety of expressions and approaches that exist within the broader framework of Islamic methodology. Islamic methodology, that is, “the methodology of epistemological integration,” has taken the form of numerous methodological schools over the course of Islamic history. These schools include, first, the “methodology of reception” that emerged during the lifetime of the Prophet and the methodology of criticism and documentation that accompanied the recording and codification of the Prophet Sunnah. This latter methodology gave rise to the sciences of contestation and validation (*al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl*), causes (*al-ʿilal*), and derivation of legal rulings from detailed evidence. This latter science coincided with the emergence of the juristic schools, the principles of jurisprudence, Qur’anic exegetical methods, and approaches to dealing with doctrinal issues, all of which underwent changes with the introduction of theology and philosophy and the Sufis’ development of the mystical-experiential approach. It should also be remembered that some groups of scholars adhered to the experimental scientific method when dealing with issues that required such an approach.

Islamic civilization embraced all of these methodological schools. Hence, when a Muslim scholar was dealing with a given topic, he would make use of whichever method was required, and in most cases he would combine more than one method. It was, in fact, quite common in many phases of Islamic history for a scholar to acquire encyclopedic knowledge, being well-versed in numerous disciplines. A single scholar might simultaneously be a jurist, an expert in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, and a hadith scholar as were Imam Mālik and al-Shawkānī. He might be a Qur’anic exegete, a philosopher and a physician as were Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), a philosopher and a Sufi as were Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Ṭufayl and al-Suhrawardī, or a jurist, a theologian and a Sufi as was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. Other examples include Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, who was litterateur, philosopher, and Sufi; Al-Ḥasan ibn al-Haytham, who was philosopher, mathematician, and physicist; Ibn Zuhr, who served at once as physician and philosopher, and Ibn Ḥazm, who was jurist, theologian and litterateur. Similarly, Imam al-Ṭabarī combined a

knowledge of history, exegesis, and jurisprudence, while Jābir ibn Ḥayyān was both chemist and philosopher.

First: METHOD AS SEEN FROM A UNITARY
PERSPECTIVE VS. A UNIFYING PERSPECTIVE

We have drawn a distinction elsewhere between what we term a “one-dimensional discourse” that spurns the type of approach advocated by an Islamic methodology of epistemological integration, and a “monotheistic discourse” which encompasses various forms of reasoned interpretation and methods of investigation, and which aims, in an integrated fashion, to advance the Muslim community toward needed reform.² What we have sought to show is that as long as such a discourse proceeds from fixed principles while aiming for the achievement of comprehensive objectives and promoting an open mind and sincere intentions, there is no harm in accommodating various forms of reasoned interpretation and approach, particularly if ample opportunity is given for cooperation and integration, and if these processes involve the review and evaluation of expertise and experience.

At this point we would like to digress slightly in order to build on the notion of a distinction between one-dimensional discourse and *tawḥīdī* discourse. This will be done by means of a distinction between what we are terming a “unitary view” and a “unifying view” of method and approach as they apply to methodological schools.

By “unitary view” we mean a vision according to which at any given time, there is only one approach to thought and research in relation to a given issue, question, or aspect of reality in the natural, social or human spheres. Seen from this perspective, human thought has evolved in a linear fashion, passing out of one phase and into another in such a way that in any given phase of their evolution, human beings have been adopting one approach only and no other. August Comte’s three-stage theory of human thought might be viewed as an expression of the unitary vision, since it holds that human beings have passed through three successive stages: the religious-theological phase, the philosophical-metaphysical phase, and the positivist-scientific phase, the last of which represents the arrival of human thought at genuine

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maturity through the discovery of the scientific experimental method. According to Comte's theory, each stage in the evolution of human thought has been marked by the use of a single approach or method and no other such that when they pass from one stage to the next, they leave behind the single method that characterized the previous stage of their development and replace it with another.

Many scholars and scientists over the past two hundred years have held that the question of how to acquire, test, and employ knowledge has been settled definitively in favor of the scientific experimental method. This method has proved highly effective in enabling us to become acquainted with material objects, natural phenomena and their defining properties, and to discover the laws that govern their composition and conduct. Given its success, the scientific method with its tools and procedures has come to be applied to the topics of social, human, and psychological phenomena as well. The predominant view has been that scientific research is the act of investigating a topic through the use of "the scientific method," and that the scientific method is, to be specific, "the experimental scientific method." It has been generally believed that scientific method or methodology cannot be described in ideological terms. One cannot speak, for example, of an "Eastern" or "Western" scientific methodology. Nor can one speak of a "positivist" or an "Islamic" scientific methodology, the reason being that to add such descriptors to the term "scientific methodology" would be inconsistent with the objectivity and neutrality of those who engage in research in keeping with the scientific method.

However, this view is countered by the Qur'an's own view of method. The Arabic term being rendered here as "method" (*minhāj*) occurs once in the Qur'an, where we read:

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law (*shir'ah*) and way of life (*minhāj*). And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community:

but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah* 5:48)

The context of this verse speaks about the nations of the prophets who went before us, affirming that the single religion brought by all of the prophets entailed a different law (*shir'ah*) for each nation. The laws specific to the world's nations share some rulings in common while differing in others. Given that this verse allows for a variety of different laws, it likewise allows for a variety of methods and approaches. It follows, therefore, that we can speak legitimately of an "Islamic method" (*minhāj islāmī*) or an "Islamic methodology" (*manhajīyyah islāmīyyah*). Moreover, within the context of this or that method, there is room for different understandings of the means and tools to be employed in research. All such tools and means are united overall by virtue of their association with Islamic methodology even though they differ in certain details.

Therefore, the researcher who adopts the concept of "*tawhīdī* methodology" is free to use numerous different methods in his or her attempts to manage the affairs of his life, be they theoretical-scientific or practical in nature, depending on the nature of the topic being investigated and the specific circumstances that impact his or her interactions with the topic, including chronological age, knowledge of the subject, experience in life, and his or her need to look into the topic concerned. The researcher will employ each of these various methods for the purpose it is best suited to achieve, without forgetting that there are other methods that he or she could also use at another time or in another situation. This practice is consistent with the notion of a multiplicity of approaches which we are terming "methodological pluralism." Nor should a researcher forget to combine methods depending on the specific roles they perform. In so doing, the researcher unites different methodological elements and procedures in an integral, self-consistent endeavor to reach his stated aim. This, in sum, is *tawhīdī* methodology.

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The notion of methodological schools occupies a central place in the methodology of epistemological integration, since a discussion of methodological schools will include the notions of plurality, integration and the divine unity as they apply to methods or approaches as opposed to the notion of a single approach. Hence, method in the Islamic vision may be described as “*tawhīdī*,” but not as “unitary.”

The term “multiplicity” as it applies to method and methodology refers to the use of whatever methodological methods and techniques will meet the needs represented by the topics and issues calling for investigation, as well as varied research requirements on the level of data, tools, and methods of organization and analysis.

The term “integration” refers to the need in research situations for elements that may belong to numerous distinct approaches. For example, research may present the need for both quantitative and qualitative data, both statistical analysis and inductive thought, both the formation and testing of hypotheses, both induction and deduction (which represent complementary parts of the reasoning process), both descriptive reports of facts and features and normative values and aims, and so on.

As for *tawhīdī*, it means directing research efforts, which are characterized by multiple elements and integrated functions, toward achievement of the ultimate aim of the research, with every step and phase of the research being connected to every other.

The notion of a unitary methodology, which exalted the experimental scientific method exclusively, remained in the ascendancy throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beginning in the twentieth century, however, it became apparent that the experimental scientific method would be incapable of answering certain questions of a purely scientific nature. The prestige of this method was accordingly undermined, while its positivist philosophical foundations came in for criticism and sometimes outright attacks. Some critics of the empirical scientific method held that it was unsuitable for application to the humanities and the social sciences because of the radical differences between natural and social phenomena, while others argued that the scientific and technological progress that had resulted from the scientific method had produced a materialistic culture founded on rivalry and conflict among individuals while fostering competition among

states for influence, power and wealth. Such developments, these critics held, had led to the most destructive wars in human history, environmental degradation, the rise of tyrannical regimes, and a widening gap between social classes and their standards of living.

After a period of dominance, the notion of a unitary methodology in the West gave way to the notion of a dual methodology, which was supplanted in turn by the notion of integrative methodology.

Rejection of such outcomes contributed to the emergence of the post-modernist philosophies, which developed approaches that were critical of the modernist notions that had relied on the empirical scientific method. The post-modernist approaches revealed the incoherence of the philosophical foundations underlying the empirical scientific method while advocating alternative methods.

In illustration of the notion of methodological integration, we find that the empirical scientific method, whether it was applied to the natural sciences or the humanities, relied until quite recently upon quantitative data which was organized into tables and charts and subjected to statistical analysis. The aim of this process was to arrive at results that could be interpreted based on statistical tests or quantitative descriptions. The value of a given piece of research was measured in terms of the quantitative data it presented and the complexity of its modes of statistical analysis together with the degree of stability, objectivity, and validity that characterized the numerical data. Toward the end of the twentieth century, however, the statistical results of research on social and human issues came in for attack, particularly when these results were not supported by qualitative descriptive data that provided higher levels of validity and significance than the results of statistical analysis. Researchers then began employing methods that relied on qualitative description rather than mere quantification of the relevant features of the research topic. In addition, professional associations promoting qualitative research methodology were established along with specialized scientific journals devoted to the dissemination of qualitative research.

However, the ongoing debate over the advantages of quantitative research, which may provide more precise, fixed descriptions, and

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qualitative research, which tends to provide greater validity and profundity of meaning, led researchers to see that, in fact, both types of research need to be used in specific situations. It had now become apparent that in the wrong situations, neither type of research is of any benefit, and that there are situations in which both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies need to be employed in a single piece of research. This latter situation falls under the rubric of what is termed “mixed research methodology.” Indeed, some writings that fall under the rubric of integrated methodology go beyond the entire quantitative–qualitative dichotomy. Hence, although it is most common to say that one’s research philosophy is what dictates the methodology one employs, some recent writings reverse this equation, holding, by contrast, that “Philosophy does not determine the research methodology employed. It’s the other way round: methodology determines the philosophy you might employ to explain your approach to undertaking research.”³

Elements of Tawhīdī Methodology

1. Ways of thinking,
2. Research procedures, and
3. Research ethics.

The *tawhīdī* methodology we are advocating is not limited to combining or integrating research methods and tools based on research-related procedural requirements. Rather, it goes beyond this to lay the foundations for an approach that unites the three levels of methodological activity, namely, (1) ways of thinking about the research topic, (2) research procedures relating to data collection and analysis and methods of deriving and interpreting results, and (3) research ethics, that is, criteria governing conduct and research activity which call for fairness, integrity and impartiality in one’s search for truth.

The monotheistic methodology unifies the researcher’s efforts to derive knowledge from its sources: both from the written revelation, which will guide him to the most suitable and reliable methods and techniques; and from the created universe in its natural, social and psychological dimensions. Similarly, it unifies the researcher’s use of

the tools available for acquiring, testing and employing knowledge, including both reason and sensory reception. The efforts entailed by the *tawhīdī* methodology include, then: derivation of knowledge from its sources, the use of knowledge-acquisition tools, and integration of these source and tools.

The effort involved in methodological activity from a *tawhīdī* perspective has three aspects: (1) derivation of knowledge from its sources, (2) the use of knowledge-acquisition tools, and (3) integration of these source and tools.

The *tawhīdī* methodology unifies a researcher's vision as it pertains to how he thinks, how he engages in research, and his conduct in the various fields of knowledge and their specializations. We have a multiplicity of fields at our disposal – the Shari'ah sciences, which revolve around the texts of divine revelation; the social and human sciences, which revolve around the changing social, economic, political, and educational conditions of people's lives; the natural and physical sciences, which examine the distinctive properties of natural substances both living and non-living and the transformations they undergo; and the applied sciences, which assist human beings in living their practical lives and providing health care and means of transport and communication. God has either directly revealed these sciences to human beings or provided them with the capacity to acquire them in order to maintain and enhance their earthly existence. This being the case, the *tawhīdī* view requires human beings to unite their efforts toward the development of such sciences, since whatever is achieved by this or that individual, nation, or community will ultimately impact, whether negatively or positively, on all other individuals, nations and communities.

It is our hope that Muslim researchers and scientists will work together to meet the challenges placed before them by the *tawhīdī* methodology: by training themselves in this methodology, applying it to their work, promoting it among others and presenting it to the world community at large, which expects Muslims to demonstrate an effective presence on the world scene by making a tangible contribution to constructing and guiding human civilization.

Second: EXAMPLES OF METHODOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

It is difficult to give a precise description of the methodological practices in which Muslim scholars have engaged within the framework of a given school or to place them within clearly definitive categories, since most Muslim scholars in ages past enjoyed some degree of encyclopedic knowledge, combining knowledge from more than one discipline. In addition, they were actively applying the scientific methods that were consistent with both their faith and the variety of fields in which they were versed.

What follows is a description of a number of the methodological schools that have contributed to shaping the thought and research of Muslim scholars in times both ancient and modern.

(1) *The Rationalist-Scholastic-Philosophical School*

We are combining a discussion of scholastic theologians and philosophers given the overlap that has occurred between these two groups of thinkers over the course of Islamic history with respect to both their research topics and their methods. The methodology represented by this school is marked by the important place it gives to human reason, particularly as it relates to questions of belief. Some Muslim scholars, such as al-Kindī (d. 249 AH/873 CE), Ibn Sīnā (d. 429 AH/1037 CE), and al-Bīrūnī (d. 440 AH/1048 CE), may be said to have demonstrated a greater affinity for Greek philosophy by dealing with religious doctrine through reliance on reason, while others, such as the Muʿtazilites, the Ashʿarites, and the Maturidites, adhered to the methods familiar to juristic scholars, though they differed in the degree to which they favored reason over revelation or vice-versa. There is, in addition, a third group, including Ibn Taymiyyah (a Ḥanbalī), Ibn Rushd (a philosopher), and Ibn Ḥazm (a Zāhirī), who formed a special school of their own which sought to combine reason and revelation based on the conviction that there is essentially no contradiction between them and that we should therefore not have to give either of them priority over the other.

Books of traditional Islamic learning are filled with theological and philosophical debates over the relative authority to be assigned to reason and revelation in the methodology one adopts for deriving doctrinal rulings. Some of these debates have been summarized for us by Dr. Hasan al-Shafi'i,⁴ who explains how, when arriving at doctrinal rulings, the Prophet's Companions, their immediate successors, and leading early Muslim thinkers such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Thawrī relied first upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah, then on reason and opinion. In other words, they relied on evidence taken at once from revelation and reason, both of which were recognized sources of authority.⁵

The Mu'tazilites raised reason to the level of sole arbiter in matters relating to divinity and prophethood, while giving revelation sole arbiter status in questions relating to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. However, they gave consideration to evidence based on both reason and revelation in relation to questions the answers to which do not serve as a basis for the validation of prophethood or the validity of Islamic legal rulings. Such questions include, for example, whether God is one, whether one must return something one has received as a trust, or whether it is permissible to benefit from or make use of something that will bring no harm to anyone.

The Ash'arites agreed with the Mu'tazilites on some points and differed with them on others. The Maturidites took a position somewhere between that of the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites. Dr. al-Shafi'i summarizes the issue of rational investigation in its capacity as a path to doctrinal knowledge, saying:

Most scholastic theologians of both earlier and later periods, particularly the Ash'arites, the Maturidis and the Mu'tazilites acknowledged that rational evidence is acceptable in relation to questions of doctrine alongside evidence based on received revelation, and that theological insight may be derived from both reason and revelation. Some of them – that is to say, most of the Mu'tazilites and the late Ash'arites, Maturidis, and Twelver Shi'is – may have gone to extremes in their reliance on rational evidence and their disparagement of the value of evidence based on revelation for theological inquiry.⁶

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After explaining the scholastic theologians' various methods, Dr. Shafi'i draws attention to the criticism these methods received from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a Sufi thinker, Abū al-Walīd ibn Rushd, a rationalist philosopher, and Ibn Taymiyyah, a leading Salafi scholar, all of whom preferred to give priority to Qur'anic evidence. All three of these thinkers viewed Qur'anic evidence as being more effective and rationally persuasive, in addition to the fact that it enjoyed greater religious legitimacy than formal theological arguments. Al-Shafi'i advocates basing methodology anew on the Holy Qur'an, not in order for us to adhere to its teachings based on a traditional, unthinking acceptance but, rather, in order for us to subject our reason to a guidance that turns our attention to the signs God has placed both within our own minds and spirits and in the created universe around us. For only in this way will we be released from the shackles of formalistic, superficial evidence and dialectical complexities into new expanses that augur a true flowering of theological studies.

The Holy Qur'an contains hundreds of verses (*āyāt*, or "signs") which instruct us to engage in rational investigation. Not only do they instruct us to use our reason; they even show us how to use it in establishing doctrine, that is, by relying on revelation as a source of knowledge and on reason as a tool. Being itself an authoritative point of reference, the Qur'an demonstrates the role and functions of reason, making it the focal point of discourse and human responsibility without any need for speculative theological schools. Shaykh Abd al-Halim Mahmud is a contemporary scholar who, after having been thoroughly trained in philosophy, theology and Sufism, chose this kind of Qur'anic focus as the means of defining the place and function of reason. Shaykh Abd al-Halim Mahmud explains his position as follows: "We remain dependent on reason until the [divinely revealed] message has been confirmed. For once the true divine revolution has been substantiated, it is absurd and inconsistent with reason itself, true philosophy, or the method adhered to by the pious ancestors, for us to treat anything else as its equal."⁷

Dr. Hasan al-Shafi'i's discussion is especially important for the way in which it traces the evolutionary phases that were witnessed by rational-theological methodology and its branches. These phases were

accompanied by some degree of vacillation as the representative scholars of each school reconsidered and developed their schools' respective arguments and the evidence on which they were based. In illustration of this process, al-Shafi'i cites the evolution that occurred in the Ash'arite school. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324 AH/935 CE) began by taking a highly reserved position in which he gave approximately equal weight to reason and revelation. However, in his *Kitāb al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* (Clarification of the Principles of the Religion), al-Ash'arī came out as a "revelationist" who argued against his former Mu'tazilite colleagues. In his book, *al-Luma'* ("Flashes"), by contrast, al-Ash'arī restored some degree of balance to his thinking by giving more credence to reason. This relative balance of reason and revelation continued in the thought of al-Bāqillānī (d. 402 AH/1011 CE) in his book *Ijāz al-Qur'ān* (The Miraculousness of the Qur'an). However, signs of a methodological evolution in the form of a growing predilection for reason began to emerge in the thought of Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 406 AH/1015 CE) and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH/1037 CE). It was around this same time that Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 419 AH/1028 CE) adopted the Mu'tazilites' tripartite division of theological issues into (1) issues that can be understood through reason alone, (2) issues that can be understood based on revelation alone, and (3) issues that can only be understood based on reason and revelation together. This rationalist trend continued with al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111 CE), who also accepted the Mu'tazilites' tripartite division. After al-Ghazālī, the rationalist approach came to dominate Islamic theology in its entirety. This can be seen in the works of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153 CE). Al-Shahrastānī was followed by al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1209 CE), who cast further doubt on evidence derived from revelation and detailed his position in a list of eleven points. Al-Rāzī was succeeded by al-Āmidī (d. 631 AH/1233 CE), who, although he agreed with much of what al-Rāzī had to say, concluded that evidence derived from revelation could yield definitive certainty if it was accompanied by supporting evidence, thereby reestablishing a greater relative balance in Ash'arite thought.

Ash'arite thought began with Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's break with the Mu'tazilah school and his restoration of a more prominent role

to revelation in theological matters. Over time, however, Ash‘arite thought evolved methodologically into an acceptance of the Mu‘tazilites’ division of theological questions into three categories depending on the roles played therein by reason and revelation.

An example Dr. al-Shafi‘i cites in illustration of the methodological evolution within one subgroup of the scholastic-theological school may give us a clearer picture of the methodological development of this school as a whole. The reason-revelation question had not been an issue of urgent importance during the days of the Prophet’s companions and their immediate successors, although a few early examples of the use of reason can be found among the Khawarij. However, the methodological foundations of scholastic theology as a discipline concerned specifically with doctrine and the principles of religion may have become clearer with the emergence of the Mu‘tazilites.

Methodological thought manifested itself in Muslims’ use of reason to understand and process the texts of revelation – that is, the text of the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah – as well as in the concern to employ these revealed texts for the purpose of deriving legal rulings in diverse manners. It was these varied ways of deriving legal rulings that paved the way for the appearance of the juristic schools founded by scholars such as Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, al-Shāfi‘ī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and others. However, these scholars saw no need to discuss whether to give priority to reason or revelation, since the Qur’anic methodology to which they adhered made it unnecessary to engage in such debate.

The Mu‘tazilites, by contrast, went to extremes in the importance they placed on reason. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī had himself been an adherent of the Mu‘tazilah school. However, he later broke with them and established a school of his own which attracted a good number of followers. The Ash‘arite school, as we have seen, rehabilitated the role of revelation without belittling the role of reason. There then came Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māturīdī (333 AH/944 CE), who, building upon the legacy left by Imam Abū Ḥanīfah, formulated a moderate scholastic theological school that struck a balance between the positions taken by the Mu‘tazilite and the Ash‘arite schools. These three schools thus share the assumption that there is an opposition of sorts between reason and revelation that requires us to determine which of the two is to be assigned greater authority.

In a subsequent development, certain scholars of the scholastic-theological school relinquished the notion that reason and revelation are somehow inconsistent. Such scholars stressed the need to avoid any appearance of conflict (*dar' al-ta'arud*) between reason and revelation, the importance of agreement between “the correct understanding of revelation and the explicit import of reason,” and the need to formulate what one scholar referred to as “the definitive word on the link between wisdom and the Islamic law” (*faṣl al-maqāl fī mā bayn al-sharī'ah wa al-ḥikmah min ittiṣāl*). These and other expressions of the balance and complementarity between reason and revelation served to revive the Qur'anic approach that had been adhered to by early Muslim scholars. This earlier approach entailed engaging in rational inquiry into those matters that call for investigation while avoiding controversial issues that lead to no constructive action, knowledge of which yields no benefit, and ignorance of which does no harm. This newly emerging school was headed by scholars with various orientations such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Taymiyyah.

(2) *The Experiential-Sufi School*

This school relies on the distinction between experiential knowledge on one hand and, on the other, the various other types of knowledge that are acquired through revelation, sensory perception or reason. Just as the latter types of knowledge are associated with specific methodological procedures that enable us to acquire knowledge, test it, and put it to use, experiential knowledge is likewise associated with specific methodological procedures. The knowledge that comes via revelation, sensory perception or reason might be described as “acquisition” (*kasb*). Experiential knowledge, by contrast, might be described as an “endowment” (*wahb*). For it is a gift from God Almighty, who grants it to those individuals who strive against their baser nature through worship and the remembrance of God and who continue to ascend to higher and higher levels of purification and consciousness of the Divine until they are in such a state of nearness to God that they merit this divine bequest.

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In his article entitled, “The Mystical-Experiential Approach of Islam’s Sufis,”⁸ Dr. ‘Abd al-Hamid Madkur describes the features that characterize experiential knowledge and expounds the rules and criteria that govern the mystical approach. Dr. Madkur grounds the mystical-experiential approach in Islamic revelation, Islamic law, and reason, making use of the original works of leading Sufi figures. He draws on the writings of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 457 AH/1074 CE), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 AH/857 CE), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 298 AH/910 CE), Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (638 AH/1240 CE), and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386 AH/996 CE). Dr. Madkur also discusses the ways in which the Sufi heritage was assessed by other scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751 AH/1350 CE). The following is a synopsis of Dr. Madkur’s discussion:

In speaking of experiential knowledge, the Sufis have employed a variety of terms, including “inspiration” (*ilhām*), “disclosure” (*kashf*), and “witnessing” (*shuhūd*). They have described their science as being *ladunnī*, meaning, “issuing from the divine presence.” The use of this term is based on God Almighty’s statement about the upright servant Moses, upon him be peace, whom He describes as “one of Our servants on whom We had bestowed grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves (*‘allamnāhu min ladunnā ‘ilma*)” (*sūrah al-Kahf* 18:65). In speaking of their experiential knowledge, however, the Sufis prefer the term *ma‘rifah* (a term used to refer to knowledge of persons) over the word *‘ilm* (the term generally used when referring to a science or academic discipline).⁹ This *ma‘rifah* – a knowledge associated with inspiration and the heart – does not originate from sensory experience, rational comprehension, or logical syllogisms. Nor does it grow out of studying the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah or learning from a professor or spiritual guide. Rather, the adept arrives at this knowledge by traveling toward God along a path on which he or she “ascends spiritually toward the Divine. Consequently, it is a path marked by way stations through which one passes, or stairs along which one ascends.”¹⁰

This path, which is what Dr. Madkur refers to as the Sufi mystical approach or method, rests on two foundations. The first foundation

consists of the upward path or spiritual journey, which is a process of inward struggle and striving marked by renunciation or emptying (*takhlīyyah*) and the acquisition of godlike, virtuous traits (*tahliyyah*). The second foundation is the desired end, or arrival at the knowledge of God Almighty. However, whereas the first foundation is necessary for the realization of the second, the realization of the second does not necessarily follow from the first, since the path traveled is a kind of acquisition (*kasb*), that is, a process that depends on human effort, whereas the knowledge sought is an endowment from God (*wahb*). The process of being emptied of one's baser instincts and imperfections and acquiring virtue and godlikeness is a long, rugged path on which the traveler may need a shaykh, that is, a spiritual guide who is knowledgeable of what the soul needs in order to be properly trained up and purified. This training and purification involves a series of strivings in the course of which the traveler ascends by degrees through a number of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) beginning with repentance and culminating in oneness with the Divine. These stations have no set order; rather, they differ from one spiritual traveler to another. The effect of these stations manifests itself through spiritual, psychological states (*aḥwāl*) that come over the heart without effort or struggle. Such states include dejection (literally, contraction, or *qabḍ*), expansion (*bast*), that is, a state of merriment and spiritual release, joy (*tarab*) and sorrow (*ḥuzn*). Describing the link between stations and states, the Sufis say, "the stations are acquired through human effort (*al-maqāmāt makāsib*), while the states are granted as gifts (*wa al-aḥwāl mawāhib*)." ¹¹

There is a longstanding consensus among both scholars and the population at large that whether we are dealing with religious texts or observing natural phenomena and social-psychological processes, we arrive at knowledge by using our reason, our senses, or a combination of the two. The Sufis do not deny this. However, to these traditional means of acquiring knowledge, all of which are associated with some type of method and discipline, they have added another, non-traditional means of acquiring knowledge. The Sufis have exerted great efforts to ground the mystical-experiential method in the texts of Islamic revelation and law as well as in human reason. In so doing, they have sought to demonstrate that experiential knowledge is an actual

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possibility, and that the supposition that one can only arrive at true knowledge based on rational evidence acquired and employed in keeping with known methods “is a narrowing of God’s wide mercy.”¹² In the course of grounding experiential knowledge in religious texts, the Sufis have focused on Qur’anic verses which link human beings’ achievement of a deep consciousness of God with the spiritual gifts God grants them. These gifts include discernment, sustenance, light, mercy, guidance, and wisdom, all of which Sufis understand to be types of experiential knowledge: “knowledge acquired without [human] instruction, and insight without experimentation.” They also cite texts of the Prophetic Sunnah that speak of the believer’s discernment and openness of heart, qualities that the Sufis understand to be the light God shines into the believer’s heart. The Sufis also refer in this context to sayings attributed to some of the Prophet’s Companions and leading Muslim thinkers about what they term “inspiration without instruction.”¹³

In connection with the Sufis’ concern to ground experiential knowledge in the Islamic revelation, Madkur offers two observations. The first is that discussions of “inspirational knowledge” are not restricted to the Sufis alone. A number of early Muslim scholars, among them Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, spoke in similar terms about an inspiration-based knowledge from God, who graciously bestows visions, disclosures and inspirations upon whomsoever He wills of His servants. Madkur’s second observation is a kind of objection to the Sufis’ interpretation of Qur’anic verses which they see as demonstrating the reality and validity of the disclosures and inspirations God gives to those who are conscious of Him. After all, observes Madkur:

Someone who is conscious of God will be aware of the distinction between truth and falsehood. Indeed, such an individual is committed to truth in his words and deeds alike, avoiding falsehood in everything he does. As for disclosure (*kashf*), it has to do with realities that are beyond the reach of normal human perception; in other words, it is unrelated to realities that are obvious to us, and comes in the form of an outpouring into the believing servant’s heart. If such an outpouring indicates anything, it indicates the way in which God grants success to His servants in the choices they make, and not a unique disclosure or inspiration.¹⁴

As for the Sufis' efforts toward grounding the mystical-experiential method in reason, they have focused around the mind's need for something beyond itself. The physical senses, for example, are necessary in order for the mind to perform its role in the acquisition of knowledge. The mind, or reason, is only capable of operating within certain realms and parameters. Faculties and talents that distinguish some individuals from others, such as the ability to write and enjoy poetry, for example, lie in the realm of subjective experience, a realm that requires us to grant people their personal preferences and tastes. Additionally, the mind can fall into error; hence, it needs a standard or criterion on the basis of which to weigh its thought and ideas rather than being its own standard. This being the case, it is best for us to turn to God for true, inspired knowledge.

The Sufis do not disparage reason as a means of acquiring knowledge of the outer, concrete world in which we live. Indeed, the Sufi, like the rest of us, stands in need of rational knowledge to serve as the external framework for mystical knowledge. However, rational knowledge is insufficient to ensure the well-being of the heart. Consequently, reason acknowledges the existence of another way to gain knowledge and treads another path toward its acquisition; in so doing, it discovers a degree of confidence that may not be possible on the level of rational knowledge alone.

The knowledge to which one gains access through the mystical-experiential method is subjective in nature. In other words, it belongs exclusively to the person who experiences it, having been cast into his or her heart in a way that excludes narration, story, indoctrination and learning. For this reason it has no need of evidence from outside itself. Rather, it is a witness unto itself, and those who deny its existence must simply acknowledge it and concede to it given their inability to acquaint themselves with it directly. It is difficult to give expression to such knowledge in ordinary language, and the experience of it is restricted to those who have "tasted" it. In short, it is impossible to give verbal expression to an experiential state. The rational thinker and the Sufi gnostic (in the simple sense of "knower") may agree on certain ideas. However, there remains an essential difference between them: the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge! When

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mystical knowledge is granted, it tends to come suddenly and all at once, without one's having been expecting it or having exerted an effort to obtain it. In this respect, mystical knowledge resembles what happens to a scientist who is engrossed in the study of certain phenomena he is unable to explain. In his frustration, he stops thinking about them for a while and busies himself with something else when, out of the blue, a sudden thought occurs to him, like light dawning in his head, and before him there appears a clear explanation and an integrated vision.

Lastly, Madkur stresses the fact that the mystical-experiential method is integrative in nature. The Sufis disregard neither rational knowledge nor the Islamic legal sciences. However, they look beyond these to another horizon. Hence, if the outcomes of this mystical-experiential approach are consistent with the criteria set by Islamic law and meet the requirements of rationality, they see no reason to reject them, especially in view of the fact that this approach is linked with the desire for spiritual ascent and moral refinement. Certain aspects of human needs are more fully met through this approach, which helps to meet the requirements of the methodological integration to which contemporary minds aspire.

(3) The Scientific-Empirical School

Chapter Four of this book, which treats the development of research methods in Islamic thought and Western thought,¹⁵ presents examples of the ways in which the scientific-empirical method has manifested itself in the Islamic world as well as the phases of its development in the West.

It should be noted here that the scientific-empirical method in Islamic history has not been applied exclusively to research on matter, its physical and vital properties and its chemical transformations. Nor has it been restricted to practical applications of this method to industry, agriculture, medicine and the like, as can be seen today in the nano-sciences and other applied fields. Rather, it has also encompassed legal rulings pertinent to these sciences and their applications. The scientific-empirical method has likewise been applied to the logical and rational

requirements of social and historical studies as well as field observations and practical experiments. All of these “worlds” created by “the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds” – the physical universe from the vastest expanses to the minutest of its elements and particles, the world of human society with its peoples, tribes and cultures, and the world of individual human beings with their souls, spirits, minds, and hearts, their agonies and their hopes – were created with masterly precision and are subject to unvarying laws that can be discovered and put to practical use. The integrative features of the scientific empirical method – which involves employing the procedures best suited to the nature of the research topic, be they field observations, practical experiments, quantitative measures, or various inductive processes – are likewise inherent to the distinctively Islamic understanding of this method.

The phrase “scientific method” is clearly associated with “science.” The term “science” as used within the Islamic perspective, based both on its etymology (being derived from the Arabic root ع-ل-م , meaning “to know”) and its use in scholarly terminology, means “knowledge” in the unqualified sense. As such, it includes ways of thinking about all topics whatsoever, methods of researching them, and their practical applications. In the West, by contrast, the term “science” has been used to refer specifically to the study of material phenomena within the fields of physics, chemistry and other “exact sciences.” And whereas the scientific-empirical method has specifically to do with acquiring knowledge about the physical nature of things, the methodology of epistemological integration requires the use of the scientific-empirical method in whichever situation calls for it, just as it uses other methods in whatever situations require them.

The scientific method as understood and applied within the Islamic framework means documentation and proof in keeping with the maxim: “If you are transmitting information, strive for accuracy, and if you are making a claim, provide proof.” Accuracy of transmission was associated with the sciences of narration (the Hadith sciences, for example), while proof was associated with research. The proof provided might be rational and logical, or sensory and empirical. Hence, within the Islamic framework the scientific method has been employed

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equally in the natural and applied sciences, the social and human sciences, and the sciences of Islamic law. Islamic classification of the sciences in the past, being based on criteria that differ from those that are prevalent today, was characterized by pairs that brought together virtually all known disciplines. Sciences were classified, for example, as “praiseworthy” or “blameworthy,” “sciences of ends” or “sciences of means,” “this-worldly sciences” or “other-worldly sciences,” “sciences of revelation” or “sciences of the cosmos.” The term “jurisprudence” (*fiqh*) was used to refer to the desired understanding in relation to all topics of study. Hence, one had a “jurisprudence of rites of worship” (*fiqh al-‘ibādāt*) and a “jurisprudence of transactions” (*fiqh al-mu‘āmalāt*), the latter of which encompassed much of what falls today under the rubric of the social sciences, such as economics, sociology, education, psychology, political science, and the like.

As for the methodological authority to which appeal was made, it found its locus in the texts of the Holy Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah as well as the reasoned interpretations put forward by early Muslim scholars. It was thus a *tawhīdī*, integrative point of reference that included methods of research, investigation and the pursuit of knowledge, as well as methods of application, practical use, and practice. The Islamic methodology that served as a guide to research stressed the importance of making use of sensory perception, reason, examination, reflection and contemplation in the search for the patterns and laws that govern events and explain natural, social, and historical phenomena. It was by means of such thought processes that scholars read religious texts and came to conclusions concerning practical realities and human nature as manifested in individuals and society. Moreover, such processes were carried out in an integrated fashion that made use of both divine revelation and the created universe, both reason and sensory perception.

Application of the scientific method from an Islamic perspective necessarily involves taking a firm stance against any hindrances to sound thinking and research. Such hindrances might take the form of haphazard behavior which is inconsistent with the methodical procedures called for by the scientific method, or practices that become commonplace by virtue of inherited custom without attempts to put

their validity to the test. Such situations are reflected in the Qur'anic account of people's defense of idol worship on the grounds that "...we found our forefathers doing the same!" (*sūrah al-Shu'arā'* 26:74) or "...We found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!" (*sūrah Zukhruf* 43:23). Such practices might be based, as in the days of the Prophet, on superstition, myth, or incorrect interpretations.

It is true, of course, that methodological theorization had begun with the recording of the oral accounts that formed the Prophetic Sunnah and the earliest interpretations of the Qur'an. The theorization process continued with the development of the principles of jurisprudence, the principles of religion, theology, linguistics, and history, after which it came to include all other sciences as well, including physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, mechanics, and so on. However, the few writings that dealt specifically with methodological theorization tended to restrict themselves to discussions of leading scholars and the methods they had used in the pursuit of knowledge and instruction. Add to this the fact that methodological theorists saw no need to explicate the Qur'anic frame of reference for systematic thinking and practice, since scholars and writers at that time assumed its validity as a matter of course. Nevertheless, many of the books that make up the Islamic heritage begin with a chapter entitled, "The Book of Knowledge (Science)," or include a chapter with a similar title such as "On encouraging the pursuit of knowledge and an exposition of its virtues."¹⁶ Such a chapter generally includes references to Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths that promote the pursuit of knowledge, detail the virtues of students and teachers, and describe the journey entailed by the pursuit of knowledge, pedagogical methods and techniques, research procedures designed to acquire knowledge on particular topics and ways of testing and applying such knowledge. There were, in addition, books that specialized in these various topics, including debate, dialectics, theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism.¹⁷

It need not be considered a shortcoming in the Arabic Islamic heritage that it has bequeathed us no books specializing in the scientific empirical method. Nor have other heritages handed such books down to us. As succeeding generations of thinkers and scholars in various

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specializations accumulate greater and greater experience and expertise down the generations and glean experience and expertise from other peoples, human thought grows and develops. If methodological thought had been served in the Islamic heritage as it has been in the Western heritage, we would discover that certain texts from the Islamic heritage are of equal, if not greater, value than the writings of Newton and Descartes, who, benefitting from the accumulation of methodological knowledge and expertise that was available to them in their time, were able to lay a theoretical foundation for methodological activity and research.

(4) The Juristic-Uṣūlī School

We have combined the juristic and *uṣūlī* methods, both of which focus on the actions of human beings in their capacity as servants of God who are accountable to Him for their conduct, into a single school. Ibn Khaldūn states in his *Muqaddimah*:

Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is knowledge of God's rulings or edicts pertaining to the actions of His servants, who are accountable to Him for what they do. Such rulings, which specify whether a given action is obligatory, prohibited, recommended, undesirable, or permitted, are derived from the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah and the evidence contained therein. The process of deriving legal rulings from this evidence is referred to as jurisprudence.¹⁸

Jurisprudence emerged with Islam's earliest beginnings, and had two sources: the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah. Islam is a set of doctrines, moral principles, and practical rulings which were revealed in the form of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, who then communicated them to the people around him. Such doctrines and principles would also come at times from the Prophet himself in the form of legal rulings, verdicts, and answers to questions. During the era immediately subsequent to the death of the Prophet, his Companions would respond to events and newly arising situations by offering reasoned interpretations of the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah; these interpretations then became a third source of Islamic jurisprudence. During the second and third centuries AH, many non-Arab

peoples entered Islam and the Islamic state extended its rule over a vast geographical area. Consequently there arose new problems and situations, which required that Muslim scholars offer new interpretations of the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the views of the Companions in order to rule on previously unfamiliar issues, some actual and some hypothetical. It was at this stage that juristic rulings began to be compiled into books, and the interpretations offered by these second and third-century scholars became a fourth source of juristic input.

Juristic writings proliferated to the point where they made up a significant percentage of Muslim scholars' output over the centuries that followed, and a variety of juristic writing styles and approaches emerged. Ibn Ashur mentions two approaches to juristic writing. The first of these approaches involves mentioning specific issues and questions and their types followed by the relevant rulings. This approach is found in *al-Mudawwanah*, which is based on the jurisprudence of Imam Mālik, and in *al-Jāmi'* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 241 AH/805 CE), a student of Abū Ḥanīfah's. The second approach to juristic writing involves touching first on juristic universals and related principles followed by a listing of specific questions and issues as we find in *al-Dhakhīrah fī al-Fiqh al-Mālikī* (A Treasure of Mālikī Jurisprudence) by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684 AH/1285 CE)¹⁹ and *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Iṣlāḥ al-Anām* (Principles Underlying Juristic Rulings for the Good of Mankind)²⁰ by al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660 AH/1261 CE).

However, the science of jurisprudence suffered a setback as a result of uncompromising attachment to this or that particular juristic school and an insistence on deriving legal rulings solely on the basis of a single school's teachings while ruling out evidence or considerations that might argue in favor of alternative rulings. These developments led to a ban on any sort of innovative interpretation of Islam's religious texts and disregard for the higher aims and intents of Islamic law. Devoting most of their attention to rulings pertinent to Islamic rites of worship, jurists frequently lacked knowledge in areas they needed to be well-versed in if they were to derive the soundest possible legal rulings.²¹ Negative developments such as these are certain to have contributed to

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the backward state in which the Muslim ummah has found itself over the past few centuries.

There was no need to spell out the principles of jurisprudence during the lifetime of the Apostle, nor in the era of the Companions following his death. However, subsequent mixing of Arabs and non-Arabs within the developing Muslim ummah generated a need to establish grammatical rules to assist non-Arab Muslims in understanding and correctly pronouncing religious texts. This development coincided with a dispute that arose between “the people of the hadith,” or simply, Traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), who relied exclusively on the literal import of the hadiths, and “the people of independent reasoning” (*ahl al-ra’y*),²² who based their rulings on reasoned, innovative interpretation (*ijtihād*). There was, in addition, a growing tendency to argue from religious texts in capricious, tendentious ways. It thus became necessary to set down rules governing the use of textual evidence and conditions for drawing conclusions from such evidence. It was these grammatical rules and regulations for how to reason from textual evidence that came to be known as the science of the principles of jurisprudence (*‘ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*).

The field of jurisprudence began small, then gradually expanded, passing through a series of stages in the process. The first Muslim scholar to write about the principles of jurisprudence was Imam al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204 AH/819 CE). Al-Shāfi‘ī’s work was followed by a number of other works that reflected varying methodologies. The method adhered to by scholastic theologians was first to establish the rules governing the principles of jurisprudence and research relating thereto by means of theoretical discussion and logical proofs. Ḥanafī jurists likewise would begin by specifying the juristic rules they believed their forebears to have used as a foundation for their interpretations. A third group adhered to a method that combined elements of the first two methods just described; in other words, they took care to define rules and establish proofs, after which they would apply them to subsidiary juristic questions. Representatives of this latter group include Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771 AH/1369 CE), author of *Jam‘ al-Jawāmi‘*. It should be borne in mind that the principles and rules of jurisprudence are nothing but tools and methods, not texts of divine revelation.²³

The discipline of the principles of jurisprudence developed to the point where some scholars described it as “the greatest, most illustrious, and most beneficial of the Islamic legal sciences.”²⁴ Most books dealing with the principles of jurisprudence were slanted toward a particular juristic school of thought, with each scholar marshalling lengthy arguments in support of his own school; examples of scholars who adopted this approach include al-Bāqillānī and al-Ghazālī. Other scholars, such as al-Qarāfī and Ibn al-Hājib, kept their expositions brief and concise. However, just as there were factors that delayed the progress of the science of jurisprudence (*‘ilm al-fiqh*), the field of the principles of jurisprudence (*‘ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*) was likewise set back by various factors. Such factors included an excessive preoccupation with logic, grammar, linguistics and theology that had nothing to do with the science per se and which added nothing of value on the practical level, and the discussion of irrelevant issues and questions which al-Shāṭibī, for example, judged to be of no use to scholarship. There was also a lack of consistency between “roots” and “branches,” that is, between the situations in response to which original juristic rulings had been issued (the “roots,” or *uṣūl*), and later situations the rulings on which were based on comparisons or analogies with the original ones (the “branches,” or *furū‘*), because the codification of the principles of jurisprudence came after the definition of the branches. Other factors that prevented the field of jurisprudence from progressing included a disregard for the higher aims of Islamic law and what is termed “the closing of the door to *ijtihād*,” that is, an unofficial ban on the use of independent reasoning and innovative interpretation, which significantly undermined Muslims’ use of their intellectual powers and the quality of Islamic life overall.

Despite such signs of backwardness in the juristic sciences, efforts toward reform in the field did not come to a complete halt. In fact, a number of scholars made appreciable efforts toward this end. In this connection, mention might be made of Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250 AH/1834 CE), who composed a number of works that contributed to progress in juristic thought. Such works include his *al-Darārī al-Muḍī’ah fī Sharḥ al-Durar al-Bahiyyah* and *al-Sayl al-Jarrār al-Mutadaffiq ‘alā Ḥadā’iq al-Azhār* on comparative jurisprudence, and

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his *Irshād al-Fuḥūl ilā Tahqīq al-Ḥaqq min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* on the principles of jurisprudence. Al-Shawkānī, whose work heralded the end of the backwardness and stagnation that had afflicted the field of jurisprudence, formulated an integrated vision of scholarly reform which consisted of a theory of renewal based on three methodological foundations: (1) prohibition of blind imitation of one's forebears and the call to independent reasoning and innovative interpretation, (2) a thorough exploration of the science of the principles of jurisprudence, and (3) revitalization of the methodology adhered to in juristic studies.²⁵

Juristic method (*al-manhaj al-fiqhī*) and the method associated with the principles of jurisprudence (*al-manhaj al-uṣūlī*) can thus be integrated, since they both address a single theme. Juristic method is no longer restricted to the work of imams and muftis who rule on issues of personal piety, such as rites of Islamic worship, daily transactions, and personal status; rather, it goes beyond these to the work of judges and lawyers in all areas of relevance to the protection of human rights and resolution of conflicts.

The discipline of the principles of jurisprudence lends itself to integration given the fact that it is a science in which, in the words of one Muslim thinker, “reason has been mingled with revelation, and which involves examination of both evidence and the rulings to which it points. As such, it has been a significant aid toward understanding the Book of God and the words and actions of the Messenger of God.”²⁶

According to Ali Sami al-Nashshar, the way of thinking adopted by Imam al-Shāfiʿī in the course of formulating the principles of jurisprudence was scientific and philosophical in nature. In support of this view al-Nashshar cites Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who is reported to have said, “Al-Shāfiʿī was a philosopher in four respects: in respect to language, the variety in people's points of view, meanings, and jurisprudence.”²⁷ Al-Nashshar points out that the rules governing the *uṣūlī* method are consistent with the rules governing scientific experimental induction, particularly the law of effective causes (*qāʿidat al-ʿillah*) and the law of constancy (*qāʿidat al-iṭṭirād*, according to which as long as a given cause is present, so is its ruling, and vice-versa), as well as the methods for identifying effective causes (*masālik al-ʿillah*) – that

is, isolation of the effective cause (*al-sabr*), restricting the range of a cause's anticipated qualities (*al-taqṣīm*), elimination of irrelevant causes (*al-ṭard*), consistency of effective causes (*al-dawarān*), and ascertaining the effective cause (*tahqīq al-manāʾ*). In this connection the author quotes a statement by al-Qarāfī according to which many of the laws governing the science of medicine are confirmed through experimentation, which is an expression of the juristic principle of consistency of effective causes (*al-dawarān*).²⁸

The *uṣūlī* method consists of rules which regulate the process of *ijtihād* for the purpose of deriving legal rulings relevant to rites of worship and day-to-day transactions and of relating more effectively to the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah. This being the case, Hadith scholars and other thinkers and researchers are of the view that this same method may be activated, developed and revitalized so as to provide guidelines for the contemporary propagation of Islam, shape religious awareness, base Islamic jurisprudence on a proper understanding of aims and priorities, and manage the Muslim community's affairs while achieving its best interests in the various areas of its life. Based on his observation of a number of experiments in the renewal of the *uṣūlī* method, one scholar posits that "the science of the principles of jurisprudence is one of the most important factors contributing to the revitalization of thought and knowledge in the Muslim community."²⁹

CONCLUSION

Our aim in this chapter has been to give a brief overview of what we term "methodological schools." Our focus has been four of the methodological schools representing Islamic methodology. All of these schools demonstrate a commitment to the general principles and ideals of Islamic methodology, deriving their data from the same sources (the written Islamic revelation and the created universe) and employing the same tools (reason and sensory perception), albeit with differing degrees of emphasis on this or that source or tool. Hence, though numerous and varied, all of these schools embody the methodology of epistemological integration from the Islamic perspective. It will be clear from our discussion here that none of these schools serves

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as a substitute for any of the others except in relation to the purpose for which it is being adhered to and the person who has chosen to associate himself with it. We have chosen to describe the phenomenon of multiplicity and variety in Islamic methodology in terms of a *tawhīdī* perspective, which adopts integration as its fundamental approach, as opposed to a unitary or one-dimensional perspective, which only sees truth in a single school.

We have found that every one of these schools adopts the methodology of epistemological integration. As such, none of them adopts an extreme, one-sided position on any given issue. The adherents of the scholastic-theological school, for example, disagreed over the degree to which we should rely on reason as opposed to revelation. However, none of the parties to this disagreement supported exclusive reliance on either reason or revelation, for to take such an exclusive position would have set them outside of the Islamic fold. Rather, most adherents of the scholastic-theological school took positions that fell somewhere along the middle range of the continuum between total reliance on reason and total reliance on revelation; some leaned toward greater reliance on reason, others leaned toward greater reliance on revelation, and still others relied almost equally on both.

Similarly, scholars belonging to this or that methodological school differ in terms of the ways they practice their school's traditions and carry out its procedures, as well as the positions they take. Hence, there are sub-schools within each of the larger schools. As we saw in the case of the rationalist-scholastic school, the positions taken by the Muʿtazilites, the Ashʿarites, and the Maturidites on the matter of reason and revelation differ, though not always or in every respect. Rather, their positions are more or less similar on some issues, while diverging on others. Similarly, we find significant variation among the positions taken by different adherents of the mystical-experiential school. Differences of position within this school are represented by major representative figures such as al-Ghazālī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, al-Qushayrī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, and so on.

As in the case of human knowledge, no methodological school has emerged fully formed. Each of them began with a distinctive experience or insight on the part of some scholar who then went on to

introduce a method of investigation, research, and treatment of intellectual or theological issues. Each of these scholars came to have students and disciples who then developed the approach he had initiated until it was fully formed and exhibited those features that distinguished it from other methods and approaches. The practices of this or that methodological school have sometimes ramified to form sub-schools. Hence, the maturation of a method and the integration of its various elements does not necessarily mean that it has stopped growing, developing and changing. On the contrary, the law of change and development governs all of these schools. It may also happen that different schools' orientations become more similar over time, and that certain elements in a given school's perspective merge with elements in the perspective of some other school with the result that they come together, causing still other schools to be born.