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Contours and Strokes of Islamic Social Policy

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This issue of *the RUDN Journal of Philosophy* is a special one as it includes a selection of articles on the social policy of Islam. This topic is vast in terms of time span (from the 7th century to the present day) and geographical extension regarding the diversity of interpretations due to objective and subjective reasons. Considering that the readers of the Journal are not only philosophers but also representatives of other humanitarian disciplines (first of all, historians, sociologists, political scientists, lawyers, and religious scholars) with different qualification levels from professors to students, we consider it expedient to preface the published articles with a brief introduction.

Let us try to outline the main features of Islam's social policy. One of the principal features of Muslim doctrine is the “unity” of religion and politics, which was conditioned by the economic, political, and spiritual state that developed in Arabia at the beginning of the 7th century. Second was tribal fragmentation that prevented “fair trade” and dictated the need for state unification to resist the expansion of the outside world. Thirdly, the spiritual atmosphere — the spread of the phenomenon of prophecy in Arabia under the influence of the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity.

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The above could be perceived as simplistic sociologizing, unacceptable to those who believe in the sacredness of prophecy. We would nevertheless like to caution against such hasty and superficial conclusions. The history of 7th-century Arabia shows that Muhammad was not the only *Nabi* (literary, “those having communion with the deity”). Such were the preacher Musaylima, the prophetess Sajah, the prophets Tulayha, Saf ibn Sayyad, and others. However, none of them became the founder of the new religion [1. P. 19—27].

One of the most enlightened Muslim thinkers of the 20th century, Muhammad Iqbal (1877—1938), drew attention to the fact that “Judging from the various types of activity that emanated from the movement initiated by the Prophet of Islam, his spiritual tension and the kind of behaviour which issued from it, cannot be regarded as a response to a mere fantasy inside his brain. It is impossible to understand it except as a response to an objective situation generative of new enthusiasms, new organizations, new starting-points.” [2. P. 191].

The Muslim chronology dates to 622, when Muhammad and his closest supporters made the *Hijrah* (Arabic for “departure” or “migration”) from Mecca to Medina, where he created an *ummah*, a “community” in which the tribal ties were replaced by an association based on the profession of one religion. Thus, the idea of statehood as a religious community was embedded in Islam from the very beginning.

Muhammad was an unusual prophet. He not only preached but performed a number of other “roles” which, to use modern terminology, might be designated as legislative, executive, and judicial. His prophetic revelation contains both prescriptions of a purely religious order, and principles of society’s social, economic, and political order. The idea of the inseparability of religion and politics boils down to the formula: God is the supreme sovereign, and the caliph — the successor, deputy of Allah is called to carry out his will.

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (632), the theocratic state — the Rashidun Caliphate existed until 661. It was successively headed by four rightly-guided caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib. After the violent death of the latter, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, a member of the Umayyad dynasty, became the caliph. The Umayyad Caliphate lasted until 750. It was replaced by the Abbasid Caliphate, where the Abbasid dynasty ruled until 1258.

The institution of the caliphate, implemented by ruling dynasties in the shifting centers of the Muslim world, lasted fourteen centuries until the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 due to Atatürk’s Reforms that proclaimed Turkey a Republic.

Nevertheless, to this day, it is commonly accepted among Muslims that Islam recognizes only the law of God — the *Sharia*. This “divine law” precepts are eternal and not subject to criticism or revision. The believer must strive to know it, though in principle, because of the limited capacity of his intellect, he will never be able to

comprehend it in its entirety. Adopting and introducing a new “law” (*qanun*) is nothing more than administration.

Indeed, even the contours of Islam’s social policy are presented above in the simplest possible way. The socio-political space they outlined was constantly changing, which meant that clarifications, refinement, rethinking, and even reforms were required. The Muslims’ lack of institutionalized centralization and canonical theology contributed to this. Theological and legal schools (*Madhhabs*) emerged during the reigns of caliphs al-Mansur (754—775), al-Mahdi (775—785), Harun al-Rashid (786—809), and al-Ma’mun (813—833) in the 8th—9th centuries. Among Sunnis, four of them still retain influence: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i, and Hanbali. The Shia have their own theological and legal schools. All recognize the Quran as the basis of Islamic law, and the Sunnah (*hadith* — traditions) is the second most important source of Islamic law.

The existence of a variety of theological and legal doctrines that constituted the sources of Islamic law (*Fiqh*) affected its pluralism. Over the centuries, the practice of implementing the conclusions of Fiqh has seriously deviated from the ideal picture painted by traditional Islamic doctrine [3. P. 97—109].

The understanding that the laws of the Middle Ages, preventing the emergence from stagnation, lagging behind the Western world, became widespread during the period of national liberation struggles and became even more active in the 20th century as a consequence of the collapse of the colonial system.

In the theological milieu, which was most committed to traditionalism, there was a tendency to limit legal changes by distinguishing three categories of laws in the Sharia:

- a) obligatory, i.e., those expressly mentioned in the Quran (such as the prohibition of usury, stealing, drinking alcoholic beverages, etc.);
- b) recommendatory, i.e., they are not obligatory, but it is desirable to fulfill them;
- c) controversial, allowing one to act freely, guided by the requirements of the time, “if there are no special instructions on the subject in the Quran and the Sunnah” [4. P. 281].

In radical opposition to traditionalism is the modernist approach to questions of legal theory and practice, particularly evident during the struggle for independence and in the early stage of its attainment. A particular group of ideologues who took an extreme modernist stance rejected the legal prescriptions of the Sharia as entirely obsolete. In Morocco and Tunisia, the modernists proposed borrowing the French law, in India — the Anglo-Saxon, and in Indonesia — the Dutch. The influence of the socio-political system of the metropolis had a direct impact here.

The openly modernist approach to legal theory and practice was not widely accepted. More readily accepted were programs of Muslim law reform that involved a reinterpretation and modern interpretation of the principles of Islamic

doctrine. Among the most brilliant and widely recognized Muslim reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were Muhammad Abduh (1834—1905), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839—1909), Muhammad Iqbal (1873—1938), Ali Abdel Raziq (1888—1966), et al.

Regarding the philosophical approach to the permissibility and necessity of reinterpreting Islamic doctrine, Iqbal's lectures in India and at the Aristotelian Society (London, December 1932) are exciting. Later, the lectures were published under the general title *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* [5].

Proceeding from the general development of Islamic culture, Iqbal concludes that Muslims have “a keen sense of the reality of time, and the concept of life as a continuous movement in time” [6. P. 150—151].

Noteworthy that the philosopher-poet refers to the views of Ibn Khaldun (1332—1406). According to Iqbal, his concept seems extremely important because of its conclusion that history, as a continuous “movement in time, is a truly creative movement, not a movement whose direction is predetermined.” Ibn Khaldun's own prospects, as Iqbal notes, drew on Muslim intellectual heritage, including the Quranic view of the “change of day and night” as a symbol of a finite Reality that “at every moment appears in a new glory”; the tendency of Muslim metaphysics to regard time as objective; Ibn Miskawayh's view of life as an evolutionary movement; al-Biruni's approach to the concept of Nature as a process of becoming. At the conclusion of his fourth lecture *The Human Ego — His Freedom and Immortality*, Iqbal makes a significant statement: “Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality” [6. P. 134]. “And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding” [6. P. 134].

Iqbal emphasized that man is a “free, responsible being, the maker of his own destiny, whose liberation lies in his own hands. There is no mediator between God and man” [7. P. 38]. The thinker simultaneously opposes the claims of Muslim theologians and jurists to a unique role in the state (recognizing their authority only as “interpreters of the law”), as well as attempts to restore theocratic power, both in the person of a Sunni caliph and a Shia imam. Iqbal believes that absolute personal power may have been appropriate in “primitive societies, but it proves ineffective at higher stages of civilization” [7. P. 53].

The polemic over the possibility of reinterpreting the traditionalist interpretations of Islam, particularly its social doctrine and the practices based on it, is still fierce today. The fundamental difference between religion and culture can explain this. For a believer, religion is a sacred character — Islamic teaching is sent down from above, and its source of origin is transcendent, otherworldly, and irrational, different from the mundane and ordinary. Hence its stable constancy and the invariability of its main provisions. Culture as a totality of material, spiritual and social values, created and constantly created by human activity, is characterized

by dynamism, flexibility, openness to change, and creation. Their rigid confrontation is destructive to society. There is, however, hope for their coexistence and fruitful interaction. For this, it is worth heeding the voice of wisdom. This voice has been heard many times throughout the Muslim world as well.

Initially, Muslims considered the Quran the only source of religious truth. During the Early Muslim conquests (632—751), the Arabs faced many questions and answers they could not find in their holy book because the economic and cultural level of the enslaved peoples was much higher. The Arabs found it expedient to adopt many of the rules of feudal law common in the Mediterranean countries to develop their law. In doing so, however, they referred to Muhammad in order, on the one hand, to provide further weight to the legal norms and, on the other, to justify the necessity of strictly obeying them as the legal and, above all, the religious precepts of the Prophet himself. This is how the second source of Islamic doctrine — the *Sunnah* (literally “way, direction,” figuratively “custom, tradition”) — emerged. The official recognition under the Umayyads, along with the Quran, of the *Sunnah* as the root of Muslim teaching — *asl* — facilitated the compilation of the *hadith* (“stories”) and their collection. History scholars (mainly Ignác Goldziher) proved the unreliability of the vast majority of hadiths if one sees them as legends going back to Muhammad. But this in no way diminishes their importance as a source for considering the history of social and state development of the Caliphate countries in the period of early feudalism. It took a little time for it to become evident that the *Sunnah* could not as well answer all the problems posed by life and the development of feudal society. In the 8th century, the Muslim *fuqahā* (jurists) split into two currents.

The representatives of one of them, the *Ahl al-Hadith* (adherents of the hadith), mostly Medinians, continued to insist on strict adherence to the word of God and his Prophet — i.e., the Quran and the *Sunnah*. The Syrian and Iraqi *fuqahā*, adherents to the second current — *Ahl al-Ra’y* (adherents of opinion) — allowed the use of the rationalistic method when an analogy — *qiyas* — could be found in the Quran and the *Sunnah* for a logical conclusion on a particular question. To avoid too much disagreement, the use of *qiyas* was conditioned on the *ijma*, the agreed opinion of the legal theologians. Thus, *qiyas* and *ijma* were also recognized as the roots of Islamic doctrine. The struggle between the representatives of the two mentioned currents led to a compromise solution — creating several *Madhhab* in orthodox Islam in the second half of the 8th — in the 9th centuries. The essence of the compromise between the *Ahl al-Ra’y* and *Ahl al-Hadith* was reduced to the fact that representatives of all legal schools agreed to recognize the four roots of the doctrine. Simultaneously, the framework of using independent judgment was significantly narrowed. *Ra’y* (personal opinion) was replaced by *ijtihad*, a judgment less arbitrary because it implied a conclusion based on a competent knowledge of the Quran and the *Sunnah* and an understanding of their meaning in a given situation.

Ijtihad (literally “diligence, great diligence”) is a derivative source of Islamic law; the principle of freedom of interpretation of Islamic legal norms appeared as an activity in the late 7th century C.E. This freedom was granted to those who knew the Arabic language, knew the Quran and the Sunnah by memory, were God-fearing and pious, possessed a penetrating mind and intuition. Throughout the first five centuries of Islam, the practice of *ijtihad* continued, although controversy surrounded it. By the 14th century, the scope was so narrowed that the “gates of *ijtihad*” were effectively closed, and the starting points of faith and law could not be used as objects of independent judgment. *Ijtihad fil Mad’hab* was permitted, i.e., within the framework of the legal principles established by a particular school of law. But once it received the sanction of *ijma*, the possibility of passing a new judgment on the matter in the future was excluded. Henceforth, Muslims had to follow *taqlid* (literally “imitation, tradition”), strictly adhering to decisions made in the past, mainly in the first three or four centuries of Muslim history. Attempts to change Islam’s social and ethical teachings, as well as the political and economic structure of Muslim society, by relying on an interpretation of religious dogma different from that given centuries ago by legal theologians, were suppressed as unacceptable heresy.

The 19th and 20th century Muslim ideologists’ demand to “open the doors of *ijtihad*” was not a form of individual protest against the existing law and order, sanctified by religion. As a trend in social and political thought in Muslim countries, the demand for *ijtihad* formed the basis for a revision and reassessment not only of the legal precepts of Islam, but of all religious doctrine in general. It meant the recognition of a certain freedom of will and action for the individual, which was necessary for the development of his initiative and active participation in the reorganization of society.

The development and evolution of social-political philosophy over the centuries of Islam’s existence have been possible thanks to developing a favorable concept of *Knowledge*. Therefore, the editors thought it appropriate to open this Special Issue of the *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* with an article by N.S. Kirabaev. The paper is devoted to the fundamental contribution to the development of the concept of knowledge by al-Ghazali (1058—1111), the most prominent representative of *Kalam*. He completed the creation of the Asharite metaphysics and thus earned the title “The Proof of Islam.” Al-Ghazali critically examined the provisions of the main directions of Islamic thought from Islamic theology, Sufism, Ismailism, and *falsafa*.

N.S. Kirabaev emphasizes the importance of the ideal of knowledge in Muslim culture, the search for which is considered the duty of every Muslim — for the effort spent on the quest for knowledge is equal to the effort of “staying on the path of God.” He notes that in Islam, even before translations from Greek began, the

tradition of rational reasoning developed initially in the field of Muslim law, with particular emphasis on the fact that faith and reason not only do not oppose but are mutually complementary.

It is no coincidence that virtually all religious disciplines have the status of Islamic sciences, including law — *ilm al-fiqh*. The article analyzes al-Ghazali's fundamental and well-known works in the Muslim world, *The Revival of Religious Sciences (Ihya' Ulum al-Din)*. It opens with the *Book of Knowledge (Kitab Al-Ilm)*, in which it is explained that knowledge has two purposes: comprehension of objects of the earthly world and the world beyond and also the development of rules for the improvement of human character because the proper knowledge, which should be the duty of each person, is the knowledge about “righteous action.”

A substantial period of advancement toward knowledge on the path of “legal science” as Islamic political thought was laid down by Ibn Khaldun (1332—1406), the outstanding Arab historian, sociologist, and philosopher. His major work, *Muqaddimah* or *Prolegomena* (“Introduction”), has even been compared to the works of influential European philosophers such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Giambattista Vico, Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, and the economists David Ricardo and Adam Smith.

An outstanding follower of Ibn Khaldun was Ibn al-Azraq (1427—1491), whose views on the state and politics showed a no less creative connection to the preceding representatives of *falsafa* (al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Averroes (Ibn Rushd)), through whom he perceived and reproduced the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.

This jurist, little known in Russian Islamic studies, is the subject of an article by M.M. Al-Janabi, Yu.M. Pochta, and Mohammed Alyousef Shirin. The paper analyzes the perception of Aristotle's political views in Islamic political thought, particularly those directly reproduced in al-Azraq's work “A Path of Virtues in the Character of a Ruler” (*Bada'i al-Salak fi Taba'i al-Malik*). In formulating the political idea of the necessity of establishing a state headed by a monarch, the social philosopher presents reasonable criteria for establishing a state and legality, the understanding of which he constructs based on the traditions of Shariah and the postulates of Islam.

The explosion of reformism, as mentioned above, occurred during the national liberation movement. Tawfik Ibrahim examines the reform movement of this period in the little-studied aspect of eschatology. He highlights one of the most critical aspects of the reformatory potential of the *falsafa* associated with the importance of the soteriological concept developed within its framework for the reconstruction of the theological discourse that began in the 19th century, represented primarily by

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida. T.K. Ibrahim uses the example of the Reformers' works to show how thinkers, inspired by the ideals of scientific rationality and sociocultural progress, overcame the eschatology of traditional theology by turning to the soteriological teachings of Muslim Peripatetics, above all, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd).

Falsafian soteriology was in demand to overcome the apocalyptic eschatology that dominated traditional theology. The falsafian version of philosophical theology appealed to the Reformers because of its characteristic rationalism and intellectualism. With this was combined a substantive openness to science. The falsafa ("philosophy") itself was seen as a "science of sciences," embracing all the scientific disciplines of the time, including mathematics, physics, and other branches of the natural sciences. Hence the orientation of its prominent representatives toward the harmony of religion and philosophy, faith, and reason (science).

The Reformers, who worked on elaborating a new theology ("new Kalam," *ilm al-Kalam al-Jadid*), more tolerant to other theological systems, confessions, and religions, were also attracted by falsafa theology inherent in its universalist-pluralist orientation. It continued Ibn Khaldun's lineage and aimed to serve as a model for constructive dialogue between religions and cultures.

Widespread eschatological expectations marked the first centuries of the second millennium. And in this apocalypticism, combined with a virtually fatalistic interpretation of God's predestination — *Qadar* — the Reformers saw the fundamental cause of the stagnation and degradation of the Muslim world.

To the Reformers, the falsafa represented an alternative version of traditional theology, which, in the field of eschatology, leaned toward a literalist interpretation of sacred texts and an acceptance of the authenticity of the Sunnah's testimony, including hadiths about the end of the world and the signs preceding it. The doctrine of future life was developed by philosophers in the form of individual eschatology, more precisely, soteriology, focusing their attention on the rational justification of the immateriality of the human soul, its incorruptibility, and the modalities of its fate after separation from the body.

T.K. Ibrahim pays particular attention to the fact that the Reformers limit the list of generally binding Islamic doctrines to the five provisions mentioned by the Quran as principles of any godly religion — belief in God, His angels, His scriptures, His prophets, and the Judgement Day. This excludes from normative doctrine, among other things, many apocalyptic dogmas based on unreliable, from the Reformers' standpoint, hadiths, which marks a significant step toward the de-eschatologization of the traditional theology of history.

The thesis of the absence of *mutawatir* (Arabic *mutawātir* — successive narration — is a hadith which in all links of the chain of transmitters is transmitted by a sufficiently large number of people who cannot collude among themselves in lying) among the hadiths about the omens of the Judgment Day. By doing so, the

Reformers question the truthfulness of all the Sunnah testimonies. Ibrahim, for his part, asserts the validity of his conclusion by resorting to a succinct quote from Muhammad Iqbal: “There is no eternal damnation in Islam”.

This is discussed in the article *Malek Bennabi (1905-1973): a Civilizational Approach to the Problems of the Muslim World in the Context of Nahda*, presented by Leyla Melikova.

The Nahda, the period of modernization and reform of the Arab world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, has been sufficiently covered in world academic literature. And yet L. Melikova’s approach to presenting and evaluating the views of one of the later representatives of the Nahda is entirely original.

Malek Bennabi (1905—1973), Algerian by birth, from 1930 to 1954 lived in France, then moved to Cairo, and in 1962 returned to the newly independent Algeria. In his homeland, he worked as chief administrator of higher education. Even during his stay in France, Bennabi exercised great interest in the reform of Muslim society. This is evidenced by his 1948 book *Les conditions de la renaissance (Conditions of a Renaissance)*, published in French and Arabic.

Bennabi continued and developed the ideas of the Nahda representatives. At the same time, he criticized them for an attempt to reform the environment rather than the individual. He was convinced that man had two identities. The first is that man is a precious creature of Allah, revered by Him and unaffected by history, embodying a world of ideas. The second identity, fluid and influenced by history, is man as a social unit. The socio-historical structure transforms the individual into an individual, a creature of civilization.

Malek Bennabi’s views and their growing popularity in academia led to authorities banning him from leaving Algeria. Only in 1971 was he allowed to leave the country to make a Hajj to Mecca. He took this opportunity to visit Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia, where he presented on “the role of Muslims in the last third of the 20th century.” In 1972 Bennabi returned to Algeria, where he fell ill and died.

Leyla Melikova’s article is original in that (willingly or unwillingly) it encourages the reader to relate the views of the Algerian reformer to recent events, with international tensions unseen since World War II. To unite the efforts of the Afro-Asian peoples in the face of colonialism and the cultural and economic expansion of the West, M. Bennabi developed the concept of *Afro-Asianism*, which he outlined in a book with the same title [8]. In it he set out to solve problems on a global scale.

For M. Bennabi, the “religious idea” must be authentic to the faith and, at the same time, valid in the modern world. He combines the knowledge of the Muslim tradition with the humanities and proposes to link his vision of an authentic Islam with the Cartesian technocratic spirit. Moreover, in the context of decolonization, he wants to realize, through the moral and social deployment of the “religious idea,”

the project of a prosperous and open, sustainable society. He believed that *ijtihad* was necessary to establish an economic doctrine outside the capitalist and socialist systems.

Sophya Ragozina's article *Environmentalism in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy* concludes the collection of articles on the social politics of Islam. An intellectual movement associated with discussing environmental problems proceeding from the so-called Shariah environmental law, environmental activism, and environmental philosophy emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In contrast to Western environmentalists, who rarely went beyond anthropo- and biocentrism in their approaches to environmental protection, eco-activists in the Muslim milieu predominantly started from two fundamental Quranic formulas: *tawhid* (the unity and oneness of Allah) and the succession of the caliph. Briefly, this means that Allah offered the trust to man, and he accepted the responsibility. Man is obliged to fulfill the trust placed in him by acting justly according to the law of Allah — the Sharia.

S. Ragozina draws attention to the fact that the discussion of environmental protection has gone beyond the confines of “Eastern” Muslims, distinguished by their reformist sentiments. It embraced the “Western” region of the Islamic world, considered the most orthodox. In 1983, under the auspices of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the Saudi Arabia Meteorological and Environmental Protection Authority drafted the first declaration enshrining Islamic environmental conservation principles. One of the authors of this declaration was Mawil Izzi Din, an advisor to the Saudi government.

Odeh Al-Jayyousi, a professor at Arabian Gulf University, calls for a rethinking of educational systems that, in his view, have neglected the beauty and grandeur of nature, as well as a revival of the concept of the Green Welfare Fund (*waqf*) to support the transition to a sustainable economy. His concept is based on three categories: green activism (*jihad*), green innovation (*ijtihad*), and green lifestyle (*zohd*) [9]. He uses theological arguments to justify the term *jihad* (as the most “problematic in the context of the current wariness of Islam in the Western world”). The basic meaning of *jihad* is to deal with imbalances, injustices, or harms that disturb the “natural state” (*fitra*). The critical role of the ummah is to ensure justice, beauty, and balance in the universe.

Per S. Ragozina's admission, she could cite only a few examples of Islamic environmentalism. But this is insufficient to understand how deeply these ideas have been developed and, even more so, how practically realizable they are.

The articles received by the editors and included in the special issue of the *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* cover the dynamics of the evolution of Islamic political thought over the centuries but within the geographically limited space of

the Arab world. This gap must be filled by expanding the circle of authors who are experts in Islamic studies, both numerous and highly qualified. There are objective reasons for this—the discourse on the political philosophy of Islam covers all Muslim countries. To confirm this take, we shall cite just one example.

The Tatar theologian, historian, and educator Şihabetdin Märcani (1818—1889), who sought to reform the consciousness of Muslims in the spirit of the new times, called for independent *ijtihad*. He called it “a mighty gift of God, a noble power <...> by means of which one gains a greater knowledge of the judgments of the Sharia and the mysteries of the faith” [10. P. 23]. Märcani insisted that “*ijtihad* is an incessant obligation and right — up to the Judgment Day. Accordingly, the statement that its time has fallen into oblivion or that there are no people capable of carrying it out is unfounded” [11. P. 502].

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