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Abstracts

Abdennour Bidar
The 'Outsiders of Islam'

This paper deals with the question whether Muslims who live in the West might be considered as the future *outsiders* of the Islamic world. It suggests that the Muslims of the West might become those through whom, in a totally unexpected and unforeseen fashion, could come the progress – even the salvation – of an Islamic civilization that the author considers as currently locked into a state of moral, social, intellectual and spiritual stagnation. To this effect, the author focuses mainly on the notion of individual and of human rights, and discusses how the Islamic and Western traditions might be brought together. The concept of God, in its relation to the human, plays here an essential role, which is discussed with reference, among others, to the work of Mohammad Iqbal.

Soumaya Mestiri
Islam as a Democratic Interlocutor? Towards a Global Concept of Democracy

This paper tries to show to what extent it is possible to make the democratic germs inherent to the Arab-Muslim tradition fruitful. To this effect, a double scheme is employed. The author argues first in favour of a re-appropriation of a particular Western legacy now largely occulted, that is, the Roman Republic. Then, she defends a specific vision of postmodern democracy as it appears, more or less explicitly, in some of John Rawls' and Jurgen Habermas' writings. It appears, then, that inasmuch as some key concepts are amended and thick-skinned prejudices dismissed, it will be possible to highlight the conditions and compromises necessary for Muslims to contribute to the building of a global concept of democracy.

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Faisal Devji
The Language of Muslim Universality

This paper discusses how it is possible to find, in the Islamic tradition, a universal concept of "humanity". It insists on the concept of "*ummah*" as a peculiar Muslim way to define a comprehensive humanity, and try to point out its internal limits. It shows the communal implication of this concept and the ways it can, or cannot, be considered as constitutive of a we-group concept that may eventually lead to conflict and violence. It brings to the attention of the reader some historical examples, focusing, among others, on Mohammad Iqbal's contribution.

Gilbert Grandguillaume
The Forgotten Cultures of the Qur'an

This paper brings to the attention of the reader some examples of how the words of the Qur'an, when examined in their literal sense, appear to connect with languages or cultures other than those acknowledged by traditional Muslim apologetics. As such, they may be echoing origins that these apologetics have dismissed from their discourse. In fact, whereas traditional exegesis has generally tended to limit the Qur'an exclusively to the Arabic language as sufficient guarantee by itself of its authenticity, the words of the text reveal a linguistic and cultural multiplicity which demonstrates the richness of its roots. In pursuing this repression exerted on outside contextual influences, the author focuses on three avenues: the pre-Islamic culture of the nomadic Arabs, the Judeo-Christian culture and the Hellenic culture. Those languages which go wilfully unrecognized, those practices whose recollection is passed over, prove to be of great assistance to understanding the sense of certain verses of the Qur'an.

Abdou Filali-Ansary
Imposture and Rebellion: Consideration the Personality of Prophet Muhammad by Ma'ruf ar-Rusafi

This paper is devoted to an analysis of Ma'ruf ar-Rusafi's work *The Personality of Mohammed or the Elucidation of the Holy Enigma*. While ar-Rusafi is traditionally known as a poet who combines great evocative power with a superb mastery of language and strict adherence to classical form, this canonical image is seriously complicated by the iconoclastic character of this book, completed in 1933 but unpublished until 2002. It totally rejects the orthodox theory of prophecy as passive transmission, and insists on the historic development behind orthodoxy. Rusafi puts forward a way of conceiving the Prophet's mission that he considers more faithful to the sources and in greater conformity with the elementary requirements of reason. He proposes a "disenraptured" or "demythologized" reading of the Prophet's life and work. The author considers ar-Rusafi's book as the most serious assault on orthodoxy that has been launched on it from within in modern times.

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Souleymane Bachir Diagne
De Fato Mahometano: Leibniz and Muhammad Iqbal on Islamic Fatalism

This paper compares Leibniz's statements about Islamic fatalism with the way in which the question has been debated in Islamic theology and philosophy, in particular by Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal. Speaking of destiny, Iqbal writes that it is "a word that has been so much misunderstood both in and outside the world of Islam". He meant that, on the one hand, Muslims themselves have misconstrued the notion as a strong belief in absolute predestination while, on the other hand, non-Muslims have mischaracterized Islam as a religion based on blind fanaticism stemming from a faith in an already written fate. Such a characterization was given philosophical dignity by Leibniz when, responding to the criticism that his philosophy inevitably led to necessity and fatalism, he insisted on establishing a distinction between what his doctrine did say about necessity and what it must not be mistaken for: Islamic fatalism, or *fatum mahometanum*. The author concludes on Iqbal's philosophy of time as duration (Iqbal was a Bergsonian) as the condition for an *amor fati* without fatalism.

Youssef Seddik
Mists and Turbulence in the 'Sunni' Ocean

This paper focuses on the concept of *sunna*, and its great theoretical and historical complexity. The term "sunna" seems nowadays to be a label for the whole set of behaviors adopted by believers, from simple details of dress or diet to the most elaborate of ritual and cultural attitudes. The daily lifestyle of the prophet is invoked so as to imitate the way he washed, how he lay down to sleep, or "sat at table", not to mention his ritual gestures during prayer, what he preferred to eat after breaking fasts, his slightest movements over the nights and days of pilgrimage. The author intends to show on the contrary, through an unprecedented study, that the Islamic society of a very large city, that of 10th century Baghdad, was for a considerable period of time completely disengaged from such obsessive scrupulousness of religious observance. It gives large evidence of this phenomenon, and tries to outline the historical reasons how the sunna eventually evolved into a rule defining the coercive power of the Islamic faith.

Meryem Sebti
The Decline of Thought in the Arab World According to Muhammad 'Abd al-Jabiri

This paper discusses in critical terms Muhammad 'Abd al-Jabiri's influential philosophical work. It engages, in particular, in the analysis of the assumptions underlying the radical contrast that al-Jabiri sets up between Avicenna's philosophy – which is supposed to represent irrationality and Gnosticism – and that of Averroes who, according to him, breaks decisively with that current of thought and thus makes

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exercising philosophical thought once again possible. After a close discussion of the positions of classical philosophers (*falasifa*), the author concludes that it is the very validity of the notion of "Arab reason" that has to be questioned in al-Jabiri's analysis.

Makram Abbes
Leo Strauss and Arab Philosophy

This paper closely examines Strauss' conception of "Medieval Enlightenment". It focuses on the central role that Arab philosophy has played in the development of Strauss's thought and discusses the validity of the uses he makes of it. It also emphasizes the interest of Strauss's analyses as regards Arab philosophy while drawing attention to the tensions they create. It claims that Strauss' involvement in the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns aims at showing that medieval philosophy cannot be reduced simply to the effort to reconcile philosophy and religion. The ideas of some Arab philosophers cropped up throughout Strauss's philosophical development and determined his interpretation of Maimonides and Plato as well as his stance in opposition to the moderns. However Strauss's idea of the "medieval Enlightenment" remains fundamentally ambiguous. Is that Enlightenment supposed to be an argument for the preservation of faith alongside reason or does it rather express a kind of atheism or disguised materialism?

Burhan Ghalioun
Islamology Comes to the Aid of Islamism

This paper discusses the idea of an incompatibility between Muslim beliefs and the demands of modernity. It claims that the idea of Islam as a religion that makes it difficult for Muslim societies to bring about the changes necessary for their entry into modernity is fostering the rise of radical Islamism. Islamology as an academic discipline seems grounded on the idea that the explanatory models of the social sciences are not applicable to Islam: interpreting the history of Muslim societies, both modern and classical, must of necessity involve a change in technique and method. Whereas chairs in Islamology are proliferating in universities, Arab world specialists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists and demographers are almost abandoning the study of real living societies in favour of Islamic studies. Scholars are increasingly taken up with theology, religious history, interfaith conflicts, the relationship between dogma and modern values and ideas. The authors claims in favour of "getting rid" of this centrality of theological issues, in favour of a more secular analysis of the history and present state of Muslim societies.

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Fatma Oussedik
'Searching for a Sleeping State'

This paper deals with the role and task of intellectual groups in current Muslim societies, with a particular outlook on Algeria. It discusses the social and educational impact of their action, and the internal and external limits to their action. Democratization and Arabization are considered as two dialectical poles of the ongoing process of modernization of those societies.

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