Critical Hermeneutics

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES IN TURKEY ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN

YUSUF ÇELIK

TEXTS AND STUDIES ON THE QUR'ĀN

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This book is dedicated to my late father Ahmet Çelik
and spiritual grandfather Jacob Arend van Hunen.

If only the trees on earth were pens and the [inky] sea were later on replenished with seven other seas, God's words would never be exhausted; God is Powerful, Wise!

Qur'an (31:27)

Contents

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I would also like to extend my thanks to my friends and family for lending their moral and material support throughout the years of writing this book. Particularly my daughter Robîn Elisha Çelik, my wife Seval Çicek, my mother Aysel Çelik, my mother-in-law Fedalet Çicek, and my mentors Joshua Ralston and Gorazd Andrejč.

Notes on Citations

All principal references to the Qur'an are from Yusuf Ali's English translation, except when a theoretical point becomes clearer with a different translation of the Qur'an. In such cases, other translations of the Qur'an have been explicitly cited.

References to Islamic concepts by Turkish thinkers have been mainly left in their native Turkish and Latinized form (for example, *iman* and not *imān*). Islamic concepts not directly related to the idiom of the Turkish thinkers, have been transliterated from their original Arabic forms.

References by Turkish thinkers to English sources, have been represented in their original form rather than their translated versions.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The primacy of the Qurʾan for the Muslim *Weltanschauung* is unmistakable. Without it, there would be no divine message to initiate Muhammad's prophetic mission and no Islam as we know it. The conventional theological belief that the Qurʾan is directly related to God in that it is comprised of His speech, reinforces this primacy. As a result, there is an intimate connection between the status of the Qurʾan and the status of God. Since God—as the creator and master of the Universe—has the highest authority, it only follows that His will, expressed in His speech, enjoys the utmost pre-eminence. Moreover, because God is omniscient and wise, it follows that His speech contains the greatest teaching and wisdom (*aʿẓamu al-ḥikmati kalāmullāhi taʿālā*).[1]

Given Muslim claims about the origins of the Qurʾan, anyone believing in its divine status should heed its calling attentively. Moreover, the Qurʾan asserts that, to be heard by God, one must first listen to Him: "I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: Let them also, with a will, Listen to My call, and believe in Me: That they may walk in the right way."[2] As the ending of the verse indicates, the aim, or telos, of listening is to walk in the right way. In other words, one listens to the Qurʾan to receive "guidance and good tidings" rather than to intuit a mere rapport by God.[3] This means that the Qurʾan must be of consequence in the lives of its believers. Put differently, it must be what I call 'life pertinent'. For, as the Qurʾan states, it is a book revealed so "that it may give admonition to any (who are) alive."[4]

The fourteen-century tradition of Islamic jurisprudence rests on the premise that God's speech contains both historical rapports (*ikhbār*; *qaṣas*) and an address (*khiṭāb al-taklīfī*) of vital pertinence. Understanding (*fiqh*) is reconceptualized as an exercise in prudence in which one discerns how God's formal address relates to the ever-changing situations in one's life. Thus, understanding is not a simple reconstructive exercise in which the verbal significance of words is made intelligible, but rather, as the grand jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d.767) defines it, "the comprehension (*maʿrifa*) by the soul (*nafs*) of that which bene-

1 Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, translated by David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 10a.

2 Qurʾan 2:186.

3 Qurʾan 2:97.

4 Qurʾan 36:70.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004537873_002

fits it (*mā lahā*) and which harms it (*ma ʿalayhā*)."[5] The formal address of God can ultimately only be understood if people are properly able to relate it to their lives in terms of how it helps them avoid the hazardous and pursue the beneficial.

Recently, Shahab Ahmad further generalized this premise by relating it to the very core of what constitutes Islam. As Ahmad recounts: "The historical phenomenon of Islam is the varied product of that engagement of the human with the Divine; it is the apprehension, elaboration and articulation by Muslims in their individual and collective lives of the *meaning(s) of the* Truth of the Divine Revelation."[6]

Accordingly, rather than associating Islam with concepts such as 'religion', 'culture', a 'symbolic system' or 'discursive tradition', Ahmad has opted to conceptualize it as a 'hermeneutical engagement'.[7] Islam is, as he argues, an "engagement by an actor or agent with a source or object of (potential) meaning in a way that ultimately produces meaning for the actor by way of the source."[8]

To reformulate Ahmad's observations, Muslims surrender themselves to God's revelation with a view to organizing their lives according to its truth.[9] As Rumi (d.1273) put it, "While I live, I will be the servant of the Qurʾan."[10] The Qurʾan is, and for Muslims will always be, as Goethe's *diwan* lyrically claimed: "*das Buch der Bücher*" (the book above all books).[11] However, regardless of its status, assimilating the truth of the Qurʾan into one's life, is not performed indiscriminately, that is in a haphazard and random way. Rather, at various turns in history Muslims have sought to reflect on the grounds and means by which their understanding of God's revelation ought to rely and proceed. In other words, Muslims have from the very beginning of the history of the Qurʾan also engaged in Qurʾanic hermeneutics.

In this book, I shall explore a particular context in the history of Qurʾanic hermeneutics—namely that of contemporary Turkey—which has received

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5 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ Al-Talwīḥ ʿalā Al-Tawdīḥ Li-Matni Al-Tanqīḥ Fī Uṣūl Al-Fiqh*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 16.

6 Shahab Ahmad, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 344.

7 Ahmad, 302.

8 Ahmad, 345.

9 The term Muslim is the active participle of the Arabic *aslama* (to surrender).

10 My translation from the Persian "من بندۀ قرآنم اگر جان دارم." Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Rūmī, "Dīwan-i Shams," accessed 14 November 2019, https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/robaeesh/sh1330/.

11 Johan Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethe's Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Verlag von W. Spemann, 1815), 156.

less attention than it deserves. The works of three contemporary authors (Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk)—each of whom has made a unique contribution to the contemporary discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics—will be discussed. The purpose of this exploration is to answer the following question. How are new and different interpretations of the Qur'an, as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk, regarded by contemporary Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics?

As I conclude in this introductory chapter, and reiterate throughout the book, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is rooted in a theoretical response to the abounding number of excessive interpretations of the Qur'an circulating in the country. Each ideological leaning has produced its own study or translation (*meal*) that supports a particular worldview. Various Turkish intellectuals have regarded some of these publications as methodologically unsound or misleading, and have responded with a corrective theory of their own. In other words, they have embarked on a theoretical reinvestigation of the grounds on which any interpretation of the Qur'an should proceed.

Observations on subjective and objective approaches to interpretation are an important feature of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics; and these observations have an impact on how the ongoing sprawl of interpretations of the Qur'an in Turkey should be appreciated. To clarify, if a theory on Qur'anic hermeneutics concludes that subjective understandings of the Qur'an are valuable and legitimate, it naturally follows that we can constructively appreciate the full range of different Qur'anic studies and translations in Turkey. However, if reflections on the matter lead to a plea for strict objectivity, then it becomes difficult to justify diverse interpretations of the Qur'an. By their very nature, objective interpretations are static and recurrent; they are identified over and over in the same way by different parties.

These seemingly dull reflections on the status of objectivity versus subjectivity in Qur'anic hermeneutics will, in the end, have a great bearing on the fundamental dialectics between the surplus and futurity of meaning in the Qur'an. Put differently, the extent to which intellectuals advocate objectivity or embrace subjectivity will have an impact on any further understanding of whether the Qur'an contains multiple meanings (surplus) that might prove relevant to the present and the future (futurity). There is no consensus among Turkish thinkers on whether it is possible for the Qur'an to mean different things to different people (subjectivities), or whether such a possibility is by God's design. However, all three Turkish thinkers are open to the possibility that the Qur'an contains hitherto undiscovered meanings that might be retrieved in the future in ways that vary quite significantly from our present knowledge of the book.

In the next section, I discuss a variety of prefatory topics that should provide further context and direction to this book. To elaborate, I have chosen to examine three Muslim intellectuals along with their theories on Qur'anic hermeneutics. However, my decision to select Turkish thinkers like Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk is based on the state of prior research and the historical context of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics. The most relevant and biggest study on Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics to date is Felix Körner's *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology: Rethinking Islam*. This book has introduced English-speaking readers to a strand of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey that is not only historicist in its main tenets but also historically and institutionally tied to the Ankara School of Theology. However, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics embodies a rich diversity that extends well beyond both historicism (*tarihselcilik*) and the Ankara School of Theology. Hitherto overlooked authors like Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk still represent a relatively unexplored aspect of this diversity.

1 Status of Prior Research

A study of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey is to some extent also a study of just one strand of that country's intellectual Islamic discourse. Hence, any enquiry into the current status of the research on Qur'anic hermeneutics starts with an evaluation of the contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey.

Some academics have commented on the scantiness of research on the Muslim intellectual discourse in Turkey. The late sociologist Şerif Mardin (d.2017) argued that, "in the contemporary literature on Islam and modernity the primary—and in fact overwhelming—voice is that of a concentration on Arab or Salafi Islam."[12] Likewise, Silverstein has argued that both the institutions and the traditions of Islamic discourse in Turkey remain "relatively unfamiliar to those otherwise knowledgeable about the Muslim world."[13]

The current under-representation of Turkish thinking in Islamic studies has been explained in a variety of ways. Mardin argued that studies on Islam in

12 Mardin's statement is further supported by the attention given to the translations of Arab authors' works into English, French, or German, while I have yet to discover a single monograph of a contemporary Turkish Muslim intellectual being translated into these languages. Şerif Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes," *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (1 January 2005), 148.

13 Brian Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 1 (2005), 134–160.

modernity failed to take the Turkish context into account because the study of Islam in this context did "not fit ready-made categories."[14] Silverstein, who wrote around the same period, concurs with this assessment. He states that the lack of interest in the Turkish context "is based on conceptualizations of the scope [and] nature of Islamic traditions in recent centuries and their relationship to modernity that are in need of profound reformulation in light of the Ottoman and Turkish experience."[15] Conversely, Silverstein also argues that researchers lack the necessary language skills to deal with the Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey.[16]

Other researchers, however, have made more moderate assessments by arguing that only particular fields have been neglected. Wilkinson admits that 'much prior' sociological and political scholarship exists on religion in Turkey, but "little work has been done to explicitly examine Turkish theological voices for their theological value."[17] Likewise, Dorroll has argued that while studies exist on Islamic thought in the Turkish Republic, these have focused predominantly on conservative groups, and have therefore neglected the more 'liberal' voices.[18] Finally, without expressing any judgement on the general field of research, Körner stated that Turkey remains "a great blank on the Western maps of Muslim exegesis,"[19] although this latter claim carries less weight now in the light of Pink's recent studies on modern Muslim commentaries in Turkey and Indonesia.[20]

Recognizing the various lacunae, the above authors have all, each in their own way, sought to further research into Islamic discourses in Turkey. However, the fact remains that only a few studies have been wholly dedicated to the philosophical aspects of Qur'anic hermeneutics in the Turkish context. The best-known of these is Körner's *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology*. A second monograph, which comes close to Körner's work, is Wilkinson's dissertation titled "Dialectics Not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue." However, this work is of peripheral interest to hermeneutics. As Wilkinson states, "finally, with Körner,

14 Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism," 148.

15 Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey," 137.

16 Silverstein, 136.

17 Taraneh Wilkinson, "Dialectics Not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue" (Georgetown University, 2017), 10.

18 Philip Dorroll, "'The Turkish Understanding of Religion': Rethinking Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Turkish Islamic Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (17 November 2014), 1035.

19 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 21.

20 Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'ānic Interpretation Today* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019).

I signal the importance of engaging and understanding Turkish theological discussions—but for a broader purpose than Qur'ān hermeneutics."[21]

Because of its direct relevance to the topic in hand, from time to time throughout this book I shall engage with Körner's study of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics. However, I only focus on three aspects of it. First, in this chapter, by studying alternative Turkish intellectuals, I argue that my work continues where his left off. Second, in the next chapter, and with my own definition, I question Körner's understanding of hermeneutics. Finally, in the concluding section I will relate my observations to Körner's final verdicts on the state of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Körner's work on Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics focused only on a particular 'strain of thought', namely that belonging to 'the Ankara School'[22]—a movement comprised predominantly of a "small group of avant-garde reformist theology professors from Ankara University."[23] Accordingly, by virtue of this limitation, the principal narrative in Western literature on the subject is the one rooted in the institutional history and thought of Ankara University. However, there are still vitally important unmapped areas left in the contemporary discourse in Turkey that are waiting to be uncovered.

2 The Ankara School: History and Hermeneutics

To better understand these uncharted areas, it is pertinent to explore the history of the Ankara School. The historical politics and ideology at the root of the Ankara University's constitution inevitably effect the subsequent discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics in the Ankara School. By having a more complete understanding of the discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics produced by the Ankara School, we can subsequently better understand which types of discourse have been left out of consideration in the existing scholarship.

The origins of the Ankara School can be traced to various reforms of religious education during the late-Ottoman and early Turkish Republic eras. As Körner describes it, "the origin of Turkey's higher religious education of today is paradoxical in many ways. It is traditional and it is a novelty, it continues Ottoman

21 Wilkinson, "Dialectics Not Dualities," 57.

22 Dorroll, "The Turkish Understanding of Religion," 1039.

23 Recep Şentürk, "Islamic Reformist Discourses and Intellectuals in Turkey: Permanent Religion with Dynamic Law," in Shireen T. Hunter (ed.) *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 236.

lines and takes up Western structures, it follows a Kemalist programme and it may prove to be of worldwide relevance for Islam."[24]

Before the existence of institutions like the Ankara Faculty of Divinity, the madrasas (*medreseler*) provided religious education in Turkey. However, when the Western influence expanded to the Ottoman state, new ideas about education began to emerge. During the period of the Tanzimat these ideas were put to effect by establishing a second type of educational institute, a kind of school known as a maktab (*mektepler*).[25] While the madrasas provided traditional and religious education, the maktabs were to provide "a Westernized or modern type of education."[26]

For decades, until the law of unification (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*) was passed in 1924, these institutions coexisted, but thereafter both madrasas and maktabs fell under the administrative and financial authority of the Ministry of Education. However, since they were now under state authority, the Minister of Education Hüseyin Vasıf Çınar (d.1935) decided to close all traditional madrasas and to open new religious secondary (Imam Hatip) schools, as well as the first Western-inspired university of religious studies (the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology).[27]

Some appreciated and others bitterly criticized the uprooting of the Turkish educational system. The conservative media regarded the closure of the madrasas as a seriously biased attack on old institutions that brought financial and social ruination to 16,000 scholars and their families. The secular media, though, saw the abolition of the madrasas as a positive development. Journalist-cum-politician Falih Rıfkı (d.1971) praised the government's actions, which caused the overnight eradication of 16,000 dogmatists, as brave.[28] However, neither conservatives nor modernists fully appreciated the establishment of the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology. The modernists found its curriculum too narrow-minded and strict, while the conservatives—ironically—found it insufficiently religious.[29]

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24 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 48.

25 The word *tanzimat* means 'reform', 'rearrangement', or 'reorganization' and, in Ottoman history, the Tanzimat refers to a period of Westernizing reforms that lasted from 1839 to 1876. See Coşkun Çakır, "Tanzimat," in Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (eds) *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 553.

26 Mehmet Pacaci and Yasin Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," in I.M. Abu-Rabi' (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 124.

27 Pacaci and Aktay, 126.

28 Pacaci and Aktay, 125.

29 Pacaci and Aktay, 127.

Both the Imam Hatip schools and the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology would ultimately have short lifespans. In 1932, the schools were shut down and, in 1933, the Darulfünun closed through lack of students.[30] Various policies were in place that restricted Imam Hatip school graduates from attending the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology. For a start, these schools were denied lyceum status, which meant that their students did not qualify for a university-level education. In other words, an otherwise potential influx of graduates from the Imam Hatip schools could not advance their secondary-level religious education with a subsequent university degree in religious studies.[31]

Some saw the consequent lack of proper religious education as highly demoralizing for the future of religion in Turkey. Parliamentary deputy and journalist Cihat Baban (d.1984) noted that, in the countryside, there were too few clergymen to bury the dead. Moreover, people were starting to fall prey to various superstitions.[32] Tuncer, another contemporary writer, evoked an even bleaker picture by arguing that, without proper training, religious knowledge would become extinct.[33]

The politicians, who were aware of these criticisms, were then swayed by their electoral interests to reinstitute the Imam Hatip schools and pursue plans for a new Islamic theological faculty. The then minister of education Tahsin Banguoğlu (d.1950) assured parliament that the new faculty would be worthy of Atatürk's revolution and would not work in the spirit of the madrasas but against 'regressive trends'.[34] The senate of Ankara University then decided to open a faculty of divinity along Western lines rather than along those of a conventional madrasa. This decision was pursued to ensure that "the investigation of religious questions [was carried out in accordance with] … scientific principles, and also to provide the required conditions for raising men of religion [to be] effective in their profession and comprehensive in their thinking."[35] In other words, the Ankara Faculty of Divinity was instituted to remedy the problem of waning religious expertise and to serve as "the flagship institution for an enlightened and reformist understanding of Islam in the Republic of Turkey."[36]

This historical emphasis on reform and on the concomitant negotiation between tradition and modernity, would ultimately resonate through the sub-

30 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 49.
31 Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education," 127.
32 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 50.
33 Körner, 50.
34 Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education," 130.
35 Pacaci and Aktay, 130.
36 Dorroll, "The Turkish Understanding of Religion," 1038.

sequent way in which the Ankara School was shaped as a particular intellectual movement. This is evident insofar as important members of the Ankara School are guided in their thinking not only by traditional thinkers and methodologies but also by non-Muslim Western authors and methodologies. Accordingly, there is an eclecticism to be discovered in the discourse produced by the Ankara School with influences ranging from Fazlur Rahman (d.1988) and Hassan Hanafi to Joseph Schacht (d.1969) and Ignaz Goldziher (d.1921). This eclecticism is further enhanced by the recent adoption of Western methodological instruments such as hermeneutics, structuralism, phenomenology, and process philosophy.[37] Besides its evident dialectical nature, researchers such as Şentürk and Körner have also noted clear reformist overtones in the discourse of the Ankara School. Şentürk, for example, has categorized the members of the Ankara School as the third generation of reformist Muslim intellectuals in Turkey. Whereas previous generations sought to reform predominantly through the traditional paradigm of Islamic legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the Ankara School is described as relying on "modern Western methods of scriptural interpretation."[38] Likewise, Körner understands the members of the Ankara School as clearly involved in an enterprise of rethinking and, hence, reforming Islam.[39]

Regardless of its inner eclecticism, there is an overarching motif to be discovered in the reformist discourse that the Ankara School produced. This motif can more specifically be described as an historicist approach to Islam, which ultimately extends to the Qur'an. The latter has even received a particular appellation and is commonly known as *Kur'an tarihselcilik* (Qur'anic historicism). Nevertheless, if we are to condense the Ankara School's historicist approach into a central hermeneutical tenet, it would be that the Qur'an can only be properly understood when its 'historical nature' is taken into account.

This major hermeneutical tenet can be further elucidated with an example from the works of Ömer Özsoy, one of the most prominent members of the Ankara School. Özsoy argued that the Qur'an should be understood as an oral discourse embedded in a particular historical context. As with all oral discourses, there is always a dialogical element to direct the meaning of speech: things are always said in a particular situation with a specific intent in mind. Since the written Qur'an is a record of God's oral discourse, it follows that it was also presented in a dialogical situation external to the text (*metin dışı*

37 Şentürk, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 232.
38 Şentürk, 232.
39 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 15.

bağlam).[40] Accordingly, as Özsoy argues, to understand the Qur'an fully, it is necessary to reconstruct the original dialogical situation in which it was revealed. Given that the Qur'an was revealed in the past, it is only natural that the reconstruction of its original dialogical situation is realized through an historical reconstruction.[41]

One cannot help but wonder to what extent such ideas are revisionist or reformist as Körner and Şentürk claim they are when traditional Islamic hermeneutics has always stressed the importance of the historical context. In classical Islamic thinking, for example, there is a particular concept called *asbāb al-nuzūl*, which relates to the data on occasions when particular verses were revealed. Premodern Muslim exegetes often relied on the *asbāb al-nuzūl* to explain the Qur'an. Accordingly, from a methodological viewpoint, there is nothing novel or revisionist about Qur'anic historicism per se. However, one could argue that real revisionism is involved at the level of how the Qur'an is conceptualized. This is clearly evident in the opening section of Özsoy's article on the historicity of the Qur'an's address (*Kur'an hitabının tarihselliği*), in which Özsoy suggests re-evaluating the dominant dogma (*egemen dogma*) that the Qur'an is a universal text (*evrensel metin*).[42] Accordingly, Özsoy suggests that we should understand the Qur'an as an address from within history (historical and particular in content), rather than as an address to humans from above history (transhistorical and universal in content), which is how the Qur'an is conventionally understood. It is this shift in conceptualization that constitutes the real revision, rather than its methodological connotations.

Now that we have a better grasp of the discourse produced by the Ankara School, it is clear that the only seminal study on Qur'anic hermeneutics, namely the one Körner wrote, is ultimately the study of a type of Qur'anic hermeneutics that is historicist, reformist, and academic. However, when the current literature on Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey is taken into account, we also discover other vantages into hermeneutics that are neither academic, reformist nor historicist.

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40 The expression Özsoy used is *metin dışı bağlam*, which literally translates as the 'context exterior to the text'. In the context of the Turkish hermeneutical authors, this means the socio-cultural situation about which and to which the Qur'an was speaking. Ömer Özsoy, "Kur'an Hitabının Tarihselliği ve Tarihsel Hitabın Nesnel Anlamı Üzerine," *İslâmî Araştırmalar* 9, no. 1–2–3–4 (1996), 138.

41 Özsoy, 139.

42 Özsoy, 135.

Modern scholars in Turkey's academic institutions have produced at least part of the Islamic intellectual discourse. Their area of study is known as *ilâhiyat*, and those trained by their institutes are called *ilâhiyatçı*. However, there are also other important contributors to the Islamic discourse in Turkey who are not *ilâhiyatçı*, one example being the *araştırmacı yazarlar*, or 'research-writers' as Silverstein translates it. These research-writers are "widely known through their journalistic activities, writing columns in dailies and weeklies, editorial work at publishing houses, and scholarly monographs."[43] One researcher who has extensively written on the topic of Qur'anic hermeneutics, and whose works are waiting to be studied, is Dücane Cündioğlu. Unlike the members of the Ankara School, Cündioğlu argues in a way that is best summed up by his self-proposed slogan, "not the advancement of the new [but] the discovery of the old (*vaz'-ı cedid değil, keşf-i kadim*)."[44] Cündioğlu shows us that there is still an unexplored critical discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics that is deliberately conservative and at the periphery of academia, rather than modernist/reformist and produced within academia.

On the other hand, while Ankara University historically spearheaded the academic discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey, in recent years new *ilâhiyat* faculties and scholars have created a much more diverse academic landscape. For ten years, Ankara University was the main institution of higher religious education, but over the last fifty or so years an additional twenty-two faculties have been established outside Ankara.[45] These have developed their own trajectories and supported the careers of other kinds of academics—one example being Recep Alpyağıl, a former alumnus of Istanbul University, but now professor of the philosophy of religion at his alma mater. What differentiates Alpyağıl from his Ankara cohorts, is his critique of the historicist approach to understanding the Qur'an. Moreover, rather than having any reformist interest, Alpyağıl engages with Western thinking not to shed critical light on conventional hermeneutical ideas but to transpose familiar questions from the Islamic tradition into new frameworks adopted from Western philosophy and to re-examine their answers in the light of these new frameworks. Thus, Alpyağıl's work offers us an opportunity to uncover a perspective on Qur'anic hermeneutics that is in some respects antithetical to the ideas and modus operandi of the Ankara School.

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43 Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey," 136.

44 Dücane Cündioğlu, "Vaz'-ı Cedîd Mi, Keşf-i Kadîm Mi? (Varlık/Nesne>Düşünce/Kavram>Dil/Sözcük Bağıntısına Dair)," *Kur'an ve Dil: Dilbilim ve Hermenötik Sempozyumu (17–18 Mayıs 2001)* XV, no. 542 (2002), 467.

45 Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education," 140.

Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu exemplify the heterogeneity of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics because their approach contrasts with that of the Ankara School. However, there is a category of thinking that resonates with that of the Ankara School, but has developed its own distinctive style, of which the works of Mustafa Öztürk are one example. A former alumnus and professor of Ondokuz Mayıs University, Öztürk is not part of the Ankara School, for he is neither a former Ankara alumni nor a staff member, yet he has endorsed an historical-critical approach to the Qur'an that is so akin to that of the Ankara School that the same publishing house publishes both their works. Given that Körner was only interested in the Ankara School, it is understandable why he omitted Öztürk's works from his monograph. However, because of this, there is still much more to explore with respect to Öztürk's contributions to the present discussion on Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey.

3 A Return to Theoretical Deliberation

That Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is not limited to the Ankara School is now clear, but it is still unclear why it has garnered so many different stakeholders. In other words, why has Qur'anic hermeneutics become so pivotally important to recent Turkish Islamic discourses and why does it deserve so much attention from different groups?

Turkish interest in Qur'anic hermeneutics is best explained through a variety of genealogies, the first of which is inevitably related to the historicity of the Turkish reform of religious education. The specifics of this were previously discussed in relation to the Ankara School. By virtue of its reformist and modernist orientation, institutions like the Ankara School provided the material conditions necessary for the further development and proliferation of a discourse specifically embedded in the desire to rethink Islam, and hence, our understanding of the Qur'an. Further investigation into the Turkish intellectual discourse on the Qur'an will show that reform is but one impulse behind Turkish rethinking on how to interpret the Qur'an. Another noteworthy impetus is the desire to reflect on and respond to a perceived excessiveness in how the Qur'an is interpreted in Turkey. In other words, the roots of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics can also be retraced to a desire by Turkish intellectuals to respond critically to ideologically motivated and anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an that they consider intellectually dishonest and/or theoretically defunct.

The excesses of which I speak are especially evident in the oversaturated and still growing market of Turkish translations of the Qur'an (*mealler*). For every

ideology there is an accompanying and vindicating translation of the Qur'an that is not always as scrupulous or truthful as some critics would like it to be.

Hasan Basri Çantay's (d.1964) popular translation of the Qur'an titled *Kur'ân-ı Hakîm ve Meâl-i Kerîm* is a clear example of political ideology influencing exegesis.[46] Çantay, who was critical of Bolshevism, advised the first parliament of Turkey to meet Bolshevik propaganda with furore (*hiddet*).[47] Accordingly, in verses 56:27–48, the Qur'an lauds the *aṣḥāb al-maymana* and criticizes the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*. Yusuf Ali translates the former as "Companions of the Right Hand" and the latter as "Companions of the Left Hand." Çantay, however, has translated these expressions as 'right-wing supporters' (*sağcılar*) and 'leftists' (*solcular*), thus offering a reading in which praise of the Qur'an is directed to political supporters of the right and scorn for those of the left.[48]

Çantay's interpretation blatantly ignores the textual context of the Qur'an to make an anachronistic, ideological point. However, if we take the context of the text into consideration, we discover that the Qur'an ironically criticizes the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* for indulging "in wealth (and luxury)" and questioning the resurrection.[49] In other words, it is quite a fanciful leap to conflate the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, namely Muhammad's polytheist detractors, with modern supporters of left-wing socialist and communist politics.

Edip Yüksel's translation of the Qur'an is another well-known example of anachronistic interpretations being made to serve an ideological point. Born into a conservative Muslim family, later in his life Yüksel became an ardent critic of traditional Sunni tenants and sources. He particularly disagreed with Sunni reliance on reports from the Prophet as an explanation and application of the Qur'an; he saw the hadith literature as full of fabrications and nonsense.[50] Given the controversy surrounding Yüksel, Cündioğlu recalls how he challenged a publisher for wanting to take on Yüksel's translation of the Qur'an. However, the publisher argued that the translation would sell well because it

46 Cündioğlu recalls that a Turkish paper was donating this translation to readers who had collected enough coupons. Accordingly, by collecting enough coupons as a 17-year-old, Cündioğlu's first translation of the Qur'an was the one written by Çantay. "E: Türkiye'deki Tek Filozof Benim," 2007, https://www.yenisafak.com/yenisafakpazar/ducane-cundioglu-turkiyedeki-tek-filozof-benim-71827.

47 *Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, vol. 1, 1921, 329, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/GZC/d01/CILT01/gcz01001136.pdf.

48 Hasan Basri Çantay, *Kur'ân-ı Hakîm ve Meâl-i Kerîm*, 15th edn, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Mürşit Çantay, 1990), 998–999.

49 Quran 56:45; "And they used to say, 'What! when we die and become dust and bones, shall we then indeed be raised up again?' " Quran 56:47.

50 Edip Yüksel, "Why Trash all the Hadiths?," 2012, https://19.org/blog/trash-hadith/.

was "full of excesses" (*aşırılıklarla dolu*). Moreover, if he declined to publish it, some other publisher would definitely do so.[51]

Cündioğlu has documented a number of Yüksel's excessive interpretations in the conservative newspaper *Yeni Şafak*. However, one example will suffice to demonstrate the previously mentioned point about ideology encouraging extreme readings of the Qur'an. It concerns Yüksel's translation of verse 12:111. Yusuf Ali translated the beginning of the verse as "there is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented." However, rather than translating the Arabic word *ḥadīth* into its usual rendering of 'tale' as Yusuf Ali did, or its Turkish equivalent of '*söz*', Yüksel deliberately uses the highly technical Turkish term *hadis*. This, as Cündioğlu observes, is less about the text than about the author's stance on the literature of *ḥadīth* (*hadis tartışmalarındaki kişisel tutumu*).[52] This observation is vindicated by the following exegetical endnote in Yüksel's English translation of the Qur'an:

> In this verse, God the Most Wise, rejects both the "hadith" and the basic excuse for accepting it as a source of Islam. No excuse is accepted from the followers of hadith in this world, nor on the Day of Judgement. The followers of fabricated hadiths claim that the Quran is not sufficiently detailed! They thus reject God's repeated assertion that the Quran is "complete, perfect, and sufficiently detailed" (6:19,38,114), and thereby justify the creation of 60 volumes of hadith, and a library full of contradictory teachings that are supposed to complete the Quran.[53]

This example from Yüksel suggests a translation of the Qur'an in which the original Arabic is being forced to make an exhortative, anachronistic point by virtue of the personal ideology of the author—in this case an author belonging to the 'Qur'an alone' movement.[54] It is true that, orthographically, the word *ḥadīth* might lend itself to this interpretation, but it is a known fact that the technical term *ḥadīth* came to be developed in the centuries following the Qur'an's revelation, and hence, could not have been intended by the Qur'an—unless one is willing to concede that the Qur'an spoke in terms that were unfamiliar to

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51 Dücane Cündioğlu, "Bir Mütenebbi'nin Ultra-Modern Çevirisi: 'Mesaj' (I)," Yeni Şafak, 2000, https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2000/aralik/22/dcundioglu.html.

52 Dücane Cündioğlu, "Bir Mütenebbi'nin Ultra-Modern Çevirisi: 'Mesaj' (VII)," Yeni Şafak, 2001, https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ducanecundioglu/bir-mutenebbinin-ultra-modern-cevirisi-mesaj-vii-45643.

53 Edip Yuksel, Layth Saleh Al-Shaiban and Martha Schulte-Nafeh, *Quran: A Reformist Translation* (Brainbow Press, 2007), 182.

54 Sometimes also referred to as Quranism.

and ahead of its original audience. In contrast to Yüksel, Cündioğlu and other exegetes interpret *ḥadīth* in keeping with its sixth-century everyday use, which is 'tale', and not according to its later technical sense, namely a record of the words or actions of the Prophet.

These kinds of ideologically divergent interpretations of the Qur'an in Turkey can be retraced to a range of historical determinants. Ömer Özsoy's *Discussions on Qur'an Hermeneutics in Turkey: An Attempt at Genealogy* is one interpretation that significantly furthers our understanding of this history.[55] Özsoy's essay, which remains untranslated and overlooked by prior research, retraces the origins of recent discussions on Qur'anic hermeneutics to the intellectual atmosphere of the latter half of the twentieth century—an atmosphere characterized by a growing desire for *öze dönüş*, namely a return to 'oneself' or to one's 'kernel'. Since the inception of Islam, the Qur'an has always been a vital guide and identity marker. In an historically Muslim country, a return to the source or kernel of one's spiritual identity inevitably means a return to the Qur'an. Or, as Özsoy put it more concretely, this means "to classify (*adlandırma*) life and things anew from the perspective of the Qur'an and to reconsider (*yeniden ele alma*) the concepts and world of ideas within the Qur'an."[56]

The desire to return to the Qur'an as a defining spirit of Turkish religious thought can be attributed to a variety of factors. The rise and presence of academic theology (*akademik ilâhiyatçılık*) and its attempt to rethink tradition was undeniably one, which has already been discussed in relation to the Ankara School and its history. However, according to Özsoy, the translations of the works of Arab and Iranian Islamist thinkers was another important contributor to the desire to return *ad fontis*. Despite belonging to a later generation of Ankara alumni, Özsoy admits with some embarrassment to the existence of a rift and deep distrust between devout believers (*dindar halk*) and the Ankara Faculty of Divinity.[57] And, devout believers were also unable to turn either to the state-led Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) because they were uninformed of current events, or to the conventional religious communities (*cemaatler*), for they were being ostracized and oppressed by the Turkish state. Turkish intellectual religious thought was thus forced to receive its sense of direction from elsewhere, notably Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran. From the 1960s onwards, the translations of popular works such as Seyyid Qutb's (d.1966) *In the Shade of the Qur'an* and Mawdudi's (d.1979) *Four Key Concepts of the Qur'an*

55 Ömer Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları—Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi," in *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Yazıları*, 2nd edn. (Ankara: Otto, 2015).

56 Özsoy, 19.

57 Özsoy, 18–19.

became especially significant to them. It was, Özsoy claimed, these kinds of works that inspired "contemporary children of a people that had for centuries been unaccustomed to reading the Qur'an, to face off with the Qur'an as an individual (*birey*) and become acquainted with an attitude to read the Qur'an with an intent towards understanding it."[58]

The Qur'an had initially been revisited by progressives, but their critical attitude to tradition further instigated the participation of conservative groups. As Özsoy recounts, progressives would respond to the call to return to the Qur'an with publications that revisited familiar concepts in ways that were counter to traditional perspectives. From the 1980s onwards, different works were published with designations such as "X according to the Qur'an" or "X in the Qur'an," but in reality they were meant to say "X according to the Qur'an, rather than what we have known from tradition."[59] Accordingly, to respond to this ongoing attack on traditional interpretations, conservative groups had no choice but to participate in Qur'an related discussions. This participation continued to such an extent that, by the 1990s, the most radical and conservative religious groups had also shifted their discursive focus to how the Qur'an was being understood.[60]

It is important to note the market consequences of this widening interest in the Qur'an, for it further agitated the growth of variant interpretations of the book. Özsoy recounts how the demand to understand the Qur'an directly led to a craze (*furya*) for *tafsīr* and *meal* literature that started in the 1980s and reached its peak in the 1990s.[61] This 'craze' is best illustrated by the sheer number of translations of the Qur'an that have come into circulation. While Özsoy fails to provide a specific tally, Üstun has argued that, as of 2012, 500 translations of the Qur'an were currently in circulation in Turkey.[62]

That the return to the Qur'an was further supported by the particular medium of translation is more than simple coincidence. Since both the Qur'an and Turkish language are seen as important identity markers in Turkey, trans-

58 We must also note that the Qur'an was traditionally interpreted by religious authorities and not by common individuals. Moreover, the Qur'an was revealed in a tongue that was unfamiliar to them, namely Arabic and not Turkish. Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları," 19.

59 Özsoy, 19.

60 Özsoy, 20.

61 Whereas *tafsīr* is a familiar term used in various Islamic languages, *meal* is distinct to the Turkish language. In Turkey, *tafsīr* refers to the Qur'an's exegesis and *meal* to its translation. Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği," 21.

62 Sema Üstun, "Cumhuriyetin Ilanından Günümüze Kur'an Tercümeleri Üzerine," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 10, no. 19–20 (2012): 457.

lations bring the Turkish language and the Qur'an together. As the infamous bard of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gökalp (d.1924) romantically recanted:

> A country in whose mosques the call to prayer is in Turkish
> A villager would even understand the supplication in the prayer
> A country in whose schools the Qur'an is read in Turkish
> Young and old would know the commands of God
> Turkish son! Yours is this homeland![63]

As ideologically different stakeholders in Turkish religious thinking direct their focuses to the Qur'an, not only do their diverse interpretations of the book come into play but so too do their various preconceptions (*tassavurlar*) of it. Özsoy has described this fragmented superabundance of different interpretations and conceptualizations as postmodern anarchy (*postmodern anarşi*). However, it is noteworthy that these differences have lent a certain urgency to meta-level reflections on the interpretation of the Qur'an. This is because, as Özsoy recounts, the presence of countless interpretations and theories of the Qur'an has exposed a dearth of solid methodological foundations (*bilimsel yöntemsizlik*) and ethical principles (*etik ilkesellik*) in Qur'anic studies.[64]

Özsoy noted an important correlation between subsequent meta-level discussions on the interpretation of the Qur'an and this anarchy of Qur'anic interpretations. As he put it, "a group of academic theologians brought to the fore the historical character of the Qur'an as a methodological problem in order to respond to excessive interpretations (*aşırı yorumlar*) that were spurred by the unexpected rapid increase of the Qur'an becoming current within Turkish religious thought."[65] While Özsoy failed to specify what he meant by excesses in this context, we can assume that he was referring to the excessive universalization of the Qur'an by non-historicist interpreters. As Chapter 5 on Öztürk will confirm, the typical critique that Qur'anic historicists share is that non-historicists over-universalize the content and pertinence of the Qur'an. Hence, in the context of Özsoy's statement, excessiveness in all likelihood signifies the indiscriminate reading of the Qur'an without regard for its historical characteristics.

Non-academic and non-historicist intellectuals share this leitmotif of responding with theory to perceived excesses in interpretation. Cündioğlu, for

63 Ziya Gökalp, "Vatan," accessed 2 December 2019, http://www.siirleri.org/siir/5553/Vatan.html (my translation).

64 Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği," 22.

65 Özsoy, 24.

example, has no academic background, but his work responds on a meta-level to what he has perceived as certain excesses in circulating Qur'anic interpretations. His project is specifically designed to enquire into the being (*mahiyet*) of understanding (*anlama*) and interpretation (*yorumlama*).[66] Furthermore, he wishes to enquire not only into the question of *how* something should be understood but into *why* it should be understood in that way.[67] One reason why he resorts to this kind of higher-level theoretical debate is because he wants to deal with the problem of false interpretations wholesale rather than with each individual interpretation. For example, if he can show a proper theory of Qur'anic hermeneutics, any illicit understanding that fails to accord with his theoretical framework will, by default, become undermined.

4 The Problem of Subjectivity–Objectivity

From the 1990s onwards, the history of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey can be retraced to an imperative to respond, at a theoretical level, to the perceived excesses in ever-increasing sectional interpretations of the Qur'an. However, when the theories themselves are studied, we discover that a noticeable strand within these theories pertains to discussions on objectivity and subjectivity in interpretation. Thus, contextually speaking, recent theories on Qur'anic hermeneutics are rooted in the desire to respond to the perceived excesses and oversaturation in ever-increasingly divergent understandings of the Qur'an, but with respect to content they are concerned with the abstract problems of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in understanding.[68] Accordingly, a question arises over the relationship between excess and oversaturation, and between specific discussions on subjectivity and objectivity in interpretations that have been current in contemporary theories of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey. Moreover, if there is a relationship to be considered, then a follow-up question arises as to what extent this relationship is of consequence for the study of these Qur'anic theories?

66 Dücane Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim 1* (Istanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2005), 15. That Cündioğlu should enquire into the 'mahiyet' of understanding as well as interpretation, shows that his work differentiates—as I do—between understanding and interpretation. Moreover, Cündioğlu wonders in both cases about the essence, as demonstrated by 'mahiyet', and therefore, about the theoretical being of understanding and interpretation.

67 Cündioğlu, 15.

68 Sectional in the sense of being limited to the interests and aims of a particular group (Cambridge Dictionary).

While not necessarily obvious at face value, there is an innate relationship between the problems of excessiveness and oversaturation in interpretation, and the limits of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in interpretation. A simple cursory phenomenology of subjectivity and objectivity will help illustrate this point.

Subjectivity is usually associated with particularity because its material cause, namely personality, is itself distinct and unique. Each person has his or her own distinct experiences, motives, and feelings. Hence, any interpretation that is influenced by subjectivity, whether consciously or unconsciously, will inevitably be as unique, different, and particular as the person doing the interpreting. Moreover, under the influence of subjectivity, understanding is bound to mutate over time as new contexts, and thus different subjectivities, arise that leave their unique imprint on the interpretations. Accordingly, any hermeneutical theory that is averse to the influence of subjectivity will inevitably also refute the legitimacy of new and unfamiliar readings of the Qur'an. Yet, a theory that constructively integrates the role of subjectivity into the process of interpretation will maintain a more productive relationship towards differentiation and divergence in relation to the ways in which the Qur'an is interpreted—even if these readings seem out of place (or excessive) to another interpreter. For example, seemingly anachronistic and scientific contemporary Turkish interpretations of the Qur'an can only be appreciated if we accord the Qur'an an ability to confer meanings to which only modern subjectivities have access.

On the other hand, while subjectivity customarily relates to immanence, change, and divergence, objectivity relates to transcendence, persistence, and ipseity. A fact can only be objective if it addresses a stable, subject-independent reality. Objectivity, as it is usually understood, revolves around a desire to describe something as it is 'in-itself', regardless of who interprets the object in question.[69]

In the realm of interpretation, objectivity conventionally pertains to whether the interpreter has been successful in reconstructing the *mens auctoris* (authorial intent), which is a static fact bound to the moment in which a linguistic expression was formulated and, for this reason, it is recurrently identifiable. For example, when a husband writes a note to instruct his wife to buy milk, there is no question that the intent embedded in the note is anything other than to ask his wife to buy milk. Anybody who asks the husband about

69 The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines objectivity as "the fact of being based on facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings." "Objectivity," accessed 20 March 2020, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/objectivity.

his intention behind the note will receive the same answer—that is to ask his wife to buy milk. In this trivial example, one would be hard-pressed to find an author who would argue that, in hindsight, he meant 'lemonade' when he originally wrote 'milk' on the shopping list.

An insistence on objectivity will stratify contradictory interpretations of the Qur'an. In the context of objectivity, one static meaning simply exists. As such, only one of many competing claims can be true and authentic to the text. The rest must, by default, be considered false and inauthentic to the text.

In sum, there is an innate relationship between the theoretical valuation of subjectivity and objectivity in interpretation, and how the production of new and different readings of the Qur'an are appreciated. Theories that accommodate subjectivity will be more open to the fact that each different stratum of civil society and academia in Turkey has recently presented a distinct take on the Qur'an. However, theories that prioritize objectivity will inevitably do the opposite. Thus, one of the most secure gateways through which to assert and comprehend the status of new and divergent explanations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is by examining the various discussions on subjectivity and objectivity that have become current in recent theories of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey.

5 Overall Structure and Conceptual Framework

The abstract and deliberative nature of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics makes the subject and methodological framework of this study inherently philosophical. However, Turkish thinkers do not philosophize on matters of language, subjectivity, or interpretation in a vacuum of private reflections. On the contrary, to varying degrees, they also address the works of certain Western philosophers.

If we were to rank Turkish thinkers according to the extent of their engagement with Western philosophy, Alpyağıl would clearly take the lead, followed by Cündioğlu and Özturk. In fact, Alpyağıl's intricate form of Qur'anic hermeneutics draws quite a lot of support and inspiration from a variety of Western thinkers. For example, his ideas on objectivity are inspired by Wittgenstein's thoughts on rule-following and private language, and those on subjectivity by Wittgenstein's notion of seeing—as well as by Heidegger's ontology and idea of art. Although Cündioğlu and Özturk are less dependent than Alpyağıl on Western thinkers when formulating their forms of Qur'anic hermeneutics, Cündioğlu complements Saussure's concepts of *langue* and *parole* and Chomsky's notions of competence and performance with their Islamic counterpart

of *muvâdaa* (convention) and *kasd'ul-mütekellim* (authorial intent). Özturk, however, relies even less on Western philosophy, but one of his most significant and interesting references involves a discussion of whether the Diltheyian imperative of *Nacherleben* (transposition) could be applied to God. In other words, Özturk asks to what extent could one legitimately psychologize God in an attempt to improve one's understanding of the Qur'an?

Although Western philosophy is widely discussed in Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics, it is a conversation that mainly supports the Turkish side of the dialogue. The creativity of Turkish thinkers in transposing discussions from Western thinking to the sphere of Qur'anic hermeneutics is at times admirable. However, it is difficult to concede that the insights they generate actually help them to develop the ideas they adopt from Western philosophy. Apart from not being their focus, the conversation is at times insufficiently deep (Özturk and Cündioğlu) or critical (Alpyağıl) to serve this purpose.[70]

The aforementioned Turkish thinkers are not the only ones to engage with Western philosophy. In certain sections of this book, I shall import specific ideas from Foucault, namely his thoughts on statements and on spirituality, and Ricœur's concept of the surplus of meaning. My motive behind these philosophical interludes is twofold—as an aid in presenting a novel, cross-cultural definition of Qur'anic hermeneutics and to establish a conceptual framework with which to guide the comparative analyses of the various Turkish thinkers. In other words, it is an attempt to put forward a conceptual common ground that will facilitate a productive dialogue between all the thinkers.

To some extent, it seems illogical to problematize a term, in this case Qur'anic hermeneutics, after it has already been used in the sense of being a meta-level investigation into the problems of understanding the Qur'an—or, put differently, a reflection on what grounds and means one ought to rely to enhance one's understanding of that book. However, this description was only meant to function on a proleptic level with a view to redirecting the focal point to the context and subject of the present study. There is still a need to re-examine the term further and, more importantly, to reach a more scientifically secure understanding of hermeneutics and Qur'anic hermeneutics, especially given the ambiguity and problems surrounding those terms.

Indeed, if there are any terms that need further explanation and clarification, these are undoubtedly 'hermeneutics' and 'Qur'anic hermeneutics'. The

70 I am referring to the fact that Alpyağıl is engaging only with his interlocutors on the Islamic side of the discussion and not with the Western thinkers. In other words, he is evoking the likes of Heidegger to criticize certain Islamic attitudes to the Qur'an, but not to engage with them dialectically.

term hermeneutics requires such treatment because of its particular history in Western thinking, for many different hands have had a say in its definition and development. Since it appears in Ancient Greek philosophy, Reformation theology, and German and French postmodern philosophy, one needs to establish to which hermeneutics one is referring. The term Qur'anic hermeneutics, conversely, has insufficient historicity to have established a familiar or mature meaning. Both the classical Islamicate and major Western languages are—the last few decades withstanding—unfamiliar with the word 'Qur'anic hermeneutics', so in this regard it is without question a neologism, albeit one whose etymology is often left ambiguous. Is it a makeshift linguistic equivalent (translation) of a classical Islamic concept, or is it an already familiar concept known in the Western intellectual tradition that has been reframed in relation to the Qur'an?

How Qur'anic hermeneutics is defined will undoubtedly affect the overall parameters of any subsequent enquiry into it. For example, one contemporary definition of the term is as a synonym for interpreting the Qur'an and, thus, exegesis. However, as previously emphasized through the contextual analysis of recent discussions on the Qur'an in Turkey, Turkish authors tend to deliberate on the theoretical aspects of understanding the Qur'an and not on the production of exegesis. This has most eloquently been expressed by Şentürk in the following terms: "however, their [Ankara intellectuals] primary concern is to develop a new theoretical framework for the interpretation and application of Islamic sources. They believe that before turning to practical issues they need to justify their new ways of interpreting the Qur'an and the *hadith*."[71] Accordingly, when understood as exegesis, hermeneutics is of no use for analysing Turkish intellectuals' recent contributions to philosophies of the interpretation of the Qur'an. Likewise, other current definitions of hermeneutics as rules of interpretation or deeper reading, are for their own reasons also inadequate representations of what hermeneutics signifies within the earlier described context of Turkish thinking.

In the next chapter, I shall seek to establish the theoretical grounds on which hermeneutics, and subsequently Qur'anic hermeneutics, are defined. I will reconsider some of the more popular ways in which the latter term is defined and to what extent these common conceptions are relevant to a more philosophical understanding of the term in the context of a contemporary Turkish intellectual discourse. After weighing up the various alternatives, I reach two conclusions. The first is that Qur'anic hermeneutics centres on reflections

71 Şentürk, "Islamic Reformist Discourses," 237.

about the conditions and operations involved in the intellectual apprehension of the meanings of the Qur'an. The second is that the most elemental expression of Qur'anic hermeneutics is necessarily mediated by a statement and not by a method typically associated with the term, such as exegesis, system of understanding, or rules of interpretation. Accordingly, every expression of Qur'anic hermeneutics needs to involve a pensive statement about the understanding of the Qur'an, but not all forms of Qur'anic hermeneutics necessarily involve rules of interpretation or delineate some kind of method. Qur'anic hermeneutics can also be developed along purely ontological lines, for example by stating that understanding is decided by one's spiritual standing rather than mechanistically guaranteed by an interpretative calculus.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I shall construct an independent, basic narrative of each author's works. Accordingly, I shall introduce each one with regard to the framework of his work, followed by an analysis of his major views and arguments about problems of subjectivity and objectivity in the context of interpreting the Qur'an.

After reframing Qur'anic hermeneutics and discussing each author in turn, I shall employ the Foucauldian distinction between spirituality and philosophy to conduct a comparative analysis of each Turkish thinker's thoughts. Now that Qur'anic hermeneutics is no longer restricted to a set of rules and regulations pertaining to interpretation, an additional clearing becomes available in which to review the statements of the Turkish thinkers—and these make another kind of demand, namely that the subject must undergo certain transformations to access the truth of the Qur'an. Most readers of the classical sciences pertaining to the Qur'an will recall that a knowledge of Arabic is a normal requirement for understanding it. However, this kind of requirement demands no substantial change from the subject. Being devout or indifferent, a believer or non-believer, moral or dishonourable have no bearing on fulfilling such a condition. An atheist can learn Arabic just as easily as a religious, practising Muslim. Nevertheless, two of the Turkish thinkers, Alpyağıl and Özturk respectively, impose spiritual requirements on the interpreters of the Qur'an. Alpyağıl believes that only Muslims can properly understand the Qur'an. In his Qur'anic hermeneutics, by contrast, Cündioğlu imposes no such spiritual requirements because he believes that, to be universally convincing, the Qur'an should be universally intelligible.

The comparative analysis will help us understand how the Turkish thinkers view the role of method. For example, Özsoy stated that the prominence of Qur'anic studies and the subsequent proliferation of alternative interpretations heightened the need to resolve two hermeneutical problems—a shortage of ethical principles and absence of methodology in Qur'anic studies. As

I alluded to earlier, it is of note that the Turkish thinkers entertain different views on the matter. Because of his belief in the universal accessibility of the Qur'an's truth, Cündioğlu will make an emphatic case for the use of method. Conversely, Alpyağıl and Özturk will emphasize and prioritize a set of subjective requirements that precede any objective method. For example, Alpyağıl disputes any claim that envisages the Qur'an as a black box that can be thoroughly decoded and with guaranteed success by following certain mechanical steps. Likewise, Özturk believes that moral scruples are more important than any method because it is possible to put forward a methodologically well-reasoned case for an interpretation that is fundamentally wrong.

The parameters of the relationships between subjectivity, objectivity, and truth will establish whether the Qur'an contains a surplus and futurity of meaning. Terms like 'surplus' and 'futurity' express the propensity of the Qur'an to offer multiple meanings (surplus) on the one hand, but that generate meanings that were previously understood differently (futurity) on the other. In Chapter 7, I explore the contours of both these terms in relation to the works of the Turkish thinkers.

In the eighth and last chapter, I discuss the somewhat paradoxical nature of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics. I confirm what other researchers have said about the dialectical aspect of Turkish thinking, specifically that it engages with both Western and Islamic thinking. However, I make the additional observation that Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is both 'insulated' and 'porous'. On the one hand, because of its unique context, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics seeks to restrict an unfettered, subjectivist or methodologically disingenuous approach to the Qur'an. Yet, ironically, due to a lack of exclusive commitment to objectivity (Özturk and Alpyağıl) and the partialness of previous scholarship in Qur'anic studies (Cündioğlu), contemporary Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics opens up the futurity of the Qur'an in new ways.

CHAPTER 2

What Is Qur'anic Hermeneutics?

1 Introduction

Although current in the fields of Western theology and philosophy, the precise meaning of the term hermeneutics remains ambiguous, which is mainly attributable to the nature of its historical evolution. For example, in the seventeenth century, it referred to the principles of biblical interpretation. At this time, hermeneutics became especially relevant in Protestant circles, where the need for manuals to help ministers interpret the Bible had increased after the Roman Church lost its role as the central authority in this respect.[1] It was not until the nineteenth century that the influence of Schleiermacher (d.1834) transformed hermeneutics into a general science for all linguistic understanding.[2] Now, hermeneutics was no longer conceptualized in regional terms, that is in the sense that it was confined to the problem of understanding a sacred or legal text; rather, it was extended to the general problem of understanding beyond these specific applications.[3] Afterwards, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, hermeneutics went in two further directions—as a phenomenology of existence and of existential understanding, and as a recollective and iconoclastic system for interpreting the meanings behind myths and symbols.[4]

In recent decades, neologisms like 'hermeneutics of the Qur'an', or 'Qur'anic hermeneutics', have extended our understanding of hermeneutics. Various authors have implicitly and explicitly presented their understandings of these terms and then localized them within the broader Islamic tradition, which has sometimes led to certain disagreements. For example, in his *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis*, Abdul-Raof translates *tafsīr* interchangeably as exegesis and hermeneutics.[5] A hermeneutics of the Qur'an is in this sense merely an exegesis of the Qur'an. Campanini (d.2020), however, rejects outright any equating of *tafsīr*

1 Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 1st edn, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 34.

2 Palmer, 40.

3 Paul Ricœur and John B. Thompson, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981), 35.

4 Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 33.

5 Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, Reprint, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East (Routledge, 2013), 84.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004537873_003

with "a proper hermeneutics of the Qur'an."[6] For Campanini, hermeneutics is about uncovering the inner meaning, which *ta'wīl* rather than the classical notion of *tafsīr* represents. While *tafsīr* is restricted to "grammatical analysis or historical surveys of the prophets and kings,"[7] *ta'wīl* truly represents "the process by which the exegete tries to seize the deep, innermost meaning of a verse without abdicating to literality."[8] Finally, neither Waardenburg nor McAuliffe see a hermeneutics of the Qur'an, or in the latter's case 'Quranic hermeneutics', as a way of reading the Qur'an (either in depth or superficially). The former understands a hermeneutics of the Qur'an to mean the rules that precede the interpretation of the Qur'an,[9] whereas the latter, in rather like manner, understands Qur'anic hermeneutics as a means with which to identify the principles and methods needed to interpret the Qur'an.[10]

Given the dispersed nature of hermeneutics and its derivatives, such as Qur'anic hermeneutics, what kind of concept are we dealing with in the context of the works of the Turkish authors under discussion? Despite the existence of multiple definitions of the term, none can provide an exact answer to this question. For example, although naming their projects hermeneutics (*hermenötik*), Cündioğlu and Alpyağıl engage only marginally in the actual exegesis of the Qur'an.[11] Moreover, rather than explaining the rules of interpretation, Alpyağıl questions the very need to follow rules at all when interpreting the Qur'an.

In this chapter I delve into the theoretical question of what kind of Qur'anic hermeneutics best suits the Turkish authors. The answer will involve draft-

6 As Campanini stated, "the question in point here is that the genre *tafsir* in Muslim literature cannot be considered a real 'hermeneutics'." M. Campanini, *Philosophical Perspectives on Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis: Key Paradigms and Concepts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2016), 23.

7 Campanini, 23.

8 Campanini, 24.

9 Jean Jacques Waardenburg, *Islam: Historical, Social and Political Perspectives* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002), 111–112.

10 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Quran* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 47.

11 All three authors constructively engage with the term hermeneutics (*hermenötik*), as well as with contemporary Western discussions on the matter. Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu go so far as to classify their works as an exercise or experiment in hermeneutics. However, not all contemporary Turkish intellectuals feel comfortable with this reliance on the term, which they consider to be of foreign origin. Ali Bulaç, for example, stated that Muslim thinkers ought first to exhaust their traditional means of interpreting the Qur'an before resorting to something like Western hermeneutics. Ali Bulaç, "Kur'an'ı Okuma Biçimi Olarak Hermenötik," *Islâmi Araştırmalar Dergisi* 9, no. 1–2–3–4 (1996), 117.

ing new definitions of hermeneutics and Qur'anic hermeneutics that are more appropriate to the Turkish context, but not necessarily confined to it.

2 Körner's Study of Revisionist Qur'anic Hermeneutics

Körner's study, which I introduced in the previous chapter, offers an extensive and noteworthy position on the subject of Qur'anic hermeneutics, especially in relation to Turkey. However, besides presenting a pioneering overview of Turkish hermeneutical thought, he offers notable insights into hermeneutics within the context of his research. Accordingly, there is not one definition of hermeneutics in Körner's work but a variety. Nevertheless, despite the diverse ways in which he understands and delineates the term, the overall purposes of his definitions are twofold. The first is to present a general account of hermeneutics that suffices for the entire history of Muslim thinking. The other is to advance a secondary, more restricted account of hermeneutics that wishes to stay true to the particularity of the contemporary Turkish works studied but that simultaneously elevates the level of Qur'anic hermeneutics to that of contemporary Western philosophical hermeneutics.

The ambitious nature of his project notwithstanding, Körner's theoretical framework is not entirely accurate on the Turkish context because of some inexact suppositions I outline in the next section.[12] As such, his understanding of hermeneutics, even if developed in the context of contemporary Turkish thought, is insufficient for use as a frame of reference with which to understand the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Özturk. Nevertheless, as an invaluable pioneering work in the field, a further examination of and challenge to his inexact suppositions will help lay the groundworks for an alternative description of Qur'anic hermeneutics that might better help us understand those found in the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Özturk.

To begin with, at their most fundamental level, Körner's definitions of hermeneutics fall into two classes—neutrally descriptive, and normative. According to him, neutral hermeneutics signifies "what X does with the text."[13] Also, in

12 Being familiar with the hermeneutical circle, Körner was well aware of his own prior suppositions, which he needed to analyse before advancing his study: "Reflecting on hermeneutics may however prove valuable not only because it clarifies a concept frequently used in this study. It may also help us to clarify the goals, chances and dangers of such a study. After all, this study certainly presupposes an *understanding* of the texts it deals with." *Körner, Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*," 22.

13 Körner, 23.

the context of neutral hermeneutics, we refer to 'explicit hermeneutics' when we witness a person's self-referential treatment of what they are going to do with the text. When merely describing what a person is doing to the text, we speak of 'implicit hermeneutics'.[14] However, when it comes to normative hermeneutics, this term is reserved for theories that exhibit a proper historical consciousness.[15]

For Körner, proper historical consciousness in hermeneutics entails five categories of awareness:

> (a) an awareness of the interpreter's pre-understanding, (b) an awareness of the effects text and tradition have on the interpreter's pre-understanding, (c) an awareness of the distance between text and interpreter, (d) an awareness of the fact that text and interpreter are in principle confronted with the same reality and only see it from different perspectives, and (e) an awareness of the therefore positive influence of this distance on the understanding.[16]

It is this special class of hermeneutics, namely one that exhibits all five degrees of awareness, that Körner believes is missing from classical and contemporary Muslim discourse.

While classical Islamic literature contains "an old tradition of 'explicit hermeneutics'," this tradition, according to Körner, lacks historical consciousness.[17] The existence of traditional concepts that hint at such consciousness, such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions on which the Qur'an was revealed), fail to deter Körner from this assessment. For, as he argues, historical consciousness is more than the awareness of context dependence. Rather, to be properly historically conscious also means being aware of how texts and traditions affect the interpreter's pre-understanding.[18]

Modern intellectuals of the Qur'an, such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d.2010) and Fazlur Rahman (d.1988), also, according to Körner, failed to deliver a properly historically-conscious hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Despite both authors being aware of the distance between text and interpreter, Körner still thought

14 "Here, it is helpful to distinguish between 'X's explicit' and 'X's implicit hermeneutics', i.e., what X *says* X does with the text—and what X *actually* does with the text." Körner, 23.

15 Körner, 32.

16 Körner, 32–33.

17 Körner, 32.

18 Körner, 33.

that they lacked a proper sense of the positive role that distance can play in the process of understanding.[19]

Much of classical and modern thinking on the hermeneutics of the Qur'an has failed to fulfil Körner's normative requirements. As he put it, "the extant maps cover the aspect of historical awareness in Muslim Koran interpretation. It is precisely because of this coverage that we can say with relative certainty that what has been produced in the mapped areas does not meet all challenges of contemporary hermeneutic reflection yet."[20]

However, unmapped areas of Muslim discourses on interpreting the Qur'an were still to be found in black Africa, the former Soviet Union, and Turkey.[21] Accordingly, there were still areas of Muslim thinking in which to seek a more historically conscious hermeneutics of the Qur'an, and Körner chose to look for it in contemporary Turkey.

The results of Körner's enquiry, while significant, were less satisfactory than he had hoped. For a start, he recognized that some features of an historically conscious hermeneutics were either explicitly, or in some cases implicitly, already present in the thinking of Turkish intellectuals. These are that the interpreter is aware of (1) his own pre-understanding and values, (2) the fundamental distance between the Qur'an and present-day readers, and (3) the fact that this distance has a positive influence on interpretation.[22] However, the productive potential of the latter is not made fully conscious, which causes these thinkers to overlook the fact that, "with the new perspectives we have gained, the Koran can be heard to say things that were previously impossible to hear."[23] Moreover, a fundamental feature still missing from these theories is the potential awareness "that the views of a reader today are already depending on the text-plus-tradition before they start asking questions."[24]

If we return to the question of what kind of Qur'anic hermeneutics exists in contemporary Turkish thinking, Körner leads one to presume that Turkish thinkers engage in an *explicit hermeneutics* that is *partly historically conscious*. Put differently, we find theories in contemporary Turkish thinking that describe a self-referential treatment of the Qur'an, that is how an author self-reflectively interprets it, which is to some extent historically conscious but still lacks an important awareness of the influence that a text and tradition have on the interpreter's pre-understanding.

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19 Körner, 47.
20 Körner, 46.
21 Körner, 47.
22 Körner, 203.
23 Körner, 203.
24 Körner, 203.

All in all, Körner is less disappointed by this lack of historical consciousness than by the fact that Turkish hermeneutics has been unproductive. As he says, "but how can one study Koran hermeneutics, and then complain that what one has found is only hermeneutics?"[25] The answer lies in his tight-knit association of hermeneutics with the act of interpretation, namely 'what X does with the text'. Accordingly, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics has failed because it failed to go beyond a retroactive uncovering of modern ethics in the Qur'an: "we know what is there in the Koran, ethics; and we know what must come out, modern ethics. The only question left is, how do we get it out? Hermeneutics has [hence] become a tin-opener."[26] This means that Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics produces too few new interpretations to demonstrate a competent rethinking of Islam in the present, even if "the Koran is ready to rethink the whole world."[27]

I have reservations about Körner's framing of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics, primarily about his conviction that, by default, it involves contrived interpretation. In other words, I feel uneasy about the argument that a neutrally descriptive understanding of hermeneutics necessarily has an agent 'doing something to the text'. This, I feel, is at odds with the historical roots of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey and with the content of the Turkish authors' works.

My historical analysis of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics in Chapter 1 showed its essence to be primarily theoretical in nature. To recap, in the last few decades Turkey has seen a proliferation of Qur'anic interpretations, each as distinct as the ideology of its author. Nonetheless, given how many critics perceived these interpretations as dishonest and methodologically weak, it is hardly surprising that, rather than actually interpreting the Qur'an, the focus of subsequent debates in Turkish theology moved to trying to solve the meta-level problems relating to interpretation. For example, as Özsoy recounts, "a group of academic theologians brought to the fore the historical character of the Qur'an as a methodological problem in order to respond to excessive interpretations (*aşırı yorumlar*) that were spurred by the unexpectedly rapid increase in the Qur'an becoming current within Turkish religious thought."[28] Producing critical theories of interpretation, rather than interpreting the Qur'an, had become the focus of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics. It is thus no surprise that Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics has produced far fewer new interpretations of the Qur'an than Körner had hoped it would.

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25 Körner, 205.
26 Körner, 204.
27 Körner, 205.
28 Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları," 24.

Cündioğlu, the first of the three authors under discussion here, as well as one of the first intellectuals to write on Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey, argues that his project is specifically designed to enquire into the being (*mahiyet*) of understanding (*anlama*) and interpretation (*yorumlama*).[29] Moreover, it is not only to enquire into the question of *how* something should be understood but *why* it should be understood in a particular way.[30] Also, in perfect harmony with its historical context, Cündioğlu explicitly goes on to argue that his focus on theory is motivated by a desire to respond to unconscionable Qur'anic interpretations in circulation. He resorts to a higher-level, more critical theoretical debate to explain how he wants to deal with the problem of incorrect interpretations of the Qur'an through an overall theoretical discussion rather than by countering each interpretation with a better one. Accordingly, Cündioğlu's work seeks to reflect and define the presumptions that underlie and direct the interpretation, rather than the interpretations themselves. If false presumptions fall apart, he reckons, so too will the erroneous interpretations that were constructed around these presumptions.

Alpyağıl, my second author, inverts the relationship between text and interpreter, thus making the text the active subject and the interpreter the passive object. In other words, rather than having the interpreter work through the text, which Körner's definition assumes by default, Alpyağıl draws our attention to instances in which the text "works on" the interpreter. The text, as Alpyağıl argues, is not a "black box waiting to be deciphered." On the contrary, much as with art, it can affect and elicit an understanding from us. Accordingly, Alpyağıl's brand of Qur'anic hermeneutics conceptualizes how the Qur'an is understood without 'doing anything to the text'.

For those still guided by a positivist understanding of the sciences, using metaphysical, religious or mystical frames of references, rather than empirical, logical ones, to theorize Qur'anic hermeneutics is considered suspect and deliberately avoided. Alpyağıl's passive, aesthetic, religious theorization of Qur'anic hermeneutics is not a new phenomenon in Islamic discourse. For example, in a very early tradition, the *muḥaddith* Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d.812)[31] records how ʿUmar—a close companions of the Prophet—looked upon understanding as God's gift and provenance. Accordingly, Wakīʿ reports that ʿUmar wrote to another companion that "understanding is not received through seniority but through God's gift (*ʿatā allah*) and His provenance (*rizqahu*)."[32] Thus,

29 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 15.

30 Cündioğlu, 15.

31 A collector and expert on oral transmissions.

32 Wakīʿ ibn Al-Jarrāḥ, *Kitāb Al-Zuhd* (Maktaba al-Dār al-Madīna al-Munawwara, 1984), 221.

as terse as this statement might seem, it contains a critical hermeneutical perspective that the advance of years does not automatically bring understanding. On the contrary, understanding is a gift that God provides. Moreover, it is bound to a hierarchy of the elect and non-elect: principally, anyone can grow old, but God does not bless everyone with understanding. Rather, as the Prophet Muhammad argued, God must choose to be beneficent towards a person: "For whomever Allah wants good, he gives him understanding in the religion."[33] Furthermore, according to this frame of reference, since God grants understanding and His beneficence is bound to supplication, it follows that understanding is something for which one can pray. This is clearly evident in Muhammad's request to God on behalf of his cousin Ibn Abbas: "My God, make him gain understanding of religion and teach him the interpretation."[34]

Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu's purely theoretical or aesthetic approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics point to the need for understandings that differ from those that intimately bind hermeneutics to laboured acts of interpretation.[35] According to these thinkers, Qur'anic hermeneutics can be entirely philosophical and focus on purely meta problems, such as whether interpretations should be rule-bound or whether the Qur'an can ever be properly understood without believing in God or in its divine nature. Moreover, unlike other definitions, the aesthetic theories produce no rules, or for that matter, any method on how to interpret the book. Accordingly, other kinds of current definitions held by authors such as Waardenburg and McAuliffe, who stipulate that a method and rules are essential to a definition of Qur'anic hermeneutics, are incompatible with the more aesthetic theories. This is not to say that a theory on Qur'anic hermeneutics cannot contain rules or canons of interpretation, or delineate a method, but that these features are not necessarily part of every theory of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

3 An Alternative Definition of Qur'anic Hermeneutics

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned discussions and critique, I define Qur'anic hermeneutics as one or more statements proceeding from reflections

33 Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā ibn Sawra Al-Tirmidhī, *English Translation of Jāmiʿ At-Tirmidī*, translated by Abu Khaliyl, vol. 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 50.

34 Yusuf Sıdkî El-Mardinî, *Mesîru Umûmi'l-Muvahhidîn Şerh U Terceme-İ Kitâb-i İhyâu Ulûmi'd-Dîn: İhyâ Tercüme Ve Şerhi*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2016), 257.

35 Namely the ones previously discussed by Campanini, Körner, and Abdul-Raouf.

on the conditions and operations involved in the intellectual apprehension of the meanings of the Qur'an. This definition imposes no requirement on Qur'anic hermeneutics to engage in contrived interpretations ('what X does to a text') and allows it to exist at a purely theoretical and philosophical level. Moreover, unlike some of the definitions previously discussed, it frees Qur'anic hermeneutics from having to set rules and methods. To recall, there are theories in existence in Turkey and in the classical tradition that only speak of the aesthetic and religious dimensions of understanding the Qur'an and have nothing to say about the rules or methods for interpreting the Qur'an.

This redefinition arises from my reconception of the term as a cross-cultural intellectual activity that accommodates Foucault's theory of the statement. However, to understand it more fully and accurately, it is necessary to look more carefully at its two above-mentioned facets, namely cross-cultural hermeneutics and the statement.

4 Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics

With origins in Ancient Greece, Protestant theology and Romantic philosophy, hermeneutics, "like almost every persistent and important problem in the West, … can be traced back to the Greeks and in particular to the rise of Greek philosophy."[36] Accordingly, the term has its origins in the Greek root of *hermeneuein*, which in its most general sense, means to interpret. However, in its more concrete everyday usage, *hermeneuein* has two important offshoots—Hermes, the messenger of the gods who brings a word from "the realm of the wordless," and *hermeios*, the priest who interprets the sayings of the Oracle of Delphi.[37] After the post-Hellenic era, hermeneutics became a specific science for interpreting Christian scriptures. In this second sense, but in keeping with its Greek origins, the term relates to making a divine word intelligible,[38] a concern renewed by the call of Protestantism to reinterpret the scriptures in its own terms, that is unfettered and undistorted by tradition. It was not until the nineteenth century, when post-Enlightenment rationalism spurred it into accommodating the wider universal claims of scientific criticism, that hermeneutics evolved into

36 Don Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 9.

37 Ihde, 9.

38 Ihde, 10.

its contemporary form.[39] In other words, at this moment in history its philosophical interest shifted to the theory of understanding in general, rather than the specific application of understanding to particular texts. This accomplishment is usually credited to the great Protestant and Romantic thinker Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (d.1834).

This historical line can also be seen as the 'deregionalization' of hermeneutics. Ricœur drew a distinction between regional and general hermeneutics, with regional pertaining to a specific domain, such as biblical hermeneutics, and general being concerned with the universal problem of understanding. In fact, the history of hermeneutics contains various examples of deregionalization. According to Ricœur, the first 'real movement of deregionalization' began with Schleiermacher, for until his intervention hermeneutics was essentially concerned with a philology of classical texts on the one hand, and the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments on the other. After Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was forged anew on the requirement "that the interpreter rise above the particular applications and discern the operations which are common to the two great branches of hermeneutics."[40] However, as Ricœur argued, the deregionalization of hermeneutics could not proceed to its conclusion until the epistemological concern for a more extensive universality was subordinated to a more fundamental ontological one. In other words, deregionalization reaches its climax when "understanding ceases to appear as a simple *mode of knowing* in order to become a *way of being* and a way of relating to beings and to being."[41] This evolution in hermeneutics, as Ricœur has noted, took place in the post-Romantic works of Heidegger and Gadamer, in which hermeneutics was elevated to a more radical enterprise by becoming not only general but, thanks to its ontological preoccupations, also fundamental.[42]

Given the particularity of the actors and events involved in the formation and evolution of hermeneutics, one might naturally assume that certain historical and cultural constraints pertain to it. The history of hermeneutics is predicated on unique events. In each of its guises (regional or general), hermeneutics seems to owe its existence to specifically Western constructs, such as Reformation theology, post-Enlightenment epistemologies, and contemporary German ontological thinking. Dilthey's undeniable contribution to the deregionalization of the field was motivated by his conscious desire to mimic Kant

39 Ihde, 11.

40 Paul Ricœur, edited, translated and introduced by John B. Thompson, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.

41 Ricœur, 4.

42 Ricœur, 4.

by writing a critique of the experiential knowledge of the natural sciences.[43] As such, given its unique historicity, must we surrender to the inescapably foreign nature of hermeneutics when we relate it to non-Western traditions such as Islamic thinking? Moreover, since philosophical (general) hermeneutics is a Western concept, might we at best hope to speak of it only in the regional sense in relation to Islamic societies? After all, Islamic societies have long-established traditions (such as *tafsīr*) that bear a close resemblance to the regional character of biblical hermeneutics.

While such rhetoric is appealing, I will not affirm its conclusions. On the contrary, unlike extant theories and previously stated hypotheses, my thesis is that in none of its regional, general, or fundamental senses is hermeneutics foreign to classical and contemporary thinking in Islamic historical contexts, including Turkey! For example, we see people like the Turkish thinker Mustafa Ozturk endorse Dilthey or the Pakistani thinker Fazlur Rahman who favoured Betti's Romanticist form of hermeneutics over Gadamer's ontological version. The presence of general and fundamental hermeneutics in modern Muslim discourse is to be expected given that the above-mentioned authors either studied at Western universities or at native ones modelled along Western lines. Consequently, by virtue of academic exchanges, in a general and fundamental sense hermeneutics has inevitably found its way into the discourses of certain contemporary Muslim thinkers.

To continue with the theme of intellectual exchanges, it is also possible to unearth hermeneutics in its various guises in classical Muslim discourses. For example, Gilliot states that, "although *tafsīr* with no other qualification refers in most cases to a qur'ānic interpretation or commentary, its origin is not Arabic."[44] Rather, the term is presumed to be borrowed from either Christian or Jewish sources. If so, then hermeneutics and *tafsīr* have Christian sources, so must in essence be related. Likewise, if we move from the Christian to the Hellenic origins of hermeneutics, it becomes evident that Ancient Greek works made their way into Islamic thinking at a very early stage, only to be further interpreted and worked on by Muslim intellectuals. We also discover that early Muslim thinkers were already acquainted, through the Greek–Arabic translation movement, with the various derivatives of the Greek *hermeneuein*, including Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*. The tenth-century scribe Ibn Nadīm (d.998),

43 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2006), 215.

44 Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, Qur'ānic Studies Online (Brill, n.d.), https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00058.

reports that this work by Aristotle was made available in Arabic at a very early stage as *Bārī Armīniyās* by Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d.910).[45] Following its translation, *Peri Hermeneias* was subsequently abridged by al-Kindī (d.873) and Averroes (d.1198), given a commentary by al-Fārābī (d.951), and reworked by Avicenna (d.1037) into *Kitāb al-ʿIbarāh*. Thus, if Ihde is right about the general philosophical sense of hermeneutics hearkening back to Ancient Greek philosophy, and that *Peri Hermeneias* belongs to an intellectual moment that engaged in the self-conscious, philosophical theorizing of hermeneutics,[46] we must conclude that Muslim thinking has been philosophically acquainted with hermeneutics for more than a millennium.

Is it possible to think of the cross-cultural presence of hermeneutics in Islamicate discourse beyond the limits of appropriation? At this point, I wish to extend my earlier thesis by arguing that, rather than being an appropriated concept, hermeneutics is a transcultural, discursive practice that can, and for that matter has, independently come into existence in various cultures at different points in time. This occurrence, however, is not random and has certain conditions, which I shall discuss shortly. The most important of these conditions pertains to theoretical reflectivity and discursive materialization—both of which are explained in due course.

To reframe hermeneutics in these terms, we must first reread its history, not as a linear achievement through which it has assumed a different form in modern times by producing newer, universal and fundamental senses, but rather as having already realized its various forms in premodernity. Some researchers have already advanced such a reading. Palmer, for example, argues that the modern definitions of hermeneutics emphasize a different direction of an already latent, "rich reservoir of meaning resident in the Greek roots," and that the field would do well to return to it.[47] However, those who are familiar with the works of Heidegger and Gadamer know that these two scholars, who are credited with bringing hermeneutics to a more fundamental, ontological place in recent times, were in fact already consciously returning to the 'rich reservoir' of Greek thinking. Heidegger's *Being and Time*, for example, is a highly conscious attempt to undo the Cartesian legacy on being, and to return to the Ancient Greek way of thinking about it. Gadamer was likewise influenced by the Ancient Greeks and consciously chose to build his hermeneutics around such concepts as Aristotle's *phronesis* and Plato's dialectics. Moreover, as Ihde argues, both Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the creators of the deregionalization

45 Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Al-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 358.
46 Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics*, 9, 11.
47 Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 31–32.

movement of hermeneutics, were in fact also returning "the sense of hermeneutics to its more general ancient philosophical sense," while naturally also "giving hermeneutics somewhat of a specific shape."[48] By these tokens, it seems that in the recent history of Western thinking hermeneutics was not snatched from a primordial regional place and dumped in a more general one, but actually brought back into its general and fundamental significance.

Hermeneutics, as I interpret it from the earlier discussions, is rooted in an event in which humans bring theoretical reflexivity to problems of understanding. In other words, it is to do with the perennial question of how the meaning of something, whatever that is, becomes intelligible to an intelligent being. Ultimately, the birth of hermeneutics lies in this event and not in the conscious application of a lexical term, or in its relationship to specific historical figures and movements. Accordingly, insofar as any culture has tangible proof of such an event, we can recognize the presence of hermeneutics in that culture. In a philosophical sense, hermeneutics should by this account no longer be considered in simple Eurocentric terms. Moreover, since hermeneutics is culturally bound to an event, which itself can develop a particular historicity, there is not one but a whole range of cultures or histories of hermeneutics, which, as we demonstrated earlier, can intersect at various points in time.

An additional point about the cross-cultural nature of hermeneutics is that in premodern works it is sometimes difficult to demarcate or uncover just one sense in which it operates. Rather, on closer inspection, one uncovers the synchronous presence of multiple—regional, general, and fundamental—forms of hermeneutics, sometimes even in one single work. Thus, if the history of hermeneutical discourse demonstrates anything, it is that hermeneutics does not always develop in a linear progression in which one sense sublates a previous one, as was the case in a recent Western hermeneutical discourse, but also that different kinds of hermeneutics can develop simultaneously, thereby allowing concurrent senses of hermeneutics to inform one another.

This claim is perhaps best illustrated by the concept of the active intellect, which has a bearing on hermeneutics at general, fundamental (ontological), and regional levels. At its core, this concept helps explain how humans can comprehend anything at all, including the meaning of things.[49] As the argument goes, no potential can be self-actualized without an external, already

48 Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics*, 11.

49 Comprehension is always comprehension of something, and the word to describe the object of comprehension in the writings of Muslim philosophers is *al-ma'ānī*, which also denotes 'meanings' in everyday and technical usage.

actualized cause. Hence, the human *material intellect* cannot know a potential meaning without the aid of an external *active intellect* that has already actualized the meaning.[50] These reflections on the active intellect are clearly a form of general hermeneutics, for they present a general theory on how it is possible for humans to understand anything. However, at an ontological level, the active intellect is also intimately tied to God. As Salim states:

> As the highest point above the Active Intellect, God, the pure intellect, is also the highest object of human knowledge. All sense experience, logic and the faculties of the human soul are therefore directed at grasping the fundamental structure of reality as it emanates from that source and, through various levels of being down to the Active Intellect, becomes available to human thought through reason or, in the case of prophets, intuition. By this conception, then, there is a close relation between logic, thought, experience, the grasp of the ultimate structure of reality and an understanding of God.[51]

Accordingly, the theory of the active intellect has significant ontological implications for the nature of understanding, namely that understanding emanates from God. Finally, the discourse on the active intellect explains how prophecy and revelation work. For example, Avicenna argued that a prophet has a special, immediate relationship with the active intellect, which allows him to receive a special form of cognizance, namely revelation.[52] As such, if the theory on the active intellect has a bearing on how revelation takes shape, it will without doubt have a bearing on how to frame and understand the Qur'an, thereby exhibiting a hermeneutical significance at the regional level.

Another point at which a general theory of understanding intersects with a regional theory of it (Qur'anic hermeneutics) can be found in the epistemological differentiation between the various levels of understanding that Muslim philosophers made. For example, al-Fārābī makes the most generic statement possible on it by saying that it is always one of two ways (*wa tafhīm al-shay'*

50 Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 315.

51 Kemal Salim, "Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali Al-Husayn (980–1037)," in E. Craig (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Genealogy to Iqbal*, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1998), 650.

52 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, 340; Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, 4th edn (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 34–35.

ʿalā ḍarbayn)[53]—either causing a thing's essence to be perceived by the intellect or by causing the thing to be imagined through a similitude.[54] Whereas the first kind of understanding is actualized through the methods and discipline of philosophy reserved for the elect, al-Fārābī argues that the second kind is mediated by religion and pertains to the masses.[55] Thus, in religion, rather than finding abstract problems such as nothingness being discussed in their naked theoretical immediacy, one discovers another more accessible method, namely by relying on approximative symbols, such as darkness as a symbolic stand-in for nothingness.[56] Since revelation is part of religion, this must therefore mean that the Qur'an is also composed of approximative symbols meant to instruct the masses.

While al-Fārābī lays the groundwork for a regional theory informed by his general theory of understanding, he does so only at an implicit level. A more explicit theory, however, can be discovered in the works of Avicenna and Averroes, who bring al-Fārābī's presuppositions into a direct relationship with the Qur'an. Accordingly, we discover that Avicenna claims that the Qur'an wittingly speaks of God in anthropomorphic rather than abstract theoretical terms. Had the Qur'an done otherwise, Avicenna argues, the Arabs and Hebrews would think that "the belief they were being invited was belief in an absolute nonentity."[57] As a consequence, since the Qur'an contains a symbolic truth that caters for the masses, it is possible through interpretation to revert these symbols to their underlying scientific truth.[58] However, this task is reserved for the wise and learned. On the other hand, Averroes who maintains similar general hermeneutical suppositions as al-Fārābī and Avicenna, relates the problem of understanding through symbols to the fundamental issue of truth.[59] Averroes argues that the Qur'an and the discursive philosophical tradition based on demonstration, contains truth, and that "truth does not contradict the truth

53 Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Naṣr Al-Farābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl Al-Saʿādah*, edited by Ali Bu Milhim (Beirut: Dār wa maktabah al-Hilāl, 1990), 88.

54 Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Naṣr Al-Farābī, *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, translated by Muhsin Mahdi (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 44.

55 Al-Farābī, 45–45.

56 Al-Farābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl Al-Saʿādah*, 90.

57 Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 42.

58 Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (*Ibn Sînâ*) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 152.

59 "Scripture contains literal and esoteric statements because human nature and disposition vary in respect of assent." Muhammad Ibn-ʿAbd-al-Malik. Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes, *Two Andalusian Philosophers: The Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan by Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Tufayl and the Definitive Statement by Abu'l Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd*, translated by Jim Colville (London: Kegan Paul, 1999), 82.

but, rather, confirms and testifies to it."[60] As such, when our understanding of something derived from demonstrative evidence contradicts our understanding derived from scripture, we must try to reconcile both sources of information by reinterpreting the latter.[61]

The concurrent presence and entwinement between general and regional hermeneutics was not only exclusive to the works of the Muslim philosophers but can also be found in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* tradition. In his work on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, a term I deliberately leave untranslated so as not to force certain preconceived notions into its discussion, the Ḥanafī jurist al-Sarakhsī (d.1090) dedicates an entire subsection (*faṣl*) to the problem of elucidating the manner in which absolute statements signify meanings ("*ibānat tarīq al-murād bi mutlaq al-kalām*").[62] Accordingly, we discover a section in which al-Sarakhsī makes statements that pertain to a universal, linguistic understanding, demonstrating the undeniable presence of a general hermeneutics in his works. However, since the Qur'an is also a linguistic expression, these insights also characterize, and are further supplemented by, al-Sarakhsī's regional, scoped hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Moreover, because the Qur'an discloses God's binding address to humankind (*taklīf*), which is the subject of *fiqh*, al-Sarakhsī inevitably also engages in another regional hermeneutics, namely the law (*sharīʿa*). For example, with regard to the discussion of directives (*al-amr*), al-Sarakhsī first explains how we should understand the universal, phenomenological essence of a directive, and subsequently how we should understand the specific directives of the Qur'an, and finally how one is to relate the prior understandings to a jurisprudential understanding (*fiqh*) of the law.

To return to my definition of Qur'anic hermeneutics, it is my claim that what distinguishes Qur'anic as opposed to other forms of hermeneutics is the simultaneous interplay of its various meanings. For instance, when we evoke the works of Muslim philosophers and jurists, we note the presence of hermeneutical statements that might advance our knowledge of how understanding operates on a universal level, but little about what exactly is involved in understanding the Qur'an in particular. Conversely, we might discover hermeneutical statements in the works of philosophers and jurists that inform us specifically of the operations involved in understanding the Qur'an, but that are not universally valid, so inapplicable to anything other than the Qur'an. Accordingly, while I refer to the prior theoretical undertaking as hermeneutics in the abso-

60 Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes., 81.

61 Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes., 81.

62 Al-Sarakhsī Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Sahl Abū Bakr, *Uṣūl Al-Sarakhsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 153.

lute sense, the latter is what I call Qur'anic hermeneutics. In other words, the qualifier 'Qur'anic' signifies the particularity of its application to the general task of reflecting on how the meaning of things becomes intelligible. Put differently, Qur'anic hermeneutics is the theory of how the particular meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible.

Such an understanding of Qur'anic hermeneutics is inevitably regional in character. However, this regionality is a matter of scope, not of being culturally specific with respect to concepts (like *tafsīr*), historical movements, or genres of works (such as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or *ʿulūm al-qurʾān*), or authors. In its absolute sense, Qur'anic hermeneutics is therefore not the exclusive possession of Muslims or their history. Massimo Campanini's *Philosophical Perspectives on Modern Qur'anic Exegesis* is for this reason no less a 'proper work' of Qur'anic hermeneutics than Averroes's *Fasl al-Maqāl*.[63]

5 Qur'anic Hermeneutics and the Statement

Let us begin with the self-evident premise that the reflective event we call Qur'anic hermeneutics always comes within a thought. However, unless this thought is externalized in an accessible form, we have no way of studying it. Hypothetically, it is possible that various hermeneutics of the Qur'an once existed but have been lost in the sands of time because their records were privately held, shared orally without being recorded, or simply mislaid, hidden or destroyed. Such theories cannot become the subject of a study because there is nothing to analyse. Thus, the only sensible way to enquire discursively into Qur'anic hermeneutics is by consulting the records that actually exist.

With this in mind, we discover that certain conventional assumptions define the materiality of Qur'anic hermeneutics in terms of a specific form of writing, for example through the formulation of rules (Waardenburg). Yet, as the history of hermeneutics suggests, this expectation seems more likely to be a bias inherited from Christian theology and post-Enlightenment empiricism. The quest for rules is synonymous with the desire for a method, or know-how whereby assertions can be elevated to the level of universal validity. However, as the history of the Reformation and Enlightenment demonstrates, certain dogmatic and positivist aspirations fundamentally motivate such quests, for

63 All the more substantiated by the fact that Campanini imports Averroes's discussions into his own work.

example asserting that one's religious interpretations hold truer than those of other religious groups (such as Protestantism versus Catholicism), or that one is scientifically secure and rigorous in one's claims. However, not all understanding of hermeneutics was pursued with such consequences in mind. Admittedly, the question of how the meaning of something becomes intelligible can potentially be answered methodologically by outlining certain rules or other kinds of measures, such as a particular spiritual discipline. Moreover, such an answer can accordingly become prescriptive, traditional, and even scientifically objective (repeatable). But, as we argued earlier, it is not *necessary* for hermeneutics to provide a solely methodological answer. What is to deter one from fixating on a passive form of understanding, an understanding that has not been procedurally or consciously manufactured, but received through the poetics of revelation or divine provenance? Is it possible in such cases to examine the essence of understanding through poetics or the theology of gift, without involving a scientific method? The history of Islamic discourse confirms such a possibility through the works of authors like Al-Ghazālī (d.1111), who explicitly related the problem of understanding to God's provenance (*rizq*).[64] Accordingly, we must conclude that the requirement for method, expressed for example in the material structures of rules, is not a necessary material condition for the existence of Qurʾanic hermeneutics.

Another temptation would be to confine Qurʾanic hermeneutics to books. Speaking of 'a book of Qurʾanic hermeneutics' seems to be an enticing and stable foundation to formalise the material limits of Qurʾanic hermeneutics. One could thus study Qurʾanic hermeneutics in a very straight-forward manner by locating, organising, and analysing 'books of Qurʾanic hermeneutics.' However, on closer examination, one quickly realizes that the idea of a book (or *kitāb*) of Qurʾanic hermeneutics would offer only a naïve, superficial solution to the question as to what the material limits of Qurʾanic hermeneutics are. For a start, in classical Islamic literature, interpretations of the Qurʾan are not only available in books but also in epistles (*rasāil*), fatwas, marginal notes in commentaries and metacommentaries, and even in what some refer to as novels. In one example of the latter, the tale of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* by Ibn Ṭufail (d.1185), Davidson is able not only to derive a theory of understanding from it, but also to relate it to hermeneutical theories expressed through other written media. As Davidson puts it, "Ibn Tufail, in contrast to Ghazali, apparently does attempt

64 Yusuf Sıdkî El-Mardinî, *Mesîru Umûmi'l-Muvahhidîn Şerh U Terceme-İ Kitâb-i İhyâu Ulûmi'd-Dîn: İhyâ Tercüme Ve Şerhi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2016), 491.

to go beyond Avicenna in ranking direct experience above discursive thought as the preferable road to human understanding."[65] Furthermore, as the recent participation of academics in the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics shows, the types of publications in which these matters are discussed have extended beyond those concerned with so-called classical Islamic traditions. We now find Qur'anic hermeneutics—especially among modern Turkish authors—being discussed in published monographs based on theses, essays, conference proceedings, interviews, and so forth.

While epistles, essays, and novels are all inherently different from one another, they are still essentially formal works, which to some may seem too constrictive. Statements about what is involved in understanding the Qur'an cover a variety of topics and are found in a multitude of different kinds of sources; even the hermeneutical outlooks of Muslim philosophers are spread over a wide range of media. The classical reference works on Qur'anic hermeneutics developed by al-Zarkashī (d.1392) and al-Suyūṭī (d.1505) are predicated on collecting and sometimes analysing scattered statements on Qur'anic hermeneutics, and this might delude some people into believing that no intricate, explicit hermeneutics exists. However, this is a superficial view. It is tantamount to arguing that Ibn ʿArabī, one of the most influential and brilliant Sufis of the Islamic tradition, had no deep knowledge of what was involved in understanding the Qur'an because he spoke about it irregularly rather than dedicating a single treatise to a solemn exposition of the subject, as we are accustomed with modern monographs.

At this point, to reach a formal conclusion on the material conditions underlying Qur'anic hermeneutics, I wish to draw theoretical support from Foucault's understanding of the statement. In other words, I argue that, at its most basic level, Qur'anic hermeneutics can be found in the 'statement'. I shall now explain why I chose the statement over the sentence or proposition as the lowest level of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

To clarify my choice, let me begin with the premise that one's awareness of the unique features of the statement forces a level of discernment that is otherwise missing in relation to propositions or sentences. For a start, as Foucault demonstrates, one could discover in 'no one heard' and 'it is true that no one heard' one proposition but two different statements. These sentences are, from a logical (or propositional) standpoint, identical, since they represent the same state of affairs. However, with respect to their nature as statements, "these two formations are not equivalent or interchangeable. They cannot occupy the

65 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, 180.

same place on the plane of discourse, nor can they belong to exactly the same group of statements."[66] For example, 'no one heard' could be spoken by an author or a character in a novel, while 'it is true that no one heard' could be discovered in an interior monologue or a silent discussion with oneself.[67] Likewise, identical sentences could be repeated on the same ink, paper, and position, yet still constitute two different statements.[68] Webb presents an example of such an instance by arguing that "when the line 'Le sommeil est plein de miracles!' appears in the 1868 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*," it is a new statement compared with the same line in the 1861 edition. This is because Baudelaire died in 1867, thus making the later edition "posthumous and placing it in a different institutional and economic set of relations."[69] In other words, the second time that the sentence "Le sommeil est plein de miracles" (sleep is full of miracles) appears, it becomes a different statement to some readers because of the metaphoric relationship between death and sleep.

Another discerning characteristic about statements is their dynamic relationship with the subject. Our usual instincts might conflate the subject of the statement with the first-person grammatical elements expressed in the sentence of a statement. Moreover, we might expect this first-person subject to be the very author behind the formulation of the sentence. However, in reality, the subject of the statement is much more variable and not always inseparably connected with the author of the formulation. This dissociation between the author and the subject is clearly present in literature when the author is not the subject of the statements made by the characters in the novel. The variable nature of the subject of a statement might even shift on a per statement basis. For example, in a preface to a mathematical treatise, the original author could explain his personal methodology and problems that he had been unable to resolve. Accordingly, as Foucault states, the enunciative subject can only be occupied by the author. However, in the same treatise one might discover the following proposition, 'two quantities equal to a third quantity are equal to each other'. Inevitably, in this case the subject of this statement can be anyone who affirms such a proposition.[70] Thus, as Foucault concludes:

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66 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), 91.

67 Foucault, 91.

68 Foucault, 101.

69 David A. Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology: Science and Transformation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 97.

70 Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 106.

> The subject of the statement is a particular function, but is not necessarily the same from one statement to another; insofar as it is an empty function, that can be filled by virtually any individual when he formulates the statement; and insofar as one and the same individual may occupy in turn, in the same series of statements, different positions, and assume the role of different subjects.[71]

These sorts of judgements might seem too delicate and finicky for a study of Qur'anic hermeneutics. However, various discourses from both classical and contemporary works call for that kind of approach. In classical Islamic discourse, we encounter two discursive phenomena—the repetition of sentences with a proper attribution to the author responsible for the original formulation, and the repetition of sentences without mentioning the author responsible for them. There are, for instance, inherent differences between statements in Sufi literature and in the biography of the Prophet, yet in both cases, the sentences are the same but the statements different. The subject of the statement can shift from the Prophet to the Sufi thinker, thus becoming the words of the thinker rather than those of the Prophet. Second, in some cases Muslim scholars omit the original author of a statement. One could see this practice as a form of plagiarism, but it is more likely that detaching the author from the original statement was done to elevate a statement to express the position of a school of thought or tradition.

The Turkish thinkers presented here are no exception with respect to the need for discernment. First, like their classical predecessors, contemporary authors repeat statements originally formulated by other thinkers. Likewise, the very act of embedding these classical statements in their own discourses inevitably alters the modality of these statements, which, as Webb argued, now belong to a "different institutional and economic set of relations."[72]

An unusual example of such an alteration can be found in the writings of Cündioğlu. In two different works, Cündioğlu recounts the following words of ʿUbaydallah b. Ḥassan (d.784): "verily the Qur'an demonstrates disagreement. Thus, the claim of freewill is correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and has a textual basis (*aṣl*). Likewise, the claim of fatalism (*al-ijbār*) is also correct and has also a textual basis."[73] ʿUbaydallah then goes on to say that, "for, each verse is one, possibly signifying two different aspects, and potentially carrying two different

71 Foucault, 105.

72 Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 97.

73 Abū Muḥammad Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif Al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Al-Maktabat al-Islāmī, 1999), 95.

meanings."[74] Moreover, ʿUbaydallah argues that whoever accords the witting adulterer the status of believer is correct, but the one who argues that such a person is a disbeliever by virtue of his or her sin is also correct because "the Qurʾan signifies all these meanings."[75] What is noteworthy about this is that in the first work Cündioğlu cites ʿUbaydallah's words to make a statement about the unrestricted potential of the Qurʾan to be equivocal.[76] At this point, the frame of reference of this statement's is highly theoretical, and ʿUbaydallah's assertion functions in a manner akin to borrowing laboratory data or field research to support his own claims. In other words, in keeping with Cündioğlu's beliefs, ʿUbaydallah is demonstrating how one can extract multiple, conflicting meanings from the Qurʾan. However, in his second work, Cündioğlu uses ʿUbaydallah's words again, but this time with a different purpose, namely to make a statement about how present-day Muslims are modern incarnates of ʿUbaydallah because their interpretations (*yorumlar*) and approaches (*yaklaşım biçim*) remind us (*hatırlatır*) of those of ʿUbaydallah.[77] A new, postmodern, perhaps cynical undertone is thereby ascribed to ʿUbaydallah that reverberates through his recurrent claims that "they are also correct," "they also have a textual basis," and "all of these meanings can be found in the Qurʾan"—an undertone reminiscent of certain postmodern relativist attitudes towards texts. As such, in the works of Cündioğlu we encounter two identical citations that ultimately embody two different statements. Foucault describes this phenomenon by saying that "not only can this identity of the statement not be situated once and for all in relation to that of the sentence, but it is itself relative and oscillates according to the use that is made of the statement and the way in which it is handled."[78]

A more modern practice warranting discernment is caused by the republication of existing essays in new works. For example, Cündioğlu originally presented his first work on Qurʾanic hermeneutics for an academic audience at a symposium. Initially, this presentation was collected and made available with other proceedings. However, the same work, containing the exact same sentences, was later published multiple times as a book with newly added prefaces. Inevitably, each new preface forged a new relationship with the original statements, and this potentially altered their modality. Likewise, Alpyağıl

74 Qutaybah, 95.
75 Qutaybah, 95–96.
76 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 57–58.
77 Dücane Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an: Hermeneutik bir Deneyim II* (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2013), 64–65.
78 Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 117.

updated three of his previously published essays and, along with three newly-written ones produced a new book on Qur'anic hermeneutics. Accordingly, the sentences expressed in earlier statements had again changed because the new essays had been added. Alternatively, failing to accord weight to such material conditions would imply that there was no inherent difference between Cündioğlu's original article and the later reprint with the additional prefaces. However, it is easy to see how much of a disservice this would be to the thinking of the author in question.

One might adopt a sceptical approach to the build-up and promotion of the statement in the context of Qur'anic hermeneutics because, as one could tauntingly ask, how much of note can a single statement in Qur'anic hermeneutics contain? To reply to this question, I wish to provide various sample statements from the great body of classical Islamic discourse, which, despite their small number, are both profound and monumental.

Let us begin by discussing the seminal work of the classical scholar al-Zarkashī, who specifically intended to write a book "that would collect (*jāmiʿ*) everything men have spoken of in respect to its [the Qur'an's] sciences."[79] One statement that al-Zarkashī found noteworthy was by al-Shāfiʿī (d.820), the eponymous grand jurist of the Shāfiʿī school of law to which al-Zarkashī belonged, and it said that "all that the community speaks of is an explanation of the Prophetic precedent (*al-sunna*). The entire Prophetic precedent is an explanation of the Qur'an and the entire Qur'an is an explanation of the exquisite names of God."[80] Al-Shāfiʿī, who was known for his eloquence, masterfully moves the statement through a vertical relationship from the most profane (the community) to the most sacred (the names of God). Representing a coherent intertwining of praxis (the sunnah) and intertextuality (*fiqh*, ḥadīth, Qur'an),[81] with each added layer of understanding coming to mediate another, finally ending up at the precipice of the end of human intelligibility, which are the names of God and whose transgression inevitably ends with the ineffable and inaccessible—God's essence.[82] Despite being succinct, such a statement undoubtably demonstrates the intricate Qur'anic hermeneutics that one can

79 Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī-ʿUlūm Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 19.

80 Al-Zarkashī, 19.

81 Each layer is inevitably 'embodied' in text. The community, among others, in texts of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Prophet in the recorded oral reports (*ḥadīth*), and God, of course, in the Qur'an.

82 Alluded to by the fact that al-Shāfiʿī does not speak of God's essence (*dhāt*) as the last element in the grand chain of understanding but of the names of God.

discover even in a single statement, especially when it is unpacked by being further linked with related statements belonging to other discourses, such as the literature on *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *tasawwuf*.

Another noteworthy example of a statement of Qurʾanic hermeneutics can be found in the work of al-Wāḥidī (d.1075). The work in question, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Occasions for Revelation), is introduced by al-Wāḥidī with the complaint that contemporaries have not been earnest in their pursuit of the sciences of the Qurʾan. Accordingly, to present a corrective, al-Wāḥidī wrote a book for beginners about when the Qurʾan was revealed. The statement of note here is that the science of *asbāb al-nuzūl* is "the best [science] that one ought to know and the most appropriate thing to which one should direct one's attention, since it is not possible to know the interpretation of a given verse or the meaning it alludes to without knowing its story and the occasion of its revelation."[83] Despite being an elementary statement, this theoretical presupposition became an important staple of Qurʾanic hermeneutics within Islamic discourse. Thus, we discover nearly five centuries later, that al-Suyūṭī still underwrote the propaedeutic and fundamental importance of al-Wāḥidī's statement for the understanding of the Qurʾan by repeating the statement verbatim and by structuring his work on its sciences to begin with the data on the occasions of the revelation of the Qurʾan.[84] Moreover, the statement is repeated in Mannāʿ al-Qaṭṭān's (d.1999) *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* ('Investigations into the Sciences of the Qurʾan').[85] Almost a thousand years has passed, and still the idea that al-Wāḥidī once stated on the proper means of understanding has not waned in the least. Both in the past and today, to various degrees Muslim scholars remain committed to Wāḥidī's statement that "the knowledge of the occasion for revelation is the best manner (*khayr al-sabīl*) to understand (*fahm*) the meanings of the Qurʾan."[86]

These examples demonstrate that the breadth and weight of a statement should not be underestimated in either Islamic discourse or beyond. For example, a gentile asked the Jewish sage Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel replied as follows: "that which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go

83 Alī ibn Ahmad Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl*, edited by Yousef Meri and translated by Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), x.

84 Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyuṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān*, vol. 4 (Wizārat al-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya wa-al-Daʿwa wa-al-Irshād, n.d.), 82.

85 Mannāʿ Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Muassah al-Risālah, 2000), 80.

86 Al-Qaṭṭān, 80.

study."[87] Likewise, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in the law is, to which he responded: "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Jesus explained that it is this commandment, along with its similar 'love your neighbour as yourself', that is ultimately the basis upon which "all the Law and the Prophets hang."[88]

6 Conclusion

With all this said, we can finally reach formal conclusions on the essence and materiality of Qur'anic hermeneutics. As stated, in its absolute sense, hermeneutics is concerned reflectively with the conditions and operations involved in any kind of understanding (passive or active). In other words, it enquires into how and under what circumstances the meaning of something, whatever that thing is, becomes intelligible. Qur'anic hermeneutics is about reflecting specifically on how the meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible. Moreover, Qur'anic hermeneutics, or for that matter just hermeneutics, is at its lowest level expressed by statements relating to the aforementioned theoretical concerns. It is therefore not materially bound to concepts or movements like *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, or *ta'wīl*, nor particularly related to various literary genres (such as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *'ulūm al-qur'ān*, or *uṣūl al-tafsīr*). Rather, the discourse belonging to such concepts, movements, and literary genres, are some of the fields in which we can discover statements of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

87 William Davidson, "The William Davidson Talmud: Shabbat 31a," n.d., https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.31a.6?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

88 Matthew, 22:36–40. New International Version.

CHAPTER 3

A Case against Subjectivity and Relativism: The Hermeneutics of Dücane Cündioğlu

1 Introduction

Born in 1962 in the district of Üsküdar in Istanbul, Cündioğlu started his career in the early 1980s by writing for various magazines and newspapers. He has since grown into a prolific author who has written different articles, columns, books, and novels on a variety of philosophical and theological topics. To the general public he is perhaps best known for his columns in the conservative Turkish newspaper *Yeni Şafak* and his occasional appearance on Turkish television.

Cündioğlu is the only author in this book without a formal academic training or teaching position. Nevertheless, despite his lack of academic credentials, he is known to have given the occasional lecture and to have taught different subjects, such as philosophy and *tafsīr*, at various institutions and research foundations. According to Silverstein, Cündioğlu's absence from the formal academic circuit seems to be more technical than related to the quality of his work. Silverstein stated that "the reasons for his institutional marginality would seem to be mainly technical and/or legal ones, for the quality and quantity of his publications is, it must be said, far superior to those of many on the country's university faculties."[1] This claim is supported by the many references that other academics make to his work in their papers and books.

Despite his marginal presence on the formal academic circuit, or perhaps because of it, Cündioğlu has developed a veritable following over the years,[2] which is particularly evident in his social media following. His Twitter account has a following of 360,000 people.[3] One would be hard pressed to find similar numbers among his academic peers. Moreover, since the end of March 2020, he has built a respectable presence on YouTube by uploading videos on a weekly basis that he films with a simple webcam from the comfort of his own home. Some of these videos have reached almost 100,000 viewers.

1 Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey," 150.

2 Some conservative Turks distrust Turkish academia because its members espouse anti-conservative ideas.

3 As of October 2020.

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In them, Cündioğlu addresses a range of philosophical and religious topics, including the meaning of freedom and justice and the significance of fasting.

Apart from a few sporadic references, relatively little research has been done on the works of Cündioğlu outside the Turkish context. The most substantial Western study to date has been Silverstein's article, *Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy*. While this study does not specifically explain the fundamental principles of Cündioğlu's hermeneutical outlook, it does provide a noteworthy description of the specific context and features of his thought. As such, Silverstein's essay informs us that Cündioğlu belongs to a larger movement of Islamist thinkers characterized by a twofold ambition, first to develop a critical genealogy of present social forms and practices, and second, to seek to reflect on the nature of sources and interpretation.[4]

Cündioğlu's reflections on the nature of sources and interpretation are further delineated in one of his interviews in which he describes the advent of his thinking on the sources of Islam in the following words:

> I was solemnly preoccupied with the Qur'an. During those times this was the dominant tendency (*eğilim*). I was also following that tendency. After this tendency, the *mealcilik* (exclusive reliance on the translation of the Qur'an) movement came to be. For example, names such as Edip Yüksel and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk were influenced by this tendency. Everyone that had an issue with tradition and lived Islam were looking for an unblemished foundation and source. What could this be but the Qur'an? It could have also been the practices (*uygulamalar*) of our Prophet. [However] the practices [of the Prophet] had issues and did not carry certainty (*kesinlik taşımıyor*). Accordingly (*o halde*), there was only one foundation (*dayanak*) that we could blindly apply our lives to. I on the other hand, opened my eyes and preferred to only rely on the Qur'an.[5]

These last sentences are revealing on the marginal role of the Prophet's *sunna* in the hermeneutical theories of certain Turkish thinkers. One reason why

4 Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey," 134–135.

5 What Cündioğlu means by "during those times" is not entirely clear. However, given that he mentions Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's translation of the Qur'an, and the time when Cündioğlu himself started publishing on the Qur'an, it seems that he is referring to the 1990s. Özgül Apaçe, "Sıradışı Bir Entelektüel: Dücane Cündioğlu," Yeni Aktüel, 2011. See http://ducanecundioglusimurggrubu.blogspot.com/2011/06/23-haziran-2011-yeni-aktuel-roportaj.html.

authors—even some of the conservative ones—omit discussing the significance of the *sunna* when interpreting the Qur'an is that they expect it to exhibit less convincing epistemic force, that is 'certainty' (*kesinlik*), than the Qur'an. While Cündioğlu avoids going into the details of this problem, from his references to 'unproblematic foundations' and to 'certainty' one can infer that he is alluding to the loss in modernity of the primacy of the *sunna* as a foundational source of Islamic thought.[6]

Cündioğlu demonstrates that known sceptics of the classical *ḥadīth* tradition, such as Edip Yüksel and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, set the stage for discussions on interpreting the Qur'an. While the Qur'an was universally accepted, the tradition of *ḥadīth*, the source that embodied the *sunna*, was not. Thinkers like Yüksel would contend that the *ḥadīth* tradition was full of fabrication and lies attributed to the Prophet. Any desire for a broad appeal and alignment with ongoing discussions, would require that the first principles of any new outlook on Islam, even those proposed by conservatives such as Cündioğlu, had to be formulated in relation to a universally accepted source, namely the Qur'an.

Another characteristic of Cündioğlu's work is that he primarily writes from a self-designated philosophical stance, so should not be understood within the framework of classical Islamic works or of the modern ideas of Turkish academic theologians (*ilâhiyatçı*). For example, the first section of his second book on hermeneutics is titled 'A Philosophical Analysis of the Essence of Understanding the Qur'an' (*Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Mahiyeti Üzerine Felsefi Bir Çözümleme*), which identifies him as a contemporary Muslim philosopher rather than as a conventional madrasa-educated scholar or academically-trained theologian. Nevertheless, despite deviating from the standards of classical Islamic scholarship, Cündioğlu's *oeuvre* is still laden with Ottoman-Turkish terminology and expressions that might seem arcane by colloquial standards, yet demonstrate his strong literacy in classical Islamic sources.

While Cündioğlu has written a variety of interesting works, our focus will be on two dedicated to Qur'anic hermeneutics. These are *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I* (*The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an*:

6 As Brown explains: "in the second half of the nineteenth century, some Muslim scholars began challenging core components of the pre-modern Islamic tradition. Some concluded that the hadith tradition was not at all a reliable representation of Muhammad's message. A few of these thinkers went so far as to reject altogether the authoritativeness of the Prophet's precedent. We can label this overall trend as Islamic Modernism, which is characterized by a radical reconsideration of classical Islamic beliefs." Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 243–244.

An Experiment in Hermeneutics I) and *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim II* (*The Evaporation of Meaning and the Qur'an: An Experiment in Hermeneutics II*). That these works are hermeneutical in nature is evident from their respective subtitles. Moreover, numbering the subtitles suggests continuity between the projects, to which I return shortly. However, both works are ultimately part of a larger series called Critical Qur'an Studies (Kur'an Tedkikleri), which includes other works by Cündioğlu on different Qur'an related topics, such as the integrity of Turkish translations of the Qur'an.

Cündioğlu regards his second publication as a continuation (*devamı*) of the first[7] and, as in the first, he centres his enquiry on "the problem of understanding the Qur'an" (*Kur'an'ı anlama sorununu*), namely how to set about understanding a text from its actual structure (*metnin yapısından*).[8] Accordingly, given the repetitious nature of Cündioğlu's goals, it should come as no surprise that his second work complements his first. While both exhibit the same goal, the manner in which and the concepts he uses to realize his goal, are—as we shall soon discover—different.

Apart from being rather repetitious, Cündioğlu's works are strongly critical. To recall, it was argued by us that a recurrent characteristic found in Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is the desire to critically respond to a perceived excess in the way that the Qur'an has been interpreted by ideologically distinct parties in contemporary Turkey. The three authors featured in this book are no exception in this respect. However, while each shares a reactive and pedagogical trait, they differ in how they envisage the fundamental problem of circulating Qur'anic interpretations. As further analysis of Cündioğlu's works will show, his hermeneutics is devised to counteract the subjectivist and relativistic readings of the Qur'an he regards as theoretically defunct and unconstructive.

My analysis of Cündioğlu's work is intended to show how he centres his hermeneutics around reconstructing the objective authorial intent. His interest is not in the subject's private and uncertain understanding but in discovering the transcendent, objective intention of the original author, which can only be retrieved by examining the historical and linguistic aspects of the expressions. However, since the Qur'an's meaning is intrinsically historical, a present-day subject has no licence to impose creative, historically foreign, or implausible readings on it. This is because, as Cündioğlu points out, if the Qur'an were to be understood by a future audience, such an understanding would conflict with

7 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, ix.
8 Cündioğlu, ix.

the Qur'an's imperative that it be reflected on by those present during the 22-year period of the revelation. Hence, the subject's role must ultimately not be defined in terms of an inventor of new meanings but as an archaeologist of objective meanings anchored in the past.

2 The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an

Cündioğlu initially wrote *The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an* as an article for the first ever annual week of the Qur'an Symposium (*Kur'an Haftası Kur'an Sempozyumu*) held during the month of Ramadan in 1995. Özsoy described the 1990s as the decade in which heightened discussions were held in Turkey on how the Qur'an should be studied and understood. While Cündioğlu's article was originally conceived as an academic work, he soon presented it for wider circulation in book form with additional prefaces in which he shed light on the original motives of his work in Turkey.

Cündioğlu argues that the aim of his first work was to develop a fundamental set of principles to guide his readers on how to interpret the Qur'an and to demonstrate how these would affect their understanding of it.[9] He based the principles he enumerated on a hermeneutical enquiry into the relationship between a reader and the text, namely on how the circumstances and conditions surrounding a text and reader influence the process of understanding the Qur'an.[10] Cündioğlu was obviously aware that such questions had already been addressed in the *tafsīr* tradition. However, without saying why, he concluded that the classical tradition had provided inadequate answers to these questions (*cevap veremediğini*). Moreover, he saw the *tafsīr* tradition as barely accessible to modern readers on the grounds that it demands arduous and long research to function properly as a hermeneutical frame of reference.[11] According to Cündioğlu, rather than helping bridge the fundamental rift between modern humans and the Qur'an, the *tafsīr* tradition, by virtue of its difficult and inaccessible nature, only exacerbates the rift further.

In his second preface, however, Cündioğlu cites a different motive for his work. This was that he wanted to write something that would establish the fundamental conditions for understanding the Qur'an, in effect conditions that would defend 'the children of this nation' (*bu toprakların cocukları*) from those

9 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 9.
10 Cündioğlu, 9.
11 Cündioğlu, 9–10.

who try to beguile (*aldatanlar*) them in the name of the Qurʾan.[12] Moreover, he wanted to come to terms with developments in twentieth-century Western hermeneutics and to show that postmodernism had no constructive contribution to make to understanding and interpreting the Qurʾan.[13]

Cündioğlu lamented the fact that, despite his best intentions, his work was less well received than he had hoped. As he put it, he was ahead of his time insofar as he had come up with the answer to a question that his audience had not yet posed.[14] The Turkish theological community met his work with sneers of derision, some even going so far as to claim that he had forged a relationship with New Testament exegesis (*Incil yorumlarıyla alâkalı*).[15] Nonetheless, while not explicitly attributed to him, Cündioğlu argued that the terminology and views he expounded had gradually become increasingly well accepted and had helped to define the topics of subsequent graduate and postgraduate students' theses. Rather than being happy though about this turn of events, Cündioğlu was left embittered, claiming that the pursuit of knowledge was not without its price.[16] However, as one might surmise, novel ideas that are initially rejected can, with increased understanding, subsequently become mainstream—for such is the price of being a pioneer.

3 Hermeneutical Beginnings

The first premise of Cündioğlu's hermeneutics is his conviction that the Qurʾan is a linguistic event (*dilsel bir olgu*).[17] As he explains it: "since the Qurʾan is God's discourse (*kelâm*), His speaking (*konuşması*), it is pre-eminently related to language (*dil*), [and is therefore] a linguistic event (*dilsel bir olgu*)."[18] Hence, to understand the Qurʾan is "to understand and interpret a speech, a word (*söz*),

12 While Cündioğlu offers no further details, we can surmise from his overall text that he is referring to interpretations that serve to further an ideological agenda rather than what he believes the Qurʾan is saying. Cündioğlu, 7.

13 Cündioğlu fails to define the term postmodernism, but from his overall text, as we shall see below, he seems to be referring to a broad cultural movement that has renounced its belief in an objective meaning and, as such, deems every interpretation relative. Cündioğlu, *Kurʾan'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 7–8.

14 Cündioğlu, 8.

15 Unfortunately Cündioğlu fails to name or elaborate on his detractors' arguments. Cündioğlu, 8.

16 Cündioğlu, 8.

17 Another synonym he uses is *nass-ı lugavî* (linguistic text). Cündioğlu, 15.

18 Cündioğlu, 18.

[or] an expression (linguistic text) in language."[19] However, since the Qur'an is realized in language, our understanding of language will reciprocally define our understanding of the Qur'an.

Up to this point, Cündioğlu had come up with nothing the classical authorities on Qur'anic hermeneutics had not already established. He acknowledges this and reminds us how language has always taken centre stage in the traditions of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*. The latter are seen, he argues, in the classical enumeration of sciences that a scholar ought to master before starting to interpret the Qur'an. In *al-Taysir fī Qawā'id 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (An Easy Introduction to the Rules of the Science of Exegesis), the Ottoman scholar Kafiyeci (d.1474) had listed fifteen prerequisite sciences needed by the exegete. Cündioğlu notes that seven of these fifteen sciences pertain to language, including rhetoric, morphology, and grammar. In other words, more than two-thirds of a *tafsīr* scholar's qualifications revolve around the expertise of language.[20]

The significance of language for understanding the Qur'an is undeniable, and Cündioğlu's own hermeneutics stems from a fundamental phenomenological understanding of communication within language. Underpinning this phenomenological understanding is the dialectical distinction between meaning-conveyance and meaning-understanding. In other words, his hermeneutics hinges on the elementary assumption that when something meaningful is expressed, there will always be someone on the one hand who conveys a message with meaning, and someone on the other hand who receives and interprets that meaning.

For Cündioğlu, meaning-conveyance involves a conveyor (*anlatan*), the act of conveying (*anlatım*), and the object being conveyed (*anlatılan*).[21] As Cündioğlu explains it, to convey meaning is to realize a communicative event with three fundamental elements—a person who addresses (*muhatıb*) someone, a person who is being addressed (*muhatab*), and the address (*hitab*) itself.[22] For example, if I were to ask my daughter to drink her milk, the conveyor or addressing subject would be me, while my daughter would be the addressee, and the imperative to drink milk would be the object, or more specifically, the address conveyed. Meaning, as Cündioğlu contends, is nothing other than the object (*şey*) that the conveyor wishes to convey (*iletmek*).

Cündioğlu presents a corresponding tri-partite division structured around the understanding subject, the act of understanding, and what is understood.

19 Cündioğlu, 19.
20 Cündioğlu, 18.
21 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 20.
22 Cündioğlu, 20.

As he argues, when a linguistic message is conveyed, one customarily also witnesses the presence of a subject who receives the message (*anlayan*). After receiving the message, the recipient subsequently engages in the act of understanding (*anlama*), and this consequently affects "what-is-understood" (*anslaşılan*).[23] For example, let us imagine that there is a person A and a person B. Person A shouts "help!" to person B, thereby resulting in person B becoming the understanding subject (*anlayan*). Person B receives this message and proceeds in an act of understanding (*anlama*). By engaging in the act of understanding, he or she comes to the realization that person A is requesting urgent assistance (*anslaşılan*/what-is-understood).

With this model of communication in place, Cündioğlu could outline the concrete criteria with which to differentiate between correct understanding (*doğru anlam*) and misunderstanding (*yanlış anlam*). Accordingly, he argued that when the what-is-understood fails to correspond with the object intended by the original interlocutor, then the original intention has undeniably been misunderstood.[24] However, the opposite also holds true: if one can reconstruct the intended meaning and then adjust one's own understanding to comprehend it, then correct understanding has been realized.

If understanding is achieved through correspondence between what is originally intended and what has been understood, then the main question becomes how one can reconstruct the original intention? In a conventional dialogue one can simply ask the interlocutor to explain his intent. However, where this is not possible, such as when the interlocutor is no longer present, the main question in a process of interpretation has to shift away from "what do *you* mean by this expression?" to "what does *this expression signify*?"[25] In other words, the answer to what an expression means must be constructed from within the strict material confines of the expression itself and not by questioning its original author.

The material confines of an expression are defined by what Cündioğlu calls its "natural connections" (*söz'ün tabii bağlamı*). Natural connections are the characteristic, material relationships contained in any meaningful linguistic expression—or, in other words, its necessary constitutive parts. As Cündioğlu explains, "the natural connections (*tabii bağlam*), however, are made up of elements such as the content (*söylenen*), the addressee (*kendisine söylenen*), the reason for something being uttered (*niçin söylenen*), and the time and place

23 Cündioğlu, 20–21.
24 Cündioğlu, 21.
25 Cündioğlu, 23.

that belongs to the utterance (*ne zaman ve nerede söylendiği*)."[26] In a subsequent section, Cündioğlu extends his description further by arguing that the manner in which the author expresses something (*nasıl söylüyor*), for example as a metaphor or narrative, also belongs to the natural connections contained within an expression.[27] By reconstructing an expression with reference to these characteristics, as will be elucidated in a later section, an interpreter is assured of being able to retrieve the objective meaning of an expression.

There is no doubt that this material approach to interpretation addresses the typical hermeneutical problem of historical distance. By suggesting a reconstructive method, Cündioğlu attempts to remedy the problem of how new recipients can understand an historical message originally conveyed in remote circumstances when its author is no longer around to clarify its meaning. As such, Cündioğlu presents an important answer to an age-old question in Qur'an hermeneutics. This is how is one to shed light on God's word and decipher it after the departure of the Prophet of God, humanity's most direct channel of communication through which to understand the revelation of God?

4 Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Subjectivity

Before fully addressing the problem of historical distance, Cündioğlu embellishes his objectivist theory by counterposing its intellectual counterpart, subjectivism. For Cündioğlu, the starting point of subjectivism is the dissolution of the above-mentioned dialectics between meaning-conveyance and meaning-understanding—that is when interpretations no longer actively seek conformity with the interlocutor's objective intention (*anlatılan*), but exclusively rely on the interpreter's subjective understanding (*anlaşılan*) instead. In such an instance, the subject becomes the sole authority on meaning. However, when the latter is no longer located outside the subject, then the subject, according to Cündioğlu, is free to interpret the Qur'an in whatever way best serves his or her interest. Consequently, this carries the risk of the Qur'an being "made to speak" (*konuşturmak*) in a way laid out by the subject's vested interests rather than being true to its author's original intentions.[28] In more technical terms, the Qur'an becomes explained (*müfesser*) rather than self-explaining (*bi zatihi müfessir*).[29]

26 Cündioğlu, 22.
27 Cündioğlu, 101–102.
28 Cündioğlu, 28.
29 Cündioğlu, 33–34.

Cündioğlu, who is deeply conversant with recent Turkish studies and translations of the Qur'an, gives three examples of how subjective interests might impede one's understanding of the Qur'an. These involve explanations of verses relating to controversial topics such as covering women's bodies, husbands disciplining their wives, and subjecting thieves to corporal punishments. Cündioğlu suspects that the modern explanations of these verses, all of which undermine their classical understanding, were born from an inability to harmonize modern sensibilities with the message of the Qur'an rather than from what the text really had to say.[30] However, rather than allowing for a dissonance to persist between the text's prima facie meaning and the values and norms of the modern world, interpreters are accused of altering their understanding (*yeni bir forma sokmak*) to convey something more acceptable.[31]

Cündioğlu's first example is his most terse, and thus his most ambiguous.[32] It pertains to women covering themselves and starts from the premise that the Qur'an is definite about women needing to be covered, although the Qur'an does not clarify if this necessarily includes head and face coverings. Accordingly, someone, such as Cündioğlu's anonymous opponent, could argue that the Qur'an only demands women to cover their breasts. However, Cündioğlu does not agree with this reading. Without going into too much detail, such a reading, Cündioğlu argued, was not derived from philological evidence (*filolojik deliller*) but from screened causes (*arkada kalan sebepler*).[33] It is not entirely clear what screened causes are, but Cündioğlu believes that the previously mentioned revisionist reading of the verse likely stems from the interpreter's belief that a head covering was no longer defensible (*savunulabilir*).[34] This could mean a variety of things, none of which Cündioğlu explicitly presented. However, given the history of Westernization in Turkey, his claim seems to hint that modern interpreters can no longer advocate the head scarf because it conflicts with contemporary dress codes for women in Turkish society. Accordingly, Cündioğlu seems to suggest that these interpreters revised their understanding to something more practical, like covering their breasts,

30 Cündioğlu, 29.

31 Cündioğlu, 29.

32 We have to remember that Cündioğlu initially presented this work to an academic audience, so I suspect the omission of detail in his examples was because simple allusions would have sufficed to remind his audience of the "exegetical deception" (Cündioğlu's ultimate point) currently circulating among politically correct, anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an.

33 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 30.

34 Cündioğlu, 30.

which is already an acceptable custom in most of the Western world and in countries that imitate the West.

Cündioğlu's second example is more straightforward and explicit, even although it also relates to a very controversial topic in Qur'anic studies. I am referring here to his discussion of 4:34, which deals with the issue of whether men are allowed to strike their wives. Cündioğlu claims that a traditional reading of the Qur'an allows men to do so under exceptional circumstances, but that our modern understanding of women's rights and male–female relationships renders this conventional reading indefensible. Pink clarifies the Turkish context to which Cündioğlu is referring as follows:

> Regardless of what construct of marriage and gender hierarchy one holds to be preferable or even God-given, it is hard to see the act of beating his wife as a man's natural right today in the same unconcerned way that an exegete in the nineteenth or early-twentieth century might have done. For exactly that reason, the debate to which the above-mentioned thread starter refers has emerged: a debate on whether the Arabic word for 'beating', 'striking' or 'hitting', *ḍaraba*, might have an entirely different meaning here. That opinion has increasingly been promoted since the 1990s in the context of a debate on marital violence in particular and gender equality in general.[35]

Accordingly, Cündioğlu explained, interpreters disturbed by traditional meanings enumerated others from which to select a more appropriate interpretation of *ḍaraba*.[36] In other words, by relying on the Qur'an's rich polysemy, what was previously understood as 'hitting' (*ḍaraba*) was now strategically reinterpreted as 'expelling'.[37]

Cündioğlu's final example pertains to verse 5:38 in the Qur'an, which addresses the issue of punishing criminals. Yusuf Ali's translation of the passage in question—"as to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example"—is thought to be an accurate rendering of how the verse is conventionally read. However, interpreters who find such verses too brutal, inevitably opt for an alternative interpretation. Hence, Cündioğlu argues, it is no surprise that some interpreters have revised the conventional translation of 'cutting off' into 'scratching' (*çizmek*).[38] Nonetheless, as

35 Pink, *Muslim Qur'ānic Interpretation Today*, 285.
36 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 30.
37 Cündioğlu, 31.
38 Cündioğlu, 32.

with the previous examples, what guides the interpretation is not so much philological honesty, since the Arabic imperative *iqṭa'* mentioned in the verse customarily means cutting off, but what the interpreting subject finds palatable.

To conclude this section, a subjectivist attitude towards interpretation will most likely result in interpretative dilemmas being resolved through private and cultural preferences. Hence, as the previous examples demonstrated, interpreters facing unacceptable readings of the Qur'an can potentially resort to the Qur'an's rich polysemy. As one of the examples showed, they could argue that the customary understanding of *ḍaraba* (hitting) is in fact not the one intended in the Qur'an, that it should rather be interpreted as 'expelling', thus giving spouses the right to correct (*te'dib*) their wives under exceptional circumstances by expelling them from their homes instead of hitting them. Given the strategic reliance of these interpretations on the rich polysemy of the Qur'an, it is hardly surprising that Cündioğlu should direct his next hermeneutical question to the status of this polysemy in the Qur'an.

5 Polysemy, Subjectivity, and the Qur'an

Polysemy is not only relevant in the event of interpretative dilemmas but also with regard to what I call 'meaning concurrency'—namely whether the Qur'an intentionally means multiple different things. In the likely event that it does in fact intentionally accommodate multiple meanings, then different subjectivities can claim to understand the Qur'an in different ways. However, if it does not intentionally embody multiple meanings, then the door to relativism in interpretation closes, and the appeal to objectivism becomes both critical and revitalized by a new argument.

Having analysed the classical views on language alongside the presence of meaning concurrency, Cündioğlu concludes that, in understanding the Qur'an, the presence of polysemy cannot be used to legitimize any form of subjective pluralism. To make his case, Cündioğlu draws on both reason and tradition. With respect to the former, he points out that a belief in concurrent meanings is an untenable idea that undermines the possibility of meaningful communication. With respect to the latter though, he demonstrates that the majority of classical experts have never suggested that the presence of polysemy in the Arabic language might point to the possibility of meaning concurrency.

Cündioğlu sees divergent understandings more as side effects occasioned by the audience's subjective diversity than as being located in the actual expres-

sions.[39] In other words, the surplus of meaning resides less in "what is conveyed" (*anlatılan*) than in "what is understood" (*anlaşılan*).[40] Meaning, as previously demonstrated, is rooted in an objective intention, which must be singular. Otherwise, if one were to intend everything simultaneously, one would ultimately intend nothing at all.[41] As Cündioğlu, citing Aristotle, states:

> If on the other hand it be said that "man" has an infinite number of meanings, obviously there can be no discourse; for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself; because it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing.[42]

Cündioğlu continues by arguing that, by intending different, contradicting things (*farklı anlamlar*) simultaneously, one invariably generates meanings that cancel each other out.[43] One simply cannot intend multiple contradictory things simultaneously: "it is impossible that 'being man' should have the same meaning as 'not being man'."[44]

Many of Cündioğlu's hermeneutical views can be retraced to problems associated with the relatively new Turkish culture of Qurʾanic translations (*meal*). Cündioğlu's advocacy of objectivism and dislike of meaning concurrency can similarly be retraced to a very concrete translation of the Qurʾan that typifies this interpretative problem. The translation in question, which Cündioğlu cites without sources, depicts verse 96:2 as follows: "he created the human from an embryo/from sticky water/love and care."[45] As the translation confirms, the author presents three different translations of the Arabic *ʿalaq*, all of which are separated by a slash. According to Cündioğlu, the word *ʿalaq* cannot concurrently signify all three entities on account of the irreconcilable differences between them.[46] For example, given the question of from what a human is created, Cündioğlu argues that the answer cannot be love (immaterial) and embryo (material) at the same time, since two contradictions can-

39 Cündioğlu, 34.
40 Cündioğlu, 36.
41 Cündioğlu, 34.
42 Aristotle, *The Metaphysics: Books I–IX*, translated by Hugh Tredennick (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 137; Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 34–35.
43 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 34.
44 Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, 167.
45 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 36–37.
46 Cündioğlu, 37.

not exist together in the same place.[47] In other words, if one were to ask whether the human was created from a material or immaterial substance, the answer cannot be both, because a substance is either material or immaterial.

Nonetheless, the various Islamic schools of legal thought cannot deny that multivalent expressions in the Qur'an occasion disagreements, which is something about which Cündioğlu is acutely aware. In this respect, he presents the case of *lamastum* in verse 5:6, in which believers are commanded to purify themselves after having performed the act of *lamasa* on women. *Lamasa* can either signify general physical contact, or more specifically coitus. While the jurist al-Shāfiʿī (d.820) favoured the former reading, Abu Ḥanīfa (d.767) preferred the latter.[48] Nevertheless, while Cündioğlu acknowledges that one can read the verse in different ways, as different legal schools have done, this does not mean "that the interlocutor (*kelam sahibi*) intended two different meanings concurrently in the same verse."[49]

Cündioğlu was not the first to argue that polysemic expressions are not evidence of concurrently different intentions in the Qur'an. The problem of polysemy, or its classical Ottoman equivalent *lafz-i müşterek*, has already been the topic of many *uṣūl al-fiqh* works. The majority of classical Ḥanafī scholars have, according to Cündioğlu, all expressed the fact that polysemic expressions do not function by way of concurrency (*şumul*) but by way of substitution (*bedel*).[50] In other words, a word with a multitude of meanings will always express in a given sentence one of its meanings to the exclusion of all its other potential meanings.

While numerous *uṣūl al-fiqh* scholars, especially among the Ḥanafīs and Muʿtazilīs, have argued against meaning concurrency, there have been noteworthy authorities such as al-Shāfīʿ who have argued in favour of the possibility of meaning concurrency.[51] Proponents of this view derive support from such verses as 22:18 in which the verb *yasjudu* ('bowing,' 'prostrating') is used in reference to animals, trees, stars, and humans. To reiterate the verse in question, "seest thou not that to Allah bow down [*yasjudu*] in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth—the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills,

47 Cündioğlu, 37.
48 Cündioğlu, 37.
49 Cündioğlu, 37.
50 The term *şumul* literally means 'comprehensive', and in reference to the topic at hand, would refer to the fact that one single expression cannot denote in a comprehensive manner all its potential meanings concurrently. Cündioğlu, 52.
51 Cündioğlu, 51.

the trees, the animals; and a great number among humankind?" Those who accept meaning concurrency argue that it cannot relate with the same meaning to categorically different entities such as trees, stars, and humans.[52] Trees obviously cannot perform the act of prostration in which they render their faces unto the ground. However, they can figuratively 'bow down' by obeying God's will. Thus, while prostration should be understood literally in reference to humans, it should be understood figuratively in reference to trees or stars.

Cündioğlu is not convinced that al-Shāfiʿ's reading forces us to admit the reality of meaning concurrence in the Qur'an, since classical authors who deny meaning concurrency propose a different reading of 22:18.[53] According to these authors, it is possible to apply the figurative meaning of *yasjudu* to all the different categories mentioned in the verse without having to compromise the idea of a single meaning. In other words, if the starting point of our understanding is that *yasjudu* means submission (*inkiyad*), then the verb can apply without any alteration to either humans, stars, or trees.[54] As such, by not taking the literal meaning as the fundamental starting point of our understanding of *yasjudu* but the figurative meaning, no interpretative quandary remains that would have otherwise forced a resolution by admission of meaning concurrency.

Classical linguists have certainly made cases that further strengthen Cündioğlu's position against meaning concurrency. One of the authorities referenced by Cündioğlu in this regard is Ibn al-Anbārī (d.940). According to him, the words of the Arabs are in a structural relationship with each other: certain words generate meaning by aiding and complementing other words in an expression. Only when all words are comprehended, can the intended meaning truly be understood.

Although it is true that words can signify multiple meanings when they are considered in isolation, their exclusive meaning will become clear when the totality of the expression is considered. As Ibn al-Anbārī vindicates Cündioğlu, one always intends one thing and not multiple things when informing someone.[55]

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52 Cündioğlu unfortunately provides no exact information on who these classical authorities are who accept meaning concurrency.

53 Cündioğlu does not give any indication of who these classical authors are.

54 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 53.

55 Cündioğlu, 56–57.

6 The Natural Relations of Expressions

After demonstrating the untenable nature of relative meanings as well as their potential false legitimization through a misunderstanding of the status of polysemy in language, Cündioğlu can finally present his own theoretical proposal for an objective Qurʾanic hermeneutics. As alluded to in the section on hermeneutical premises, Cündioğlu's hermeneutics is fundamentally reconstructive. In other words, the objective meaning of a verse can be found by reconstructing its 'natural connections,' namely by enquiring into questions of what, why, by whom, and when something was stated in the Qurʾan.

Towards the end of his work, Cündioğlu advances into describing these natural connections with varying degrees of details. He starts with the proposition that any meaningful expression is necessarily connected to a content, namely 'the what' (*ne*) of an expression. This is the object that the original author wishes to convey.[56] As elementary as Cündioğlu's conclusions might be, the fact remains that no understanding is possible without knowing what has been said.

According to Cündioğlu, the content of any meaningful expression is intrinsically bound to its *raison d'être*. In other words, the what of an expression is organically bound to the *why*.[57] An example that illustrates this is verse 2:45, which states: "seek (Allah's) help with patient perseverance and prayer." Cündioğlu argues that by understanding the reason behind this statement, which is to encourage people to seek help through patience and prayer, we inevitably also understand what it wishes to convey, which is nothing other than to seek help through patience and prayer.[58]

Besides the content and motives behind an expression, it is also important to reconstruct the identity of a message's addressees.[59] According to Cündioğlu, any variance with respect to identity assessment, will necessarily change the outcome of an understanding. For example, since the word *kāfirūn* in verse 5:44—"and whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed is of the *kāfirūn*"—is customarily translated into 'unbelievers', Cündioğlu argues that if one understands this appeal to pertain to Muslims, it means that any detraction from the application of Sharīʿa would result in apostasy.[60] Historians of Islam are aware of this reading of the Qurʾan, since different histor-

56 Cündioğlu, 71.
57 Cündioğlu, 73.
58 Cündioğlu, 73.
59 Cündioğlu, 80.
60 A 'kāfir' in this context would refer to a 'disbeliever'.

ical sects, such as the Kharijites, have advanced such an interpretation.[61] On the other hand, if the addressees are acknowledged to be the Jews of Medina, then the verse no longer applies to Muslims, which negates its conclusion that Muslims who wean themselves away from the Sharīʿa are apostates.

An address has an organic relationship with its spatio-temporal context because, as Cündioğlu explains, it also necessarily has an addressee (*muhatab*). However, any human addressee is bound to space and time. Accordingly, as Cündioğlu concludes, for humans to understand them, expressions have to be uttered in space and time.[62] In other words, they have to have a certain historicity to them. How we identify this spatio-temporal context will determine our understanding of an address. As Cündioğlu puts it, "meaning is realized in adjunction with time, [meaning] receives its shape within a specific time."[63]

To prove this intrinsic relationship between the meaning of expressions and the context in which they are uttered, Cündioğlu imagined a scenario in which a Turkish reader is confronted with the following headline: "the head scarf is gaining great popularity in high society!" Now, Cündioğlu argued, if the origin of the statement were retraced to Turkey in the 1990s when Muslims were banned from wearing head scarves at universities, this statement would be met with gleeful hope. This is because it would signify that the secular elite, of which Turkish high society was composed in the 1990s, had come to accept the head scarf, thus signifying a broader and renewed interest in religious symbols after Turkey's growing embrace of laicity. On the other hand, if one were to contextualize the statement to the end of the Ottoman era, then its significance would more likely change from a message of hope to a message foreboding a future of further secularization and growth of indecent behaviour. For, as Cündioğlu states, women in Ottoman times were covering not only their heads but also their whole bodies with a robe-like dress (*çarşaf*).[64] Accordingly, among conservatives the headline would have evoked a sense of regression rather than progression.

The historicity of expressions necessitates they have a primary addressee (*ilk muhatab*), that is the first intended recipient of an address.[65] In the case of the Qurʾan, the primary addressees are the direct witnesses of the revelation. Consequently, Cündioğlu merely recognizes us—the contemporary readers—as indirect addressees (*dolaylı muhatablar*) of the Qurʾan. Moreover, since Cün-

61 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 82.
62 Cündioğlu, 83–84.
63 Cündioğlu, 94.
64 Cündioğlu, 92–94.
65 Cündioğlu, 80.

dioğlu also states that the original recipient is the cause for the inception of a message, it follows that the reconstruction of the meaning of such a message should be done in reference to how this expression would have been received historically.[66] Put differently, because a message is directed and tailored to a specific audience, its significance is organically bound to the context in which the recipient is expected to receive the message, thus implying that a modern reader cannot derive a meaning from the Qur'an that would have been historically foreign to its original audience.

Cündioğlu even goes so far as to imply that no one can understand a message as well as its historical recipient. This can be inferred from his belief that the passage of time results in the weakening (*zayıflamak*) of meaning, that is in "the disappearance (*kaybolmak*)" of the addressee of an expression.[67] While Cündioğlu fails to expand on this somewhat cryptic statement, he is probably inferring that meaning is ephemeral, since one of its necessary components—a connection to an addressee—is also ephemeral (addressees die). Accordingly, it is implied that a message caused by someone's actions and presented in circumstances that such a person personally witnessed, can never be better understood by others who have no direct experience of either.[68]

If we knew for sure that the Qur'an's initial audience had indeed fully understood it, or was even capable of doing so, it might make sense to reconstruct its messages in terms of what its first audience made of them. However, to substantiate his claim, Cündioğlu evoked various classical authorities, including Ibn Khaldun, to confirm that all classical Arabs understood the Qur'an on both its semiotic and semantic levels.[69] This, as Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) had argued, had to be the case because the Quran claimed to have been revealed specifically with a view to being reflected on by its recipients. Since it is impossible to reflect on something without understanding it, this surely means that the first recipients of its contents were fully cognizant of their meanings.[70] As Cündioğlu put it, to demand reflection on a message would only make sense if one were to believe in the intelligible nature of the message.[71]

This assumed historical capacity to understand the Qur'an is not exclusive to believers. On the contrary, Cündioğlu held that non-believers and believers

66 Cündioğlu, 80.
67 Cündioğlu, 80.
68 This reading is supported by another citation from Cündioğlu: "it is natural that those who were present during an event know the very things that those who were absent do not know of or have not seen." Cündioğlu, 92.
69 Cündioğlu, 87.
70 Cündioğlu, 90.
71 Cündioğlu, 90.

alike understood the Qur'an, with the most explicit support for this assumption coming from the fourteenth-century jurist al-Shāṭibī (d.1388). According to al-Shāṭibī, there was never any suggestion that the Qur'an's detractors could not understand it, merely that they did not want to. As al-Shāṭibī, quoting the following verse, put it, "what is amiss with these people that they come not nigh to understand a happening?"[72] Al-Shāṭibī held that "this verse means that disbelievers do not understand God's intention from His address. It does not mean that they do not understand the speech itself (*nafs al-kalām*). How could that be the case when the Qur'an has been revealed in their language? On the contrary, they are not inclined to grasp God's intention from His speech."[73] This reading, which is less straightforwardly adduced from an English translation, seems to be inferred from the fact that the Qur'an does not state outright that disbelievers do not understand what God is saying (*lā yafqahūn*); rather, the verse uses an additional verb *yakādūna* in conjunction with the verb *yafqahūn*, thus potentially rendering the meaning in the way Pickthall translated it—"they come not nigh to understand." Thus, as this reading suggests and al-Shāṭibī concludes, the detractors of the Qur'an do not even attempt to understand what God is saying.

Finally, according to Cündioğlu, the Qur'an should also be interrogated with respect to the mode of its expression. This question is critical not because it pertains to the problems surrounding the Qur'an's discourse (such as its context), but because it directly involves the language of the Qur'an and, hence, the essence of its discourse.[74] For example, to recognize whether the Qur'an uses historical narrative or allegory will inevitably make a great difference to how it is interpreted.[75] A case in point is verse 7:4, which commands, "and thy garments keep free from stain!" Accordingly, as Cündioğlu argues, it makes a great difference whether the call to purification is meant in a figurative or a literal way. If it is meant literally, then the object of purification is merely one's garments, whereas if it is meant figuratively, then the object of purification can be understood to mean the soul.[76]

Another important concern related to the Qur'an's mode of expression is whether it should be understood as an oral or written work—in other words, should it be understood as a product of 'written language' (*yazı dili*) or of

72 Cündioğlu, 90–91.

73 Free translation from the Arabic edition. Abū Isḥāq Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dâr Ibn 'Affān, 1997), 208.

74 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 102.

75 Cündioğlu, 102.

76 Cündioğlu, 102.

'spoken language' (*konuşma dili*)? For Cündioğlu the answer is clear: the Qur'an should be understood as an oral rather than a written entity,[77] and Cündioğlu supports this view with a range of arguments. First, the Qur'an was revealed by an illiterate (*ummi*) Prophet to a culture that was predominantly oral.[78] It only follows that the Qur'an would be revealed in accordance with the tradition familiar to its audience. Second, while it is true that there is an imperative that the Qur'an be read (*iqra'*), Cündioğlu argues that this should be interpreted as "read aloud!" "When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace: that ye may receive Mercy."[79] Cündioğlu concludes that the fact that the Qur'an speaks of an auditory relationship is proof of its oral nature and a refutation of any potential understanding that argues that it was principally a written report (*yazılı bildiri*).[80]

The conclusion that the Qur'an is oral in essence might seem trivial, but has certain hermeneutical consequences. According to Cündioğlu, by accepting that the Qur'an is principally an oral rather than a literary product, we can contextualize certain of its features that might otherwise seem idiosyncratic. For example, in a written work repetitions might seem redundant, but they are common in oral discourses. A similar case might be made for other characteristics of the Qur'an, such as its alternation between pronouns, its sudden change in topics, or its tendency to answer questions that have not been posed.[81]

7 Hermeneutics in Practice

Besides a few small allusions, there is only one significant example that could shed light on how Cündioğlu's reconstructive epistemology would work in practice. This revolves around the polysemic word *kāfirīn* in verse 26:19—"you acted in the manner that you acted, and you are of the *kāfirīn*." This word is the plural dative of the active participle of *kafara*, conventionally signifying 'to

77 This view is congruent with the dominant Sunni belief that the Qur'an was first spoken and heard, and was only codified after the Prophet's death. Accordingly, the primary event of revelation is oral, while the codex of the Qur'an is only derivative of this event.

78 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 104.

79 Cündioğlu, 104.

80 It is true that the Qur'an invokes its readers to listen to its message, but it also speaks of being God's *kitāb* (a term conventionally translated as "book"). Accordingly, one wonders how Cündioğlu reconciles these two seemingly disparate descriptions. Since he fails to address this issue, his claim that the Qur'an is intrinsically oral, remains rushed and underdeveloped. Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 104.

81 Cündioğlu, 107.

hide, cover up', 'be ungrateful', or 'disbelieve'.[82] Since there is clearly a major technical difference between being ungrateful and being a disbeliever, it is important to resolve which of the meanings is intended by the verse because, as Cündioğlu repeatedly emphasized, verses in the Qur'an do not concurrently signify different meanings.

Cündioğlu's solution to this interpretative predicament is to reconstruct the verse's secondary references in an attempt to establish what the original intention behind the word *kāfirīn* might have been. Accordingly, Cündioğlu's first step is to establish the identity of the person pronouncing the statements in verse 26:19. By taking preceding verses into account, he established that the interlocutor was the infamous Pharaoh of Egypt and that the addressee was Moses.

Having established who the interlocutor and addressee are, Cündioğlu then looks into when and under what circumstances the Pharaoh expressed his sentiments. In short, Moses was taken by the Pharaoh's wife as an infant and raised in the Pharaoh's court. After intervening in a fight between an Israelite and an Egyptian, Moses struck the Egyptian and ended his life.[83] Afraid of the repercussions, Moses then fled from Egypt. After building a new life for himself, God approached him and ordered him to go to Pharaoh: "go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."[84] Thus, when Moses returned as a messenger to command Pharaoh to release the Children of Israel, Pharaoh reminded him of his earlier transgression ("you acted in the manner that you acted") and of the fact that he was of the *kāfirīn*.

To reiterate, a *kāfir* can be someone who either disbelieves or is ungrateful. However, now that we know the context of the verse, Cündioğlu argues that the most plausible meaning of *kāfir* in this context is not a disbeliever, or someone who covers up something, but an ungrateful person.[85] In other words, Pharaoh wishes to express how ungrateful Moses was by commanding and threatening him after all that Pharaoh had done for him by taking Moses in as a foundling and raising him within his own court.

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82 Cündioğlu, 23.

83 See Qur'an 28:15–16: "and he entered the city at a time when its people were not watching: and he found there two men fighting, one of his own religion, and the other, of his foes. Now the man of his own religion appealed to him against his foe, and Moses struck him with his fist and made an end of him. He said: 'this is a work of Evil (Satan): for he is an enemy that manifestly misleads!' He prayed: 'O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul! Do Thou then forgive me!' So (Allah) forgave him: for He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

84 Qur'an 20:24.

85 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 24.

8 The Evaporation of Meaning and the Qur'an

Now that Cündioğlu's first attempt at hermeneutics has been discussed, we can advance to the fundamental theoretical propositions of his second hermeneutical work, *The Evaporation of Meaning and the Qur'an*. Although it is a continuation of his first work in that it entails deconstructing subjectivist attitudes towards interpretation and centring the hermeneutics around the historical reconstruction of the author's objective intent, it would be appropriate to think of it in cyclical rather than linear terms.

While Cündioğlu's fundamental outlook did not change over the course of his two works, in his second work he arguably devoted more attention to certain points of his theory that he had previously neglected or explored only briefly. In his second foray into hermeneutics, he pays stronger attention to the importance of why interpretations should be objectively justifiable, what it means to regard the Qur'an as a linguistic event, and what the interpretative challenges of a diachronic reading of the Qur'an are. I shall now analyse and explore these three themes further in order to develop a deeper understanding of Cündioğlu's overall hermeneutics.

9 Objectivity, Subjectivity, and the Justification of Interpretations

The preface of the *Evaporation of Meaning* once more informs us of the motives behind Cündioğlu's involvement in hermeneutics. For him, the prime instigator was his observation that, apart from some futile attempts, no concrete steps had yet been taken to escape 'the chaos' generated by what he perceived to be the subjectivist trend (*öznel*(*ci*)*lik cereyani*) within Qur'anic exegesis.[86] What exactly this chaos entails, remains unexplained, but he assumes that the reader shares the same sentiment. Nevertheless, as Cündioğlu continues, attempting to discredit each individual interpretation produced by this trend in Qur'anic exegesis would be highly unfeasible. As he puts it, "it is my contestation that the criticism of each individual interpretation is not a very constructive path in order to get ahead of this widespread weakness that may be called 'liberalism' or 'subjectivism'."[87] Each critique, Cündioğlu asserts, will become but another 'interpretation among interpretations' (*yorumlardan bir yorum*). Rather, a more productive path, he suggests, would be to parse crit-

86 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, x–xi.
87 Cündioğlu, xi.

ically through the prior understandings (*ön-anlamlar*) and presumptions (*ön-kabulleri*) that precede interpretation (*yorumlara tekaddum eden*).[88] Since, by inspecting the elements that precede and guide interpretation, we are able to advance a more thorough discussion that also includes the circumstances (*koşullar*) that generate disputable interpretations, that is important circumstances that are otherwise neglected in a purely exegetical discussion.

Conversely, in the main text, Cündioğlu presents a more devotional view of why a critical hermeneutics is so important. There is no doubt that the Qur'an is fundamentally a book of guidance and, hence, every Muslim tries, or should try according to him, to appropriate and live by its message.[89] However, before one is able to do so, one should be able to understand what that message is. Understanding, though, is only possible if one has knowledge of why and how (*niçin ve nasıl*) the Qur'an means what it does.[90] Unless, Cündioğlu argues, one has the ability to discern such things, no certain (*kesinlik*) knowledge can be reached about one's interpretations.[91] "Where there is no certainty, there can be no speak of right or wrong interpretations. Let there be no doubt: when we cannot speak of right or wrong interpretations, we can also not speak of meaning!"[92] In other words, if we have no criteria for assessing what the meaning of something is, then we can never come to know what something actually signifies. In such a case, being ignorant of the correct meaning of something is no different from a scenario in which meaning did not exist at all.

Cündioğlu's second work is envisaged to succeed where a decade of understanding the Qur'an through sheer translations and exegetical works has failed. As Cündioğlu clarifies, the gap between the Qur'an and the modern subject has fundamentally widened and continues to do so: "neither do they [modern Muslim readers] attempt to read it nearly as much as they should, and if they read it, they do not understand it."[93] To remedy this problem, various attempts were made by Turkish writers to make the Qur'an more accessible by translating both it and its *tafsīr* (exegesis) into the Turkish language. Inevitably, this has meant that almost all *tafsīr*, even those spanning dozens of volumes, have been translated into Turkish, and countless translations of the Qur'an, often of varying quality, have been made available in the Turkish language. However, as Cündioğlu notes, mere access to classical exegetical works and translations

88 Cündioğlu, xi.
89 Cündioğlu, 4.
90 Cündioğlu, 7.
91 Cündioğlu, 7.
92 Cündioğlu, 7.
93 Cündioğlu, 4.

of the Qur'an into one's own language are no guarantee that one will understand it; in fact, the risk of still failing to bridge the above-mentioned distance between the text and the contemporary reader might still remain.[94] Translations do not speak to a modern audience, and the classical exegetical works provide so many different interpretations that they confuse rather than clarify the meaning of the Qur'an.[95]

These opening sections prove that Cündioğlu is an advocate of judiciously knowing why and how the Qur'an signifies a certain meaning. An important part of this knowledge is to understand the relationship between the preconceptions we have and how they influence our subsequent interpretations. Cündioğlu put considerable pedagogical effort into raising his readers' awareness of this relationship. However, given the predominantly Muslim character of his Turkish audience, it should come as no surprise that this effort is rooted in the familiar discourse of classical and contemporary Islamic studies.

Cündioğlu's inculcation begins by drawing parallels between the hermeneutical notions of preconceptions and interpretations and the classical Arabic logic of conceptions (*tasavvurat*) and judgements (*tasdikat*).[96] As he recalls, the basic epistemological principle of classical Islamic traditions of logic and *kalām* is that "all knowledge is either conception [*tasavvur*] or assent [*tasdik*]."[97] While conceptions pertain to terms and definitions, assent pertains to judgements and propositions.[98] However, there is a fundamental similarity between preconceptions and interpretations, and between conceptions and judgements:

> Similar to how the event of thought is realized by first proceeding from objects being conceptualized in the mind followed by these conceptions being strung together, the act of interpretation also incepts with certain presumptions that are subsequently transformed under the name of 'interpretation' into a cohesive unity.[99]

In other words, interpretations are merely the logical conclusions about the meaning of things that have come together through our presumptions.

94 Cündioğlu, 5.
95 Cündioğlu, 5.
96 Cündioğlu, 11.
97 Cündioğlu, 12.
98 Cündioğlu, 12.
99 Cündioğlu, 14.

This kinship between preconceptions and interpretations and conceptions and judgements also means that interpretations can be held accountable by the integrity of their preconceptions, for judgements can be tested according to the accuracy of the conceptions on which they are based. Accordingly, if our conceptions are incorrect, so too by extension are our propositions: "when our conceptualizations are inaccurate, our propositions that exhibit judgements will inevitably also be inaccurate."[100] Likewise, since interpretations also express judgements about the meaning of something, they can also be tested in accordance with the soundness of the presuppositions underlying their claims.

For Cündioğlu, preconceptions are more fundamental to the interpretative process than faith, as evidenced from a classical discussion he recalls over the substantiality of magic. According to him, the predominant position in Sunni discourse is to accept that the magic mentioned in the Qur'an is real. However, despite being one of the most important standard bearers of Sunni thinking, Abū Ḥanīfa rejected that claim. As such, Cündioğlu argues, Abu Ḥanīfa's dissent is a clear example of how interpretative differences can occur even within the same religious faction. If faith were of consequence in how things are understood, then Abu Ḥanīfa—whose faith is indisputable in Sunni circles—would have reached the same conclusion as the Sunni majority. That he did not means that there are other factors at play that overrule (*aşan*) mere faith (*mucerred iman kabullenişi*).[101] Cündioğlu concludes that the ultimate fate of interpretations is decided by methodology (*metodoloji*), not one's creed (*itikad*).[102]

It is important that at every turn our preconceptions, and by extension interpretations, are based on dependable objective claims, and not on purely subjective impulses. To further support this argument, Cündioğlu refers to a classical concept in Islamic thinking called *müsellemat*, which in this context can be translated to mean an accepted assumption. To recall, in classical dialectics a healthy debate requires an argument based on a supposition that both debaters share. The theologian and encyclopaedia writer al-Jurjāni (d.1414) presented a helpful example on the etiquette of debate. This was that, when a jurist argues that an adolescent girl's gold adornments can be taxed on the basis of a solitary report (*khabarun wāḥid*) from the Prophet, the adversary cannot simply defeat the argument by stating that he opposes the judgment

100 Cündioğlu, 13.
101 Cündioğlu, 19.
102 Cündioğlu, 19.

because he does not accept solitary reports. For, as al-Jurjāni stated, the admissibility of solitary reports is an accepted interpretative principle in classical jurisprudence.[103] Rather, as we can further extrapolate, if the adversary wishes to win the argument, he must do so on basis of propositions admitted by both parties.

True to this spirit of classical dialects, Cündioğlu argues that our interpretative claims must also be based on suppositions that are not only shared but also sustainable, convincing, and true to the spirit of Islam. First, assumptions based on unquestioned fallacies run the risk of eventually being exposed. Interpretations based on such suppositions will inevitably have the rug pulled from under them.[104] Moreover, interpretations that lack clear and objectively proven premises will never become powerful or convincing (*ilzam edici olmaz*).[105] Interpretations based only on subjective impulses will, by their nature, be weak and will, through a lack of confidence that they really signify the ultimate truth of things, lose any kind of potential to be critical. Finally, when interpretations no longer exhibit any critical fervour, they inevitably become alien to the spirit of Islam itself. As Cündioğlu recalls, "Islam, has from its very inception expressed itself in terms of a rebellion and a challenge; being critical, opposing, daring to be criticized, and arguing that its principles could be accepted by all. What is more, it even voiced the critique of others in its own holy scripture."[106]

For Cündioğlu, a subjectivist reading is ultimately a fideist one; when an interpretation cannot be rationalized, it also becomes impossible to ascertain or validate its meaning, and this renders our enquiries into it meaningless: "this verse means such and such. Why? Because it simply does!"[107] Such an attitude is for Cündioğlu akin to fideism and fideism, as he describes it, "is to be closed, to have a predisposition to not openly voice one's claims, to desire darkness, to be without claims (*iddiasizdir*), to be conservative, to be complacent, to pose no challenge, and since it does not have an open mind towards critique, it also does not like critical attitudes."[108] However, this attitude is clearly against the overall critical spirit of Islam that was previously mentioned.

Only when the rationale behind an interpretation is correct can we really claim that it is legitimate. Otherwise, as Cündioğlu argued, if the rationale

103 Al-Sharīf Al-Jurjāni, *Al-Ta'rifāt* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 2000), 212.
104 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 20.
105 Cündioğlu, 23.
106 Cündioğlu, 22.
107 Cündioğlu, 7.
108 Cündioğlu, 22.

behind an interpretation is simply what the subject fancifully imagines, and is not drawn from a reasoned inference of what the author intends, then the meaning will simply 'evaporate'.[109] While the title of Cündioğlu's second work evokes the evaporation metaphor, and there are sporadic references to it within the book, one is left without any concrete or detailed explanation of what the term actually means. Nonetheless, it can be adduced from his overall argument that it reflects the loss or forgetting of meaning, as occasioned by a theoretical renunciation of the authorial intent;[110] as we witnessed in Cündioğlu's earlier work, and we shall continue to do so in his second one, meaning is inseparable from authorial intent, and to abandon the author is to abandon meaning all together.

10 The Qur'an as a Linguistic Event

Since preconceptions structure understanding, it is first necessary, through proper critical hermeneutics, to establish what those preconceptions should be. In other words, a critical hermeneutics needs to answer the question of what object are we trying to understand in our attempts to understand the Qur'an? However, as Cündioğlu warns, in trying to answer that question, we must be careful to avoid mixing the Qur'an's content (*muhteva*) with its essence (*mahiyet*). The Qur'an contains warnings, but that does not mean that the Qur'an itself is a warning. Rather, as Cündioğlu will argue, "to understand the Qur'an, is to understand [in essence] a language (*lisan*) within a language; [in other words] to understand a word (*kelam*) expressed in language."[111] In fact, at its core the Qur'an is a word (*kelam*), a discourse, and it is this appellation that best describes its essence (*mahiyet*), nature (*tabiyat*), and constitution (*yapı*), whereas an attribute such as "admonisher" (*nezir*) can only describe the content and function (*işlev*) of the Qur'an.[112]

Alternatively, having clarified our preconceptions, one might wonder to what extent our propositional statements can state something inherently embedded in the term Qur'an itself. In other words, can we test our preconceptions according to whether they are analytical or synthetical? To return to Kant's familiar distinction between analytical and synthetical statements, a sentence such as "bachelors are unmarried" is analytical, because it only tautologically

109 Cündioğlu, 8.
110 See Cündioğlu, x, 54.
111 Cündioğlu, 26.
112 Cündioğlu, 24–25.

describes what is already evident in our understanding of the term bachelor. Such statements are independent of experience, whereas one such as "a bachelor is running outside" is synthetical because it depends on experience and does not relate something to us that we can infer from the term bachelor itself. Hence, when we return to Cündioğlu's statement that the Qur'an is a discourse, he is arguing that we are stating nothing new but are repeating an analytical description of what the Qur'an is.[113] Although not an example provided by Cündioğlu, it contrasts with statements like "the Qur'an is a very relevant book in the twenty-first century." The latter statement, while describing what the Qur'an is, is not an analytical statement describing the essence of the thing itself—something we can cognize independently of certain experience—but is rather a synthetic statement that can only be supported by specific experiences.

Once the essence of the Qur'an has been conceptualized, it is easy to infer the direction in which our subsequent interpretations should proceed. As Cündioğlu states, "when we replace the term Qur'an with language (because it is revealed in the Arabic language) and discourse (because it is God's word), we necessarily arrive at the means whereby understanding is procured, [and] what kind of relationship we will have with the 'thing' [the Qur'an]."[114] In other words, by knowing that the Qur'an is a word revealed in the Arabic language, we inevitably know that we can only understand it by understanding language itself. As Cündioğlu's argument suggests, had the Qur'an been a musical composition, it would by default mean (on account of this constitution) that we can only understand the Qur'an through hearing and by investigating the significance of sounds.

Now that it is clear that the Qur'an should be considered in terms of a linguistic event, more specifically a discourse (*kelam*) expressed in language (*lisan*), we can consider its consequent hermeneutical implications. Accordingly, as the next sections will show, to understand the Qur'an is to understand God's intent (*murad-i ilahi*). However, before advancing to that conclusion, I need to describe the philosophical paradigms of the language on which Cündioğlu relies. In other words, it is necessary to delve a bit deeper into what he understands when he says that the Qur'an is a discourse expressed in language.

113 Cündioğlu, 26.
114 Cündioğlu, 31.

11 *Lisan* and *kelam*

While Cündioğlu introduced the terms discourse and language in Turkish (*lisan–kelam*), there are various signs in his work demonstrating that they hearken back to, or at least converge with, the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole* and the Chomskian one between competence and performance. The first evidence of this is when Cündioğlu brackets *langue* together with *lisan*, and similarly juxtaposes *kelam* with *parole*. This juxtaposition suggests that *lisan* and *kelam* are in essence synonyms for *langue* and *parole*. Moreover, when Cündioğlu delineates the concepts of *lisan* and *kelam*, he also cites verbatim in brackets the English words competence and performance. This fact clearly demonstrates once more that Cündioğlu's ideas are rooted in certain foreign concepts—in this case Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. For, if they were original and organically derived from the Turkish language, there would be no reason for him to mention their foreign equivalents.

Saussure's impact on modern linguistics and philosophy can hardly be overlooked, especially his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, which has become a staple in recent theories of deconstruction and hermeneutics. To recall, Saussure argued that language has two aspects, *langue* and *parole*. As Chapman and Routledge explain, *langue* "denotes a system of internalized, shared rules governing a national language's vocabulary, grammar, and sound system."[115] On the other hand, *parole* signifies actual oral and written communication between members of a particular linguistic community.[116] Accordingly, to clarify this with an example, in Kurdish the antonym for "garm" (warm) is "sar" (cold). This rule is part of the *langue* of the Kurdish language. Hence, there is no possible way to state "garm" and intend "sar" without going beyond the bounds of the system in which the Kurdish language is set up. Conversely, *parole* does not denote the system itself but expressions formulated by putting the earlier described system into use, such as when someone says in Kurdish *derve sar e* ("It is cold outside").

It is also by extension possible to think of *langue* and *parole* in terms of competence and performance. In other words, borrowing Chomskian terms, *langue* represents a linguistic community's competence. Hence, language is the competence readily at hand for members of the linguistic community to utilize to generate expressions. For example, all English speakers share a competence

115 Chapman, Siobhan and Christopher Routledge, *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) 113.

116 Chapman and Routledge, *Key Ideas*, 113.

based on a set of grammatical rules that enables them to express declarative, interrogative, or imperative sentences. However, *parole* denotes the performative aspects of language, that is when the earlier mentioned competence to communicate interrogations or imperatives is put to use in actual conversations, poems, or literature.[117]

With these concepts clarified, we can turn to their hermeneutical significance in Cündioğlu's thinking. According to him, meaning must be sought in the performance of language, not in the bare system of language,

> for meaning, to repeat once more, is more so found in the use of language, than language itself. Whereas language is a possibility, desire (*istem*) is its necessary condition. In other words, meaning is not in language, in the general knowledge thereof, but hidden in the purpose (*maksad*) and intention (*murad*) of the speaker of that language.[118]

By itself, language is merely ready at hand, unspecified, and incapable of defining meaning (*tayin etmez*).[119] However, language performance, for example speaking, is what brings meaning about, because one utilizes language to convey a meaning, an intent.[120] For example, the word "mouse" can refer to either an animal or to a device used with a computer. It is by virtue of the technician's desire to speak of the device that the word mouse means a device and not a type of animal.

As with all his modern arguments, Cündioğlu also finds support from classical Islamic literature. Accordingly, he puts his more conservative readers at ease by locating the traditional Islamic equivalents of the earlier-mentioned *langue–parole* paradigm; the ones he recalls in this regard are *muvâdaa* (convention) and *kasd'ul-mütekellim* (authorial intent). The reference made to tradition in this case is interestingly not to the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition, which historically has been the dominant intellectual tradition in Turkey, but the Muʿtazilīs, which is customarily considered to have been a heterodox sect in Islam. The Muʿtazilīs, as Cündioğlu points out, had argued that understanding the Qurʾan always depended on two variables—*muvâdaa* and *kasd'ul-mütekellim*. *Muvâdaa* defines what certain expressions customarily mean, and

117 Barbara C. Scholz, Francis Jeffry Pelletier and Geoffrey K. Pullum, "Philosophy of Linguistics," in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016).

118 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 44.

119 Cündioğlu, 43.

120 Cündioğlu, 44.

this includes whether they were conventionally known to be used literally or metaphorically.[121] In other words, it is the *langue*, the system of a language. However, *muvâdaa* is not enough by itself; one must also infer (*istidlāl*) the *kasd'ul-mütekellim* (authorial intent) because it is the interlocutor who decides how to utilize (perform) language to convey an intention.[122]

The *kasd'ul-mütekellim* is more fundamental than the *muvâdaa*. Without actually being stated, in their potential and neutral state words can mean a variety of things that are compliant with the rules of the system. Accordingly, the system itself cannot be the final arbiter in deciding what something means. Rather, as Cündioğlu frequently emphasized, it is the author's intent that determines how a potential meaning is actualized in speech. Cündioğlu further clarifies this point with a discussion taken from al-Ghazālī (d.1111) to the effect that the Arabic word *fawq* can signify either elevation in rank or elevation in physical space. However, we can wonder which of these meanings is intended in the Qur'an with the statement that "He is the irresistible, (watching) from above [*fawq*] over His worshippers."[123] Is God above believers in physical space or rank? For Cündioğlu, the answer can only be resolved by taking into account what the authorial intent could have been. In this case, given the premise that God is absolutely transcendent, al-Ghazālī and Cündioğlu concluded that God could not have meant that He is elevated in physical space, since that would anthropomorphize God and diminish His transcendence. Accordingly, *fawq* can only be sensibly understood as elevated in rank, for that is more fitting of God's intention.[124]

Understanding can thus only succeed by reconstructing an expression according to its original intention. Cündioğlu recalls the position of Schleiermacher in this respect. "Every act of understanding, according to Schleiermacher, has its inversion in the act of the speech, for understanding is nothing more than the reconstruction of the construction of the interlocutor by the

121 Cündioğlu, 45.

122 Cündioğlu, 45–46.

123 Qur'an 6:61.

124 This is a rationalist take on the matter because reason dictates the most rational form of a polysemic expression to be the most appropriate in this case because it undercuts whatever potentially anthropomorphistic significations *fawq* might have. However, this approach to expressions in the Qur'an has also been contested by other scholars, such as the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328). Ibn Taymiyya stated that "the Creator, glorious and exalted is He, is elevated in a real manner above the world, not elevated in rank" (*wa al-bāri'u subḥānahu wa ta'ālā fawqa al-'ālami fawqiyyatan ḥaqīqatan wa laysat fawqiyya al-rutbati*). Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān Al-Talbīs Al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1 (Madina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li Tibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2005), 390.

addressee."[125] As a consequence, understanding is not an activity in which new meanings are sought or creative readings developed.[126] Rather, as Cündioğlu makes it adamantly clear, "understanding is a second reconstruction, a new realization; wherein an understanding subject tries to figure out in language how the original constitution [that is of a word] by the speaking subject was realized and realizes it anew in accordance with its essence."[127]

12 The Diachronic Aspects of Understanding

Cündioğlu's theory has certain diachronic implications. As I argued above, to understand is to reconstruct an expression in reference to its original intention. However, as Cündioğlu points out, this reconstruction is not purely linguistic (*dilsel*) but also historical (*tarihsel*).[128] For a start, as the *lisan–kelam* paradigm clarified, meaning is realized in relation to a linguistic system. However, the system behind language is always evolving and changing, and thus in possession of different historical states (diachroneity). Accordingly, when we reconstruct the meaning of an expression, we must pay careful attention to the particular system in place at the time the expression was first uttered.[129] Otherwise, as we can surmise, our interpretations run the risk of ascribing a meaning that might have been current at one stage in history but foreign to the language of a work at another stage.

Given this hermeneutical premise, the interpretation of the Qur'an requires a competent knowledge of how words were used during the period of its revelation. However, this leads to the follow-up question of whether sufficient historical data exist to allow for a proper diachronic reading of the Qur'an. Given the findings of the Egyptian scholar al-Khūlī (d.1966), Cündioğlu had no choice but to accept that extant lexicons fail to provide a helpful record of the diachronic aspects of the Arabic language. According to al-Khūlī, even renowned lexicons like the *Lisān al-ʿArab* and the *Qamūs al-Muḥīṭ* haphazardly gathered random meanings of words from sources that were ages and cultures apart.[130]

125 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 53.
126 Cündioğlu, 53.
127 It is of note that Cündioğlu actually uses the English term 'second reconstruction'. Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 54.
128 Cündioğlu, 63.
129 Cündioğlu, 47–48.
130 Cündioğlu, 48–49.

The lack of proper data on the diachrony of words undoubtedly creates a hermeneutical conundrum. As Cündioğlu explains, al-Khūlī himself conceded that extant dictionaries were of little help in establishing the diachrony behind meanings. Accordingly, for al-Khūlī, a modern exegete has by default no choice but to reconstruct the historicity behind words.[131] After diligently doing this to the best of his knowledge, al-Khūlī argues that the exegete should relate his findings to the Qurʾan itself. How one should subsequently relate the Qurʾan is not entirely clear from al-Khūlī's words. Moreover, unlike his previous work, Cündioğlu fails to disclose what a proper answer to this question might be. However, given the previous example on whether God was above humans in rank or physical space, we can only surmise that words can be tested to be true to the Qurʾan if we can somehow make a rational case about why God would assign this meaning to a word as opposed to another historically accurate one. In Cündioğlu's system, as we have repeatedly seen, meaning is constituted by the objective intent behind expressions, and not by the potential, polysemic significance of the words.

13 Conclusive Remarks

That Cündioğlu is an ardent advocate of objectivism in Qurʾanic hermeneutics should by now be clear, but that does not necessarily mean that he is against understanding the Qurʾan in differing ways. This might seem counterintuitive, given that the starting point of objectivity is to reclaim a meaning that is singular and distinctly true to the original intention of the text. However, Cündioğlu's reverence for different legal schools in Islam, all of which are known for their divergent understandings of the Qurʾan, suggests that advocating objectivity need not preclude tolerating multiple readings of the book. Rather, it is my conclusion that his actual aim in advocating objectivism is to insulate the Qurʾan and Muslims from theories and readings that argue that the Qurʾan concurrently proposes different things to different people. In other words, as demonstrated in all the previous sections, he is against the sort of relativism that accepts that all understandings and interpretations are equally valid and indicative of God's intention, but not—as his works might insinuate—against different applications and interpretations of the Qurʾan coexisting in the larger Muslim community.

This attitude towards objectivity and relativism in Qurʾanic hermeneutics and exegesis expels all readings of the Qurʾan that are unfounded and flimsy

131 Cündioğlu, 49.

on the one hand, but creates a clearing for disputation in exegesis that is open to non-believers on the other.

Cündioğlu's objectivism centres on authorial intent (*kasd'ul-mütekellim*). In the case of the Qur'an, Muslims conventionally believe this to be what God intended with His revelation. Accordingly, valid interpretations of the Qur'an must always aim to disclose God's intent, although Cündioğlu requires them to be rationally justifiable. People simply cannot argue that they understand a verse in a certain manner just because they "feel or believe it to be so." Interpretations that lack rational justification, according to Cündioğlu, are unsustainable and contradict the overall spirit of the Qur'an. Readings simply based on subjective whims rather than solid rational foundations are always a hair's breadth away from being exposed as incorrect or unfounded. Moreover, these kinds of interpretations are weak and unconvincing because they are based on private sentiments rather than on universal rational grounds. To rely on private sentiments is to contradict the overall spirit of the Qur'an, which revealed a message that was meant to convince and be intelligible to everyone, including disbelievers. As such, we must conclude that in Cündioğlu's framework the capacity for understanding is not grounded in subjective faith but in objective reason.

This need for interpretations to be rationally justifiable creates, by implication, a space for disputation in exegesis. In other words, Muslims may entertain different interpretations, but they can explain why they hold one rather than another competing version. Moreover, since the capacity to understand is grounded in objective reason rather than subjective faith, any non-Muslim can write an exegesis of the Qur'an as long as they have reasonable grounds to justify why their explanation of the Qur'an holds true.

CHAPTER 4

Subjective Bearing Is More Fundamental to Understanding Than Objective Method: The Hermeneutics of Recep Alpyağıl

1 Introduction

Born in Samsun in 1977 to the local imam, Alpyağıl's formal religious education began in 1998 when he attended a traditional religious lyceum (*Imam hatip lisesi*) in Turkey.[1] As I mentioned in the first chapter, Imam-Hatip schools were designed to groom the next generation of religious clergy—a task previously carried out by the now defunct madrasas. However, after finishing a religious lyceum, one could also, as Alpyağıl did, advance further into one of Turkey's theological universities (*ilahiyat fakültesi*). As such, after obtaining a bachelor and master's degree in theology, Alpyağıl wrote a doctoral thesis for Istanbul University titled *Din Felsefesinde Dekonstrüksiyon* (Deconstruction in the Philosophy of Religion). Having received his doctoral degree, Alpyağıl started teaching and researching for his alma mater Istanbul University, which he continues to this day.

As an author, Alpyağıl has produced an impressive body of work, comprising a wide range of mainly Turkish contributions to the philosophy of religion. These can be divided into three categories—monographs on certain thinkers, comparative and dialectical analyses of different thinkers, and his own ideas. It is especially in the last two categories that we discover the broad range of his knowledge and an explicit mediating engagement between Islamic ideas and contemporary Western philosophy. Articles such as "Faslu'l-Makâl'i Wittgensteincı Bir Bağlamda Okumak" (Reading Faslu'l-Makal'i [Averroes's Decisive Treatise] in a Wittgenstenian Context) or "Trying to Understand Whitehead in the Context of Ibn ʿArabi," are but a couple of examples of the cross-cultural nature of his intellectual activities.

Despite the broad range of Alpyağıl's writings, two works primarily represent his own hermeneutical thinking, and are the primary focus of this chapter. These two works, which I shall describe shortly, contain a collection of essays,

1 Ibrahim Türkan, "Prof Recep Alpyağıl Ile Kütüphane Sohbeti," 2019, https://www.ilimdergisi.org/kitap-sohbetleri/prof-recep-alpyagil-ile-kutuphane-sohbetleri/.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004537873_005

both constituting earlier published essays as well as new ones. The first, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kuran'ı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler I* (Whose History, Which Hermeneutics? Philosophical Experiments in Understanding the Qur'an I), revolves primarily around Alpyağıl's own ideas. The second of these works, *Fark Ve Yorum: Kur'an'ı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler II* (Difference and Interpretation: Philosophical Experiments in Understanding the Qur'an II), contains essays dedicated to reviewing the work of other thinkers in addition to Alpyağıl's own ideas.

Alpyağıl describes his interest in hermeneutics in the preface to his first work, according to which a fundamental turn to language, known as the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, marks contemporary thought. The linguistic turn has disturbed the self-evident nature of what we understand as a text and has reinitiated enquiries into the status of the text, the essence of meaning, the relationship between text and history, and the relationship between the text and the reader.[2] Regarding the latter, like Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl claims that contemporary hermeneutical thinking has become biased towards taking the subjective reader as the referent of meaning (*okur yanlı*), rather than the objective meaning of the text, as classical hermeneutics used to do.[3] Opting for neither radical subjectivism nor so-called objectivism, Alpyağıl wants to explore to what extent it is possible to maintain a hermeneutical position that allows for both approaches to operate simultaneously (*eş zamanlı*).[4] In other words, Alpyağıl aims to contribute to ongoing hermeneutical discussions by trying to find a middle way (*arabulucu olmak*).[5] It is only by finding a middle way, he argues, that we can hope to escape the otherwise inevitable reductionism (*indermecilik*) to which radical objectivism or subjectivism fall prey.[6]

In a 2019 interview, however, Alpyağıl provided a more personal recollection of his first foray into hermeneutics. In this interview, he stated that the previously mentioned work, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kuran'ı Anlama*

2 Recep Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?: Kur'an'ı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler I* (Istanbul: Iz Yayıncılık, 2013), 7.

3 Alpyağıl, 7.

4 Alpyağıl, 7. "Alpyağıl does not wish to eliminate either the subjective or objective elements which may factor into an interpretative act. He recognizes that a reader's context is essential to meaning, but he also does not wish to reduce textual interpretation to subjective relativity." Taraneh Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 68.

5 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 7.

6 Unfortunately, Alpyağıl fails to indicate which authors might have succumbed to a radical objectivism or subjectivism, only that he specifically does not want to fall into the trappings of either. Alpyağıl, 7–8.

Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler 1, was influenced by the quest to find an answer to the questions that were stirring inside himself. As he recalls:

> For example, one of the works that I published was my book *Kimin Tarihi? Hangi Hermenötik?* This work that comprises philosophical attempts at understanding the Qur'an, was a kind of conversation, a reckoning—without differentiating between the first or second person—that I had with the person in my mind. When that book was born, the most discussed topics in the field of theology (*ilahiyat sahasında*) were questions pertaining to such issues as how the Qur'an should be understood, whether the Qur'an was historical or not, and what kind of stance one ought to take in hermeneutical discussions. These discussions were also demanding an answer from me. It is possible to consider (*telakki etmek*) this book as a response [to these problems].[7]

Unlike Cündioğlu's staunch objectivism discussed in the previous chapter, Alpyağıl notes the limitations of an objectivist Qur'anic hermeneutics in a few substantial ways. While he acknowledges the importance of a rule-based approach to hermeneutics, he simultaneously argues that understanding cannot always be realized through the static application of rules. First, this is because of the tendency of the text to elude any static, recurrent identification of meaning by virtue of its ambiguous character and, second, because the text only discloses its full meaning to readers who satisfy a set of subjective preconditions. For example, without subjective variables, such as faith, empathy, imagination, or existential humility, it is impossible to understand the Qur'an fully.

In the next sections, we will discuss in more depth how Alpyağıl tries to manage his dual commitment to objective rules as well as subjective experiences in interpreting the Qur'an. This discussion will mainly revolve around four important essays written by Alpyağıl.

2 The Problem of Private Language and Subjectivist Qur'anic Readings

One of the first major essays in which Alpyağıl explores the dialectics of objectivity–subjectivity and the status of the subject's role in interpreting the

7 Türkan, "Prof Recep Alpyağıl Ile Kütüphane Sohbeti."

Qur'an is in a work focused on the problem of private language. By private language, Alpyağıl means a language that is exclusively understood by one person.[8] He wants to explore whether such a language can exist. In the first instance, this problem might seem unrelated to the problem of Qur'anic hermeneutics, but, as Alpyağıl states, "if a language can only be a communicative medium under certain conditions, then, in a similar fashion, giving meaning to a Qur'an that presents a message in a language, is also bound to certain conditions."[9] In other words, whatever we understand language to be in its limitations and possibilities will affect how we relate to the Qur'an, since the Qur'an is also a message expressed in language. For example, if we conclude that significations are only meaningful in a language if they are established in relation to fixed objective grounds (for example, by following communal rules of a language), we simply cannot make a justified case for an interpretation of the Qur'an that is purely based on volatile, subjective convictions. However, if language always eludes the possibility of conveying an objective meaning, then we cannot but interpret everything subjectively, so should not be blamed for doing so.

Alpyağıl's discussion of the private language problem begins by recalling some of the later Wittgenstein's examination of language in his *Philosophical Investigations*. The first relevant discussion mentioned by Alpyağıl concerns the question of whether it is possible for someone to name his or her private sensations in a meaningful way without recourse to a pre-established language. According to Alpyağıl's reading of Wittgenstein this is not possible:

> What would it be like if human beings did not manifest their pains (did not groan, grimace, etc.)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word 'toothache'.—Well, let's assume that the child is a genius and invents a name for the sensation by himself!—But then, of course, he couldn't make himself understood when he used the word.—So does he understand the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone?—But what does it mean to say that he has 'named his pain'?—How has he managed this naming of pain? And whatever he did, what was its purpose?—When one says "He gave a name to his sensation," one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense. And if we speak of the someone's giving a name to a pain, the

8 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 27.

9 Alpyağıl, 27.

> grammar of the word 'pain' is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed.[10]

Alpyağıl unpacks this very dense philosophical enquiry by Wittgenstein to imply two important conclusions. First, a private denotation of a sensation can never be meaningful to others on account of its reference being constricted to the private knowledge of someone.[11] Others will never come to know what the sensation of a hypothetical private language user truly is, because they only have their own communal language to go by to communicate, and inversely understand, such a sensation. Accordingly, any arbitrary denotation that circumvents a pre-established communal language, as hypothetical private language users do, can never be meaningful to them. Second, as the latter half of Wittgenstein's citation indicated, one cannot begin to name things—even privately—without already being acquainted with a language.[12] As Alpyağıl concludes, naming is always done against the 'stage-setting' (*sahne dekoru*) of language, that is in reference to prior fixed references and rules.[13] As such, this implies that even a private language user cannot create, and inversely understand, his own private denotations without starting from a pre-established language.

In further clarification of the last point, Alpyağıl argues that even if we were to assume that someone circumvented a pre-established language to privately conceive references that signify private sensations, that person would still be confronted with the inability to identify recurrently whether new experiences are indeed recurrent experiences signified by the earlier mentioned self-conceived references. In other words, as Alpyağıl questions, "if a person has not learned to bring words together in a specific rule-based manner, how would he be able to know that his current sensation is equal to the sensation he experienced last Wednesday?"[14] Alpyağıl would argue that this is impossible, since, as Wittgenstein reasoned, such a person lacks a pre-established criterion with which to establish a correct identification of sense: "but in the present case [namely that of privately conceived references] I have no criterion for correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct.

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10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 98e; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 29.

11 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 29.

12 Alpyağıl, 30.

13 Alpyağıl, 30.

14 Alpyağıl, 31.

And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'."[15] Since privately conceived references to sense lack an objective criterion by which they can be recurrently identified, it is not possible to be sure that recurrent instances of an experience are signified by the earlier, privately constructed references, thus ultimately hindering self-conceived references from being persistent signifiers both to the self and others.

After having overweighed Wittgenstein's remarks, Alpyağıl extrapolates a set of generic suppositions on the nature of language. The first postulate states that language has a complex structure (*yapı*) that prevents it from being confined (*hapisedilemeyecek*) to pure subjective constraints.[16] Wittgenstein's remarks on the incongruity of private denotation, have demonstrated that it was impossible for the subject to denote something arbitrarily. Rather, as Alpyağıl concludes, the internal structure of language transcends the subject and always receives its meaning at a collective (*toplumsal*) level.[17] Accordingly, proper sense references cannot be conceived by mere subjective fancy, or in the words of Alpyağıl, "a person cannot create a connection between a word and its object through some fancy prestidigitation (*hokkabazlık*)."[18] The second postulate, which continues the first, admits that language must be based on a consensus, that is on objective rules whereupon agreement rests.[19] For, as the previous discussion demonstrated, the meaning of something necessarily depends on the ability to identify this meaning recurrently, which is only possible if meaning is related to independent rules.

Alpyağıl's second postulate receives further conceptual clarification in the light of Searle's views on the interconnection between language and constitutive rules. To clarify, according to Searle there are two types of rules—constitutive and regulative. When rules regulate pre-established activities, they are called regulative, whereas when they determine whether a given act constitutes an activity, they are called constitutive. Alpyağıl further illuminates this distinction by referring to two examples from Searle, handing out wedding invitations and playing football.[20] As he recounts, it is customary to send out wedding invitations at least two weeks in advance. However, while this rule regulates the activity of sending out wedding invitations, it does not constitute

15 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 99e; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 31–32.
16 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 34.
17 Alpyağıl, 34.
18 Alpyağıl, 34.
19 Alpyağıl, 35.
20 Alpyağıl, 40.

the activity, as it is quite possible to send out wedding invitations in a world in which this rule does not exist. On the other hand, if there were no football rules, there would be no talk of playing football:

> [As Searle stated] it is possible that twenty-two men might go through the same physical movements as are gone through by two teams at a football game, but if there were no rules of football, that is, no antecedently existing game of football, there is no sense in which their behavior could be described as playing football. Hence, as both examples can be further generalized, regulative rules often take the form of "perform X!," or if "Y is the case, then perform X." While constitutive rules take the form of "X counts as Y," or "in the context of C, X counts as Y."[21]

Language also involves constitutive rules.[22] Rather than fully explaining the connection between the two, Alpyağıl hints that promises are a demonstration of how constitutive rules relate to language use.[23] To clarify Alpyağıl's reference to promises further, we can turn to the self-evident fact that promises are only realized when certain rules are followed. As Searle put it, one can only promise something when a promising device specific to convention is utilized to undertake a matter of obligation,[24] for example, when someone states in English, "I promise to wash the car," for one simply cannot randomly pronounce utterances and expect to signify a promise. Likewise, with respect to religious language use, specific rules constitute the pronunciation of a blessing. For example, in Arabic, Muslims customarily pronounce a blessing by specifically adhering to a set of phrases, such as *mabrūk* or *barakāllah*. A meaningful blessing cannot be formed in Arabic without following pre-established conventions.

Having clarified his basic preconceptions about language, Alpyağıl then ventures into relating them to the problem of Qur'anic hermeneutics. He commences his discussion on how private language relates to Qur'anic hermeneutics by introducing a few contemporary, primarily scientific and anachronistic readings of the Qur'an. One noteworthy example he recounted pertains to verse 29:19, which is conventionally interpreted as "see they not how Allah

21 John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 34th edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35–36; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 40–41.

22 Searle, *Speech Acts*, 37.

23 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 41.

24 Searle, *Speech Acts*, 40.

originates creation, then repeats it: truly that is easy for Allah." However, a contemporary Turkish interpretation Alpyağıl cites introduces a very contemporary vocabulary to the verse, "do they not scientifically research nature that turns green and withers? How [is it that] God makes the DNA seed absorb and exhort energy?"[25] Such contemporary readings, according to Alpyağıl, while not consciously motivated by a theory of private language, are in practice akin to private language use,[26] primarily because they are arbitrary and show no regard for how and where in the Qur'an they were originally used, or the rules that gave shape to their original meaning.[27] In other words, by ignoring the linguistic horizon (*dilsel zemin*) on which the Qur'an was originally revealed, these interpretations inevitably circumvent the language in which the Qur'an was revealed in favour of the interpreter's arbitrary interpretations, which, in the end, is the same as if the interpreter had ascribed meaning to the Qur'an based on his own private language.

Alpyağıl challenges interpretations based on arbitrary uses of language with a variety of arguments. First, he believes that the linguistic horizon of a given text should be the base reference when interpreting the text under consideration.[28] As Wittgenstein had argued elsewhere, meaning is constituted in use, and signs receive their meaning in a context.[29] Moreover, the rules that regulate a language originate from and receive their meaning through certain institutions.[30] Accordingly, to ignore the linguistic origins of a text will result in certain anachronistic absurdities. For example, as Alpyağıl argues, to claim that Aladdin's lamp was not a mysterious object but a device that worked according to the second principle of thermodynamics, and that it could bend the space–time continuum, inevitably removes it from its original life form and language game, for modern science and its terminology had not been invented at the time the *Thousand and One Nights* was written.[31] Likewise, to argue that the poet Woodsworth was referring to a sexual orientation when he said that a poet could not be gay, is equally anachronistic, for the term gay originally had different connotations—it meant being light-hearted and carefree—and only recently came to be used in relation to a person's sexual orientation.[32]

25 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 47.
26 Alpyağıl, 46.
27 Alpyağıl, 48.
28 Alpyağıl, 48.
29 Alpyağıl, 38.
30 Alpyağıl, 39.
31 Alpyağıl, 48.
32 Alpyağıl, 49.

Anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an that are laden with modern scientific terminology have, according to Alpyağıl, been abstracted from their original language. According to him, substituting the original sixth- and seventh-century Arabic words for contemporary scientific terms, is akin to changing chess pieces for checker stones. In such an instance, the status of the individual chess pieces would change dramatically in their significance. When substituted for a simple checker stone, the king piece would no longer be a king at all, and therefore, receive a completely different meaning in chess.[33] Similarly, to substitute an Arabic word from the seventh century for a contemporary scientific term in a Qur'anic verse as the earlier translation of verse 29:19 demonstrated, would equally drastically alter the meaning of the verse in question. For, such a substitution would anachronistically allow the Qur'an to be speaking of DNA and photosynthesis.

Alpyağıl further challenges such anachronistic readings in relation to the earlier discussed identification principle of language. If an interpreter can only rationalize his interpretation on subjective grounds, which is what Alpyağıl claims certain contemporary Qur'anic interpreters do, it follows that there would be no external, static reference to meaning that is recurrently guaranteed. As such, if certain Qur'anic verses meant one thing in the past, and something else in the present, what prevents these verses from gaining another new meaning for a future audience?[34] One might, as Alpyağıl rightfully notes, argue that such interpretations are indicators of a surplus of meaning (*anlam zenginliği*).[35] However, he considers this naïve, since the actual outcome of such a hermeneutical practice is not the constructive surplus of meaning but the very destruction of communication (*iletişim tahribi*).[36] As Aristotle stated, "for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself; because it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing."[37] In other words, if an understanding of the Qur'an lacks any fixed meaning that can be recurrently referenced throughout time, a verse would be able to mean one thing while simultaneously meaning its opposite, and therefore, lose meaning altogether.

Up to this point, Alpyağıl has only argued in favour of an objectivist view of Qur'anic hermeneutics. However, as stated in the Introduction, he intends to

33 Alpyağıl, 49.
34 Alpyağıl, 50.
35 Literally signifying 'meaning richness'.
36 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 50.
37 Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, 167; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 50.

find a position that goes beyond pure objectivism or subjectivism. Accordingly, after establishing the importance of the objective aspects of understanding, Alpyağıl starts to move his arguments in the opposite direction—in favour of a constructive integration of subjectivity into Qur'anic hermeneutics. He first reminds us that conventions and rules are contingent on how a community subjectively understands them. A religious text can express the same imperative to be generous to each successive generation of readers, but what generosity entails for this community of readers depends on the unpredictable and context-specific circumstances in which the readership of the text lives. Second, not all hermeneutical problems are occasioned, or for that matter solved, by our relationship to the text: "to give meaning to a text, rules are necessary but not sufficient."[38] Rather, there are also certain hermeneutical problems that originate—naturally as Alpyağıl would argue—from the text itself.[39] In fact, even the Qur'an itself is admittedly not entirely unequivocal (*muhkem*).[40] In other words, the ambiguous elements of the Qur'an prevent a wholesale objectivist theoretical approach because the nature of some elements of the text itself resists continuous recurrent identification of the same sense.[41]

To return to the relationship between language and rule-following, Alpyağıl argues elsewhere that the need to follow rules does not entirely discard the role of subjective interpretation. He demonstrates this with a poignant example from the Qur'an. Accordingly, verse 25:67 reminds us that God favours those who "when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)." However, he argues, whether one is considered to be extravagant or niggardly depends on a variety of contingent factors.[42] For example, an amount of expenditure seen in one culture as extravagant could well be seen in another as very modest or even niggardly. Hence, while objectively speaking a believer cannot be extravagant, as the verse clearly emphasizes "they are not extravagant," the parameters defining what extravagance is are subjective.

The previous discussion demonstrates that it is impossible to apply rules without interpreting them in relation to the prevailing circumstances. How-

38 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 53.

39 Alpyağıl, 52.

40 Alpyağıl is referring to the self-description of the Qur'an as expressed in such verses as 3:7: "he it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [*muḥkamāt*]; they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical [*mutashabihāt*]." Alpyağıl, 52.

41 Alpyağıl, 53.

42 Alpyağıl, 20–21.

ever, as Alpyağıl concludes, interpreting rules always calls for practical wisdom on behalf of the subject, or in Aristotelian terms, *phronesis* (prudence).[43] To describe prudence, Alpyağıl refers to Macintyre's definition that it is "the virtue of practical intelligence, of knowing how to apply general principles in particular situations."[44] Accordingly, to add credence to Alpyağıl's arguments, we know that the general principle behind extravagance, as defined in the Cambridge Dictionary, is the "behaviour in which you spend more money than you need to." However, what constitutes 'more than you need to' undoubtedly depends on the particularities pertaining to a given situation and the subject's ability to recognize these properly. As such, only a prudent person is properly able to interpret the abstract principle of extravagance in the light of the particularities of that situation and guard himself against squandering.

While it is true that interpreting rules is fortuitous and subjective, this does not, however, mean that all subjective interpretations are by default valid. On the contrary, Alpyağıl argues that it is the larger community that makes the final judgement on whether a rule is properly followed. As he put it, "when a rule is to be followed, it is possible that a subjective interpretation is needed. However, this subjectivity does not fall outside communal supervision. If one may say so, the subjective interpretation must be acquitted (*temize çikması gerekir*) by the community."[45] Hence, if we are to return to the imperative of avoiding extravagance in the Qur'an, we must acknowledge the possibility that the imperative of not being extravagant can be reinterpreted according to changing circumstances. However, it is not the person but that person's community that decides whether his or her interpretation accords with what might customarily be considered extravagant behaviour.

The proper application of rules changes over time. It is therefore not possible to make absolute objective claims about the Qur'an in terms of its rules. However, the Qur'an further eludes absolute objectivity by being partially ambiguous in nature. There are certain subjects in it "that cannot be interpreted with certainty in one single try. It is by design very difficult to arrive at an interpretation of these subjects that can convince everyone equally."[46] Alpyağıl presents two examples in this regard. The first pertains to the fact that the Qur'an contains otherworldly (*öte dünya*) descriptions and metaphors (*benzetmeler*). While Alpyağıl fails to cite any particular examples from the Qur'an,

43 Alpyağıl, 22.

44 Alisdair Macintyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 74; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 22.

45 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 24.

46 Alpyağıl, 52.

it is not difficult to assume that he is referring to the many verses about the theological concepts of the Unseen (*al-ghayb*) or Hereafter, for example, "near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass … is the Garden of Abode."[47] One can question whether the reference here is to a metaphorical or real tree? Moreover, we can wonder why it is specifically a lote tree that stands near paradise and not some other kind. The second example, which inevitably continues the discussion above, refers to the narratives in the Qur'an that also employ certain imagery (*tasvir dili*),[48] one example, but not further explained by Alpyağıl, being *sūra Kahf*.[49] For Alpyağıl, the degree to which the Qur'an uses univocal or metaphorical language in such narratives is unclear. Accordingly, it is impossible to make a wholesale claim about the reality or fictitious nature of such narratives. While, to a degree this ambiguity arises from the language of the text itself, Alpyağıl does not exclude the possibility that modern readers are experiencing ambiguity because they are simply unfamiliar with the Qur'an's poetics. In other words, it might have been that the early readers of the Qur'an knew full well how to navigate through its literary aspects, whereas contemporary readers have lost this ability through an inescapable, fundamental historical distance (*tarihsel mesafe*) to the text.[50]

As much as Alpyağıl stresses the importance of objectivity in interpretation, he never reaches the same conclusion as Cündioğlu, namely that we cannot allow for subjectivity when interpreting. On the contrary, he arrives at a position he describes as 'dual hermeneutics' (*ikili bir hermenötik*), which is one that considers the dialectics and synthesis between objectivity and subjectivity.[51] Accordingly, Alpyağıl wants to promote a hermeneutics that respects the rules that give the text its meaning, while also appreciating the internal (*içsel*) dialogue between the subject and the Qur'an.[52] We have to acknowledge, he continues, that an unregulated relationship to the text will inevitably render the latter indefensible against being overrun (*istila*) by subjective interpretations.[53] However, he goes on, we must also acknowledge that all the rules and regulations set out in the tradition of the Qur'anic sciences (*Kur'an ilimleri*) must on occasions bend.[54] This is because the ambiguous elements of the Qur'an, such

47 Qur'an 53:14–15.
48 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 53.
49 Alpyağıl is referring to the well-known chapter in the Qur'an that contains the story of the Companions of the Cave (*aṣḥāb al-Kahf*).
50 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 53.
51 Alpyağıl, 54.
52 Alpyağıl, 55.
53 Alpyağıl, 54.
54 Alpyağıl, 54.

as its otherworldly descriptions, require creative interpretations that go beyond the static application of pre-defined rules.

In later essays, Alpyağıl further emphasizes that a subjective relationship with the text transcends method because of the latter's limits. By delving into the aesthetic and historical significance of the Qur'an, he accentuates the role of the subject in interpretation by arguing that the full meaning of the book can only be disclosed when the right subjective preconditions are in place. In other words, how the earlier-mentioned dialogue between reader and text will fare depends more on how the reader relates to the text than on whether the right theoretical method of interpretation is followed. Accordingly, faith and emotion play an important part in Alpyağıl's hermeneutics. Moreover, since not everyone shares the same belief in, or has the same emotional sentiments towards, the Qur'an, the latter will not be accessible to everyone in the same objective way.

3 The Qur'an and Art

Alpyağıl continues the discussion on the subject's transcendent relationship with the Qur'an, and on the limits of method, with reference to the reader's aesthetic experience of it. In *Heidegger'in Ontolojik Hermenötiği Bağlamında Kuramsal Anlamanın Tenkidi: Kur'an Bizim Neyimiz Oluyor* (The Critique of Theoretical Understanding in the Light of Heidegger's Ontological Hermeneutics: What is the Qur'an for Us?), he challenges the hermeneutical presupposition that the Qur'an is a 'black box' waiting to be deciphered by the right theoretical instrument, such as hermeneutics, structuralism, or anthropology.[55] On the contrary, the Qur'an is not a passive object waiting to be decoded but, according to Alpyağıl, it is like a piece of art (*sanat eseri*) that guides its own experience. In other words, when we engage in understanding the Qur'an, "the reader does not guide the text, but the reader is guided by the text."[56]

That the aesthetic nature of the Qur'an guides its own experience might suggest that earlier-mentioned interpretive instruments (*araçlar*) like anthropology have no place in understanding it. However, Alpyağıl insists that this is not the point he is trying to make. Rather, he only wishes to emphasize that a believer's aesthetic experience of the Qur'an is so fundamental and profound that it is impossible to describe its inner dimensions with a single theory

55 Alpyağıl, 57.
56 Alpyağıl, 58.

(*kuram*).[57] As we shall see in a subsequent section, Alpyağıl will argue that the communication realized in the aesthetic experience between a person and the reality witnessed, is indescribable and resistant to methodic dissection.

It is important to note that Alpyağıl's reference to the Qur'an as art, and a believer's reading of it as an aesthetic experience, should be treated in a metaphorical and heuristic sense. For a start, Alpyağıl makes it clear that he does not equate the Qur'an with art but wishes to discuss it in the context of art, for he sees that as the best way of describing a believer's experience of it.[58] Moreover, Alpyağıl only likens and does not identify the experience a believer has of the Qur'an to that of a spectator of art: "the essence of this experience [reading the Qur'an], most resembles a work of art (*sanat yapıtı*) and its spectator (*izleyici*)."[59] Furthermore, by claiming that reading the Qur'an resembles the experience of seeing a work of art, Alpyağıl is explicitly enunciating that both experiences are similar but not the same.

Alpyağıl used Heidegger's ideas to explain the hermeneutical significance of art. By recounting some key insights from Heidegger's work on art and meaning, Alpyağıl will critically re-examine the classical subject–object dichotomy, and establish that truth reveals itself not independently from either the subject or the object but in the intersubjective interaction of both. Consequently, Alpyağıl will make the point that the meaning of the Qur'an can only be recovered by a reader with the right personal qualifications, such as an awareness of his or her finitude. However, to understand the full extent of this important hermeneutical presumption, we must devote the coming sections to some of the Heideggerian insights that form the basis of Alpyağıl's conclusions.

Alpyağıl's relationship with Heidegger's ideas, incepts with the latter's question about what a piece of art really represents:

> A painting by Van Gogh: a pair of sturdy peasant shoes, nothing else. The picture really represents nothing. Yet you are alone at once with what is there, as if you yourself were heading homeward from the field on a late autumn evening, tired, with your hoe, as the last potato fires smolder out. What is in being here? The canvas? The brushstrokes? The patches of color?[60]

57 Alpyağıl, 59.
58 Alpyağıl, 59.
59 Alpyağıl, 58.
60 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 37–38; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 60.

According to Alpyağıl, the answer to 'what is in being there?' is undeniably not the material elements of the painting, such as the paint or the canvas used. On the contrary, as Alpyağıl argues, the painting communicates another reality, one that is ineffable: "we remain silent, only the fact that we have experienced is certain. The image tells us many things, [and] between us a profound (*yoğun*) communication occurs that is not expressed or cannot be expressed in language."[61]

To follow a profound experience of art with theoretical scrutinization will, according to Alpyağıl, break our natural relationship (*doğal ilişkimiz*) with the art.[62] Alpyağıl accepts that it is the nature of theory to dissect. However, by dissecting our experience of art, the holistic meaning received through it becomes disseminated (*bütünlüklü anlam saçılır*)[63] and thereafter impossible to reassemble (*toparlanamaz bir hale gelir*). Alpyağıl illustrates this meaning with the aforementioned example of Van Gogh's depiction of peasant shoes. Once we apply a theoretical analysis to these shoes, we risk digression into chemistry-level explanations (*kimyasal açıklamalar*) or historical data on shoes.[64] Accordingly, as we must surmise, rather than allowing us to capture the meaning of Van Gogh's art, certain theoretical examinations only scatter meaning through various inquisitive diversions.

Alpyağıl further emphasized the importance of the unitary relationship between the subject and the object for the constitution of meaning with Heidegger's concepts of 'present-to-hand' (*vorhanden*) and 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*). These concepts pertain to our relationship with objects in the world. For example, with tools such as a hammer. According to Alpyağıl's reading, Heidegger argued that we come to know what a hammer is not by considering it as an object present-to-hand (*vorhanden*) but as a tool that is ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) with which nails can be hammered.[65] As Heidegger states:

> The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' [*Handlich-*

61 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 60.
62 Alpyağıl, 61.
63 Alpyağıl, 61.
64 Alpyağıl, 61.
65 Alpyağıl, 62.

> *keit*] of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call '*readiness-to-hand*' [*Zuhandenheit*].[66]

Conversely, argues Alpyağıl, by removing a hammer from our lifeworld, namely its context of use, the hammer becomes devoid of meaning, and turns into a simple wooden handle with a piece of metal attached to it.[67]

Inspired by Heidegger's earlier remarks, Alpyağıl starts with the argument that the Qur'an also receives its meaning from practice and experience. First, to the extent that a hammer could ever be really understood in the event of hammering, the full meaning of rituals described in the Qur'an, such as prayer, fasting or ritual charity (*zekat*), are also, according to Alpyağıl, only understood in practice.[68] Second, Alpyağıl believes that the dialogue between the Qur'an and reader is defined by a relationship that is akin to the earlier expressed aesthetic experience of a Van Gogh painting. In other words, in the event of understanding the Qur'an, one also enters a communicative relationship without being able to express this communication in words. According to Alpyağıl, this deeper, more intuitive nature of experiencing the Qur'an has also been expressed by the Qur'an itself. As Alpyağıl recites the verses in question:

> For, Believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord;[69]
>
> And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses."[70]

While the similarities between the experience of art and the Qur'an have been emphasized up to this point, it must be noted that Alpyağıl also sees a fundamental difference in both experiences. This difference primarily revolves around a set of preconditions necessary for understanding the Qur'an but not necessarily for understanding art. He enumerated these preconditions as follows: adherence to a proper politics of recognition (*tanıma siyaseti*); aware-

66 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 98; Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 63.

67 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 62.

68 Alpyağıl, 66.

69 Qur'an 8:2.

70 Qur'an 5:83.

ness of personal finitude (*fanilik bilinci*); harbouring goodwill (*iyi istenç*); and exercising common sense (*sağ duyu*). Accordingly, whereas understanding art might not depend on whether someone harbours goodwill or is aware of his or her own finitude, the Qur'an, according to Alpyağıl, only discloses its full meaning to a reader who properly fulfils these conditions.

The first condition for understanding the Qur'an, according to Alpyağıl, is to follow the right politics of recognition. This term is conventionally used in international relations between nation-states. Accordingly, he argues, if a nation were to declare its independence, such an assertion would be meaningless unless other nations recognized its sovereignty.[71] In other words, the significance of something changes according to how it is recognized. Likewise, to a great extent (*büyük ölçüde*), faith is also marked by a politics of recognition.[72] While Alpyağıl does not fully explain exactly what it is that faith enables one to recognize, one can only assume he means that faith recognizes that the Qur'an is God's Word and not made-up fiction. As such, the degree to which someone recognizes the Qur'an as a source of divine truth will inevitably be of consequence for what kind of meaning the Qur'an has to offer.

Besides the politics of recognition, or more indirectly faith, according to Alpyağıl, the extent to which someone is aware of their own finitude will also direct the meaning of the Qur'an. This awareness, which Alpyağıl calls a knowledge of finitude (*fanilik bilinci*), "is the awareness of humanity's limitations, that there cannot be an absolute subject (*mutlak özne*), and that they [humans] cannot encompass (*kuşatmayacağını*) all knowledge."[73] As such, one must be aware of their own limitations, and thereby sustain an openness to learn from the other.[74] As attested by the following verse from the Qur'an, without the willingness to listen to the other, one will never be able to understand: "when Our Signs are rehearsed to such a one, he turns away in arrogance, as if he heard them not, as if there were deafness in both his ears."[75]

Both above-mentioned preconditions to reading the Qur'an inevitably have an important bearing on the status of the relationship between the reader and the work. While humans are flawed and finite, God and His message are perfect and infinite.[76] Accordingly, the relationship between the Qur'an and its reader cannot be realized in horizontal and equal terms, since the text has an authority

71 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 69.
72 Alpyağıl, 69.
73 Alpyağıl, 71.
74 Alpyağıl, 71.
75 Qur'an: 31:7.
76 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 71.

over the subject by virtue of having its origins in God. As such, while interpretation is still a legitimate means of engaging with the text, it must always respect the status of the latter and therefore, never try to force itself on it.[77] On the contrary, a reader of God's revelation must let the text 'open itself' to the reader by standing in service of the text and by letting oneself be guided by what the text has to say.[78]

Goodwill must also not be forgotten as another important subjective precondition. According to Alpyağıl, the will to understand each other (*anlama istenci*) is a basic condition for healthy communication between author and audience.[79] In other words, authors believe their readers understand them, and readers try their best to listen to and understand the author.[80] Accordingly, when communication between reader and text lacks this goodwill, a breakdown occurs, which inevitably impairs the reader's understanding of the text in question. The reception history of the Qur'an, which Alpyağıl references, illustrates this point further. As is known, the Qur'an describes a variety of similes, referring to the likes of mosquitos and other symbols. However, the detractors of the Qur'an questioned why God would refer to something as lowly as a mosquito in His message. The Qur'an's answer to this problem is: "Allah disdains not to use the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is truth from their Lord; but those who reject Faith say: 'What means Allah by this similitude?'"[81] As this verse demonstrates, those who believed in the Qur'an had no difficulty understanding the verses containing similes. On the contrary, it was the detractors of the Qur'an who wondered what God meant by a certain analogy. Alpyağıl believes that the Qur'an might shed light on the cause of this misunderstanding: "and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the Unbelievers may say, 'What symbol doth Allah intend by this?'" In other words, believers understood the verses because of their intrinsic openness to understanding the text, whereas the inability to understand the Qur'an by its detractors was accounted for by their ill intent (*art niyet*) towards it.

Lastly, one must exercise common sense to understand the Qur'an. While Alpyağıl noted the importance of common sense on various occasions, he only explained it with one particular example, which pertains to the Qur'an's strong disapproval of slander:

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77 In this context, Alpyağıl speaks of the "rape of the text." See Alpyağıl, 72.
78 Alpyağıl, 72.
79 Alpyağıl, 72.
80 Alpyağıl, 73.
81 Qur'an: 2:26.

> O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it. … But fear Allah: For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.[82]

Alpyağıl argues that while his Turkish audience might find the idea of eating the flesh of a brother abhorrent by virtue of their common-sense understanding, a cannibal might have a totally different view of it. Accordingly, in the absence of a reference to common sense, the dreadful significance of slander, which the verse wishes to convey through its analogy with eating human flesh, would be lost, thereby altering the meaning and understanding of the Qur'an.

By stipulating preconditions for understanding the Qur'an, Alpyağıl is limiting the possibility of its message being universally accessible. Alpyağıl, who is fully aware of this, argues that God accepts that not everyone can understand the Qur'an. "And We put coverings over their hearts (and minds) lest they should understand the Qur'an, and deafness into their ears: when thou dost commemorate thy Lord and Him alone in the Qur'an, they turn on their backs, fleeing (from the Truth)."[83] As such, we must admit that God has wilfully excluded some people from understanding the Qur'an.

As with his previous works, Alpyağıl concludes the current essay with some final reflections. These centre on two hypothetical questions that a critical reader might ask in response to all his previous claims about understanding the Qur'an. The first is could his elevation of the aesthetic experience of the Qur'an have moved too forcefully from an optimistic assumption (*iyimser varsayım*) that readers would have no difficulty understanding the Qur'an?[84] While Alpyağıl fails to explain how such a question might have arisen, one can only assume that it is because he had so far only spoken positively about the aesthetic experience of reading the Qur'an, and had forgotten to explore other potential concerns. The second question, deduced from Alpyağıl's constant accentuation of subjectivity in understanding, is might he be guilty of introducing meaning subjectivism (*anlam subjektivizm*) into Qur'anic hermeneutics?

Rather than rebuking this potential criticism, Alpyağıl chooses to acknowledge it. Indeed, he argues, the history of Qur'anic interpretation suggests that the meaning of the Qur'an might be less self-evident and less directly intuited than his analogy between reading the Qur'an and having an aesthetic experi-

82 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 75. The verse to which Alpyağıl was referring is Qur'an 49:12.

83 Qur'an 17:46. See also Qur'an 6:25.

84 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 76.

ence might have suggested. Moreover, it cannot be denied that even with goodwill, one can potentially fail to understand the Qur'an.[85] Accordingly, in such cases where understanding becomes problematic, interpretation by recourse to objective methods becomes indispensable (*vazgeçilmez*).[86]

Alpyağıl also admits that his ideas introduce a degree of subjectivism into Qur'anic hermeneutics: "for this author, there is no meaning in an subject independent of the text, or an text independent of the subject."[87] However, this does not mean that the subject can read any kind of meaning into the Qur'an;[88] this is because, in the aesthetic experience, the object directs the subject rather than the other way around. Moreover, it would also be contrary to the earlier-mentioned principle of being aware of one's limitations;[89] which always wants to service the text rather than overrule it.

Given the prior remarks, it should become clear that the subject–object dialectic in Alpyağıl's thought is fundamentally grounded in a mutually interdependent relationship. In the dialogue between the Qur'an and its reader, the subject's private pre-understanding and the use of objective theoretical methodologies are both given a right to exist. In this sense, Alpyağıl admits, his theory differs from the more objectivist ones, which fundamentally fail to acknowledge the subject's undeniable role in the constitution of meaning. Conversely, his respect for objective rules also demonstrates how his theory veers away from a hyper-subjectivist position. However, if we are to measure subjectivity against objectivity, it would, according to Alpyağıl, be in terms of precedence, and not in terms of the one cancelling the other's right to exist. For, as Alpyağıl clarifies, without people believing in a text, there is no value to having all these complicated instruments with which to interpret the text. In other words, "the essence of what we are trying to say is as follows: instruments are only meaningful when the people exist that are able to use them."[90]

4 Seeing-as

Alpyağıl also explored the aesthetic experience of the Qur'an on a second occasion, but this time with reference to Wittgenstein. In an essay titled *Farklı*

85 Alpyağıl, 77.
86 Alpyağıl, 76.
87 Alpyağıl, 77.
88 Alpyağıl, 77.
89 Alpyağıl, 77.
90 Alpyağıl, 79.

Görme, "... Olarak Görme" (Seeing Differently, Seeing-as), Alpyağıl explores why diverse parties 'see' the same phenomena differently. He asks why it is that some people merely see rain as a natural occurrence (*doğal hadise*), while others see it as an act of God's mercy?[91] Moreover, he wonders to what extent interpretation plays a role, if at all, in such divergent perceptions of the same phenomena. To answer these questions and to understand their ensuing Qur'anic hermeneutical consequences, Alpyağıl returns once more to Wittgenstein when he states that, "the perspective maintained in discussing this topic will be fundamentally Wittgensteinian."[92]

As in his prior essay, Alpyağıl lays the groundwork of his argument by recounting some of Wittgenstein's later philosophical enquiries, beginning with his distinction between the uses of 'seeing', which he describes as follows:

> Two uses of the word "see." The one: "What do you see there?"—"I see *this*" (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: "I see a likeness in these two faces"—let the man to whom I tell this be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself.[93]

Alpyağıl states that whereas the first manner of seeing, such as seeing a simple rock, is with sensory perception, the second seeing, such as noting the likeness between two faces, goes beyond sensory perception (*algı*).[94] The latter, which Alpyağıl subsequently refers to as seeing-as (*olarak görme*), is evident when we suddenly perceive something in a different manner because of another aspect of the phenomenon dawning on us. As Wittgenstein explains, "I observe a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience 'noticing an aspect'."[95] In this regard, Wittgenstein gives the well-known example of Jastrow's duck-rabbit:

> I'm shown a picture-rabbit and asked what it is; I say "It's a rabbit." Not "Now it's a rabbit." I'm reporting my perception. a I'm shown the duck-rabbit and asked what it is; I *may* say "It's a duck-rabbit." But I may also react to the question quite differently. The answer that it is a duck-rabbit is again the report of a perception; the answer "Now it's a rabbit" is not.

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91 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 18.
92 Alpyağıl, 18.
93 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, xi; Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 19.
94 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 19.
95 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 205e; Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 20.

> Had I replied "It's a rabbit," the ambiguity would have escaped me, and I would have been reporting my perception.[96]

In other words, by claiming that something is 'now'—in all suddenness—a rabbit, we are presenting a report about an experience that is more than a mere visual experience;[97] for, as it can be surmised, if it were to be a mere visual experience, the object would have had to remain static in experience and not change as it did.

Wittgenstein further explained the fact that seeing-as is more than a visual experience with another instance of observing a rabbit. When we plainly see a rabbit, we can be asked what we see and answer, "a rabbit." However, when we look at a landscape and suddenly see a rabbit running past us, we would exclaim "a rabbit!" Nevertheless, as Wittgenstein argues:

> Both things, both the report and the exclamation, are expressions of perception and of visual experience. But the exclamation is so in a different sense from the report: it is forced from us. It stands to the experience somewhat as a cry to pain. But since the exclamation is the description of a perception, one can also call it the expression of thought. Someone who looks at an object need not think of it; but whoever has the visual experience expressed by the exclamation is also *thinking* of what he sees.[98]

As Wittgenstein concluded, the "lighting up of an aspect" seems to be both a "half visual experience" and a "half thought."

Seeing-as is defined by variables other than visual experience, the first of which Alpyağıl discussed being education and the mastery of technique. According to him, one need only consider traffic signs because their meaning depends on convention. As such, our reaction (*reaksiyonumuz*) to these signs is determined by our familiarity with and education about them.[99] Those who are unfamiliar with these signs will inevitably have a totally different reaction. To clarify, while we might see traffic signs as a regulating device and organize our actions around its conventional significance, someone who has not learned traffic rules or for that matter does not even know what a traffic sign is, might see it differently and, accordingly, react in a wholly different way. Likewise,

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96 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, xi; Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 19.

97 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 20.

98 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 207e; Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 22.

99 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 20.

argues Alpyağıl, mastery of a technique (*bir teknikte usta olma*) also plays an important role in the subject's experience of seeing-as. Wittgenstein explains:

> In the triangle I can see now *this* as apex, *that* as base—now *this* as apex, *that* as base. Clearly the words "Now I am seeing *this* as the apex" cannot so far have any significance for a learner who has only just met the concepts of apex, base, and so on. But I do not mean this as an empirical proposition. Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility would one say that he saw it now *this* way, now *that* way. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique.[100]

Besides education and the mastery of technique, Alpyağıl also credits volition (*irade*) with an important role in defining the experience of seeing-as, since this implies that a person can be asked to see things differently. Without doubt, it is not possible to command someone to see a blue object when that person experiences the object as red.[101] However, according to Alpyağıl, it is possible to ask someone to see a form differently (*şimdi bu şekli böyle gör*). While Alpyağıl does not present a concrete example, we can assume that he is referring to phenomena such as seeing a seemingly bad predicament as a blessing in disguise. Accordingly, a person who is told to see his or her predicament in another manner, can choose to fulfil such a request or reject it.

Having established these basic reflections on the experience of seeing-as, Alpyağıl further describes the relationship between the concept of seeing-as and the philosophy of religion and, by extension, its relationship to what he calls religious hermeneutics (*dinsel hermenötik*). Since he regards religious belief as a form of seeing-as, Alpyağıl sees no fundamental difference between that and the earlier discussed examples from Wittgenstein, such as seeing a face as similar to another face, or coming to see something as a duck that had hitherto been depicted as a rabbit, or seeing an event as a miracle, or a text as God's revelation.[102] Moreover, Alpyağıl also deems the earlier discussed expressions, such as "I see a rabbit!" and its religious counterpart "the Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" as being similar expressions of seeing-as.[103]

Alpyağıl sheds further light on these claims by briefly discussing the concept of seeing-as with reference to familiar problems within the philosophy of

100 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 219e.
101 Alpyağıl, Fark Ve Yorum, 23.
102 Alpyağıl, 24.
103 Alpyağıl, 24.

religion, commencing with arguments about the existence of God. He notes that these arguments, including the cosmological one, or the one about God's design, are inevitably neither without their weak points nor closed to further criticism.[104] As such, they cannot compel someone to believe.[105] They are only meaningful to those already capable of seeing the thing in terms of how it has been argued.[106] In other words, as Alpyağıl makes clear, the argument about God's design is only meaningful to those who are capable of seeing the universe as His construct. According to Alpyağıl, religious experience, another topic of the philosophy of religion, is also defined by a private experience of seeing. For example, we cannot see something as beautiful on account of another's experience. Rather, we must see the thing as beautiful for ourselves.[107] Likewise, it is not possible to believe in God on account of another person's experience, but one must believe it oneself.[108]

Alpyağıl argues that religious conversions also relate to the concept of seeing-as, because it could be argued, as Alpyağıl does, that an aspect of something can dawn on a person and thereby make them see things differently. Accordingly, someone who saw the universe as a product of blind evolution, could suddenly see it is as a creation of God.[109] To Alpyağıl's mind comes the experience of Job, who came to lose a lot in life such as his children. However, rather than seeing his tragic loss in naturalistic terms, Job called out the following: "the Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."[110]

It should be clear by now that for Alpyağıl there is an undeniable relationship between the concept of seeing-as and certain religious experiences. However, it is still unclear what the relationship of seeing-as is to the problem of interpretation. Given the prior discussions, we might be inclined to identify the phenomenon of interpretation with the experience of seeing-as. Religious worldviews are for that matter often said to be different interpretations of the world. However, according to Alpyağıl, while there is a relationship, there are also marked distinctions between the experience of seeing-as and the act of interpreting. First and foremost, he argues, interpretation is an activity, something we do, while seeing is a state (*durum*).[111] Second, the act of seeing-as

104 Alpyağıl, 24.
105 Alpyağıl, 24.
106 Alpyağıl, 24–25.
107 Alpyağıl, 27–28.
108 Alpyağıl, 28.
109 Alpyağıl, 28.
110 Alpyağıl, 29.
111 Alpyağıl, 31.

is not something that can be validated, whereas an interpretation can.[112] Lastly, interpretations have a coercive nature to them. An interpretation can argue that something must actually be understood as something else. On the other hand, the experience of seeing-as is neither in any respect forced nor the outcome of a logical deliberation or overweighing of evidence.[113]

The direct experience of seeing-as in juxtaposition with interpreting is further advanced by Alpyağıl by drawing a parallel with language. Accordingly, the difference in experience between seeing-as and interpreting is similar to that between our mother tongue and a foreign language.[114] To elaborate, when we converse or read in our native tongue, we do not interpret the words used. However, when engaging with a foreign language, we often think about the words used, interpret them and, if necessary, search for their meaning in a dictionary.[115] As such, Alpyağıl concludes that interpretation is an incidental resource, only taken when something is foreign to our natural and intuitive experience.[116]

To continue the aforementioned argument, Alpyağıl regards seeing-as as the most primary relationship a believer can have with the text, far more fundamental than interpretation, which he sees as an incidental resource. For example, that a believer sees God in scripture is what defines that person's relationship with the text.[117] This experience is basic, fundamental and not reliant on or occasioned by logical inference (*çıkarım*), interpretation (*yorum*), or dogma.[118] This, however, does not mean that the text cannot or should not be interpreted, only that certain aspects of the Qur'an cannot be interpreted because their meaning derives from a more direct experience of seeing-as.[119]

The miracles described in the Qur'an constitute one element that relies on the direct experience of seeing-as rather than interpretation. Believers, according to Alpyağıl, see miracles as a direct manifestation (*tezahür*) of God's will without resorting to logical inferences (*mantıksal çıkarım*) or interpretations.[120] For them, to witness (*tanık olmak*) or be told of miracles is not an experience guided by interpretation. For example, a believer who experiences the event of Moses splitting the Red Sea does not need to deliberate or interpret

112 Alpyağıl, 31.
113 Alpyağıl, 31.
114 Alpyağıl, 32.
115 Alpyağıl, 32.
116 Alpyağıl, 32.
117 Alpyağıl, 33.
118 Alpyağıl, 33.
119 Alpyağıl, 38.
120 Alpyağıl, 33.

before reaching the conclusion that it was an event from God. Rather, as Alpyağıl argues, a believer sees the event directly (*aniden*) as a revelation of God's will.[121]

Following these comments on miracles and seeing-as, Alpyağıl concludes his essay by asking about the status of someone who is unable to see something as something else (*olarak görememek*)—for example, a person who, unlike the believer, cannot see a miracle in an event. In other words, what determines aspect blindness (*görünüş körlüğü*)?[122] Recounting Wittgenstein, Alpyağıl argues that the notion of seeing-as is intimately tied to imagination: "the concept of an aspect is related to the concept of imagination. In other words, the concept 'now I see it as …' is related to 'now I am imagining *that*'."[123] Accordingly, as Alpyağıl concludes, the ability to see more than what is ordinary (*sıradan*) or mundane (*olağan*), as believers do with miracles, has to do with the degree to which a person is able to apply his or her imagination.[124] For Alpyağıl, people who lack imagination inevitably become the prisoners (*tutsak*) of one mode of appearance (*görünüş*)[125] and, as implied, blind to other aspects.

Aspect-blindness is an impediment that pertains not only to visual experiences but also, according to Alpyağıl, to meaning. In other words, one can be afflicted with meaning-blindness (*anlam körlüğü*).[126] Alpyağıl authenticates the relationship between meaning-blindness and the hitherto discussed concept of seeing-as with a few remarks from Wittgenstein. The first of these establishes an intimate connection between the experience of words and seeing-as: "the importance of this concept [aspect-blindness] lies in the connection between the concepts of seeing an aspect and of experiencing the meaning of a word."[127] Accordingly, for example, someone who is incapable of seeing a sign as an arrow is simultaneously incapable of understanding the words "to see the sign as an arrow." In such an instance, we must consider the aforementioned person to be meaning-blind: "anyone who cannot understand and learn to use the words 'to see the sign as an arrow'—that's whom I call 'meaning-blind'."[128]

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121 Alpyağıl, 34.
122 Alpyağıl, 35.
123 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 224e; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve Yorum*, 35.
124 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 36.
125 Alpyağıl, 35.
126 Alpyağıl, 36.
127 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 225e; Alpyağıl, Fark Ve Yorum, 35.
128 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, and H. Nyman, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), para. 344; Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, para. 36.

Imagination also plays an important role in the experience of meaning, for Alpyağıl blames a lack of imagination for causing the earlier mentioned meaning-blindness..[129] He relates in this regard the following citation by Ricœur: "imagining is first and foremost restructuring semantic fields. It is, to use Wittgenstein's expression in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 'seeing as'."[130] While this citation makes it clear that Alpyağıl supports Ricœur's claim, a reader unfamiliar with Ricœur's work might wonder what the exact significance of imagination is in its ability to "restructure semantic fields," since it is a question left unanswered by Alpyağıl. Nevertheless, taking the grander context of this citation into consideration, we are told by Ricœur that it is imagination that allows a person to see a relationship, as in the case of a metaphor, between two objects that would otherwise be considered logically distant from each other:

> Resemblance is itself a function of the use of unusual predicates. It consists in the rapprochement in which the logical distance between far-flung semantic fields suddenly falls away, creating a semantic shock which, in turn, sparks the meaning of the metaphor. Imagination is the apperception, the sudden view, of a new predicative pertinence.[131]

In other words, as the example of metaphors illustrates, by using imagination, a person can see why a seemingly illogical predication can still be sensible. Inversely, a person lacking imagination will able neither to forge nor to understand the meaning of a metaphor, thus evidencing the connection Alpyağıl made between imagination and meaning-blindness.

5 Faith and History

The subject–object dialectic is also important to Qur'anic historicism. Accordingly, Alpyağıl's final essay for discussion is *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Tartişmalarina Eleştirel Bir Katkı* (Whose History, Which Hermeneutics? A Critical Contribution to the Debates Concerning the Qur'an

129 Alpyağıl, *Fark Ve Yorum*, 36.

130 Paul Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.) The Human Being in Action: The Irreducible Element in Man Part II Investigations at the Intersection of Philosophy and Psychiatry (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1978), 7; Alpyağıl, Fark Ve Yorum, 36.

131 Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," 7.

and Historicism). As its title suggests, his essay is primarily a critical evaluation of Qur'anic historicism, the legitimacy of which has been an important topic of discussion in contemporary Turkey. This is mainly because of its controversial nature and because that is what the illustrious Ankara School, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, advocated. While a discussion on Qur'anic historicism might at first glance seem of little direct relevance to the question of subjectivity–objectivity in Qur'anic hermeneutics, at certain points Alpyağıl's critique of the former intersects in interesting ways with the latter. This can be attributed to the fact that a central problem for Qur'anic historicism has been to establish how a present-day subject can understand an historical object like the Qur'an. As such, to broaden our understanding of Alpyağıl's ideas on the role of subjectivity in understanding the Qur'an, it is important to expand on his perspective on Qur'anic historicism.

According to Alpyağıl, before any healthy understanding of Qur'anic historicism can be offered, some general observations on the relationship between interpretation (*yorumlama faaliyeti*) and power (*iktidar*) need to be presented.[132] Every interpretation is bound to a political context (*siyasal baglam*).[133] Accordingly, by admitting that interpretations are not free from political contexts, we are able to understand that historicism can also not operate without itself being influenced by its own political context. Hence, if we wish to understand historicism fully, we must understand it in the light of its political context.

A keen awareness of this connection between power and historicism becomes especially critical with regard to the problem of *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid*. As Alpyağıl recounts, historicist discourse proposes that we forego the literal (*ẓāhir*) interpretation of verses in favour of the higher intents (*maqāṣid*) behind verses and their goal towards prosperity (*maṣlaḥa*).[134] However, according to Alpyağıl, we must not overlook that both of these notions receive their significations through a 'politics of interpretation' (*yorum siyaseti*).[135] In other words, what these notions mean is defined by the political context in which they are understood. For example, as Alpyağıl argues, "Turkey's prosperity [*maṣlaḥa*] in the Middle East is not the same as that of the United States, because the powers are not the same."[136]

Alpyağıl's critique lays bare an important oversight in some theories of historicism, which is the inability to acknowledge that our understanding of the

132 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 136.
133 Alpyağıl, 143.
134 Alpyağıl, 147.
135 Alpyağıl, 147.
136 Alpyağıl, 147.

objective intents of the Qur'an is in fact relative to the socio-political context in which we live and therefore, subjective. For example, as Alpyağıl recalls, Fazlur Rahman had argued that with respect to the Qur'an, "the *ratio legis* is the essence of the matter, the actual legislation being its embodiment so long as it faithfully and correctly realizes the *ratio*; if it does not, the law has to be changed."[137] There is no doubt, as the overall work of Rahman further attests, that Rahman sees the ratio as a transhistorical, objective fact, while legal rulings are seen as transient. However, if we are to subscribe to Alpyağıl's hermeneutical tenets that interpretation cannot be separated from power relations, we have to acknowledge that both the ratio legis and the ratio, or with similar notions, the *maqāṣid* and the *maṣlaḥa*, are not transhistorical, objective facts undergirding the law of the Qur'an. On the contrary, as Alpyağıl stated, the significance of the *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥa* changes in accordance with the socio-political context.

Since Alpyağıl's method relies more on heuristics than on explicit examples, there is some speculation over what interpretations of the Qur'an demonstrate his point about the subjectivity involved in the *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥa*. Nevertheless, if we continue with Rahman's works, we can find an interpretation that can easily be deconstructed in the light of Alpyağıl's 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. To recall, Rahman argued that verse 4:3 permitted polygamy out of historical necessity, since it was "not possible to remove polygamy legally at one stroke."[138] However, while the verse permits men to marry multiple women, the same verse also argues that "if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) [namely your wives], then [marry] only one." Thus, as Rahman concludes, while polygamy is permitted for legal reasons, the sanctions put on it are "in the nature of *a moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move*."[139] Consequently, we can gather from Rahman's statements that the Qur'an has two levels of significance—possible and ideal. While it is possible to engage in polygamy, the sanctions surrounding it express the ideal of a monogamous society. However, as we return to Alpyağıl's hermeneutics, we could question whether it is indeed some objective moral ideal that is at work in the Qur'an or actually Rahman's subjective projections on the text. As Alpyağıl states elsewhere, Rahman inherited a world in which Islam had lost its force and become overshadowed,[140] for there is no doubt that polygamy is eschewed

137 Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 48.

138 Rahman, 48.

139 Rahman, 48.

140 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 145.

in most of the modern Western world. For Alpyağıl, even with the best of intentions, interpreters could still fall prey to their context: "a good intention is not enough by itself. For, there could always be ill-intended political powers that direct this good intention."[141] Accordingly, it would not be too difficult to question whether Rahman's characterization of polygamy as possible and monogamy as an objective moral ideal is not in reality a disguised apologetic attempt to weaken the status of polygamy in Islam and to elevate that of monogamy.

Alpyağıl was in no doubt that historicist readings of the Qur'an harboured a progression bias. In other words, historicists assume that the text was revealed in a distant, less ethically progressive past.[142] As such, he likens the historicist attitude to that of the positivist anthropologist, for the positivist anthropologist always approaches a foreign culture from the perspective that their own culture is better (*daha doğru*) than that being studied.[143] Similarly, as Alpyağıl reverts the discussion to the understanding of the Qur'an, historicists advance a like position by confronting the text as the historical Other (*başkası gibi*) and judging it according to the perceived more elevated standards of the present.[144]

Such an approach to interpretation leads to two different consequences. First, as Alpyağıl argues, there is an inevitable alienation occurring (*yabancılaşmak*) between the Qur'an and the reader[145]—the Qur'an is the historical other standing at a distance from the modern reader. Second, by always measuring the Qur'an according to the relative standards of our subjective present, we lose the ability to be judicious and pragmatic with regard to its application within different contexts.

Alpyağıl clarifies the latter point by arguing that historicism has a flawed understanding of time (*zaman tasavvuru*).[146] His text seems to be referring to the earlier-mentioned progression bias inherent in Turkish historicist discourse. In other words, historicists appreciate the Qur'an in terms of the perceived history of progress in which they find themselves. However, what they forget to understand is that the Qur'an can be read synchronously by different communities with different histories:

> It would not be a right approach, to argue that the understanding of a Muslim in North America should be absolutized and be put against

141 Alpyağıl, 143.
142 Alpyağıl, 153.
143 Alpyağıl, 151.
144 Alpyağıl, 152.
145 Alpyağıl, 153.
146 Alpyağıl, 156.

> an understanding developed in South Africa. If we are to expand upon this, while raising warhorses [as the Qur'an has argued] is not something incumbent upon American Muslims, the same could not be said in respect to someone from Afghanistan.[147]

Alpyağıl never meant the Qur'an to address or resolve all possible issues that humans face over the course of history.[148] Accordingly, when we look at verse-8:60, which proposes that believers ready "steeds of war," it is not meant to suggest that there is only one way to prepare for war, since, as Alpyağıl stated, "a horse was even for those times one of the possible examples that could have been mentioned (besides such items as swords, camels, or catapults)."[149] Rather, the Qur'an is a book that indicates between the lines (*söz arasında*) that it is merely presenting a possible example of how to resolve an issue (*örneğin diyen bir kitaptır*).[150] It is up to believers to expand further on it and find suitable solutions to certain problems.[151] For example, if in seventh-century Arabia the best preparation for war was to get the horses ready, Western Muslims in the present ought to follow that model and prepare for war with the best resources of our times (for example, a tank).

While some verses can be actualized in new contexts, others seem less assimilable for present circumstances. In this regard, Alpyağıl recounts verses that pertain specifically to the Prophet's relationship with his spouses: "it is not lawful for thee (to marry more) women after this, nor to change them for (other) wives, even though their beauty attracts thee."[152] It is difficult to infer an example or model to be followed from such verses, since they are particular to the Prophet and his personal experiences. Does this mean that we should regard them merely as objective historical facts, or can we draw significance from them for our seemingly unrelated experiences?

For Alpyağıl there are two potential answers to the previous question. First, we could still appreciate seemingly historical verses as an inspiration for alternative modes of thinking (*alternatif düşünce biçimi*).[153] For example, while the corporal punishments cited in the Qur'an might not fit present circumstances, it is possible that the future might bring a different perspective on their applic-

147 Alpyağıl, 156–157.
148 Alpyağıl, 157.
149 Alpyağıl, 158.
150 Alpyağıl, 158.
151 Alpyağıl, 158.
152 Qur'an 33:52.
153 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 164.

ability and, thereby, reintroduce them as one of God's penalties (*hudud*).[154] What is important for Alpyağıl is not whether we should apply corporal punishment, but that we should remain capable of seeing a world in which it makes sense to do so. This stands in contrast to the neurotic tendency in Qur'anic historicism to fear any regression into the past (*geçmişe duşmeme nevrozu içinde olmak*).[155] Second, even if certain verses cannot again be realized, they still have important bearings on Islamic cultural consciousness. As Alpyağıl states, "the Qur'an that recounts the seventh century is not [a source of] historical [facts], but a totality of events (*olaylar bütünü*) that give us identity and define our [collective] memory (*bellek*)."[156] Thus, if we are to return to the example of the Prophet and his wives, we could argue that such a verse has no practical relevance for modern Muslims. Nevertheless, it is a record of the Prophet's experience, and hence, meaningful for the historical, cultural consciousness of Muslims.

6 Closing Remarks

Unlike Cündioğlu, whose commitment to an objective understanding of the Qur'an is discussed in the previous chapter, in all his works Alpyağıl showed equal commitment to both subjective and objective understandings. However, like Cündioğlu, he respects the linguistic horizon on which the Qur'an's message was revealed, and concedes that language cannot function without being intrinsically intersubjective, which means that it must have subject independent rules. However, while Alpyağıl defends and advocates respecting the rules of a language, he does not believe that rule-following, or method alone, can uncover all the meanings in the Qur'an. Our relationship with the book is not one sided—it exerts power over us in that its ambiguity eludes our ability to fixate its meaning objectively and persistently, and because, to receive its message fully, the right subjective preconditions such as faith need to be present.

Given Alpyağıl's openly confessional and sometimes conservative stance, what has been unexpected in the previous discussions is that his dualistic hermeneutics lacks any substantial references to classical Islamic thought.[157] In

154 Alpyağıl, 165.
155 Alpyağıl, 165.
156 Alpyağıl, 169.
157 Alpyağıl's conservatism can be discerned from his unapologetic stance on corporal punishments in Islamic jurisprudence.

other words, traditions such as *tafsīr* are mentioned very sparingly. Therefore, it is unclear from Alpyağıl's own discussions, how many of his ideas he borrowed from the hermeneutical traditions of *tafsīr* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or what status they hold in his thinking. His most noteworthy reference to *tafsīr* is his statement that the rules and regulations set out in the tradition of Qur'anic sciences must be to bend on occasion, since, as previously discussed, certain ambiguous elements of the Qur'an, such as its historical narratives, demand a creative understanding that goes beyond a static application of the rules.

That Alpyağıl solves familiar Qur'anic hermeneutical problems without much reference to tradition demonstrates the distinct, and thus novel, nature of his hermeneutical narrative. However, given that he also omits to provide an explicit or implicit critique of tradition, thereby allowing one to characterize it as reformist or revisionist, it becomes difficult to locate his work in relation to other hermeneutical theories by contemporary Muslim thinkers considered to be reformist or traditionalist.

Situating Alpyağıl's works becomes more problematic when we compare them with those written by his Turkish colleagues such as Ali Bulaç and Ömer Özsoy. In *Hermeneutics as a Means to Read the Qur'an*, Bulaç questions the recent Turkish trend towards seeing hermeneutics as a framework within which to understand the Qur'an. He finds hermeneutics incompatible with a fundamental Islamic outlook and thinks that we ought first to exhaust the traditional frameworks (*elimizdeki usuller*) before adopting other methods (*yöntemler*).[158] Bulaç's view of hermeneutics is thus deeply conservative. Alpyağıl, though, displays no such reservations, for he explicitly sees his work as an experiment in hermeneutics, and constructively engages with the non-Islamic philosophies of Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Likewise, Özsoy and other Ankara School theologians are explicitly critical of traditional conceptions (*tasavvurlar*) and recommend we revise them.[159] Yet, none of Alpyağıl's previously-studied works contain even a hint of a critique of tradition, let alone any proposal to revise it. However, since Alpyağıl's work points to the existence of a narrative that is neither a simple reform or revision of tradition, nor an apology for the latter, there is a need to extend, or perhaps revise, the conventional typology

158 Ali Bulaç, "Kur'an'ı Okuma Biçimi Olarak Hermenötik," *Islâmi Araştırmalar Dergisi*, vol. 9 (1–4), 1996, 117, 118. As exemplified by the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, an important aspiration in hermeneutics is to understand the author better than he understood himself. However, given the Muslim belief that God is the author of the Qur'an, it would imply that we could understand something better than God Himself.

159 Which was why Körner called his study on Özsoy, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology*.

that draws binary distinctions within Muslim intellectual discourse between categories such as traditionalist–modernist and conservative–revisionist.

Regardless of how we classify Alpyağıl's thinking, he made an important contribution to the overall discipline of Qur'anic hermeneutics by providing a framework in which to separate interpretation from understanding. In other words, as his essays on the aesthetic experience and seeing-as have demonstrated, not every understanding is based on an interpretation, for a text can also be understood without recourse to volition, or to words that express our understanding. As a result, Alpyağıl has presented a hermeneutical framework that challenges methodical approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics that envision understanding as a process that can always be mechanically induced and, in discourse, be expressed by applying a set of interpretative rules.

Conversely, by introducing a more direct and intuitive experience of understanding the Qur'an, Alpyağıl developed a hermeneutics that assumed that fully understanding a religious text was the sole prerogative of the community for which it was written, rather than of every potential future audience. This was made evident through Alpyağıl's argument that belief was a precondition for fully understanding a religious text and thus, by default, precluded those without faith from understanding the Qur'an's message. This position, however, stands in stark contrast to Cündioğlu's views discussed in the previous chapter, for he held that reason, and not faith, to be the ultimate arbiter, or guarantor, of our understanding of the Qur'an.

CHAPTER 5

Between Subjective Scruples and Objective Historical Reconstruction: The Hermeneutics of Mustafa Öztürk

1 Introduction

Born in 1965 in Giresun (Turkey), Öztürk's venture into Islamic studies started at one of Turkey's conventional religious lyceums (*Imam Hatip*). After graduating, he continued his religious education at a Turkish school of divinity (*ilâhiyat*), where he wrote a dissertation on the Bāṭinī tradition in *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*. This was the first step in his long academic career studying the historical tradition and problems of *tafsīr*. He has also published a volume of *tafsīr*, which makes him the only author in this study to have written an exegesis of the Qur'an.

Despite the breath and diversity of his publications, certain characteristics define his work. First, unlike his peers Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, he mounts a highly vocal critique of the traditional ideas expressed in *fiqh* and *tafsīr*. The motivation behind this critique emerged from a personal struggle he described in the preface to one of his works: "these writings are a result of an effort to understand the divine speech (*ilahi kelam*) by a mind tormented (*sancılı zihin*) and disturbed by conventional ideas or stereotypical beliefs concerning Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular."[1] As a consequence, Öztürk does not merely study the history of *tafsīr* to regurgitate its fundamental ideas in a descriptive manner (*tasvir*), but he also seeks to analyse (*tahlil*) and critique (*tenkit*) the tradition of *tafsīr* at various turns to establish a new normative view on exegesis.[2] As he himself put it, he worries not only about "what is" (*olan*) but also about "what should be" (*olması gereken*).[3]

Öztürk's dual commitment to criticizing and revising traditional ideas elevates his work into something more than a study of the history of ideas in classical Islamic thinking. Therefore, by engaging on a personal level with the fundamental theoretical elements of interpretation, his works become hermen-

1 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2011), 7.

2 Öztürk, 7.

3 Öztürk, 7.

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eutical and it these theoretical reconsiderations in particular that will move centre stage in the proceeding sections.

Öztürk always pursued his quest for a normative hermeneutics in a dialogical manner, either by engaging Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers in conversations that reinforced his own points of view, or by demonstrating to them how they had failed to present an adequate hermeneutics of the Qur'an. In the latter case, Öztürk would deconstruct the arguments made by Muslim thinkers, with a view to subsequently creating an intellectual clearing for his own perspective on the matter.

A second defining characteristic of Öztürk's works is its historicist (*tarihselci*) approach towards understanding the Qur'an. Given that historicism, like hermeneutics, means different things in different contexts and to different authors, it is important to define what the term means to him. In one of his latest works, Öztürk articulated that an historicist interpretation (*yorum*) and approach (*yaklaşım*) is, at its very core, an inquisition into the answer to what the Qur'an tells us, or wishes to tell us, in the present.[4] However, since contemporary readers are not the direct addressees of the Qur'an, it is necessary to understand its pertinence through a 'historical detour'. In other words, an interpreter mediates between the Qur'an and present-day circumstances after the original historical understanding has been reconstructed.

Although Öztürk had no association with the Ankara School of Divinity, in his hermeneutical thinking he shares an important idea with some of its graduates, especially İlhami Güler and Ömer Özsoy. This idea is to see the Qur'an as containing both historical and transhistorical/universal aspects. Güler, for example, argues that while all universal religion (*dīn*), such as the belief in a monotheistic God, is transhistorical, God's revealed law has always been historically conditioned, and therefore, contingent.[5] Öztürk also maintains a dualistic view on the Qur'an, which he sees as containing elements that are contingent and transhistorical, universal and particular, irrelevant and relevant. Given this basic similarity between his work and that of the Ankara School, it is no surprise that the latter's publishers also produce almost all his books.

That Öztürk neither graduated from nor taught at the Ankara School of Divinity could explain why, despite his impressive output, the revisionist nature of his works, and the closeness of their ideas, Körner failed to mention Öztürk in his book, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish*

4 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2018), 10.

5 Ilhami Güler, *Sabit Din Dinamik Şeriat* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2012), 27.

University Theology.[6] Nevertheless, later in his career, Körner did introduce Öztürk's work to the Western world by translating one of his articles into German and by reflecting on some of his ideas. According to Körner, Öztürk had put forward an earnest and empathic case for an historically-based critical approach to explaining the Qur'an that was aware of the shortcomings of tradition. However, while such an approach might find resonance (*gehör*) with non-Muslims, Körner doubted whether Muslims who were sceptical of revisionist readings could be convinced of the validity of the historical-critical approach by reading Öztürk's texts.[7] Nonetheless, other than Körner's insightful remarks, some valuable translations of articles, and certain footnotes, discussions of Öztürk's ideas are virtually non-existent in Western literature,[8] a matter affirmed by Körner, who wrote that "Mustafa Öztürk has as of yet received little attention outside Turkey."[9]

The vocal nature of Öztürk's critique of tradition, paired with some of his historicist claims, have made him the most contested of the three intellectuals studied in this book. One reason why he is controversial is because he challenges the 'principle of pertinence'. As Todorov explains:

> In order to account for the triggering of the interpretative process, we must assume from the outset that the production and reception of discourse (of utterances, and not sentences) obey a very general rule of pertinence, according to which if a discourse exists there must be a reason for it. So that when at first glance a given discourse does not obey this rule, the receiver's spontaneous reaction is to determine whether the discourse might not reveal its pertinence through some particular manipulation. "Interpretation" (still in the narrow sense) is what we call this manipulation.[10]

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6 Körner speaks of wishing to analyse only four authors from the Ankara tradition, but fails to specify either what this tradition entails, or what belonging to it signifies. Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 62.

7 Felix Körner, "Türkisch Islamische Theologie Im Aufbruch: Mustafa Özturk," *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 63, no. 2 (2008), 107.

8 Besides Körner, Zimmerman also translated it. See Mustafa Öztürk, "Über Die Notwendigkeit Und Die Methoden Der Entmythologisierung Des Koran," translated by Johannes Zimmermann, *Die Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 2 (2010).

9 "Mustafa Öztürk hat bisher außerhalb der Türkei noch wenig Beachtung gefunden." Felix Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei: Eine Diskussion Mit Mustafa Öztürk," in *Im Dienst Der Versöhnung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2008), 13.

10 Todorov Tzvetan, *Symbolism and Interpretation*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1982), 28.

As it will become more evident in the coming sections, Öztürk challenges this principle by questioning whether all verses in the Qur'an are relevant to a modern audience. Moreover, Öztürk does not believe that some verses should be manipulated, that is interpreted with a view to revealing their relevance for modern audiences. Some verses, Öztürk will argue, are only applicable to the historical situation in which they were conveyed.

Some conservative critics have taken note of such claims and have publicly rebuked Öztürk. Ihsan Şenocak, a conservative known to oppose the historical-critical view of the Qur'an, has gone so far as to appeal to and reproach the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). As he put it:

> Diyanet, you respond when the Qur'an is being offended in France. However, this person [referring to Öztürk], goes into *tafsīr* classes, speaks of the Qur'an to the children of this nation; this man that enters the *tafsīr* classes, subsequently says that some of the narratives of the Qur'an bear no truth. Tell me, what is the ruling concerning a person that holds such beliefs? What is the ruling concerning the one who says that some of the verses of the Qur'an are—God forbid (*haşa*)—fables (*masal*)?[11]

A few of these controversies have had lasting consequences for Öztürk's life. For example, in 2018 he came forward with screenshots from a *fatwā* circulating in a WhatsApp group calling for his death. Some members of that group shared the message that "Öztürk has to be killed (*katledilmeli*), in case he does not repent (*tevbe etmezse*)"[12] Moreover, perhaps due to these kinds of threats, Öztürk has closed his social media accounts and no longer actively engages with the public through social media.

Despite the active resistance of various groups in Turkey to his ideas, Öztürk remains both resolute and conspicuous in his hermeneutical method of approaching the Qur'an in an historical-critical manner, but he acknowledges that very few people in Turkey uphold that view of the Qur'an. Furthermore, those who hold historicist ideas, are also reluctant to come forward. While he refrains from giving names, Öztürk claims that various fellow academics are really "crypto-historicists" (*kripto tarihselci*) who have, due to the *zeitgeist* (*zamanın ruhu*), chosen to appear as traditionalists (*gelenekçi*). These academics, Öztürk argues, are forced to live double lives.[13]

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11 "Prof. Dr Mustafa Öztürk'e 'ölüm Fetvası' Hakkında Suç Duyurusu," Duvar, 2019, https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/01/04/prof-dr-mustafa-ozturke-olum-fetvasi-hakkinda-suc-duyurusu.

12 "Prof. Dr Mustafa Öztürk'e 'ölüm Fetvası'."

13 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 9.

Öztürk's unwavering commitment to an historical-critical view of the Qur'an was recast in one of his latest works *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular* (On the Qur'an and Historiography: Frame Articles, Sample Topics). Öztürk not only discusses and reaffirms his own historical-critical view of the Qur'an, but also that of one of his biggest influences, Fazlur Rahman.

Fazlur Rahman, a modern intellectual of the Qur'an, became popular among certain Turkish Muslims through his direct contact with students attending his doctoral classes in the 1970s, through subsequent translations of his works into Turkish, and through various symposiums held in Turkey in the 1990s at which his ideas were discussed.[14] Rahman's contextualist approach to the Qur'an was one of the main reasons why some Turkish intellectuals became enamoured with his ideas. As Wielandt recalls, certain Turkish intellectuals took particular interest in Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics "because it facilitates an historical understanding of the Qur'ān in the sense of reading it within the original context for which it was formulated and then recontextualizing its message in view of the situation of modern believers, without abandoning the belief that it is God's verbal revelation."[15]

In more technical terms, the interest in Rahman was partially spurred by his 'double movement theory'. To recall this theory, Rahman describes the interpretative process in terms of two movements. The first attempts to understand the given meaning of a statement in the Qur'an by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer.[16] After establishing the meaning of a verse in relation to an historical situation or problem, the exegete continues to the second step, which "is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from specific texts in light of the sociohistorical background and the often-stated *rationes legis*."[17]

There is little doubt that Fazlur Rahman was a major source of inspiration for certain modern Turkish scholars, especially those like Öztürk who advocated an historical-critical view of the Qur'an.[18] It is no surprise that some

14 Mustafa Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan, Sınır ve Sorunları," in *Kur'an'ı Anlama Yolunda: Kuramer Konferansları—1* (Istanbul: Kuramer, 2017), 24–30.

15 Rotraud Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought from the Late Nineteenth Century to Present Times," in S. Schmidtke (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 739.

16 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6.

17 Rahman, 6.

18 For the Rahman connection to Turkish thinking, see Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought," 739.

elements of Öztürk's thoughts are reminiscent of Rahman's works. One of the most conspicuous similarities pertains to Rahman's aforementioned two-tiered approach to the Qur'an. In other words, both authors propose that the Qur'an must first be read in relation to the historical situation in which its verses were revealed, and then with respect to what these verses potentially signify for the present. Furthermore, both authors seek this latter significance through the more generic, universal principles behind the verses rather than via the Qur'an's historical idiosyncrasies.

Unlike Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, however, Öztürk has not published any work that focuses solely on the subjectivity–objectivity debates in Qur'anic hermeneutics. Nevertheless, at various turns he has directly addressed different issues related to the problems of subjectivity and objectivity in Qur'anic hermeneutics.[19] Accordingly, it is possible to formulate an overall narrative from his works that describes subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in interpretation. However, to construct such a narrative, it is necessary to venture through different tiers of Öztürk's thought. In the following sections, various levels of his thinking will be discussed to describe his complex and multi-layered view on subjectivity versus objectivity when interpreting the Qur'an.

2 Rehabilitating the Historical

An important cornerstone of Öztürk's overall work is to rehabilitate the historical in relation to the Qur'an, in other words to acknowledge the book's historicity, but not for this acknowledgement to become a negation of its universal aspects, that is its ability to address an audience beyond its initial revelation period.[20] Rather, this should be a sober corrective measure against an exaggerated interpretative stance that indiscriminately accords transhistorical qualities to all elements of the Qur'an.

By acknowledging both qualities of the Qur'an, Öztürk opens the pathways to bifurcations, such as transhistorical-in-essence versus historical-in-form, historical meaning versus contemporary meaning, and so forth.[21] These

19 For example, in one of his works, Öztürk presents some of his views under the following heading *Yorum Mahiyeti ve Yorumda Nesnellik–Oznellik Meselesi* (The Essence of Interpretation and the Problem of Objectivity–Subjectivity in Interpretation), thereby demonstrating that he has addressed this epistemological issue at various turns in his writings.

20 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 50.

21 The Turkish concepts of *tarih-üstü* and *tarihsel* are respectively translated as 'transhistorical' and 'historical'. The notion of 'trans' in transhistorical is substituted for the 'üstü'

consequent bifurcations have an implication for the status of subjective understanding in Öztürk's Qur'anic hermeneutics. To clarify, by differentiating between an historical and a contemporary meaning, Öztürk will on the one hand judge that the Qur'an has a necessary objective meaning determined by its original engagement with its historical audience, while simultaneously maintaining that its contemporary meaning becomes accomplished by deliberating anew on its message with reference to present-day subjective considerations.

To rehabilitate the historical dimensions of the Qur'an, Öztürk relies on a variety of different analyses and premises, depending on the context of the discussion. One key premise is to historicize the Qur'an's appeal. He argues that present-day Muslims are not direct addressees (*muhatap*) or recipients of the Qur'an's address (*hitap*).[22] Rather, "the Qur'an's direct addressees are the Arabs of the Prophet's time."[23] As such, being indirect addressees and therefore unable to be addressed by it "as-is," present-day readers can only reconstruct the pertinence of the Qur'an's appeal through mediation. In other words, contemporary readers must investigate how the Qur'an's appeal is still relevant in the here and now, despite not being its direct or original addressees.

While this might seem like a logical hermeneutical premise, Öztürk has argued that both classical and modern Muslim intellectuals have been reluctant to historicize the Qur'an's address. According to Öztürk, Muhammad Asad's (d.1992) interpretation of verse 88:17 would be a case in point on how exegetes still force a universalist message on the Qur'an. Instead of translating the Arabic word *ibil* as "camels," as many other translators such as Yusuf Ali and Pickthall have done, Asad has suggested translating it into "clouds pregnant with water." For Asad, translating *ibil* into camels would be too provincial, and not proper to the Qur'an's universal appeal:

> If the term were used in the sense of "camels," the reference to it in the above verse would have been primarily—if not exclusively—addressed to the Arabian contemporaries of the Prophet, to whom the camel was always an object of admiration on account of its outstanding endurance, the many uses to which it could be put (riding, load-bearing, and as a

in tarih-üstü, which conventionally relates to something 'above' and, in this context, to 'history transcending', thus transhistorical. Körner supports such a translation by translating tarih-üstü as *Übergeschichtlichkeit*. See Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei."

22 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015), 18.

23 Öztürk, 18.

> source of milk, flesh and fine wool) and its indispensability to people living amid deserts. But precisely because a reference to "camels" would restrict its significance to people of a particular environment and a particular time (without even the benefit of an historical allusion to past events), it must be ruled out here, for the Qur'anic appeals to observe the wonders of the God-created universe are invariably directed at people of all times and all environments.[24]

For Öztürk, such excessive universalization of the Qur'an's address is unsustainable because it introduces pathologies, which Öztürk lists as—embarrassed/apologetic universalism (*mahçup evrensellik*), deceptive universalism (*muğfil evrenselcilik*), and noxious universalism (*müstekreh evrensilcilik*). In other words, if one were to ignore the historical aspects of the Qur'an because they are always universally pertinent, one would by default have to succumb to one or other of the pathologies to maintain its universal nature. Accordingly, some interpreters will feel embarrassed about having to defend verses they feel conflict with their modern sensibilities. As a result, rather than acknowledge outright that these verses are historically accurate, such universalists will seek to find a different, more appropriate, universally pertinent meaning behind them. Other interpreters, however, might in such a case offer deceptive interpretations that either restrict (*hasıraltı almak*) verses or pretend as if they did not exist (*görmezden gelmek*).[25] Finally, some interpreters will maintain that "the Qur'an is universal as long as its rules do not force or bind me." Öztürk provides a specific example of the latter, although not of the previous two categories, by arguing that a Muslim woman might state that a ruling on the freedom of polygyny is a universally valid rule as long as it is not incumbent on her to be part of a polygamous relationship. In other words, such a person would acknowledge the universal pertinence of polygamy but would avoid its application on account of a personal aversion to it.

This excessive insistence on the universality of the Qur'an can, according to Öztürk, be retraced to three principal theoretical causes in tradition[26]—thinking that God's speech is inseparable from His eternal essence, subscribing to the notion that one shall not consider the particularity of the cause but the generality of statements, and the Qur'an's seeming self-description. Öztürk

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24 Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, n.d.), 949; Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 19–20.

25 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 69.

26 Öztürk, 72.

addresses and deconstructs all three causes to establish a clearing for his own hermeneutical understanding.

Excessive universalist readings of the Qur'an are rooted in the theological premise that God and His speech are eternal. This is primarily because His speech is conceptualized as being part of His knowledge, and therefore part of His attributes. Accordingly, since God and His attributes are eternal, and speech is one of His attributes, it too must also therefore be eternal.[27] By committing to this idea, classical Sunni theologians belonging to the Ashʿarī or traditionalist schools have gone to great lengths to stave off the idea that the Qur'an was not eternal but created.[28] Unfortunately, as Öztürk argues, some of these same theologians have at times resorted to weak reports (*ḥadīth*) and even ideas that contradict common-sense principles. According to Öztürk, a clear example of the latter is the traditionalist conviction that even the written letters of the Qur'an were eternal.[29]

Not all grounds for excessive universalism are theological, according to Öztürk. There is also a particular hermeneutical reason for such a position. This pertains to the accepted interpretative principle within classical jurisprudence and exegesis that claims that the generality of the statement (*lafzın umumiliği*) rather than the particularity of the cause (*sebep*) will be considered.[30] To further clarify this principle, it is a well-documented fact that certain verses of the Qur'an were revealed in response to the particular actions of specific people who lived at the time of the revelation. Nevertheless, rather than understanding this causal relationship between specific situations and the content of the Qur'an to be restricted to those specific situations, the general theoretical perspective adhered to by jurisprudents and *tafsīr* scholars was to read the response as transcending the particularity of its cause. Moreover, that the Qur'an was speaking in generalities could only further support the decision to

27 Öztürk, 72–73.

28 Öztürk calls the traditionalists 'Selefiyye', which, as the context seems to suggest, refers to the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* (partisans of traditions). See J. Schacht, "Ahl Al-Ḥadīth," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ahl-al-hadith-SIM_0379.

29 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 75.

30 Öztürk is referring to the classical tenet that states *al-ʿibratu bi ʿumūm al-lafẓ, lā bi khuṣūṣ al-sabab* ("the generality of the statement will be considered, not the particularity of [its] cause"). While this tenet can be found reiterated in principle *usūl al-fiqh* works belonging to Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī scholars, al-Razī (d.1210) reports that some students of al-Shāfiʿī have argued the opposite. In other words, scholars such as Abū Thawr (d.854) and al-Muzanī (d.878) argued that the particularity of the cause for a statement will be leading, and not the generality of the statements in which the Qur'an addresses an issue. Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥṣūl Fī ʿIlm Al-Uṣūl* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 1999), 370.

consider the generality of the statement (*lafzın umumiliği*) rather than the particularity of the cause (*sebep*) behind it.

Öztürk questions whether statements are truly general or are made to be general on account of the above-mentioned principle of interpretation.[31] For, as Öztürk says, the Arabic language also permits, and in some cases necessitates, a restricted reading of seemingly general statements. He then presents a clear example of why some seemingly general statements should still be read in restricted ways by referring to the word *al-insān* in the Qur'an. Taken at face value, one would conventionally be inclined to read this word as "humankind." Accordingly, there are plenty of verses to be found in the Qur'an that are harshly critical of *al-insān*. If we were to dehistoricize such verses and read them in unrestricted, universal terms—that is apply them to all humanity—Muslims would have to subscribe to a very negative view of all people, since God, their creator, criticizes *al-insān* at various turns. However, if we were to contextualize such verses in terms of their original historical referents, we would inevitably be able to restrict the meaning of *al-insān* to these referents, and thereby, avoid a misanthropic reading of the Qur'an. In such cases, *al-insān*, and its concomitant critique, would only refer to a handful of people.

Based on these claims, Öztürk regards the Qur'an's description as the strongest, for verse 34:28 describes the Prophet's mission as *kāffatan li al-nās*, which means "to all of humankind." In addition, other verses in the Qur'an start with *yā ayyuhā al-nās*, which can be understood as "o ye people." As such, it is tempting to believe that the Qur'an's message is not specific to a certain audience or time, but universally addresses all humankind.[32] Some statements by the Prophet, such as "I have been sent to the red [skinned] as well as the fair [skinned]," reinforce the plausibility of that claim.[33]

As with the prior arguments for universalist readings, Öztürk wonders if the earlier-discussed expressions in the Qur'an really imply a generic meaning, for the evidence he evokes from classical jurisprudence and exegesis clearly questions them. For example, al-Ghazālī (d.1111) argued that it was impossible to obtain universal applicability by exclusively considering the Qur'an's state-

31 In other words, not the particular cause, but the generality of the statements will be considered.

32 Although not an example presented by Öztürk, Yusuf Ali's translation of verse 34:28 is a clear case in point of such a belief: "we have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not." It should be noted, given the context of the present discussion, how Yusuf Ali substitutes the earlier *kāffatan li al-nās* for the English "universal (Messenger) to man."

33 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 82.

ments (*mujarrad al-alfāẓ*)[34] because there is always a need for accompanying evidence to show that a Qur'anic injunction is not context specific and, accordingly, relevant to all occasions.[35] Moreover, al-Ghazālī argued, sending the Prophet for all humankind does not mean that his message need address everyone in the same way.[36] Also, different exegetes, like Ibn al-Jawzī (d.1200), translated *yā ayyuhā al-nās* not as "o ye people" but in a more restricted sense as "people of Mecca."[37] The famous classical *tafsīr* scholar and linguist al-Zamaksharī (d.1144) even claimed that interpreting the earlier mentioned *kāffatan li al-nās* as "all of humankind" is grammatically not possible.[38] Rather, as Öztürk shows, it is possible to read *kāffatan li al-nās* as "to prevent Meccan people," which would inevitably alter the sense of verse 34:28 to its more restricted form of "we have merely sent you to deter the Meccan people from polytheism and disbelief."

As mentioned earlier, the historical premise of the Qur'an is restored to coexist alongside its transhistorical one, and not to negate the latter's potential. However, it is important to remember that Öztürk's historicism is a corrective to a charge of excessive universalism, which inevitably means that, within his framework, the Qur'an's transhistorical elements are co-defined along with its historicity. As such, despite having a universalist perspective on the Qur'an, and thereby, acknowledging its history-transcending nature, Öztürk does so with certain qualifications.

This double commitment to the historical and transhistorical qualities of the Qur'an is determined in Öztürk's thinking by a set of interrelated conceptual bifurcations. Among the key distinctions he makes is to differentiate between address and message (*hitap-mesaj*) and essence and form (*öz-suret*). By virtue of these distinctions Öztürk will extend the historical-transhistorical/universal dichotomy further and argue that the Qur'an is in address and form historical, while in its underlying message and core it is universal and transhistorical.

By distinguishing between address and message, Öztürk brings to a close the earlier discussed circle that started with the notion that the present-day subject was not the direct addressee of the Qur'an—even when, as demonstrated above, one might be inclined to believe otherwise because of the Qur'an's seemingly general expressions. The address exemplified by the vocative expres-

34 Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfa Min 'Ilm Al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2010), 51; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 84.

35 Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfa Min 'Ilm*, 51; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 84.

36 Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfa Min 'Ilm*, 51–52; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 84.

37 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 85.

38 Öztürk, 86.

sion of ("O believers!") is therefore, technically speaking, only directed towards the historical audience present during the revelation of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Qur'an does not speak to a contemporary audience. Rather, as Öztürk argues, it is not the historical address but the essential message that speaks or should speak to a contemporary audience.

Öztürk has perceived various elements of the Qur'an as universally relevant. In one of his earlier works, he argued that the Qur'an contained a set of universal themes recognizable from their consistent repetition throughout the history of prophecy: "all themes that have existed during every moment of history, and as such, have been expressed in the message of every prophet, are transhistorical (*tarih-üstüdür*)."[39] Öztürk follows this statement with three beliefs he considers exemplary of the universal concerns of the Qur'an—a belief in God's absolute unity with respect to His divinity (*uluhiyet*) and lordship (*rububiyet*); the belief in a hereafter; and advocacy of a variety of important virtues such as being kind to one's parents, being just, and helping the destitute.[40] A similar but different reformulation of the Qur'an's universal aspects can be discovered in a later work of Öztürk's, namely that "in respect to its base (faith, ethics, spirituality) the Qur'an is universal, while in respect to its branches (social order and law) it is historical."[41] In the case of the former, Öztürk also emphasized the primacy of articles of faith over all other elements of the Qur'an's message, since he argued that the most universal aspects of the Qur'an's universality are related to its fundamentals of faith (*inanç ilkeleriyle ilgilidir*).[42]

Öztürk continues to refine his views on the dialectics between transhistorical and historical by arguing that certain verses of the Qur'an are in form (*suret*) particular to a given historical situation, while in essence (*öz*), that is in their underlying message, they are transhistorical and universally relevant. As he put it, "the Qur'an is an address that considers the situation at hand (*verili durum*) of the Prophet's time. Accordingly, even the transhistorical messages of the Qur'an have been presented in forms that express the situation at hand."[43] To illustrate this, let us look at verse 31:14: "and We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning." This verse, as Öztürk argues, presents a universal message through a frame of reference that was particular to an historical

39 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 17.
40 Öztürk, 17.
41 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 93.
42 Öztürk, 87.
43 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 21.

practice. Put differently, verse 31:14 reminds us of the universal injunction to be kind to one's parents through reference to an historical practice, namely two years of weaning.[44] Likewise, to refer to another example by Öztürk, the universal fact of God's absolute authority over the universe, was made relevant to the Qur'an's Arab audience through the use of provincial regal imagery. To clarify, by describing God as governing the universe from a throne situated above the highest of heavens, Arab listeners of the Qur'an's message, who were already familiar with monarchs, were told of God's absolute dominion in terms to which they could relate.[45]

3 The Two Stages of Interpretation: Reconstruction and Mediation

Both these degrees of differentiation that Öztürk applied between historical/particular-in-form and transhistorical/general-in-essence form the foundation of Öztürk's two-stage hermeneutics, a two-stage hermeneutics that can be delineated in terms of reconstruction and mediation, which means first reconstructing the meaning of the Qur'an within its historical horizon, and then relating it to the present.[46] While the first stage answers the question about what the Qur'an meant in the past, the latter revolves around the question of how and what a modern-day reader can sensibly appropriate from the contents of the Qur'an, given that the form in which this information was delivered was intended for a specific historical understanding. Moreover, the former stage emphasizes the objective relationship to the text, whereas the latter stresses the more subjective relationship to it.

These two stages of reconstruction and mediation harken back not only to the earlier mentioned bifurcations but also to Öztürk's understanding of the difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, and to how this difference relates to the disciplines of *tafsīr*, *kalām*, and *fiqh*. Öztürk's distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* is much like that of the classical scholar al-Mātūrīdī (d.944), according to whom, *tafsīr* is concerned with clarifying God's intention towards the first recipients of the Qur'an,[47] whereas *ta'wīl* is to do with bringing the original meaning (*özgün anlam*) into later times, and with reinterpreting the original

44 Öztürk, 21.

45 Öztürk, 24.

46 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 13.

47 Mustafa Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," in Mustafa Öztürk (ed.) *Tefsir Geleneğinde Anlam-Yorum Nüzul-Siret Ilişkisi* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2017), 17.

meaning in renewed circumstances.[48] Moreover, while the science of *tafsīr*, as the name implies, mainly concerns with the activity of *tafsīr*, *fiqh* and *kalām* revolve around the activity of *ta'wīl*:

> The Qur'an does not establish a relationship with humans living in time periods distant from its revelation by virtue of the science of *tafsīr*. On the contrary, it establishes this relationship with the science of *kalām* where beliefs (*itikâd'i alan*) are concerned and *fiqh* were praxis (*ameli alan*) is concerned. For, while the science of *tafsīr* focuses on what the Qur'an has said in the context of its revelation, the sciences of *kalām* and *fiqh* busy themselves with the problem of what the Qur'an wants to say in the present and the future.[49]

In other words, as Öztürk summarizes: "*Tafsīr* is the science that looks back and understands, while *fiqh* and *kalām* are the sciences that look forward through living [what is understood]."[50]

Among the more pertinent consequences of this bifurcation between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, is that two meanings are ascribed to the Qur'an—past and present. Accordingly, rather than contextualizing a primary and secondary meaning in terms of superficial versus deeper, or literal versus allegorical, as mystics might have done in the past, the primary and secondary meaning in Öztürk's framework revolves around historical and contemporary/future. Öztürk often described the former in terms of 'first and principal meaning' (*ilk ve asli mana*), 'principal and historical meaning' (*asli ve tarihi anlam*), or 'original meaning' (*özgün anlam*).[51]

4 Reconstruction: An Archaeology of Meaning

Since the first step of interpretation needs to reconstruct the divine intent directed towards the first recipients of the Qur'an, it must engage in a process that Öztürk described as an 'archaeology of meaning' (*anlam arkeolojisi*). This involves working through the language (*dil*), history (*tarih*), and oral tradition

48 Öztürk, 17.

49 Mustafa Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2018), 30.

50 Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan," 255.

51 Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, 1:38; Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan," 263; Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," 18.

(*rivayet*) of Islam.[52] The desired outcome of this archaeology is to build a repository of meaning upon which the sciences of *kalām* and *fiqh* can derive their inspiration and develop new practical and religious meanings from the Qur'an for the present day.[53]

The first point of departure within this archaeological uncovering of the meanings of the Qur'an is by decoding the text's linguistic codes. According to Öztürk, no mediation can ever be initiated without first understanding what a text means. Given that the Qur'an stands in front of us as codified text, it follows that its mediation must also begin by first decoding its linguistic codes:

> Without doubt, the assimilation and internalization of the divine message, is only possible by correctly understanding it. However, to understand, we have to decode the linguistic codes of the text that stands in front of us as a written document. Technically speaking, at this level of understanding and interpretation, approaching the Qur'an as an epistemic object (*epistemik bir nesne*) becomes inescapable.[54]

Decoding the linguistic codes of the Qur'an is not something that can be done merely in reference to the strict confines of the text's linguistic materiality, but must be reconstructed in relation to the historical context that is external to the text. This is primarily because, as Öztürk argues, meaning is never constituted without context: "meaning is not a thing hidden in mere words and/or present in the text waiting to be transferred—as is—to our present. Rather, meaning is constituted through context (*bağlam*)."[55] As such, the confines of interpretation should not be restricted to the relationship between expressions and meaning (*lafiz-mana*) but text and history (*metin-tarih*).[56]

By reframing the scope of understanding in terms of text and history, Öztürk reiterates the dialectical relationship between history and the formation of the Qur'an's text—something already hinted towards with the earlier bifurcation between the Qur'an's historical content and its transhistorical message. For Öztürk it is a given that "the content of the Qur'an (*Kur'an'daki muhteva*) was formed from the dialectical relationship between God and humans."[57] Other-

52 Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, 39.
53 Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan," 254.
54 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an'ı Kendi Tarihinde Okumak: Tefsirde Anakronizme Ret Yazıları* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2013), 41.
55 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 93.
56 Mustafa Öztürk, *Tefsir Tarihi Araştırmaları* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2011), 26.
57 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 264.

wise, as Öztürk states, we would have to admit that God is inconsiderate of the circumstances surrounding the first recipients of the Qur'an, which would lead to a fatalistic view of revelation. Öztürk argues that "to think that the elements of man, history and society are not of influence during the time of revelation, is equal to saying that God desired from the onset (*ibtidaen*) to address and that He consequently transformed (*tahvil*) the state and conditions of the human addressees in accordance with what He wanted to say."[58] In other words, if God's address does not adapt to history, then that must mean that the events of history were laid out in advance by God, so that He would have the right audience and circumstances for His message to be relevant. Otherwise, if history were independent of God's message, even although it had been laid out in advance, there would be a risk that God would say things that failed to conform to the volatility of the circumstances at hand. On the contrary, as Öztürk argues, "God decides when He will descend his revelation, but the subject of revelation is defined by what humans do."[59]

This tight association between text and history necessitates reading the Qur'an alongside other sources that disclose the historical experience of the Qur'an. At various turns, Öztürk has further specified what some of these sources are. Hence, one of the first Öztürk mentioned is the Prophet's biography (*sīra*): "it should be put forward that what the divine intent (*ilahi irade*) wants, should be gathered from reading the Qur'an in parallel to its historical particularity (*tarihsel özgüllüğü*) and the Prophet's biography."[60] Another obvious source Öztürk mentioned is the literature explaining the causes for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Finally, there is also the *sunna*. However, as Öztürk argued, the idea of *sunna* should not be restricted to documented reports that were related from the Prophet (*metinleşmiş hadisler*). Rather, the *sunna* should be understood in broader terms as a way of Islam (*Müslümanlık*) that was transmitted from the Prophet's generation onwards and that has since then become part of the genetic code (*genetik kod*) of the larger Islamic community.[61]

5 Mediation

After reconstructing the objective meaning intended for the Qur'an's initial audience, the question arises of how this meaning can be made relevant for the

58 Öztürk, 264.
59 Öztürk, 264.
60 Öztürk, *Tefsir Tarihi Araştırmaları*, 26.
61 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 27.

Qur'an's present-day readers. As previously stated, this is the stage in Öztürk's hermeneutics when subjectivity plays a more important role because it is when the second meaning of the Qur'an is being constructed. This is the one that can be derived from a dialogue between the Qur'an's initial meaning and present/future subjective circumstances. Accordingly, Öztürk's work deals with the parameters of this dialogue in terms of the following topics—narratives (*kasas*), theology (*îtikad*), and jurisprudence (*ahkam*), but in each case with reference to the earlier discussed dialectics between historical and transhistorical. In the following section, all three topics will be discussed with a view to gaining further insights into Öztürk's specific views on the limitations and possibilities of understanding the Qur'an either subjectively or objectively.

6 The Inescapable Particularity of Narratives

The Qur'an contains a variety of narratives that speak of experiences not belonging to its first recipients but to other actors, such as Adam and Satan, the prophets of Israel, and the peoples of Ad and Thamud. While these narratives are mostly understood to be historical in character, recent scholars in the fields of biblical and Qur'anic hermeneutics have taken a renewed interest in the status of these narratives, and are wondering whether they are mythological rather than empirical in character. Following this trend, Öztürk has also readdressed the problem of the status of the narratives within the Qur'an.

Among the more salient sub-problems Öztürk addresses is the question of the purposes (*gaye-amaç*) of the Qur'an's narratives, for which he comes up with three answers—they are to guide people towards the assertion that Allah is the only true god (*tek gerçek tanri*); to support the Prophet and the believers morally; and to provide ethico-religious profundities/lessons (*ibretler*).[62] While the first and last purposes might be relevant on a transhistorical level, it is unclear how the second purpose can be mediated into the present, since it is rooted in a specific historical problem. In such cases, the reader might have to admit that there is no transcendent, objective meaning to be appropriated into the present from these narratives, other than to acknowledge their historicity.[63]

62 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2013), 37; Öztürk, 38.

63 Öztürk clearly admits to this by arguing that some narrations are merely answers to historically contingent questions; in fact, "it can even be said that some narratives do not contain any ethico-religious message." Öztürk, 102.

Öztürk elaborated the latter possibility, namely the unassimilable nature of certain narratives, in relation to two specific cases in the Qur'an—the narratives of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* (People of the Cave) and the *Dhū al-Qarnayn* (Possessor of Two Horns). There is no question about the abstract nature of these narratives, especially given that they contain no concrete names, places, or dates. From this, Öztürk infers that they were not intended to provide any historical or factual data, or for that matter any ethico-religious message, because otherwise they would have already done that.[64] Rather, these kinds of narratives were merely meant to support the Prophet by providing an answer to the questions set by the Prophet's detractors.

Öztürk supports his historicist claim by turning to the traditional view on these narratives, which is that they were revealed as an answer to questions posed by the Prophet's detractors. As history reminds us, the polytheists asked the Jews of Medina about the status of the Prophet, which the latter responded as follows: "ask Muhammad three questions. If he is able to answer these questions, he is a prophet. However, if he is unable to answer them, then he is not a prophet, and you can do with him as you please."[65] As such, the following three questions were asked: what is the story concerning the youth that escaped their homeland, the man who travelled to the ends of the west and the east, and what is the quiddity of the spirit?[66] The answers to the first two questions became the narratives of the People of the Cave and *Dhū al-Qarnayn*.

According to Öztürk, attempting to make more of these narratives by dehistoricizing them and arguing they contain transcendental truths, would risk coming up with forced and fanciful interpretations (*hayali yorumlar*) that might contradict the Qur'an's message.[67] One example of the former is the suggestion that *Dhū al-Qarnayn* is a space traveller who has journeyed through various galaxies.[68] Another is that the People of the Cave are young men seeking refuge from a despotic ruler. However, as Öztürk asks, are present-day Muslims likely to seek refuge in a cave when confronted with oppression? If this is the message to be inferred, what do we make of the Qur'an's command

64 Öztürk, 46.

65 Öztürk cites Ibn Hishām. Öztürk, 45. Ibn Al-Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Al-Hishām*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 301.

66 Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili*, 45.

67 Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an Kıssalarının Mahiyeti* (Istanbul: Kuramer, 2017), 19.

68 The tone in which Öztürk mentions this is one of perplexity, for he cannot fathom how some present-day interpreters manage to interpret the Qur'an's historical messages in ways that are reminiscent of science-fiction literature. Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili*, 46.

always to incite the good and forbid the wrong within the public domain?[69] Does the one message not contradict the other?

7 Rediscovering God

Historicity pertains not only to the narratives but also to the theology of the Qur'an. According to mainstream Islamic views, many different prophets throughout history have consistently asserted God's divinity (*uluhiyet*) and absolute unity (*tevhid*). However, as Öztürk argues, while the proclamation of God's unity has remained consistent throughout history, other aspects, such as the names with which God is referenced, for example, as Elohim, Yahweh, or Allah, have not. In other words, to reiterate Öztürk's metaphor, while the message enveloped (*mazruf*) has been transhistorical, its envelope (*zarf*) has been historically defined. Moreover, while the former might be absolute and objective, that is, signify a meaning that can be recurrently identified, the latter is contingent and rooted in culture. "However, when the three great religions are considered (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), it can be seen that each religion and generation has a subjectively valid (*kendisi için*) idea (*imge*) of God rather than an objective (*nesnel*) idea of God."[70] Hence, it is no surprise to Öztürk that the Qur'an depicted God as a king, because a king symbolized the greatest possible authority to the early Arab recipients of the Qur'an.[71]

Part of the provincial nature of the Qur'an's theological imagery is due to the nature of language itself. Language is a dynamic entity with its own historicity. As Öztürk states, "the language of the Qur'an is not absolute (*mutlak*), primordial (*kadim*) [but] the language of a particular human experience, tradition, history, and culture."[72] Öztürk refers in this regard to the Heideggerian metaphor that *Sprache ist das Haus des Seins* (language is the home of being). Arabic, he argues, "is also the house of the Arab's being (*arabi varlığın meskeni*)." Since God utilizes Arabic, He speaks by default in terms that stem from Arab culture and history.

While the previously discussed examples and context demonstrate the interreligious historicity of how God is conceptualized, Öztürk also notes a degree of historicity within the larger tradition of Islam itself. These observations are rooted in an analysis of two classical disciplines—*tafsīr* and *kalām*, which,

69 Öztürk, 47.
70 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 25.
71 Öztürk, 24.
72 Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin, Sınır ve Sorunları," 251.

according to Öztürk, both bear witness to the way in which ideas concerning God have changed and evolved within the overall Muslim community.

With respect to *tafsīr*, Öztürk relates how the word *rab* was transformed from its primary historical meaning within the exegetical tradition, through God being described as *rab* (lord) in the Qur'an, whereas we, His human creation, are designated as *'abd* (slave). These notions, with which the early recipients of the Qur'an were familiar, were carefully selected to challenge the Meccan polytheists' concept of God. While the Meccan polytheists believed that God created everything, they did not believe that He intervened in human life, for it was not God, but fate (*dahr*), that governed their lives. By claiming God's lordship over humans, a revised concept was brought forward in which God was described as having mastery over people's lives.[73] However, in later exegetical works, Öztürk claims that God's lordship moved away from its domineering connotations, to one that laid more emphasis on education (*eğitme*) and cultivation (*yetiştirme*), rather than authority.[74]

Similarly, in the case of *kalām*, there is a clear discrepancy to be noted between how some of the earlier and later generations of theologians envisioned God. For example, the Qur'an states that God is to be found in the heavens (*fī al-samā'*). Early theologians such as Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (d.855) and Sa'īd al-Dārimī (d.893), have taken this statement literally and even argued the heretical status of those who understand God to be omnipresent.[75] However, as Öztürk notes, later theologians have interpreted "being in heaven" as God being above everything in terms of authority (*saltanat*) and power (*kudret*)—arguing that this is the proper way of thinking about Him (*sahih Allah tassavuru*).[76] In other words, what used to be unthinkable and regarded as heretical notions of God, became mainstream, and what used to be the default way of thinking about Him, itself became contested.

In conclusion, the historicity of Islam's theology as witnessed by the traditions of *tafsīr* and *kalām* ratifies the possibility of future, different theologies. In other words, as past generations have demonstrated how they revised their theological notions in relation to those of previous generations, so too, argues

73 Öztürk, 252.

74 Öztürk does not name the later exegetical works in which this shift of emphasis occurred, but does refer to al-Ṭabarī's (d.923) *tafsīr* as a source in which *rab* signified authority. That he did not name specific sources could be because his ideas were being voiced in the context of an academic conference. In other words, he was addressing an audience already familiar with the source materials, and therefore, not in need of specific titles. Öztürk, 252.

75 Öztürk, 250.

76 Öztürk, 250; Mustafa Öztürk, *Söyleşiler, Polemikler* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015), 110.

Öztürk, can subsequent generations revise their theology in relation to the past. Consequently, new generations can revise the meaning of what a token revealed by the Qur'an, such as "the Almighty," signifies for them subjectively. In other words, they can apply their personal *ta'wīl* to certain notions. However, it can be gathered from Öztürk's works that such revisions do not happen leisurely but are rather preceded by certain theological conceptions becoming no longer tentative to a certain age: "however, depending on certain theological concerns and discussions, or philosophical ideas, a conceptualization of God belonging to a certain time frame could become problematic in another period. In such an instance, a new conceptualization of God needs to be constructed."[77]

8 The Teleology of the Sharī'a

Besides narratives and theology, the Qur'an also expresses judgments on practical and societal matters Akin to the earlier categories, that is narratives or descriptions of God, verses that pass judgments on practical matters (*ahkam ayetleri*) are, according to Öztürk, also defined by the dialectics and context of the revelation: "it is our contestation that God revealed all verses, legal verses (*ahkam ayetleri*) included, with consideration of the practices (*fiili durumlar*) of the people that witnessed the Prophet and the environment of the revelation."[78] Moreover, as in the previous categories, Öztürk also distinguishes between the fortuitous and transhistorical qualities of the Qur'an's legal verses and defines the parameters of subjective mediation accordingly.

For Öztürk, a proper separation between the transhistorical and historical with respect to legal rulings is necessary in order to escape the pitfalls of ugly analogies (*iğreti benzerlikler*). In other words, if one were to argue that the Qur'an's legal dimensions are universal, transcendent, and therefore, transhistorical, they would have to, for example, relate these attributes to the Qur'an's acknowledgement of the institution of slavery, which runs against modern-day moral sensibilities. As a result, rather than accepting the historical reality of the institution of slavery, as Öztürk does, some might attempt to dismantle such a controversy by arguing that the term "slave" carries a meaning in the Qur'an that is more akin to our present-day notion of a "working-class person," rather than our classical definition of a slave. Such analogies, Öztürk argues,

77 Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan," 253.
78 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 28.

are merely apologetic and by virtue of their blatant anachronism neither reasonable (*makul*) nor acceptable (*makbul*).[79]

According to Öztürk, the Qur'an is realistic and pragmatic about legal concerns, but perhaps idealistic about matters of faith and ethics.[80] For example, the Qur'an was undeniably clear about condemning polytheism and approached its abolition with great urgency. However, on slavery, it maintained an ambivalent approach that supported its gradual abolition, but made use of the institution for its own practical purposes, as evidenced from the fact that slavery was tolerated because the prospect of gaining slaves gave some Muslims an incentive to participate in military campaigns against the Meccan polytheists, mainly because captives of war could be kept as personal slaves.[81]

To reiterate one of Öztürk's core hermeneutical principles, as the transhistorical–historical dialectic reminds us, not everything in the Qur'an is meant to be applicable (*geçerli*) and of value (*değerli*) for all times and places,[82] nor is everything part of religion (*din*) or religious (*dinî*) in nature. Some judgements passed by the Qur'an are contingent, namely defined by an historical and contingent pragmatic value. Historical injunctions, such as physically reprimanding women, are according to Öztürk not part of Islam's transcendent message, and therefore do not contain virtues worthy of future repetitions: "swatting women in order to discipline, is neither religion (*din*), nor an ethico-religious virtue (*dinî-ahlaki bir fazilet*)."[83]

As for the clarification of what might be the transhistorical quality in the Qur'an's legal message, Öztürk resorts to a teleological framework. He understands the transhistorical quality of legal judgments to be the incentive, namely the purpose supporting an injunction and not the specific, historical implementation recorded by the Qur'an. What must therefore be assimilated into the present is not the historical judgment per se, but the realization of the original incentive behind the judgement.

Öztürk's teleological understanding of law is supported by his understanding of language, which is that the composition of an expression is not necessarily identical to the intention preceding its utterance or writing. Rather, as he argues: "the expression (*lafiz*) is not the purpose (*maksat*) itself but an example [of its] implementation (*örnek uygulama*)."[84] In other words, a par-

79 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 91.
80 Öztürk, 90.
81 Öztürk, 91.
82 Öztürk, 91.
83 Öztürk, 91.
84 Öztürk, 94.

ticular expression can be separated from its *intentio*.[85] This implies that the abandonment of the Qur'an's literal instruction does not necessarily entail abandoning the purpose behind the instruction. For example, as Öztürk argues, one can separate the Qur'anic injunction "cut the hands of a thief" from its *raison d'être*—the protection of private property (*özel mulkiyet*).[86]

What is important in Öztürk's thinking about the mediation of Qur'anic law, is not so much the earlier mentioned objective (*nesnel*) and textual (*metinsel*) reality of the judgments passed by the Qur'an, but its relevance and applicability on a social level (*sosyal ve işlevsel gerçeklik*).[87] Put differently, rather than jumping through various interpretative hoops, Öztürk understands cutting hands as the literal cutting of physical hands, which is from an historical and philological standpoint the most straightforward reading. However, the objective reality concerning the meaning of the verse does not necessarily mean that a Muslim should apply himself to the verse in question. Rather, one must measure the applicability (*işlevsellik*) of such a verse under present-day social circumstances.[88] In other words, one must also take into account the subjective aspects of those who are addressed by the Qur'an in the present.

Öztürk argues that even classical authorities like Ibn Abbas were evaluating verses in terms of their applicability to changing circumstances and felt no unease about accepting the historicity of the Qur'an. This is made clear by a narration in which Ibn Abbas is confronted by a group of Muslims complaining that no one is applying the command in verse 24:58, according to which at certain times preadolescent children must ask permission before entering the house. Ibn Abbas replies that this verse was revealed at a time when the majority of Muslim houses had no separate rooms or doors, so a child could encroach on their parents at embarrassing times. However, once people acquired houses with separate rooms with doors, the injunction in the verse ceased to be practised.[89]

Changing circumstances will keep challenging Muslims with respect to how they apply the Qur'an's injunctions. Öztürk argues that in some cases it is even possible to find better ways of mediating the Qur'an's above-mentioned uni-

85 This aspect of Öztürk's thinking was also acutely observed by Körner from another element of Öztürk's work. Körner argued that Öztürk's bifurcation between the previously mentioned address (*hitap*) and message (*mesaj*), signified the differentiation between what the Qur'an said (*Gesagtem*) and what it actually meant (*Gemeintem*). Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei," 15.

86 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 94.

87 Öztürk, 97.

88 Öztürk, 97.

89 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 31; Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 55.

versal interests into the present.[90] To return once more to the injunction of amputating the hands of thieves, Öztürk informs us that one of the purposes behind this verse is to prevent the thief from further acts of stealing. However, rather than amputating people's hands publicly after Friday prayers, as Saudi Arabia does, Öztürk expresses more empathy with the wellness programmes of the municipality of Gaziantep (Turkey), which have successfully helped glue-sniffing (*tinerci*) youths turn around their lives of larceny.[91] In other words, with modern resources, present-day Muslims can honour the perennial concerns of the Qur'an in new and different ways that might be better than their historical precedents.[92]

Öztürk understands that such a teleological take on the Qur'an's legal content will open a pathway to myriad different understandings of what the real interests behind certain verses might be. It is now possible, he argues, that some interpreters might make an unconventional claim that a verse commanding women to wear the veil was not a categorical imperative but a piece of advice (*tavsiye*). However, Öztürk hopes that in case someone presents such interpretations these should at the very least be realistic (*gerçekçi*), have proper bases (*temellendermiş*) and supporting principles (*ilkeli olmak*), and be more than mere rhetoric (*retoriksel*) alone.[93] In other words, different interpretations are quite natural but are only respectable if they fulfil the aforementioned conditions.

9 Responding to Criticism

The previous section has demonstrated that an important aspect of Öztürk's work is the desire to identify God's intent behind the verses. In other words, to wonder, and thus analyse psychologically, the wishes behind God's revelation. Öztürk is aware of the potential critique against the psychologization of the Qur'an and has responded to this issue in a variety of ways.

He recounts that the issue of psychologization had already been debated in the Turkish context with respect to the question of whether the hermeneutical models that Romantic thinkers like Dilthey proposed could be helpful

90 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 97.

91 Öztürk, 97.

92 Öztürk uses the phrase "daha güzel" (literally 'more beautiful'), which in this context should be translated as "better" or "more appropriate." Öztürk, 97.

93 Öztürk, 98.

in the context of understanding the Qur'an.[94] Critics dismissed appropriating Diltheyian concepts such as re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*) because of the ontological rift (*ontolojik farklılık*) between humans and God.[95] In response, Öztürk argues that one does not empathize directly with God's essence (*zat*) but with the spirit of revelation (*vahyin ruhuyla*).[96] In other words, one empathizes with God's intention (*maksat*) informed from and directed towards the experiences of a specific historical audience. Accordingly, while it is true that God's essence transcends human understanding, we must not ignore the fact that His revelation has become relatable by being revealed within a given history in a format directed towards human understanding (*beşeri düzleme*).[97]

The Qur'an's history of revelation further testifies to the possibility of empathizing with revelation. Öztürk argues that various traditional accounts document how certain opinions voiced by the Prophet's companions were subsequently reiterated, sometimes verbatim, by the revelation in the Qur'an.[98] In other words, there is a clear historical precedent of Muslims being able to direct their intentions towards problems that are in accordance with God's will, even in the absence of revelation.[99] In the case of the latter, Öztürk argues that you only need to inspect certain traditions pertaining to the correspondence between the opinion of ʿUmar and the revelation of the Qur'an.

This concept of ʿUmar's congruence (*muvafakat-i Ömer*) is based on a recurrent historical occurrence in which ʿUmar voiced an opinion on a matter that was subsequently reiterated in, and thereby vindicated by, revelation. Among the notable examples Öztürk related is ʿUmar's suggestion that the *Maqām Ibrahim* (Station of Abraham) be established as a place of worship, which led to the revelation of "and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer."[100] Another example is ʿUmar's advice to the Prophet to make his wives speak to strangers from behind a veil, since his house is "visited by good people as well as people with ill-intent."[101] Accordingly, in congruence with ʿUmar's wishes, the following verse was revealed: "and when ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs."[102] Finally, when some of the Prophet's wives were creating domestic

94 Öztürk, *Kur'an'ı Kendi Tarihinde Okumak*, 37.
95 Öztürk, 37.
96 Öztürk, 38.
97 Öztürk, 38.
98 Öztürk, 38.
99 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine*, 265.
100 Qur'an 2:125; Öztürk, 237.
101 Öztürk, 237.
102 Qur'an 33:53.

unrest because of their envy, ʿUmar advised them in the same words that were later reiterated, namely "it may be, if he divorced you (all), that Allah will give him in exchange consorts better than you."[103]

A more pertinent consequence of these historical congruences between revelation and human ideas, such as those documented about ʿUmar, is the prospect they offer of resolving issues in the absence of revelation. According to Öztürk, companions were able to think of solutions that were animated by an awareness (*bilinç*) and sensibility (*duyarlık*) particular to being a Muslim, which were subsequently confirmed (*teyit*) by revelation; in fact, this happened to such an extent that some verses recounted a companion's words verbatim.[104] As such, it is possible for a Muslim to envision solutions to certain problems that are in congruence with God's will (*ilahi irade*), even in the absence of text (*nas*).[105] However, as Öztürk argues, such solutions will only work if they are offered by a Muslim who is rational, scrupulous (*vicdan sahibi*), genuinely faithful, and in full submission (*teslimiyet*) to God.[106]

10 The Ethics of Interpretative Claims

As the last sentence of the previous section shows, Öztürk's hermeneutics has more to offer than its methodological dimension, for there are also distinct ethical considerations to discover in his work. The importance he accords ethical matters should not be underestimated: "before [there is any speak of] theology of Islamic sciences, grace (*nezaket*), delicacy (*zarafet*), etiquette (*görgu*), or more succinctly, civilized manners (*medenilik*) must be attained."[107] In the following section, the ethical side of his hermeneutics will be further elaborated, for it has an important bearing on the status of subjective understandings. As we shall soon discover, Öztürk supports subjectivity in interpretations because of its tendency to embrace tolerance, authenticity, and humility.

Given his decades-long academic presence in the discipline of *tafsīr*, it is no surprise that a keen awareness and understanding of interpretative differences should form the basis of his ethical concerns. Such an understanding is but an inevitable outcome of a research career that has investigated differing tradi-

103 Qur'an 66:5.
104 Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul*, 264–265.
105 Öztürk, 265.
106 Öztürk, 265.
107 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 93.

tional and sectarian groups and their Qur'anic exegesis, including the Shīʿa, the Muʿtazilīs, the mystics, and the more dominant Sunni schools of the Māturīdīs and Ashʿarīs.

Öztürk points to the canonization of the Qur'an as a key cause of interpretative differences between diverse groups. As a canonized text, it ceased to be a recitation that originated from a conversation between man and God; rather, it had become separated from its original meaning-circumscribing context, and this introduced a range of different interpretations. Consequently, by being open to a variety of meanings, the Qur'an also raised the prospect of meanings ratifying rather than challenging sectarian interests.

The Prophet argued that disagreements in his community were a sign of mercy. However, while keenly aware of such prophetic wisdom, Öztürk claimed that the Muʿtazilīs never extended this mercy to the Ashʿarīs, and neither did the Ashʿarīs extend it to the Muʿtazilīs.[108] On the contrary, Ashʿarī dogmatists like Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī (d.1037) wrote detailed heresiographies that used denigrating language to describe groups that did not share their interpretations.[109] The other would always be thought of as being astray and following mere fancy. As such, it is naïve to address the problem of exegetical strife from a methodological standpoint: "to argue that all these problems [that is interpretative disagreements] stem from mere divergence in method and scientific understanding, is pure naivety. It is my contestation, that the real matter revolves around consideration (*izan*), fairness (*insaf*), and character (*ahlak*)."[110]

Negative attitudes towards difference are, according to Öztürk, cured by giving up claims to having exclusive access to the truth. In this respect, he advocates refraining from *tek hakikatçi dil* (saying there is only one truth) and *hakikatı temelluk etmek* (claiming exclusive ownership of the truth).[111] Rather, as Öztürk argues: "truth is not something humans possess. Humans can only pursue truth and perhaps grasp one of its aspects (*bir yönüyle kavrayabilir*)."[112] Therefore, it is imperative to be humbler and more modest in one's interpretative claims (*haddini bilmek*). This kind of humility, Öztürk believes, is absent from the interpretative landscape, since many are using an absolutist language similar to that of God. However, for Öztürk, such claims about the Qur'an are a

108 Öztürk, 90.
109 Öztürk, 93.
110 Öztürk, 91.
111 Öztürk, 93; Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," 35.
112 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 93.

sign of impudence (*küstahlık*) and arrogance (*kibirlik*) that will in the long run benefit neither humanity at large nor Muslims in particular.[113]

According to Öztürk, one simply cannot resort to claims of absolute objectivity (*mutlak nesnelci*) without being naïve,[114] for no interpretation is free of subjectivity.[115] Interpretation is influenced by a person's capacity to understand, ideological inclinations, emotional state, culture, and practical experience, and all these aspects differ from person to person. Even members of the same religion or the same denomination will read a religious text differently because of these changing variables.[116]

Öztürk argues that two problems further obscure the absolutist claims about the Qur'an, namely historical distance and the way in which the Qur'an's interpretative tradition lends itself to manipulation and disinformation (*dezenformasyon*). As Öztürk repeatedly mentioned, the amount of alienation (*yabancılık*) that has developed between our present-day world and the language (*dil*), meaning (*anlam*), and terminology (*kavram*) used at the time of the revelation has complicated our understanding of the Qur'an,[117] which fifteen centuries of political (*siyasi*), sectarian (*mezhebi*), and doctrinal (*itikadi*) strife have only aggravated further.

To conclude, in Öztürk's hermeneutics, objective interpretative principles and subjective conscientiousness are part of the interpretative process. Objectivity is something one ought to pursue but can never absolutely claim. Present-day readers find it especially difficult because, from the outset, their historical distance from the text and its distorted interpretative tradition affects their understanding. Interpreters must thus always show subjective humility in relation to the Qur'an and remain open to the possibility that they might be wrong. As Öztürk put it, "when we are able to turn to and criticize ourselves, we will learn to be less polarizing in respect to understanding the Qur'an, to be more acquainted with an understanding that draws closer, and to be at the very least tolerant of those who think differently."[118]

113 Öztürk, 91; Öztürk, 93.
114 Öztürk, 92.
115 Öztürk, 92.
116 Öztürk, 92; Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," 39.
117 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine*, 92.
118 Öztürk, 93.

11 Guarding the Lines between *taḥrīf* and *ta'wīl*

Öztürk's hermeneutics maintains a constructive view towards the pursuit of objectivity and the presence of subjectivity when interpreting the Qur'an. Subjectivity and objectivity both have their own important role to play in the process, which also means that each in turn has its own specific limits. In this final section, these limitations will be further explored as they provide concluding insights into the dynamics between subjectivity and objectivity in Öztürk's thinking.

The historicity of the Qur'an prevents us from over-universalizing its relevance. For a start, because its message was initially directed to a specific historical audience, by default it has an objective meaning that is embedded in God's original intent. However, this historicization implies that at one level, the Qur'an's meaning is inaccessible to our subjective experiences.[119] Otherwise, we would risk letting the Qur'an signify what we personally think in the present, rather than what it signified historically.[120]

In a previous section, Öztürk clarified that *tafsīr* is the science that unearths the historical and objective meaning of the Qur'an, whereas *ta'wīl*, based on information provided by *tafsīr*, renews its significance for the present. With this bifurcation in mind, we can conclude that, in Öztürk's view, *tafsīr* can never be directed by subjective deliberations.[121] However, less straightforward is his claim that, despite being related to the subjective elements of interpretation, *ta'wīl* has to rely on logical, linguistic, and historical deliberations. In other words, although *tafsīr* should never be mixed with subjectivity, *ta'wīl*, while considerate of subjectivity, should never be solely based on it.

Öztürk's primary reason for guarding *ta'wīl* stems from a wish to protect it from becoming *taḥrīf* (distortion). *Ta'wīl* without reference to historical, logical, or linguistic considerations will lose its scientific dependability. Consequently, in the absence of independent references with which to examine interpretations, the lines between interpreting (*ta'wīl*) or twisting (*taḥrīf*) the meaning of the Qur'an become blurred (*muğlaklaşmaktadır*), or even worse, lost.[122] Since interpretations, especially when related to God's wishes, become normative, it is important to be able to justify their status as *ta'wīl* and protect them from being a *taḥrīf* of the text.

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119 To recall, there are two levels of significance in Öztürk's hermeneutics—historical and contemporary.

120 Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," 33.

121 Öztürk, 33.

122 Öztürk, 39.

Öztürk accords a different status to purely subjective intuitions about meanings in the Qur'an. He believes that one should not automatically reject some of them just because they are not *tafsīr* or *ta'wīl* in the proper sense. A believer might do his ablutions, segregate himself, and read the Qur'an with true deliberation, after which various new, hitherto unknown and inspiring meanings might well up in that person's heart. However, "we have no right to declare canon (*kanonikleştirme*) certain meanings and associations that appear in our minds and hearts drawn from our personal relationship with the Qur'an."[123] In other words, one cannot regard intuitive meanings as authoritative if they are not born from reflections based on principles that can be verified scientifically but are merely drawn from pre-predicative intuition, such as the mystical experience.[124] Rather, such meanings, should be considered apocryphal (*Apokrif*). The latter comprises all kinds of meanings according to Öztürk that escape the linguistic, historical, and logical data on which *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* rely—meanings that are neither ultimately binding (*bağlayıcı*) nor formally accepted (*gayr-i resmi*).[125]

12 Concluding Remarks

Öztürk's hermeneutics presents a strong case of how an understanding of subjectivity in interpretation simultaneously defines the contours of the surplus of meaning. First, binary distinctions like historical–transhistorical, essence–form, or address–message, on which Öztürk's hermeneutics heavily relies, are inevitably superimposed on the Qur'an's text, for none of those terms is present in the text itself. Accordingly, an historicizing subject cannot avoid superimposing, and thereby forcing, a surplus of meaning not present in the linguistic materiality of the text. For example, rather than straightforwardly reading a Qur'anic injunction as "cut off the hands of a thief," one will inevitably read it as "cut off the hands of a thief [because there are no better resources to protect property and deter thieves in seventh-century Arabia]" or "[I, God, command you to] cut off the hands of a thief [tentatively]."

123 Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, 1:49.

124 Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, 1:48. Öztürk speaks of 'canonical' but means in this context objectively verifiable interpretations that are formally accepted (*resmi*) as legitimate interpretations of God's will. Moreover, when they have legal content, they can become potentially binding (*bağlayıcı*) on the larger Muslim community.

125 Öztürk, 1:49.

With binary distinctions such as historical–transhistorical, and by arguing that its primary address was reserved for its initial, historical audience, Öztürk is applying a strict perimeter around the Qur'an's appeal. Hence, even if it speaks with generic pronouns (like "you" and "believers"), contemporary readers may not relate the address indiscriminately to themselves. Rather, for the modern reader, a proper meaning of the Qur'an is, according to Öztürk's framework, only gained through an interpretative detour, that is (1) by relinquishing the claim that one is directly addressed by the Qur'an; (2) by abstracting the universal, transhistorical message of the Qur'an from its historical, contingent application; and (3) by performing a new mediation between the present and the universal message of the Qur'an.

This commitment to recognizing the dialectics between the historical and transhistorical aspects of the Qur'an, reaffirms the innate kinship between the ideas of Öztürk and Fazlur Rahman. In some instances, Öztürk is rehashing and paraphrasing Rahman in Turkish. For example, Rahman argued:

> We see, then, that the Qur'an and the genesis of the Islamic community occurred in the light of history and against a social-historical background. The Qur'an is a response to that situation, and for the most part it consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems confronted in concrete historical situations.[126]

Whereas Öztürk stated that "the transhistorical messages of the Qur'an have been presented in forms that express the situation at hand."[127]

If similar ideas can be found in the works of Rahman or among members of the Ankara School, one might wonder what is truly novel about Öztürk's thinking. Körner framed his contribution in terms of radicality, namely that Öztürk's work is similar to that of Turkish Qur'anic historicist Ömer Özsoy, but more radical.[128] Unfortunately, he does not explain in what way Öztürk is more radical than Özsoy. I can only suspect that Körner is referring to Öztürk's more incisive statements, for example that some verses in the Qur'an do not contain a higher ethical message but were only intended to give appropriate answers to the Prophet's detractors. In other words, Öztürk is almost suggesting that some verses were just "stopgap verses," which inevitably raises a few theological

126 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 5.

127 Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 21.

128 "Öztürk radikalisiert Özsoys Positionen" (Öztürk radicalizes the positions of Özsoy). Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei," 13.

controversies.[129] I have yet to discover such incisive statements in the works of Özsoy or other Ankara School theologians for that matter.

Besides its incisive nature, I argue that Öztürk's contribution to the historicist paradigm also lies in the range and creativity of his arguments. There is a great deal of overlap in the ideas of Öztürk and Rahman, as both authors argue for a hermeneutical method in which the universal values of the Qur'an are distilled and mediated anew with the present. However, while Rahman and Öztürk might share a similar hermeneutical outlook, they do not necessarily use the same references to the Qur'an, the Prophet, or the overall Islamic tradition merely to support this outlook. Accordingly, what makes Öztürk's plea for an historico-critical interpretation of the Qur'an unique, is his particular creative reading and deconstruction of the Islamic tradition.

Öztürk's deconstruction of tradition, and resistance to seeing it as untouchable and sacrosanct, imbues his work with a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' best illustrated by his earlier-discussed evaluation of intra-Muslim interpretative differences. As it should by now be clear, all three writers of this study address the status of personal faith in understanding. Cündioğlu sees faith in interpretation as a dead end, while both Alpyağıl and Öztürk affirm its constructive value for understanding. While Cündioğlu sees divergent interpretations among Muslim sects as evidence of why faith has little to do with guiding understanding, Öztürk, however, argued for its necessity, together with other subjective experiences like conscientiousness. It seems that both authors are basing their arguments on another hidden premise, which in Cündioğlu's case must be the conviction that all theological sects, despite their differences, have authentic faith involved in their interpretation. Öztürk, we must inversely conclude, seems to believe that authentic faith was not involved. He implies that, had there been genuine faith and submission to God, certain differences of understanding would not have occurred in the first place. Each exegetical faction would have come to the same base conclusion guided by its 'internal exegetical compass' (genuine scruples).

This hermeneutics of suspicion creates both openness and a fundamental interpretative humility in Öztürk's thinking. Truth, as we saw earlier, can only be aspired to and never be claimed by one interpretative party alone. Öztürk not only advocated this openness on a theoretical level, but also practised it in his recently published *tafsīr*. In this work, he stated that he would not seek to mediate the secondary, present meaning of the Qur'an solely with reference to the Islamic tradition. On the contrary, he would also venture out and

129 For example, does it befit God to put disposable information in His last will to humankind?

garner insights from other traditions of faith and thinking. As he recounted, "in interpretations concerning words and concepts such as faith, the problem of evil, and Satan, the views of Western thinkers have also been given a place. Accordingly, the utilization of humankind's general accumulation [of wisdom] has been considered as beneficial, rather than harmful."[130] For, as Öztürk further argues, while humans might partake in different religions and civilizations, their fundamental interests (*meraklar*) and big questions (*büyük sorular*) remain a shared constant (*benzer mahiyettedir*).[131]

130 Öztürk, *Ilahi Hitabın Tefsiri—1*, 1:65.
131 Öztürk, 1:65.

CHAPTER 6

Truth, Subjectivity, and Method

1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, a case was made to find a definition better suited to the study of contemporary Turkish discourses on hermeneutics. Accordingly, an appeal was launched to come up with a new definition and, in retrospect, the one proposed can be rephrased as Di Cesare eloquently put it, as "hermeneutics strives for nothing other than to *understand understanding*."[1] Or, in more technical terms, it is a type of contemplation on the operations and conditions through which the meanings of things become intelligible. In this sense, hermeneutics is not something that belongs to a specific culture or history, as is often imagined, for the question of how understanding works is as old as the human capacity to cognize. However, without addressing its material character, there is still no way of studying it. Yet, contrary to popular conceptions, a case was made that it could be most productively studied at its lowest threshold, namely the statement, rather than through the application of interpretative rules, methods, or a (theoretical) system.

Qur'anic hermeneutics, by extension, is related to this general sense of hermeneutics but only derivatively and more restrictively. The term, as I have come to define it, is in one respect a proper noun, since it has its own share of independence and is unique in nature, but the term 'Qur'an' in Qur'anic hermeneutics simultaneously functions as a typical qualifier that further characterizes the earlier mentioned understanding of the term. As such, Qur'anic hermeneutics pertains to statements that proceed from reflections on the conditions and operations pertaining to how *the particular meanings of the Qur'an* become intelligible. Qur'anic hermeneutics is on account of this general definition not by default, as some might claim, a mere translation of a traditional concept or literary tradition within the Islamic sciences (for example, *tafsīr*).

The difference between statements belonging to hermeneutics or Qur'anic hermeneutics, can be further clarified with these examples. An author might ask how humans understand at all, and state that all understanding is linguistic. Consequently, while the circumstances and variables in which understanding

1 Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, translated by Niall Keane (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 37–38.

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might be practised differ, as in daily conversation or when reading an inspiring text (the Qur'an included), one could argue that there is still no denying that in each of these instances understanding is mediated through and actualized within language. These sorts of hermeneutical statements advance our knowledge more broadly and, generally, with respect to the problem of understanding. Thus, we can define these kinds of statements as general hermeneutics. However, when authors discuss what is theoretically involved in specifically understanding the Qur'an, they are usually only advancing our knowledge of understanding the Qur'an, and less so our understanding of other media. These statements, however, should be regarded as a type of regional hermeneutics.[2] For example, any theory that deals with the question of how to understand the enigmatic letters that precede certain chapters of the Qur'an, namely 'the disjointed letters' (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*), is inevitably only solving a problem of understanding that is mainly relevant to the Qur'an and cannot be directly transposed onto a theory related to understanding other media and objects.

The Turkish authors discussed in the previous chapters followed general and regional hermeneutics in their works. In other words, they produced two types of hermeneutical statements—general and specific to the Qur'an—with the discourse much like a duet between two statements in which the one informed the other. For example, Alpyağıl issued a variety of statements on the theoretical impossibility of private language use, which applied to any kind of linguistic understanding, so were not specific to understanding the Qur'an. However, Alpyağıl in turn used these statements to make another claim that did affect our understanding of the Qur'an. This was that we cannot transpose anachronistic scientific jargon on the Qur'an, since that would resemble private language use.

Likewise, Öztürk argued that the intention behind a statement is not fully commensurate with its form, with the general hermeneutical implication of this being that we can understand more behind a statement than its mere linguistic form. For example, if I said to a child, "do not kick your brother," one could not imply that just because I did not explicitly mention other forms of violence, such as punching, that I was condoning those. On the contrary, my intention was to stop the violence of the moment and, by extension, all kinds of violence. Similarly, with respect to the Qur'an, Öztürk argued that we must distinguish between the higher intent of God behind the verses and their his-

2 This is because the scope of the hermeneutical problem is regional, that is restricted to a specific object such as the Qur'an.

torical application. The apparent meaning of a verse is not commensurate with the higher intent.

Finally, Cündioğlu enquired into how meanings were conveyed and what the conditions for conveying them were. He claimed that in communication one cannot at the same time intend everything, without failing to intend anything at all. Thus, the conveyance of meaning assumes a prior restricted intention, and therefore, the need to acknowledge that there is always a particular intention behind an utterance. In other words, an objectively discernible intention governs the meaning of utterances. Since the Qur'an conveys meanings through utterances, it also contains objectively discernible meanings that are uncovered by retrieving the authorial intent.

The general and regional hermeneutical statements of contemporary Turkish thinkers on subjectivity versus objectivity in interpreting the Qur'an were analysed, with those of each author being introduced, contextualized, and studied in their own right. However, a more substantial, more thematic cross-examination is still needed to achieve a better understanding of what the central themes and problems are in contemporary theories of Qur'anic hermeneutics in the Turkish context. Consequently, in this chapter I shall undertake the task of comparatively and thematically analysing the statements of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk on the status of subjectivity and objectivity in the context of interpreting the Qur'an.

I shall start this cross-examination with the following question: what are the similarities and differences between the theories of Alpyağıl, Öztürk, and Cündioğlu in respect to their views on the various subjective and objective conditions required to access the truth of the Qur'an? The answer will serve as the basis of the next chapter, in which the implications of these conditions will be brought to their logical end, namely understanding the statuses of new and different readings of the Qur'an.

The following example will further illustrate the teleological relationship between the discussions in this chapter and the next. For the sake of brevity, for now I shall only use Cündioğlu's work to demonstrate my point. Hence, we must recall that he argued that the truth, and hence, the meaning of the Qur'an, is God's original, solitary intention—solitary because of the theoretical impossibility of God simultaneously intending to convey different meanings. The objective means of accessing this truth, however, is to reconstruct God's authorial intent within the historical and linguistic horizon of the Qur'an's initial revelation. That God only intended one meaning implies that new and different readings of the Qur'an are, by default, qualified with reference to how adequately they disclose this meaning vis-à-vis the already existent exegetical tradition. Moreover, any present or future exegetes who come up with a new

understanding of the Qur'an must rule out past readings and make a rational case for why their own should correspond to God's intent. In other words, new readings can only be meaningful if the old ones are wrong: they cannot, since concurrency of meaning is excluded, be additional or deeper truths disclosed by God.

Nevertheless, to explore the main question of this chapter further, and to demonstrate the philosophical stakes involved, I will rely on various insights gathered from Foucault's historiographical discussion on subjectivity and truth. There are a few reasons for this choice. The most important of these is to establish the context and technical terminology that will help us to organize and navigate better the divergent ideas discussed in previous chapters. In other words, it is not to present a dedicated study of Foucault but a heuristic frame that provides a deeper philosophical context and reflection on what is at stake in the ideas of the Turkish thinkers. Moreover, it will also demonstrate the philosophical breath of the discussions of the Turkish thinkers as they are clearly intersecting with discussions held in contemporary philosophy.

In the following sections I first delineate some key insights from Foucault, followed by their pertinence to the Turkish thinkers' discussions. Guided by these insights, I shall then devote two sections to comparative examinations of the thinkers' opinions—the first on the subjective and the second on the objective conditions required to access the truth of the Qur'an.

2 Truth and Spirituality

In the latter part of his career, Foucault gave a lecture on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the main goal of which was to answer the following question: "in what historical form do the relations between the 'subject' and 'truth', elements that do not usually fall within the historian's practice or analysis, take shape in the West?"[3] Foucault approached this question by exploring the historical significance of the classical Greek notion of *epimeleia heautou*, which he translated variously as care of oneself, attending to oneself, and being concerned about oneself. While current in Greek thought, according to Foucault the notion of *epimeleia heautou* had received little attention in the historiography of philosophy.[4] This was mainly because the history of philosophy, or more broadly the history of Western thought, had argued that "the founding expression of

3 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 2.

4 Foucault, 2.

the question of the relations between the subject and truth" is in fact the famous Delphic prescription, *gnōthi seauton* (know yourself).[5] In other words, not care of oneself but knowledge of oneself is what gives us access to truth. Hence, what is ultimately at stake between these two precepts in Foucault's forthcoming discussion are two different paradigms with which we can establish the relationship between the subject and truth. The first, related to the notion of *epimeleia heautou*, and epitomized by the discipline of spirituality, emphasizes that truth is accessed by exercising certain actions on the self that change, purify, transform, and transfigure oneself.[6] The second, related to the *gnōthi seauton*, and epitomized by philosophy, argues that truth is accessed by the subject by virtue of knowledge (*connaisance*) alone.[7] Both these paradigms, which decide how truth is guaranteed, will eventually also surface in the ideas of the Turkish thinkers. However, I shall save that aspect of their thought for a later section.

As irrelevant as it might be to present historiographies of philosophy, from the fifth century BC to the fifth century AD, *epimeleia heautou* was an important precept of classical thinking. Its history, as Foucault recounts, extended from "Socrates stopping young people to tell them to take care of themselves up to Christian ascetism making the ascetic life begin the care of oneself."[8] It was a notion that described not only one of the fundamental philosophical attitudes of ancient Greek culture but also that of the subsequent Hellenistic and Roman cultures.[9]

During this period of history, the question of "how to access the truth" and the practice of spirituality (namely realizing what transformations were necessary at the very heart of the subject to allow access to the truth), were never separate.[10] Rather, the *epimeleia heautou* specified precisely what "set of conditions of spirituality, the set of transformations of the self, … [were] necessary conditions for having access to the truth."[11] For example, in classical Greek thinking, there are instances in which truth is accessed only by performing purification rites. As Foucault recounted, one cannot hear what the oracle had to say without first performing a sacrifice that purified the self.[12] Similarly, the Pythagoreans believed that contact with the divine world, and consequently

5 Foucault, 3.
6 Foucault, 11.
7 Foucault, 15.
8 Foucault, 10.
9 Foucault, 8.
10 Foucault, 16–17.
11 Foucault, 17.
12 Foucault, 47.

the "world of truth," could be procured through dreams.[13] However, the condition for this procurement was the purification of the soul by applying certain techniques such as listening to music, inhaling perfumes, and examining one's conscience.[14]

A more elaborate example of the close relationship between self-knowledge and self-care, and for that matter between spirituality and truth, can be discovered in a dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades.[15] As Foucault explained it, Alcibiades occupied a privileged position in Athens in that he was wealthy, powerful, and attractive. However, he was still dissatisfied and set his aims higher; he wanted to transform his privilege and pre-eminence into political action, and hence into effective governance over others.[16] As expected, Socrates questioned Alcibiades's ambition on a variety of fronts. Having established that a city is well governed when harmony reigns among its citizens, Socrates asked Alcibiades what constituted that harmony.[17] Having no ready answer, Alcibiades crumbled and accepted that he had "lived for a long time in a state of shameful ignorance without being aware of it."[18] Socrates's cross-examination led Alcibiades to conclude that "he does not know the object of good government, and that is why he must pay attention to himself."[19] He must first remedy not only his ignorance of the subject but also his lack of awareness of his own ignorance. He must thus take care of himself before governing others. Yet, and this is where the spiritual nature of Socrates's advice becomes evident, to take care of oneself, one must know oneself; to know oneself one looks not directly at oneself but at oneself in an element that is most like oneself and, for Socrates, that is the divine element at the source of all thought and knowledge.[20] Consequently, by opening oneself to the knowledge of the divine, the soul will be endowed with *sōphrosunē* (wisdom) and taught to distinguish good from evil and truth from falsehood. Moreover, as a result of becoming wiser, "the soul

13 Foucault, 48.

14 Foucault, 48.

15 The source of this dialogue is Plato's *Alcibiades*.

16 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 33.

17 Foucault, 35.

18 Foucault, 36.

19 Foucault, 38.

20 We can also interpret this statement by Socrates as God-given: "it is God, then, that we must look at: for whoever wishes to judge the quality of the soul, he is the best mirror of human things themselves, we can best see and know ourselves in him." However, Foucault does not want to overemphasize this explicit relationship with God, since there is still ambiguity over whether Socrates really said this or whether the statement was later added by the Platonist-Christian tradition. Foucault, 70.

will be able to conduct itself properly, and being able to conduct itself properly it will [finally] be able to govern the city."[21]

After Antiquity, however, reverence and the close relationship between caring for and knowing oneself slowly disintegrated to the point of becoming irrelevant as a condition for accessing the truth. In Foucault's words, "now, leaping over several centuries, we can say that we enter the modern age (I mean, the history of truth enters its modern period) when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone."[22] Thus, the question of what conditions one must impose on their being as a subject to gain access to the truth becomes inconsequential. As a result, anyone who satisfies a set of formal, methodological conditions is able to reach the truth without undergoing any fundamental transformation.[23]

For Foucault, the "Cartesian moment" was an important cause behind this historical change. By discounting 'care of the self' and re-emphasizing 'knowledge of the self', René Descartes (d.1650) separated the philosophy of knowledge from the spirituality of the transformation of the subject's being.[24] To recall this moment, Descartes, as documented in his *Meditations*, critically reconsidered his previously held opinions: "and thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences."[25] By employing methodical doubt, Descartes started to tear down everything he previously held to be true. However, in the process, he discovered the self-evident fact that he—as a subject—was indeed cognizant, and hence, existing (*cogito ergo sum*). Having found this Archimedean point, Descartes proceeded to rebuild his knowledge of God, mathematics, and the physical world.[26] However, as Foucault argued, the outcome of the Cartesian moment also heralded a new twist to the previously discussed precept of knowing thyself by disconnecting its knowledge from its classical requirement of taking

21 Foucault, 71.

22 Foucault, 17.

23 Kerem Eksen, "Truth in Practice: Foucault's Procedural Approach to Spirituality," in Heather Salazar and Roderick Nicholls (eds) *The Philosophy of Spirituality: Analytic, Continental and Multicultural Approaches to a New Field of Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 280.

24 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, xxiv.

25 Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress, 4th edn (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 59.

26 Brad Elliott Stone, "Subjectivity and Truth," in Diana Taylor (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2011), 145.

care of oneself. For, what secured indubitable knowledge was no longer thought to be the spiritual transformation of the subject but the self-evident nature of existing and being cognizant.

The divorce of epistemology from spirituality does not necessarily mean that there are no longer conditions for accessing truth. On the contrary, a new set of conditions exist that "only concern the individual in his concrete existence, and not the structure of the subject as such."[27] Nonspiritual epistemologies can stipulate internal and external conditions that need to be fulfilled to access the truth.[28] For example, they can stipulate that an internal condition for procuring the truth is to apply a formal rule or method. Moreover, with regard to an external condition, they can stipulate certain cultural conditions such as having an education, or the need to operate within a certain scientific consensus.[29] Nevertheless, in each of these instances the conditions stipulated are either intrinsic or extrinsic to the act of knowledge. In other words, in contrast to requirements such as purification rites or religious conversion, neither of these conditions concerns the subject "in his being."[30]

Epistemologies that concern only the concrete existence of the individual and not the structure of the subject as such, have two markedly different significances. Spiritual epistemologies have a "rebound effect" according to Foucault. Truth procured through such epistemologies will "complete in the subject" and serve as a crowning for the work or sacrifice paid to receive this truth.[31] Nonspiritual epistemologies, however, only result in the indefinite development of knowledge.[32] They do not rebound on the subject by transforming, that is by enlightening or fulfilling, the subject. On the contrary, nonspiritual epistemologies ensure that "knowledge will simply open out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which is unknown and the advantage of which will only ever be realized in the course of history by the institutional accumulation of bodies of knowledge."[33]

Having researched the Turkish thinkers in the previous chapters, I have reached the conclusion that the Foucauldian question of what conditions I must impose on my being as a subject to gain access to the truth has also been an important concern in the works of the Turkish thinkers. The latter

27 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 18.
28 Foucault, 18.
29 Foucault, 18.
30 Foucault, 18.
31 Foucault, 18–19.
32 Foucault, 18.
33 Foucault, 19.

have addressed and answered the question by delineating conditions that concern only "the individual in his concrete existence" and "the structure of the subject as such." In other words, as I shall soon discuss further, their reverence for method has led them to stipulate conditions that only pertain to the act of knowledge itself, while they have simultaneously also debated, and some even specified, conditions that, to understand the Qur'an, require an alteration on behalf of the subject. With respect to the latter, on the one hand there is Cündioğlu's emphasis on the self-sufficiency of objective knowledge to ascertain the meanings of the Qur'an, while on the other there is Öztürk and Alpyağıl's additional emphasis on the subject's transformation through self-knowledge as a condition for the reception or pursuit of the meanings of the Qur'an. As such, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics can be seen to exhibit the interplay of both the Cartesian divorce of spirituality from a philosophy of knowledge, as well as the Socratic harmony and interplay of both.

With these findings, I have also discovered unanimity and divergence among the authors on both the subjective and objective criteria for reaching the meanings of the Qur'an. With respect to the objective conditions, Alpyağıl, Öztürk and Cündioğlu require that interpreters revere the diachrony of the Arabic language and this, they unanimously agree, is grounded in the objective structures of language itself, such as the formal rules of language and its embeddedness in an historical horizon of meanings. However, there is less unanimity among the authors over the subjective conditions, and this has resulted in both subtle and major divergences. For example, Cündioğlu did not regard faith (*itikad*) as a prerequisite for understanding the Qur'an, while Alpyağıl saw it as essential. The exact similarities and differences, and on which arguments they are grounded, are analysed in the next sections.

3 Subjectivity and Truth

The least spiritual hermeneutics and the one closest to the Cartesian paradigm, is that of Cündioğlu. Knowledge alone, as epitomized by proper method, is enough to warrant access to truth (the meanings of the Qur'an as intended by God). Accordingly, for Cündioğlu, a spiritual transformation in the form of a personal conviction is irrelevant. The ultimate arbiter in matters of interpretation is adhering to formal rules and consolidating solid hermeneutical presuppositions (*tasavvurat*), not whether or not someone has converted to Islam.

Cündioğlu supports this hermeneutical principle with various interpretations of the history of *tafsīr*. As he argues, while we can discover the divergence

of interpretations motivated by factional presuppositions in the tradition of *tafsīr*, we simultaneously witness that members of the same school support different interpretations. One pertinent example of the latter involves the problem of magic, that is whether there is any reality (*gerçeklik*) to it. According to Cündioğlu, general Sunni thought exhibits a more accepting attitude to magic and its presence in the Qur'an. However, the Mu'tazilīs outright reject its existence. What is of note, in this regard, is that Abū Ḥanīfa—the eponymous founder of one of the great schools of Sunni thinking—sides with the Mu'tazilīs on the matter rather than with the dominantly held position by his own school and the other major Sunni schools of theology. This demonstrates to Cündioğlu that elements beyond the mere fact of having accepted the faith of Islam (*mucerred iman kabullenişi*) govern understanding,[34] one being the theoretical presuppositions held by the interpreter. As such, he concludes, methodology (*metodoloji*) and not one's creed (*itikad*) decide the ultimate fate of interpretations.[35]

This hermeneutical principle shares thematic similarities with the structures of understanding discussed in the works of Heidegger and Gadamer. As explored in Chapter 2 in relation to Heidegger, the argument here is that our understanding of something is preceded by an interplay of an advanced grasp of potential meanings (fore-having), our expectation of how these meanings are likely to appear (fore-sight), and the preconceptions at our disposal (fore-concept). For example, "I can see something as an implement, but not as a violin if I lack the concept of a violin."[36] Like Heidegger and Gadamer, Cündioğlu makes the point that the preconceptions with which we enter the hermeneutical circle will inevitably define the meaning one derives from something. Moreover, Cündioğlu's works embody a similar Heideggerian point "that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."[37] Yet, despite the similarities, in contrast to Heidegger and Gadamer who develop their arguments from the mode of human being (*Dasein*), Cündioğlu explores the theme of the preconceptions of understanding through the familiar vocabulary of Arabic logic and dialectics.

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34 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 19.

35 Cündioğlu, 19.

36 Michael Inwood (ed.) *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 107.

37 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 195.

In classical Arabic logic, rational judgements (*taṣdīqāt*) are preceded by conceptions (*taṣawwurāt*). Whether one can assert that a human is a rational animal inevitably depends on what is understood by "human," "rational," or "animal." Thus, there is an intimate relationship between conceptions and judgements because conceptions direct judgements. However, judgements can inversely be tested on the grounds of whether the conceptions on which they are based are sound. As Cündioğlu puts it, "when our conceptions are inaccurate, our propositions that exhibit judgements will inevitably also be inaccurate."[38] Since interpretations also express judgements about a state of affairs, namely the Qur'an's intended meaning, they are likewise preceded by their own share of theoretical preconceptions that can be tested in accordance with the soundness of the presuppositions underlying their claims.

In this sense, the dichotomy between *taṣawwurāt* and *taṣdīqāt* expresses the contrast between hermeneutics and exegesis in that our judgements are preceded, grounded, and directed by our conceptions. Likewise, our exegesis of the Qur'an is comprised of our judgements about its meanings, whereas hermeneutics is comprised of the preconceptions that precede and direct our assertions. For Cündioğlu, there was a practical reason for this deliberate bifurcation, namely to establish a more pragmatic foothold for dealing with rampant misunderstandings of the Qur'an. Rather than criticizing each individual interpretation, Cündioğlu wanted to address the issue of existing interpretations on a thematic level, namely in relation to their weak subjectivist, theoretical foundations. Accordingly, he deliberately directed his critique from the exegetical to the hermeneutical sphere by primarily focusing on foundational questions preceding any interpretation rather than on the particularities of different interpretations.[39]

Only properly scrutinized conceptions can form the basis of solid, accepted suppositions (*musalammāt*) supporting interpretations. In other words, only interpretations based on conceptions that have weathered the critical test and been publicly accepted can truly be sustainable and convincing. Those based on unquestioned or private falsities will, according to Cündioğlu, come under scrutiny from future critics, which will inevitably result in the collapse of the house of exegetical cards. Moreover, interpretations without clear, distinct, logically-proven principles will be unconvincing (*ilzam edici olmaz*) and unconvincing. Cündioğlu argues that subjectivist interpretations without solid theoretical grounds become withdrawn, timid, and lose their critical sheen

38 Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an*, 13.

39 Cündioğlu, xi.

because one cannot be confident that their claims signify the ultimate truth of things. Nevertheless, Islam, as Cündioğlu countered, entered the public sphere by challenging and criticizing the general praxis and convictions held by the sixth- and seventh-century inhabitants of the Arab Peninsula. Moreover, not only did the Qur'an appeal to its audience with its own critique, but it also recorded and debated the counterpoints made by its detractors within its own text. Consequently, an approach that Cündioğlu would regard as truer to the Qur'an would be one that made solid, intersubjective claims that could stand up in a critical, public debate.

To return to our Foucauldian framework, by prioritizing method (*metodoloji*) over faith (*itikad*), Cündioğlu is creating a hermeneutical theory that provides access to truth on the grounds of knowledge alone, thus enabling anyone with the right theoretical suppositions to access the meanings of the Qur'an. The spiritual status of a person is irrelevant.[40] This conclusion is further supported by Cündioğlu's work containing no references to classical spiritual practices, or concepts in Islam, that might suggest that understanding the Qur'an requires a spiritual dimension. In other words, his work is devoid of any explicit mention of purification rituals, love, piety (*taqwā*), or the effects of sin on the experience of truth. For example, a recurrent Islamic trope concerns the "hardening of hearts" through excessive sinning, causing the ones whose hearts have hardened to have a different experience of truth from those whose hearts are soft. As the Qur'an puts it, "is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he has received Enlightenment from Allah, (no better than one hard-hearted)? Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of Allah! They are manifestly wandering (in error)!"[41] Despite their relevance or importance, Cündioğlu's works completely omit these kinds of verses and concepts.

Unlike Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl considers the subject's transformation and self-knowledge as essential to accessing the Qur'an. While Alpyağıl accepts the productive role of method, he disagrees that it is more important in the process of understanding than, for example, lived faith. On the contrary, he explicitly argues that Muslims are privileged in that, as subjects who properly recognize and practice Islam, they are especially well positioned to understand the Qur'an.

To establish an epistemology that prioritized spirituality over method, Alpyağıl explored a variety of hermeneutical questions from two different ap-

40 For example, being 'pure' or 'impure', a believer or a non-believer.

41 Qur'an 39:22.

proaches. From the first, he reflected on the problem of method by asking three questions. How does the object affect understanding without any deliberate action by the subject? Does the ontological status of both the subject and object characterize the process of understanding? And to what extent does the subject's behaviour direct understanding? He answered these questions from a predominantly Heideggerian perspective. With respect to the second approach, Alpyağıl asked why different parties experienced the same phenomena differently and whether interpretation played any role in that fact, which were questions he answered from a mainly Wittgensteinian perspective. Nevertheless, despite the different questions and approaches, one topic remained constant in Alpyağıl's thinking and that was the need to reflect on the aesthetic and ontological elements of understanding. This central concern stood in stark contrast to Cündioğlu's focus on which interpretative instruments facilitated understanding, or on justifying the objective status of interpretations.

Inspired by Heidegger's ontology, Alpyağıl was able to conclude that understanding needs praxis to bring about the right context for a certain meaning to appear. Heidegger argued that a hammer only disclosed its meaning through its relevance to the carpenter, as expressed by the act of hammering. When we remove the hammer from the practice of hammering, it is no longer able to disclose to us its significance as a hammer. In such an instance, the object in our hands might only be considered a piece of wood with a piece of steel attached at its tail end. As such, one may only come to know the real significance of the Qur'anic injunctions of fasting, charity, and so forth, by actually engaging in fasting and charity as a believer. As Alpyağıl argues, a subject uninvolved in these tenets of Islam will not fully understand these practices as they are expressed by the Qur'an.

Alpyağıl contends that not all engagements with meaningful objects are realized through a deliberate procedure. On the contrary, in certain areas, as in art and the Qur'an, the subject becomes a passive receptor of the meaning directed by the object. In other words, some meanings are received beyond the control of the subject. Nevertheless, for Alpyağıl, how well the subject adheres to a set of personal requirements still ultimately defines the level at which the meaning is obtained.

Alpyağıl lists four important subjective requirements—adherence to a proper politics of recognition (*tanıma siyaseti*), awareness of personal finitude (*fanilik bilinci*), maintaining goodwill (*iyi istenç*), and practising common sense (*sağ duyu*). Two of these requirements are more strongly related to spirituality and truth than the others, namely the knowledge of personal finitude, and adherence to a proper politics of recognition. Alpyağıl stated that "the knowledge of finitude, is the awareness of humankinds's limitations: that there

cannot be an absolute subject (*mutlak özne*) and that they [humans] cannot encompass (*kuşatmayacağını*) all knowledge."[42] Hence, by acknowledging finitude, the subject has no other option in Alpyağıl's framework but to relinquish the belief in self-sufficiency and become open to receiving the truth from the outside (for example, from other people and art, as well as from the Qur'an). Truth is thus only received through attending to oneself and learning to become aware of one's finitude. Similarly, the truth of things only becomes disclosed when they are approached with the right politics of recognition. Alpyağıl uses the example of a state that has declared independence. Such a state can only signify the meaning of its independent statehood if other nation-states actually recognize it as a state. Likewise, in the case of the Qur'an, the Qur'an can transfer its truth as God's revelation only if it is recognized beforehand as God's final revelation. However, as Alpyağıl argued, this recognition is only possible when the subject has prepared himself by way of faith.

Only those with faith can experience the truth of things in an exclusive manner. This theme, which Alpyağıl recognized in his first work, was further continued and explored in his second work in relation to Wittgenstein's concept of seeing-as, which Alpyağıl saw as a variety of phenomenological and hermeneutical facts. The first of these was that, if something altered in the subject, that same subject could perceive the same object in different ways. For example, one could observe an initially unfamiliar face and afterwards realize that it is actually a person one recognized from the past. In such a case, the face observed is the same face, yet comprehended in two different ways by virtue of an aspect that dawned on the subject. Accordingly, even a previously staunch nihilist, who saw the world devoid of higher meaning, could—after a religious experience—come to see the hand of God in all creation. Second, there is an immediacy to perception that precedes deliberation. A rabbit might hop by, resulting in a bystander exclaiming "rabbit!" without any planned deliberation preceding such a proclamation. Likewise, a believer would be able exclaim "God!" or "miracle!" when reading scripture, without having to resort to interpretation.

In Alpyağıl's thinking, understanding in terms of seeing-as, is distinct from and more immediate than interpretation—a distinction that is further characterized by another set of peculiar differences between understanding and interpretation. First, understanding is an experience, whereas an interpretation is something one does. Second, while interpretations can be invalidated, someone's experience of something simply cannot. Finally, Alpyağıl deems

42 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 71.

interpretations to be coercive because they argue for a reality behind the appearances. The experience of seeing-as, on the other hand, is not dependent on evidence or inference. Rather, one sees something as something automatically (*kendiliğinden*) without any required effort.

Since experience precedes deliberation in terms of priority, it stands to reason that, from Alpyağıl's viewpoint, contrary to that of Cündioğlu, logical arguments have no fundamental or imperative sway over the subject. Religious proofs (*kanıtlar*) only have significance for subjects who are culturally conditioned to affirm the reality projected by the proofs in question. Someone without the requisite experience will be unable to see the truth of the matter as argued. In this regard, Alpyağıl cites a highly relevant verse from the Qur'an, which explains that if Muhammad had received a divine book that his detractors could touch, they would immediately claim that "this is nothing but obvious magic!"[43] In other words, rather than seeing such an event as a divine miracle, Meccan polytheists would provide an alternate response, which is that they are being hexed.

Like Alpyağıl, Öztürk qualifies the quest for truth with conditions pertaining to the structure of the subject. In his earlier work, Öztürk established this requirement in relation to the concept of the *muvafakât-ı Ömer*, namely the historical fact that Umar, a companion of Muhammad, was able to offer an opinion on a matter that was subsequently vindicated through revelation. For Öztürk, an historical occurrence of this sort is proof that humans can project their will in ways that are congruent with the Divine Will of God. Consequently, two implications can be drawn from Umar's interpretative conduct. First, in the absence of relevant verses, it is possible to address new issues in accordance with God's will. Second, true understanding is to recognize the purpose (*maksat*) beyond the expression (*lafız*). Thus, even if there are verses that have an apparent and direct solution to a matter, it is still possible to argue over and above the literal position of the text by referencing the fundamental purpose behind the letter of the law rather than the letter itself. However, before someone is able to practise such interpretations, Öztürk requires that the person in question must be rational, scrupulous (*vicdan sahibi*), genuinely faithful, and in full submission (*teslimiyet*) to God. To put it in a Foucauldian sense, 'one must first attend to oneself.'

While Öztürk stipulated that interpreters needed to meet spiritual requirements, he failed to elaborate on them or to provide any philosophical arguments to support them. We are only told that a believer must be scrupulous

43 Qur'an 6:7.

and faithful but not explicitly why. Nevertheless, one can logically surmise through the notion of correspondence that an unscrupulous interpreter motivated by injustice could not possibly project a vision on the world that accorded with that of a just God. Hence, only subjects who are wholly just can ultimately interpret the world in ways that correspond with the will of a just God.

In a later work, Öztürk revisited the problem of subjective requirements explicitly in relation to the status of method. He maintains that mere difference in method cannot explain the history of sectarian strife in Islam, and that it must be related to a deeper-rooted problem of amorality in the field of interpretation. In other words, interpretative differences, and thus obstacles to the truth of the Qur'an, have less to do with differences in method than with the interpreter's inability to show sufficient consideration (*izan*), fairness (*insaf*), and character (*ahlak*) towards other interpreters. Öztürk is keenly aware that both classical and modern understandings of the Qur'an are more often than not driven by ideological motives rather than a sincere desire for the truth. In relation to the tradition of *kalām*, Öztürk observes that authors go to great lengths to read their sectarian presuppositions into the Qur'an. While some clever argumentative backtracking can make such a reading appear wholly methodical, that does not mean that it is sincere. Similarly, modern interpreters in Turkey often resort to simple ideological rhetoric when arguing in favour of a transhistorical reading of the Qur'an. However, by psychologizing such interpretations, Öztürk demonstrated that they are often insincere and incoherent. As such, it is no surprise that his overall view privileges personal requirements over method and argues that interpreters should always read the Qur'an in a way that allows them to look themselves in the eye.

In Öztürk's thinking, genuine application of method, despite not being as fundamental as conscientiousness, does have a significant and limited role. To safeguard the space between distorting (*taḥrīf*) and genuinely interpreting the text (*ta'wīl*), it is necessary to adhere to principles that can be inspected and tested. However, according to Öztürk, applying scientific principles alone do not ensure absolute knowledge. At best, one can claim that the interpretations are fitting, but not that they are incontestable truths. Truth is something to which one can only aspire; it is not something that one can claim to have reached with absolute certainty and exclusive ownership. Every interpretation embodies a degree of speculation and, therefore, potential flaws can be questioned and revised.

4 Objectivity and Language

In the previous section, I compared the various subjective requirements needed to reach the truth within the Qur'an. Accordingly, I demonstrated a strong divergence between Cündioğlu's views and those of Alpyağıl and Öztürk, with the former stipulating no subjective requirements at all, as opposed to the other two who did. However, that the latter two imposed such requirements on interpreters, did not preclude them from also stipulating objective ones. As we saw earlier, they never intended to set the subjective requirements against the objective ones with a view to abandoning one in favour of the other. On the contrary, they merely argued that subjective requirements were also necessary and in some cases more important than the objective ones. Therefore, while two of the Turkish authors embraced subjectivity, their acceptance of it never went so far as to suggest that the meaning of the Qur'an was wholly dependent on the subject's relative understanding. This contrasts with what we might expect from some esoteric and sophist traditions. A human is by no means the ultimate measure of all things, as Protagoras once claimed. As all three authors unanimously agree, an interpreter must also know and revere the objective structures of language, such as its rule-based nature and its embeddedness in history (diachrony).

Unlike the previous section, in this part on hermeneutical prerequisites I focus on conditions that do not pertain to the structure of the subject. On the contrary, I focus on those that are realized by fulfilling the internal and external requirements of knowledge. For example, all three authors required the interpreter to know Arabic as spoken at the time of the revelation. However, this condition requires no alteration of the subject itself. To put it in terms with which we became familiar in the previous section, knowledge of the Arabic language is independent of religious conversion and moral conscientiousness.

While not always as direct and explicitly argued, I can confidently claim that, for the Turkish thinkers, objectivity in interpretation is important because of the classical Islamic belief that the Qur'an is God's spoken word. This is demonstrated through a variety of recurrent concepts in the works of the Turkish thinkers, such as the Qur'an being God's *kelam* (speech) exhibiting the *murad-i ilahi* (the divine intent). All three authors advocated that the Qur'an should "speak for itself," that is as God intended, and not express what the subject wishes the text to mean. For example, Cündioğlu observed that contemporary interpreters were reading *into* rather than *from* the Qur'an. One of the priorities of his first work was to invert this relationship through the emphasis on objectively interpreting the Qur'an, thus allowing it to speak for itself rather than

expressing (*konuşturmak*) the interpreter's interests. The Qur'an had to become *müfessir* (self-explaining) again rather than *müfesser* (explained from the outside). Alpyağıl, on the other hand, argued that interpretation should be grounded in a process that allowed the text to 'open itself up' (*metnin açılmına*) to the reader. Interpreters should always serve the text. Hence, as Alpyağıl crassly put it, interpreters should never force themselves on the text, they must not 'rape the text'. Öztürk is in no doubt that, in the classical and modern interpretative tradition, the Qur'an has been forced to speak on behalf of the vested interests of its interpreters. As such, he pleads for a sincere interpretation, so that one might objectively read *from* the Qur'an rather than subjectively read *into* it.

The need for objectivity also evolves from the history of Qur'anic studies in Turkey. To recall an observation made in the introduction, recent Turkish theories on Qur'anic hermeneutics started as a critique of arbitrary and disingenuous interpretations of the book. Hence, it is no surprise that the case for objectivity was fuelled by Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk's perception of what they considered arbitrary or distorted interpretations. As we saw in the previous chapters, each of these authors located what he regarded as the source of such arbitrary and distorted interpretations. For Cündioğlu, one such source lay in the politically correct contemporary readings of the Qur'an. Traditionally, based on a reading of verse 4:34, men were allowed to slap their disobedient wives with a small wooden toothbrush, although not on the face. However, attempts to be politically correct in contemporary renderings of the verse have distorted its historical meaning by advocating that a husband expel his disobedient wife. Alpyağıl rejects readings that promote scientific and historicist interpretations to render the Qur'an more relevant, which has resulted in subjective accounts loaded with outmoded, scientific jargon. Finally, like Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, Öztürk detects unsound interpretations in the contemporary ideological and scientific analyses of the Qur'an, especially those espousing an excessive and unquestioned transhistorical understanding of the Qur'an. However, unlike his peers, Öztürk ventures one step further by extending his critique to the classical readings as well.

Despite the different views on what might constitute a proper hermeneutics, there is still a common motif to the thinking of the three Turkish thinkers, for each cements his commitment to objectivity in a particular philosophy of language. All three share the premise that God's revelation is expressed through language, which is communal, is in its essence historical, and only functions when it is intersubjective. Since revelation also involves language, it too must contain historical and intersubjective aspects and knowledge of it must become an objective requirement for interpreting the Qur'an.

With respect to Cündioğlu, we can go so far as to say that his entire hermeneutical project hinges on an interpreter being able to understand the Qurʾan objectively. Unlike the other authors, who maintain a more multivalent relationship with the idea of objectivity, Cündioğlu is only concerned with establishing the rationale and method behind objectively interpreting the Qurʾan. Accordingly, his work is burdened with proving that objective understanding is not only possible but also a requirement.

In his first work, Cündioğlu tried to establish a rationale behind his objectivist position through the dialectics of meaning-conveyance and understanding. From the outset, he made it clear that the Qurʾan is a linguistic phenomenon (*dilsel olgu*), or linguistic text (*nass-ı lugavî*), and that linguistic utterances are not monological in essence: in his view, there is always a sender, message, and receiver involved. However, he holds that the authority on how the message is understood, lies not with the receiver but with the person who pronounces the message.

The first implication of this shift in authority is that a message is unilaterally defined by the sender's intention. However, the intention behind the significance of an utterance must be definite. As Aristotle argued, intending to signify everything ultimately results in nothing being signified. Hence, according to Cündioğlu, radical meaning concurrency is impossible: the Qurʾan cannot intend everything simultaneously. On the other hand, a more modest meaning concurrency could technically be possible. Classical authorities like al-Shāfiʿī claim that a handful of concurrent meanings in some verses in the Qurʾan are intentional. However, as Cündioğlu countered, the majority of Ḥanafī scholars and even non-Ḥanafī ones such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī disagree and claim that meaning concurrency is either absent from, or highly unconventional in, the Arabic language. Hence, in contrast to what certain relativists would like to propose, meaning concurrency cannot serve as a generic premise for any Qurʾanic hermeneutics. Not every possible interpretation is the same in terms of value, since not all interpretations exemplify what was originally intended. There are inescapably wrong and right, and thus, less and more valuable interpretations within Cündioğlu's framework.

While the author of an utterance defines its meaning, there is inevitably a problem when it is codified and read in the absence of its original author. In a typical dialogue, one can easily and objectively discern someone's intent with respect to a statement simply by asking what it meant. However, in a text like the Qurʾan, no such dialogue is available. Cündioğlu solves the problem by introducing the concept of natural connections (*söz'ün tabii bağlamı*). An utterance always contains the following material relationships within itself—the what (content), whom (addressee), why (reason), when and where (spatial-

temporal circumstance), and how (mode) of the expression. Accordingly, since the interlocutor is absent, the interpreter must verify his or her understanding in relation to the adequacy with which these aspects are reconstructed.

In his second work, Cündioğlu again explored the relationship between language and the problem of objectivity through the contrast between the system and performance of language. The Qur'an, as previously stated, is a text expressed in language. There are, however, two intersubjective aspects to language—the systematic rules and conventions that determine its possible meanings, and the ensuing results from the performance of those rules and conventions. Accordingly, meaning is not determined by the subject's arbitrary fancy, but rather by reproducing the system and intention responsible for actualizing the medium being interpreted. The exegetical enterprise is for this reason always reconstructive and objective.

The first range of concepts Cündioğlu used to highlight and explore the intersubjective dimensions of language pertained to the *lisan–kelam* dichotomy. While *lisan* embodies the general system of a language, *kelam* represents its application. For example, the *lisan* aspect of English would be to argue that the nominative case is not a substitute for the accusative case: you have seen me, and not seen I. On the other hand, the *kelam* aspect of English can be represented by many different media, such as sonnets, plays, texts, and so forth, since they have all been actualized through the practice of *lisan*. *Lisan* is language in the sense of the system, and thus, anonymous, whereas *kelam* is authored, and therefore, always initiated by a subject. Accordingly, *lisan* is passive, static without a subject, while *kelam* is active, dynamic, and always realized by a subject. If we relate these concepts to the Qur'an, we understand that the Qur'an is a *kelam*, and that God is the subject who authored it by putting the Arabic *lisan* to use.

There is undeniably a complex reciprocal relationship at work between *lisan* and *kelam* in Cündioğlu's work, which has important hermeneutical consequences. For a start, prior performances of language have the capacity to become part of the conventional use of signs, that is, the *muvâdaa*.[44] Through denotations, speakers can establish new relations between signs and objects, which by communal agreement can become part of the *muvâdaa* repository of significations. Accordingly, in the absence of the original dialogical situation, the *muvâdaa* can become an important reference with which to understand what a word could have meant at a certain period in the linguistic community's

44 *Dil'in genel bilgisi* is an alternative formulation, or Turkish translation that Cündioğlu provided in his second book. Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an* 54.

history. The *muvâdaa* establishes whether words were used metaphorically (*mecazi*) or literally (*zahiri*). Present-day interpreters may therefore not base their arguments that an expression in the Qur'an should be taken metaphorically instead of literally on their private opinion. Rather, they must justify such an interpretation through reference to the earlier mentioned *muvâdaa*.

On the other hand, Cündioğlu is unwilling to go so far as to argue that knowing the historical significance of words is enough to understand the Qur'an. Rather, and this is where his theory returns to the problem of the subject and the performance of language, the intent of the speaker (*kasd'ul-mütekellim*) must also be taken into account. A word can be polysemic, even when considered exclusively within a particular time frame. For example, the Arabic word *fawq*, which can mean elevation in either rank or physical space, is also related to God in verse 6:61: "he is the irresistible, (watching) from above [*fawq*] over His worshippers."[45] Thus, an exegetical dilemma follows: is God above believers in physical space or rank? From the perspective of *muvâdaa*, both meanings are possible. However, the secure way forward for Cündioğlu is to reference the original intent as the proper means whereby this dilemma can be resolved. God could not have meant that he is above his servants in physical space, for that would anthropomorphize Him and jeopardize His transcendence. Hence, when we try to reconstruct the original meaning, it is logical to take the verse to mean that God is above humans in rank.

There is no denying that Cündioğlu's philosophy of language is inspired by Saussure's linguistics, for the distinction between *lisan* and *kelam* is no different from the latter's differentiation between *langue* and *parole*. Cündioğlu does not deny that his ideas are partly inspired by Saussure, and even states in his preface that he will address the problem of the Qur'an's interpretation through insights garnered from recent developments in linguistics. Cündioğlu merely contextualizes and elaborates on Saussure's concepts with a vocabulary with which his mostly Muslim audience is more familiar, and then spells out the crucial hermeneutical implications of these concepts. In this sense, Cündioğlu resembles Ricœur or Derrida, who also reached hermeneutical conclusions from Saussure's understanding of language.

Alpyağıl, on the other hand, relies more on Wittgenstein to make a similar hermeneutical case for objectivity as Cündioğlu did. To do this, he incorporated two important notions from Wittgenstein's thinking—rule-following and private language use and, by exploring Wittgenstein's reflections on these, was able to conclude, much like Cündioğlu did, that language could only

45 Qur'an 6:61.

function when it was set up and practised intersubjectively. Only with pre-established, objective conventions can language users express anything meaningful. Inversely, interpreters can only properly understand something when they fulfil the objective requirement of referencing the same conventions. Accordingly, those who explain the Qur'an in ways that circumvent the established conventions of the language community to which the Qur'an belongs, are engaging in a practice that would be akin to private language use. Primarily, this is because such interpreters make their own decisions about what certain signs mean, rather than relying on those of the community. However, as Alpyağıl argued, arbitrary denotation is a philosophically incoherent idea.

For Alpyağıl, language use and rule-following are intrinsically related to one another, as clearly argued in relation to Searle's differentiation between constitutive rules and regulative rules. Rules either regulate pre-established activities or establish whether an act constitutes an activity; for example, the act of driving exists independently of the rule not to drive through red lights because even if the rule forbidding motorists to drive through red lights did not exist, one could still engage in the activity called driving. Conversely, without the rule governing the game of checkers that the pieces may only be moved on to dark squares, one would be unable to play checkers. As Searle argued, while regulative rules often take the form of imperatives, constitutive rules take the form of "x counts as y" or "in the context of c, x counts as y." According to Alpyağıl, when this typology of rules is applied to language, the language is also comprised of constitutive rules. For example, a promise can only be actualized if a certain set of rules is followed. One simply cannot randomly use language to promise something.

Since language depends on a communal set of rules, it inevitably has an intersubjective aspect. Rules provide the frame of reference in which one can test an activity's conformity to them. However, the individual does not privately own them—they belong to the community, which is why one can objectively argue whether or not an individual has conformed to a rule. It is by virtue of such a fact that native English speakers can correct others who have just started to speak English in a way that is counter to the grammatical conventions of English. Likewise, Alpyağıl claims that interpreters who apply themselves to the Arabic language of the Qur'an in ways that are alien and foreign to the rules of the Arabic language can also be held accountable. As such, arguing that a seventh-century text such as the Qur'an contains references to the modern theory of relativity or quantum theory, is for Alpyağıl akin to the claim that it is possible for a person to say it is cold but mean that it is actually warm, or that in a game of chess one can use checker stones as a substitute for chess pieces.

According to Alpyağıl, interpreters who subjectively, and thus privately, define what the words of the Qur'an signify, prompt a debate on private language use. In other words, their behaviour relates to the question of whether it is possible for someone to decide what certain symbols signify without resorting to pre-established rules. Alpyağıl sees the private language hypothesis as internally riddled with inconsistencies. A key inconsistency here is the inability of a private language user to apply a sign to reference the same object over and over again, for a subject simply cannot know if his or her experience of an object corresponds to that of an earlier made-up signifier. People cannot determine if the experience they have on Tuesday, and the sign they write to record it, will actually conform to the one they subsequently have on Wednesday. Accordingly, even expressions of private experiences in language, including pain, rely on existing linguistic conventions. Only in the context of a pre-established communal language can individuals always ascertain and express their experiences in a persistent way in language.

The objective aspects of rule-following, however, do not entirely discount the role of the subject in the process of following rules. As Alpyağıl reminds us, tradition, and therefore conventions and rules, is contingent on something else. For example, the Qur'an argues in verse 25:67 that the servants of God are neither extravagant nor stingy when they perform charity. However, extravagance or stinginess depend on a range of contingent factors. An act could well be seen as extravagant in one culture or instance, but stingy in another. Hence, before applying a ruling on the matter, it is necessary to establish the right parameters of what constitutes extravagance and stinginess.

To apply a rule necessitates interpreting it, and this in turn requires practical wisdom. In this regard, Alpyağıl refers directly to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (prudence), for it is through prudence that an individual can judge individual situations in accordance with a particular rule. Thus, by applying practical wisdom, the subject can judge whether an action in a given situation is generous, miserly, or extravagant.

That someone is allowed to interpret a rule does not mean that the subject's own judgement is the ultimate arbiter in the matter. Rather, the final judgement on whether a rule is correctly applied still rests in the community. A signpost can be read in a multitude of ways, but whether it is correctly interpreted ultimately depends on how a linguistic community defines the symbols on it. Consequently, if a subject were to interpret the Qur'an, it would be the Islamic community that would ultimately validate whether or not the interpretation offered was sound.

Alpyağıl's view of the relationship between language, subjectivity, objectivity, and interpretation is undeniably much more complex than Cündioğlu's

straightforward objectivism, and this is primarily because he permits a degree of flexibility that is simultaneously both fixed and dynamic. Alpyağıl fully acknowledges that the correct application of interpretations can change over circumstances and time. This creates a space for new and divergent interpretations of the Qur'an. However, the value of these interpretations is not determined by the subject's personal appreciation, but by the appraisal of the community to which the text belongs. Renewed circumstances can thus generate interpretations of the Qur'an that are in one respect subjective (specific to a community's understanding) and in another objective (recognized by a community rather than a single individual). As such, and I shall discuss this further in the next chapter, there is a constructive view on the diachrony of interpretations to be discovered in Alpyağıl's framework that is directed by a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity. Not all historically unknown interpretations of a verse are therefore by default discarded.

In parts, Öztürk's position is reminiscent of those of Cündioğlu and Alpyağıl. Öztürk and Cündioğlu were certainly in agreement that the objective meaning of a verse in the Qur'an is the one understood historically at the time of its revelation. However, that is only part of the process of understanding, for it does not necessarily tell us what the verse signifies for the subjective present. The interpreter has to abstract away the historically contingent aspects of certain verses to start the process of mediating between the current context and the transcendent, timeless ideals of the Qur'an. Therefore, like Alpyağıl, Öztürk's work consists of an important dialectical relationship between the interpreter's objective and subjective understanding of a verse.

The most important premise supporting this duality between the objective and subjective understanding of the Qur'an comes from the belief that modern audiences are not the direct addresses of the Qur'an. On the contrary, Öztürk is convinced that the latter are the Prophet and his community and that the Qur'an's message is tailored to their experiences and understandings. This is partly because the Qur'an responded to its initial audience by offering solutions to its various societal problems, but also because it conveyed its message in a language with which this audience was familiar. Hence, the objective meaning of the Qur'an is always what this first audience understood and not what present-day interpreters might read into it in the light of their own personal experiences of the text and its language. Its subjective meaning, on the other hand, is what is understood anew from post-revelation readings in the light of contingent factors.

This bifurcation leads Öztürk to acknowledge historical readings of the Qur'an, irrespective of whether modern sensibilities find them distasteful. Thus, from Öztürk's viewpoint, the Qur'an's injunction to cut off the hands of

a thief is an objective historical fact. However, the presence of an injunction does not necessarily mean that a modern reader need apply it in the form in which it is presented, for it is not its form but the ultimate purpose behind it that represents the timeless and transcendent message of the Qurʾan.

By virtue of the distinction between form and purpose, Öztürk is able to direct one's understanding of the Qurʾan beyond the confines of its literal statements. From a philosophical point of view, Öztürk argued that the form of an expression cannot be regarded as a coterminous stand-in for what the author wishes to convey. Rather, the linguistic form of an expression should be regarded as a vessel through which the author's intent (*maksat*) is expressed. Hence, what an author intended is not necessarily limited by what that author said.

The emphasis on purpose rather than form introduces an element of psychologization into Öztürk's hermeneutics, for his enquiry is now no longer restricted to what is said but includes why something is said. Accordingly, God's announcement in Arabic that the hands of a thief must be cut off is objectively clear in Öztürk's framework, but why He announced such an injunction is answered by revealing the reason behind it. Öztürk argued that God's ruling was announced to protect private property and correct the thief. However, with present-day resources it is possible to implement His will in ways that might be better than those historically suggested in the Qurʾan.

This binary perspective on subjectivity versus objectivity has implications for the status of the traditional Islamic sciences. In Öztürk's view, *tafsīr* is the science pertaining to the reconstruction of the earlier mentioned objective historical meaning of the Qurʾan, whereas *fiqh* and *kalām* are about establishing the significance of the Qurʾan for a particular age. *Fiqh* certainly does this for the legal elements of the Qurʾan, while *kalām* does it for the theological aspects of the Islamic experience.

5 Conclusion

With respect to the different subjective and objective requirements for understanding and interpreting the Qurʾan, the hermeneutical theories of the three Turkish thinkers have shown important points of divergence as well as convergence.

A noteworthy point of contestation between the different authors concerned whether faith was a prerequisite for accessing the meanings (namely the truth) of the Qurʾan. For Cündioğlu, the answer is clearly no because to think otherwise would undermine the Qurʾan's universal address and establish

interpretations on fideist rather than rational grounds. The Qur'an appeals to everyone, non-believers included, and must thus be capable of being heard, understood, and acknowledged by those who do not profess a faith in Islam. Moreover, since even Muslims belonging to the same school of theology or jurisprudence differ in their opinions, faith is neither a guarantee nor an impediment to understanding the Qur'an. Alpyağıl and Öztürk, however, hold the opposite view and claim that being a Muslim is a subjective requirement for understanding the Qur'an. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, unlike Cündioğlu, they oppose the idea that the Qur'an is universally either intelligible or appealing. For Alpyağıl, the significance of something is determined by how it is recognized. Accordingly, unless the Qur'an is believed to come from God, it will never be able to disclose its significance as God's final revelation to humans. Rational arguments pertaining to religion, even those proving God's existence, are only meaningful to those who have already been initiated into religion. Likewise, the Qur'an's primary appeal and significance for Öztürk is only directed to its initial, historical audience. However, to infer its secondary significance, an interpreter must fulfil personal requirements such as faith and submission to God. Only a conscientious, scrupulous, and sincere person can attune himself to God's will and lift the barriers to truth that might otherwise have been imposed through disingenuous ideological and sectarian biases. The bottom line of an interpretation is decided less by whether one can make a rational case for an interpretation, for reason can be instrumentalized, and more by whether it is motivated by personal sincerity.

While Cündioğlu did not regard self-knowledge as an important requirement for understanding the Qur'an, both Alpyağıl and Öztürk thought otherwise. Alpyağıl, for example, spoke of *fanilik bilinci*, or knowledge of one's epistemological finitude. In other words, it is important to recognize one's inability to know everything. Likewise, Öztürk spoke of the elusive nature of truth, and how it can never become something that a particular subject can possess (*temelluk*) without descending into an interpretive hubris fuelled by sectarian zeal, which, according to Öztürk, some past exegetes have done. In sum, insincerity obstructs our ability to understand the Qur'an truthfully, for it guides us to read into it rather than from it. However, sincerity is grounded in humility, which is based on self-knowledge of one's incapacity to take absolute and sole possession of the truth.

There was less disagreement among the authors over the need for objective requirements, to which they added two premises. The first of is that, by its nature, language is historical, systematic, and inescapably intersubjective. Cündioğlu argues that because linguistic utterances have material aspects, such as their concomitant intents, what defines their meaning is not the subjective

experience of the receptor but what the conveyor intended to transmit objectively. Likewise, as Alpyağıl argued, languages have concrete rules that determine what meanings can be constructed under what circumstances. One simply cannot utter "one item" in the English language, yet refer to two. However, based on the first premise, each author shares a second premise, namely that since the Qur'an is expressed in language, it also has a history, system, and objective character that must be revered to do it justice. In Öztürk's case, this means that utterances in the Qur'an also have clear historical addressees and referents. Hence, one should always first try to understand it through the eyes of its historical audience, rather than through what one might personally experience by relating it to oneself. Likewise, for Alpyağıl this means that interpreters cannot saddle their commentary with anachronistic jargon, since that runs counter to the diachronic nature of the Qur'an and its language. The Qur'an, as Alpyağıl argued, could not have referred to modern concepts such as thermodynamics, because sixth and seventh century Arabic did not have the means to express such ideas. Nor, for similar reasons, as Cündioğlu pointed out, could it harbour ideologically modern concepts such as gender equality.

By stipulating objective requirements, the Turkish authors restrict any exclusive reliance on subjectivity to justify their interpretations. Accordingly, in the view of the authors studied, an overtly sceptical or mystical attitude to meaning is both foreign and out-of-place. For example, there is no epistemologically-based position in the Turkish thinkers' hermeneutics that argues that all meaning is relative to the subject's experience, and thereby, equally true or valuable. Nor, for that matter, is there a view that one is able to discover the truth of the Qur'an on the exclusive basis of someone's personal relationship with God.[46] On the contrary, as repeatedly made clear, the subject must also fulfil requirements that do not pertain to the structures of subjectivity but that lie outside the subject itself, such as knowing how Arabic was practised and understood at the time of the Qur'an's revelation.

That all three authors advocate some form of objectivity should be understood neither as a plea for a static understanding of the Qur'an, nor as evidence that its earlier history will automatically stilt future exegetical activity. On the contrary, in all three theories there is still a great deal of dynamism involved in how future interpreters can and should relate to the interpretation of the Qur'an. For example, as Alpyağıl argued, while it is true that one cannot use the word miserliness to mean generosity, a linguistic community can over time change its idea of what it considers miserliness or generosity. There is thus

46 For example, by being an elect friend or saint of God.

a great deal still to be said about the further implications of the earlier discussed theories and the problem of reading the Qur'an in different and new ways. However, this theme will be further worked out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Surplus and Futurity of Meaning: The Status of New and Divergent Readings of the Qur'an

1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this book, I mentioned that the appreciation of reading the Qur'an differently, or in new ways, is thematically tied to an interpreter's theoretical views on subjectivity and objectivity. To recall, the greater the emphasis on objective understanding, the lesser the appreciation of divergent interpretations; this is because objectivity epitomizes stability by demanding that a fact about something, in this case the meaning of the Qur'an, can be repeatedly identified in the same way by different parties. On the other hand, the more the subject's private understanding is regarded as inescapable or valuable, the easier it becomes to relate constructively to variant interpretations, since subjectivity by default implies particularity, and hence, difference in the reading of the Qur'an. As such, while we have been examining the features of objectivity and subjectivity, there has undoubtedly been an inescapable practical consequence to these otherwise dull theoretical problems, which is to establish the relative statuses of new and different interpretations of the Qur'an.

Before describing the implications of each author's thoughts on reading the Qur'an in new and different ways, I wish to introduce the two concepts with which I shall conduct my analysis—surplus of meaning, and futurity of meaning.

Surplus of meaning has its lexical roots in Western philosophical hermeneutics, particularly in Paul Ricœur's work. Apart from providing a secure theoretical model on which to base the work of the Turkish thinkers, using an already established concept also clarifies the relationship between Western philosophical and Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics. I should also add that, while borrowed, the concept will ultimately be further tailored to suit the present framework. Thus, I first contextualize the concept in relation to Ricœur's work, then develop it further along with that of the futurity of meaning and, finally, relate both concepts to the current discussion on the statuses of various readings of the Qur'an.

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2 The Surplus of Meaning and the Double Significance of Symbols

The notion of surplus is usually invoked in an economic context to denote the amount of money left over when more is sold than bought. Consequently, in its conventional use, we already know that it is related to excess and wealth. It should come as no surprise then that a similar significance can also be found in some current hermeneutical discussions. Nevertheless, while a specialized use of the term does not wander too far from its conventional usage, it still has its own nuances that need to be considered.

While Paul Ricœur (d.2005) used the term at various turns, it is on one of his earlier works, *Interpretation Theory*: *Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, originally based on a series of lectures he gave at the Texas Christian University in the autumn of 1973, that I wish to focus here. I have chosen it because in it he explicitly relates the concept to interpreting texts, even although it is only mentioned a few times in a work of almost one hundred pages. However, to get a clear view of what the surplus of meaning entails, it is necessary to refer to the context in which the term is employed. In other words, Ricœur's use of the term only becomes apparent through retracing the interplay between it and the surrounding text, purpose of the work, and its overall arguments.

In the third essay, entitled 'Metaphor and Symbol', Ricœur introduces the term surplus of meaning in the context of understanding literary works. As he put it, "the question here is whether the surplus of meaning characteristic of literary works is a part of their signification or if it must be understood as an external factor, which is noncognitive and simply emotional."[1] Thus, the notion of surplus is introduced in terms of a characteristic that literary works possess. However, what this characteristic is, is made more apparent and concrete in the subsequent enquiry into how metaphors and symbols function.

In classical rhetoric, the metaphor was conceptualized around the notion of the word rather than the sentence. Hence, a metaphor is what extends the meaning of a word through deviation from its literal meaning, a deviation that stems from the desire either to "fill a semantic lacuna in the lexical code or to ornament discourse and make it more pleasing."[2] As Ricœur pointed out, we simply have more ideas than words to express them, and hence, need to stretch the signification of known words by using metaphors. Moreover, in some cases we rely on figurative words because a figurative expression is more persuasive.

1 Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 45.

2 Ricœur, 48.

Thus, we rely heavily on resemblance to "ground the substitution of the figurative meaning of a word in place of the literal meaning, which could have been used in the same place."[3]

As the last part of the previous sentence suggests, according to this classical understanding, metaphors are incapable of creating new meanings. Accordingly, they are always translatable, since the figurative word is understood to be a substitute for a literal meaning. No new information is provided about reality when a metaphor is put to use. In other words, as Ricœur explains in more technical terms, a metaphor does not represent any form of semantic innovation.[4]

Ricœur's conceptualization of metaphors inversely states that they are able to confer new information about reality. Rather than arguing that they centre on a word, Ricœur claims that they operate at the level of a sentence. Put differently, they function at the level of predication, not denomination.[5] In Ricœur's view, the heart of the metaphor lies in its 'semantic dissonance', that is in the absurdity we experience because of the tension between words in a metaphoric expression. For example, when a poet speaks of a "mantle of sorrow," by default our prima facie understanding of the expression creates an interpretative uneasiness, since a literal pertinence between the notion of a garment of cloth and an abstract feeling of sorrow are irreconcilable. However, it is precisely this dissonance that invites us to resolve the 'semantic impertinence' with a second interpretation that can make sense of both notions by still looking for other resemblances between them.[6] Moreover, since we relate things to each other in new ways, we are conferred with new information about reality. As Ricœur eloquently concludes, a metaphor is "a calculated error, which brings together things that do not go together and by means of this apparent misunderstanding it causes a new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed."[7]

Ricœur carries his notion of semantic impertinence into his discussion of symbols and then specifically links it to the concept of the surplus of meaning. In a previous work, he had described a symbol as "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be appre-

3 Ricœur, 49.
4 Ricœur, 49.
5 Ricœur, 50.
6 Ricœur, 51.
7 Ricœur, 51.

hended only through the first."[8] Consequently, a symbol is something that has a double meaning, but, as in the case of a metaphor, to establish that meaning means having to depend on two opposing interpretations. Once we recognize that the literal meaning falls short of what we wish to convey, we see that the symbol still contains more meaning. For example, we intuit in a poem by Wordsworth that a sunrise signifies more than a simple meteorological phenomenon and that in Babylonian myths the sea signifies more than the expanse of water that can be seen from the shore.[9] Hence, this surplus of meaning that we intuit "is the residue of the literal interpretation."[10]

Ricœur expounds further on the surplus of meaning in the scriptural context of the Exodus, which describes the well-known historical event experienced by the Children of Israel. However, as Ricœur pointed out, the Bible has more to tell us than what happened in history, for it also discloses "a certain state of wandering which is lived existentially as a movement from captivity to deliverance."[11] Accordingly, the double meaning present in the Exodus conveys not only an historical event but also "the means of detecting a condition of being."[12]

To recapitulate, certain expressions are able to confer more meaning than an initial reading will yield. The excess of meaning present in such expressions inevitably encourages multiple attempts to be made to reach the secondary meaning. Thus, the surplus of meaning is a phenomenon that, by its very nature, concerns the problem of multiple meanings and variant interpretations.

3 Surplus and Futurity

Having reached a prefatory understanding of the surplus of meaning through Ricœur's works, I wish to develop that further in relation to those of the Turkish authors. I shall start by differentiating between a qualitative and quantitative approach to the term, followed by a discussion on its relationship with diachrony and the futurity of meaning.

Insofar as Ricœur refers to double, hence multiple, meanings with regard to the nature of symbols, his understanding of the surplus of meaning is quant-

8 Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Illinois (Northwestern University Press, 1974), 12–13.

9 Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 55.

10 Ricœur, 55.

11 Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 66.

12 Ricœur, 66.

itative. In this sense, there is a quantitative approach to the concept, namely an understanding that an excess of meaning signifies the possibility of inferring multiple meanings from the same object of understanding. Symbols, as the example from the Exodus showed, can be understood both literally, that is historically, and existentially.

Alternatively, it is also possible to understand the surplus of meaning in qualitative terms. For example, in relation to the Qur'an, one can argue that one's understanding of it can have a transformative influence on one's life. In other words, the surplus (overflow) is not in the text's multiple leftover meanings, but in what it effects through its moral instructions. The surplus lies in the ability of the text to make the reader a better person, to create a more wholesome community, and to bring greater prosperity to humankind.

I emphasize this difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches to the surplus of meaning to show that only a quantitative approach to the surplus of meaning is pertinent to the problem of variant interpretations. The very idea of multiple meanings implies that each is distinct, so different from other meanings. Thus, a claim that a unit in the Qur'an, such as a verse or word, contains a surplus of meanings, would in a quantitative framework automatically mean that this same unit is able to offer multiple, hence distinct, meanings. Since different meanings ultimately lead to different readings, an enquiry into the status of the surplus of meaning within a hermeneutical theory is undoubtedly an inquiry into the status of variant interpretations of the Qur'an.

Up to this point we have only described the surplus of meaning in terms of multiple contemporaneous meanings, so the idea of multiple meanings is still only understood synchronically. However, it is possible to relate the surplus of meaning to the more complex question of diachrony, and thus, to the idea of the futurity of meaning.

With the futurity of meaning, I simply wish to point out that a text can disclose new, hitherto unknown, meanings. As already argued, the term surplus of meaning pertains to the assumption that an element in the Qur'an can offer a variety of distinct meanings. However, receiving a *different meaning* from the text (surplus of meaning), can simultaneously be experienced as receiving a *new meaning* if the experience takes place at a later date in different spatiotemporal circumstances (futurity of meaning). For example, to stay true to Ricœur's examples taken from religious myths, the Fall of Adam might be understood literally by a child attending Sunday school. At this point, one might simply regard it as an historical/mythological retelling of what happened to humankind's ancestor. However, future experiences can make an excess of meaning existentially pertinent in new ways. For example, when people come of age,

they leave the security of their parental home (paradise) and realize that they have to work to survive—"through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life."[13] Or, perhaps someone does something wrong in adult life that leaves such a 'stain' on their reputation that they regard it as tantamount to losing their initial Adamic innocence. As these examples illustrate, people's future experiences and changing circumstances can lead to Adam's Fall taking on different meanings.

Let me further illustrate the relationship between the surplus and futurity of meaning with certain hypothetical situations associated with interpreting the Qur'an. Let us suppose that the Qur'an contains an important message conveyed to its initial audience via one interpretation and to a future audience via another. Thus, the Qur'an has multiple meanings (surplus of meaning) that can be discovered diachronically (futurity of meaning). With these assumptions in mind, an interpreter can now address verse 4:3 in which polygamy is permitted because of contextual constraints, but ultimately absolved by implying that monogamy is the better option. While the latter meaning might have been dormant in the text (surplus of meaning), only a future audience no longer socioeconomically entrenched in the institution of polygamy is capable of perceiving this utopic meaning (futurity of meaning). Similarly, if we were to modify this example by starting from a scientific standpoint, an interpreter could argue that our enlarged understanding of science allows us to read the Qur'an in a way that is informed by modern scientific findings. By implication, such an interpreter could argue that God deposited two meanings into a verse (surplus of meaning)—the one that the book's first audience can understand, and the one that will unveil itself later to a community that is more scientifically informed (futurity of meaning).

The surplus of meaning thus refers to the phenomenon of being able to infer a variety of meanings from the same text, verse, or even word. Likewise, the futurity of meaning is about present and future audiences uncovering new meanings. Relating these concepts back to the Turkish authors in a simple descriptive manner is not particularly interesting because there is nothing remarkable about either historical or future interpreters reading the Qur'an in different ways. Any serious hermeneutical scholar is aware of this, as are the Turkish thinkers. For example, Cündioğlu repeatedly acknowledged that the Qur'an could be read in multiple ways, but that only one interpretation could authentically convey God's intentions. A much more important question for the Turkish thinkers is, to what extent can new or different interpretations be

13 NIV Genesis 3:17.

constructively appreciated from a hermeneutical standpoint? Hence, according to the Turkish thinkers, any enquiry into the status of the surplus of meaning must concern the matter of authenticity.[14]

These facts considered, we already know that, in the case of an anachronism, the three previously discussed Turkish thinkers, by default, find the appeal to the surplus and futurity of meaning in the Qurʾan objectionable. As I pointed out in the section on objectivity and language in Chapter 6, all three authors agree that the synchronic nature of language sets objective limits to how it might have been used during a specific era. Thus, any appeals to the surplus of meaning derived from a language's later diachrony would be regarded as suspect and inauthentic by these authors. To reiterate Alpyağıl's example, one could never interpret Woodsworth's reference to poets not being gay as an indication of their sexual orientation because the word only acquired that connotation after Woodsworth's death. By extension, to argue that the Qurʾan informed humankind of quantum mechanics in the seventh century is equally suspect and unconvincing.

Anachronistic readings are, by default, inauthentic to the text; on that each author is agreed, but they diverge with respect to other circumstances. Hence, where these divergences occur and their further implications are highlighted in the following sections.

4 The Surplus and Futurity of Meaning in Turkish Qurʾanic Hermeneutics

Cündioğlu advocated a very strict objectivist approach to Qurʾanic hermeneutics, with his specific take marked by a claim that utterances are always preceded by a delimited intention. Accordingly, to warrant a certain reading from the Qurʾan, an interpreter can have only one intention. Consequently, if two different interpretations are offered, one has to be wrong in case the other is right. Since the Qurʾan contains no intentional concurrency of different meanings, there is also no intentional surplus of meaning.

Cündioğlu's scepticism about meaning concurrency was derived predominantly from his appraisal of polysemy in the Qurʾan. As he put it, unlike some outliers such as al-Shāfiʿī, the dominant position in classical Islamic hermeneutics either rejected or downplayed the significance of meaning concur-

14 That is, relative to their understanding of when subjective/objective interpretations are authentic/inauthentic.

rency. Saying one thing while at the same time meaning other things was not something with which Arabs, and hence, the Arabic language, were familiar. To do that would have meant God having to use the Arabic language in ways that were unfamiliar, and therefore, incomprehensible to the Qurʾan's original audience.

Within Cündioğlu's framework, variant interpretations do not occur by God's design, but are merely the side effects of discrepancies between interpreters occasioned by their method and interpretative assumptions, that is by their pre-understanding. The more a subject secures the right interpretative assumptions and stays true to the objective material aspects of the text, the less likely it will be that the interpretation will become volatile and prone to divergence and error. Words are uttered or written at a specific time, and hence, become actualized in relation to their historical horizon. For example, a personal pronoun such as "you" (plural) is in its form very abstract and could potentially refer to any group of addressees. Thus, an interpretation that merely regards the form will inevitably be able to posit that the personal pronoun "you" could refer concurrently to any possible group of readers throughout time and space. However, from Cündioğlu's standpoint, the question is not of possibility but of historical actualization. Thus, the "you" uttered in the Qurʾan can only refer to the people present during the revelation of a verse. The interpreter should therefore not look at what a word can possibly signify but at what it actually signified during the historical period in which it was stated.

Given the reconstructive and objectivist nature of Cündioğlu's hermeneutics, we might be inclined to conclude that the Qurʾan's meanings have no futurity. However, I would argue that his work suggests otherwise. Since Cündioğlu restricts the event to the date when an utterance was actualized—"I [the interpreter] must seek the (correct) meaning not in the future but in the past"[15]—it is true that the meanings have no futurity in the sense that God communicates new messages through the Qurʾan, or that the real message is waiting to be actualized at a more opportune time. Nevertheless, there is a futurity in the sense of recovery. To elucidate, Cündioğlu does not believe that historical distance makes the subject's relationship to the Qurʾan more productive. On the contrary, as he put it, "meaning has an essence that does not get stronger (*güçlenen*) or become clearer (*belirginleşen*) over time but even gets lost."[16] Accordingly, to use Cündioğlu's metaphor, what is lost over time can, through an archaeology of meaning, be recovered again in the future as if for the first time.

15 Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı*, 92.
16 Cündioğlu, 86.

Within a reconstructionist paradigm it is still possible for competing parties to argue over what the Qurʾan ultimately signifies, even to the extent that a future understanding is considered better than one held in the past. However, as bold as this implication is, it does have conditions. First, given Cündioğlu's recurrent emphasis on historical understanding, it is unlikely, through his hermeneutics, that anyone could claim to understand the Qurʾan better than the Prophet and his companions did. The latter were the first addresses, they were the ones to whom God directly spoke. However, it is possible, as Cündioğlu's work implies, that an interpreter could argue that over time some exegetes missed the mark with certain interpretations because of the deteriorating effects of time on our collective and historical understanding.

Cündioğlu unfortunately fails to develop the technical details of how historical distance weakens understanding, or how this process evolves into the ongoing archaeological task of meaning recovery. If Cündioğlu had given this question more attention, he would have perhaps better understood the drawbacks of his own theory. To use his own principles to illustrate this point, meaning can become muddled (or vaporize as he calls it) through the sheer existence of competing interpretations. Hence, the surplus of meaning is not something to which a Muslim should aspire, but should rather try to stall as far as possible. To a certain extent, this is a sensible position, for what does Islam specifically mean if it can mean everything that any random interpreter imagines it to be? It is only natural for followers of religions to cling to some level of essentialism by setting boundaries around interpretations concerning identity. Nevertheless, to argue that historical understanding can guarantee the retrieval of the Qurʾan's constants is naïve in the light of certain historical facts. For example, if the companions of the Prophet, the surrogates for the historical horizon, were already circulating multiple competing understandings of the Qurʾan, how can we be sure that theirs can capture its 'solitary original signification'?

That a mere recovery of the historical horizon is incapable of providing straightforward answers to what the Qurʾan means can already be discerned from the sheer amount of interpretative narratives attributed to the Prophet's companions and their students. A clear example of this pertains to verse 108:1, which states that God will give Muhammad *al-kawthar*. However, as the famous exegete al-Ṭabarī tells us, "interpreters have disagreed on the meaning of *al-kawthar*."[17] For example, the Prophet's wife ʿAisha states that it is a river (*nahr*)

17 Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jāmʿ Al-Bayān ʿan-Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qurʾān*, vol. 24 (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-al-Dirasāt al-ʿArabiyya wa-al-Islāmiyya, 2001), 679.

in paradise,[18] the Prophet's nephew Ibn ʿAbbās describes it as an abundance of blessings (*al-khayr al-kathīr*), whereas ʿAṭāʾ, the student of a companion, claims that it is not a river in paradise, but a pool (*ḥawḍ*).[19] Although this might sound overly scrupulous, semantically speaking a river is not equal to a pool, and neither a river nor a pool can be seen as the equivalent of an abundance of blessings. This becomes especially evident in the light of how some interpreters have argued that the seemingly abstract blessings mentioned in the verse actually refer to the office of prophecy.[20] Thus, we are left to conclude that even in the earliest history of the Qurʾan, variant readings had come into existence despite their interpreters being close to the Prophet, or in the case of the students to the companions, and having immediate access to the language of the Qurʾan. Consequently, a critical historical approach cannot guarantee the recovery of an objective meaning that is free of uncertainty.

This, of course, is not to say that a reconstructionist approach cannot still mitigate the presence of different interpretations of the Qurʾan, but only that it cannot happen in Cündioğlu's hermeneutics because of its various blind spots. For example, the classical Islamic tradition acknowledged the early generations as the exegetical authorities, but also recognized that they sometimes issued conflicting reports. In an attempt to resolve this problem, some classical thinkers integrated a complex system into their hermeneutics of criticizing and harmonizing their sources. While this is not the place to expound on the minutiae of how this was achieved, suffice to say that whereas the classics took it upon themselves to address the issue of conflicting historical interpretations, Cündioğlu failed to do so. As a result, while Cündioğlu was able to emphasize the importance of his archaeological approach, he was unable to work out the finer details necessary to implement it.

Some of the above discussions also pertain to an important part of Öztürk's hermeneutics, since he shares certain fundamental principles with Cündioğlu. For a start, like Cündioğlu, he stresses that any understanding of the Qurʾan must first establish its objective historical significance. It is clear that the Qurʾan's message was tailored to fit the experiences of a specific historical audience, and therefore, contains elements that are appropriate to that. To ignore this aspect of the Qurʾan in favour of universalizing its message would, according to Öztürk, have a variety of unfavourable consequences, the most important being the introduction of a dissonance between one's hermeneutics and one's actual practice. For example, some female interpreters in Turkey

18 Al-Ṭabarī, 24:680.
19 Al-Ṭabarī, 24:685.
20 Al-Ṭabarī, 24:684.

acknowledge polygamy as a transhistorical practice advocated by God because they believe that everything the Qur'an contains is valid for all ages. Nevertheless, despite this belief, none of these interpreters intends to involve herself in polygamy. Thus, as Öztürk concludes, such interpreters only pay lip service to the universalist paradigm, while in reality they already understand that the institution of polygamy has no place in modern Turkey. In conclusion, a more earnest approach to the Qur'an would be to acknowledge its historicity more fully.

Since the Qur'an's original significance is located in the past, an act of recovery and reconstruction must, as Cündioğlu noted, characterize its interpretation. However, under certain circumstances, it is also possible for an archaeology of meaning to unfold in an ongoing recovery of new meanings (futurity of meaning). In other words, if an interpreter believes the meaning has been lost through historical distance, this sense of loss, coupled with the hope of recovering it, can result in the utopian promise of a new exegesis actually uncovering some of the Qur'an's significance with which Muslims have lost touch over the course of time. Given that Öztürk also believes that the passage of time causes the disappearance of certain insights, his work is akin to that of Cündioğlu, but different insofar as he tries to delve deeper into how meanings get lost over time.

Although the Qur'an contains meanings that modern Muslims can easily grasp, it contains others that are no longer self-evident because of their historical distance. Öztürk is confident that the overall Muslim community, despite its internal conflicts, has a firm understanding of the basic ethos and rituals of the Qur'an. For example, despite their different political convictions, Sunnis and Shias still agree that the Qur'an commands able-bodied Muslims to fast during the month of Ramadan. However, modern Muslims living in Turkey are indisputably distanced from the Qur'an in that they do not speak the language in which it was written and are unfamiliar with the finer details of the seventh-century Arabic experiences depicted in it. Thus, the Qur'an is familiar and intelligible on the one hand, but alien and incomprehensible on the other.

To mitigate the problem of alienation, a modern Muslim might consult the classical sources on the historical context in which the Qur'an was written and establish what the earlier authorities had to say about its meanings. However, as Öztürk points out, to serve the various political, sectarian, and theological interests arising over the course of Islamic history, the classical sources themselves were exposed to manipulation and disinformation (*dezenformasyon*). Thus, Öztürk concludes, Muslims did not only lose touch with the meaning of the Qur'an because Muslims had culturally outgrown its world, but also

because their current understanding of it might well be based on distorted interpretations that had developed over time to further various ideological agendas.

While Öztürk and Cündioğlu agree on a number of issues, the former's work has broader implications for debates on the surplus and futurity of meaning. This is predominantly because he upholds a two-step hermeneutics that constructively relates to subjectively understanding the Qur'an, which is absent from Cündioğlu's work. As mentioned earlier, Öztürk was adamant about remaining as objective as possible over the historical significance of the Qur'an. However, in their attempts to reconcile the Qur'an's message with present-day circumstances, interpreters cannot escape from their own subjective backgrounds. To repeat a recurrent example, in today's world it would be considered more appropriate to deal with a thief through accessing various social services rather than by cutting off their hands. It is a better measure not because of our modern sensibilities, but rather because it better captures the spirit behind God's original injunction, namely to correct the thief and protect the community. As such, in Öztürk's view, besides recovering the meaning, there is also a futurity to the meanings of the Qur'an in the guise of a possibility of improving on the historical methods of applying the injunctions of certain verses.

Öztürk based this possibility on the idea that the form of a linguistic utterance is not fully commensurate with the intention behind it. To give another example, God's promise of paradise does not entirely match its descriptions in the Qur'an because, as Öztürk argued, they were tailored to the aesthetic sensibilities of seventh-century Arabic men and women. Rather, the essence of the meaning of paradise is in it being where all subjective dreams are realized. Thus, the significance of paradise is exhausted not by its descriptions in the Qur'an but by the imaginings of its present and future readers. Yet, despite this open-ended possibility of reading the Qur'an in new ways, we should avoid jumping to the conclusion that God intended different things simultaneously. On the contrary, all elements of Öztürk's work suggest that God communicated a single transcendent intention that humans subsequently relate to their particular situation in new and imaginative ways.

Nothing in Öztürk's work lends credence to the idea that God is asserting multiple different things simultaneously and, in this sense, there is an overlap between his and Cündioğlu's ideas. Öztürk argues that variance is caused not by divergent intentions behind verses but by the different applications of the verses. To a degree, this is logical, for had he argued that God planned the variance while maintaining that His intention is the universal constant behind the verses, then Öztürk would have to account for the possibility that God's

ultimate wish is for humankind to prosper and not prosper, for a thief to be corrected and not corrected—in other words, that God would contradict Himself. Accordingly, variant readings can never be justified with the argument that God willed different things, only by arguing that new contexts can result in new subjective implementations of God's solitary intention.

Despite acknowledging the universal higher objectives behind God's contingently formulated message, there is also an undercurrent in Öztürk's work that specifically argues that certain verses in the Qur'an have no futurity to their meaning. Some are simply responses to historical events and only have a meaning within that moment. There is no higher ethical message to be inferred from such verses. A clear example of this is in the fact that some stories in the Qur'an were only narrated to satisfy the curiosities of Muhammad's detractors. In other words, they were ad hoc responses devoid of a transcendent message to be discovered over and over again by new subjectivities.

Alpyağıl's outlook on the futurity of meaning in the Qur'an is both similar to and different from that of either Öztürk or Cündioğlu. Like them, he assigned an important hermeneutical place to the intersubjective dimensions of language, but ruled out private language use on the grounds that it was tantamount to claiming that one can ascribe a random meaning to any given word. Since the latter is clearly absurd, any interpretation that fails to respect previously established language conventions is also nonsensical. Thus, from Alpyağıl's stance, any appeal to a surplus of meanings in the Qur'an that is neither historically acknowledged nor linguistically feasible is, from the outset, suspect and inadmissible. However, unlike Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl maintains a view of objectivity that allows interpretations to not be chained to historical readings, and hence, capable of changing over time. Likewise, in contrast to Öztürk, Alpyağıl questions whether there is more futurity to the otherwise contingent historical meanings of the Qur'an.

While it is true that rules ought to be followed, it is also true that they cannot be followed without being interpreted, as Alpyağıl demonstrated with a straightforward example from the Qur'an. As we saw in verse 25:67, which states that the servants of God are neither extravagant nor stingy, what constitutes extravagance or stinginess in one context is not necessarily so in another. For example, it is not difficult to envisage a modest present-day breakfast in Western Europe as lavish by medieval standards, simply because of the progress in food security. Hence, renewed contexts can produce new interpretations of certain verses.

Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu disagree over whether the same word can mean different things in different contexts. While Cündioğlu believes that readings cannot be revived to reference modern contexts, Alpyağıl feels that, to retain

their relevance, certain words have to be interpreted in a way that renders them accessible to contemporary situations. Accordingly, Alpyağıl is committed to both the subjective and objective meanings of the Qur'an. He is loyal to the subjective meaning because every context demands a different reading if the Qur'an is to be properly understood at different points in history, but also loyal to the objective meaning because the subjective interpretation should ultimately be approved by the greater community.

This latter point also differentiates Alpyağıl from Öztürk. While both acknowledge that the implementation of verses can change over time, only Alpyağıl insists that the wider community recognize the change. The only condition that Öztürk explicitly emphasizes is that new implementations should not contradict what are believed to be the higher objectives of these verses.

The differences between Öztürk and Alpyağıl become more marked in relation to the higher objectives of the Qur'an. However, before elaborating on this, I wish to shed a little light on the notion itself, for both authors assume that their readers are familiar with the concept, which is hardly surprising given that anyone who is familiar with modern Islamic discourses will have observed the rise and proliferation of writings on the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*). As its name suggests, the focus of this traditional concept is on the abstract higher objectives of Islamic law rather than on any particulars pertaining to it—or, to put it more crudely, on the spirit rather than the letter of the law.

Given its current prominence, reformist and non-reformist researchers have made various attempts to uncover the historicity of the concept in traditional Islamic discourse, partly out of genealogical interest but also because of the weight that traditional concepts carry for a conventional Muslim audience. Introducing a reform without the backup of a traditional authority is inevitably a challenging task. Had the traditional authorities approved of taking the higher objectives of Islamic law into account, then reformists would find it easier to convince their audiences of the legitimacy of their own appeal to them. However, anyone studying the concept will soon discover that it has been accorded different historicities, which have been retraced back to various important stages in Islamic history, including that of the eponymous founders of the legal schools in Islam, and that of the companions of the Prophet. However, to introduce the concept, I shall refer to only one interpretation—that of the fourteenth-century Andalusian scholar al-Shāṭibī (d.1388)—mainly because his ideas remain dominant in contemporary discussions and he continues to influence modernist thinkers.

When al-Shāṭibī advanced the idea of higher objectives, he obviously had no modernist scruples in mind, but wanted to discuss whether God's actions had

a rationally definable cause (*taʿlīl*). Unlike his predecessor al-Rāzī (d.1210), al-Shāṭibī believed that humans were capable of discerning the reasons behind God's actions.[21] Although he conceded that one might not find evidence for his hermeneutical position in an explicit mention in the text, we can infer (*istiqrāʾ*) it from a holistic reading of a greater body of verses—in other words, by recurrently noting that God Himself mentions in verses that there is a specific preponderance involved in His request or report. For example, verse 20:14 states that the prayer should be maintained *in order* to remember God. Another example is verse 4:165, in which the sending of messengers is unequivocally related to a clear rationale—"that humankind, after (the coming) of the messengers, should have no plea against Allah."[22] Thus, for al-Shāṭibī, not only are there clear reasons for why God requests or reports something, but He also explicitly mentions these reasons in His Qurʾan.[23]

Having established a rationale behind God's law that is intelligible to human beings, al-Shāṭibī then set about constructing a comprehensive hierarchical framework within which to understand *sharīʿa*, the ultimate objective of which, he argued, was to help procure well-being (*maṣlaḥa*) in the present and hereafter.[24] To realize this greater purpose, *sharīʿa* is structured around three elements pertaining respectively to necessities (*ḍarūriyāt*), exigencies (*ḥājiyāt*), and enhancements (*taḥsīniyāt*).[25] Any injunction that protects life is deemed a necessity because protecting life is one of the absolute aims of *sharīʿa*. When something is urgent, without being absolutely necessary, it belongs to the category of exigencies, a clear example being abandoning the fast when one is ill: "but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later."[26] Enhancements are what improve the quality of life, but they are neither necessary nor urgent; Islamic rules on personal hygiene is a clear example of this.

The theory of higher objectives and the problem of subjectivity intersect over the question of what items belong to the category of necessities. According to al-Shāṭibī, the following five necessities—protection of life, progeny, religion, intellect, and property—are of principal concern to *sharīʿa*, and may be of equal concern to other religions. However, some of al-Shāṭibī's contempor-

21 Abū Isḥāq Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl Al-Sharīʿa*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1997), 322.

22 Qurʾan 4:165.

23 Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl Al-Sharīʿa*, 2:323.

24 Al-Shāṭibī, 2:322.

25 Al-Shāṭibī, 2:324.

26 Qurʾan 2:184.

aries, including al-Ṭūfī (d.1316) and al-Subkī (d.1355), added a sixth item to his list, namely honour. Al-Qahtani claimed that al-Ṭūfī and al-Subkī had "argued that sensible people would often be willing to sacrifice their lives and wealth in defense of their honor,"[27] so that should also belong to the list of necessities. But how can something based on such subjective grounds be considered a necessity? While it might hold true in some parts of the Middle East that honour is regarded as more important than life, one would be hard-pressed to find a Dutchman who would be prepared to kill or die over a point of honour. Consequently, we cannot but question, as Alpyağıl does, whether this is a case of the interpreter's subjective projections rather than God's so-called objective higher aims being imposed on the text.

Öztürk arranged the binaries of universal/transhistorical and contingent/particular within a certain hierarchy. This hierarchy, as it was recurrently emphasized, favours the purpose behind a verse, that is the higher objective over the specific form in which a verse was delivered. However, Alpyağıl suspects that such hierarchies are not derived from the text but are the consequence of a modernist appreciation of past cultures.

An optimistic appreciation of modernity assumes that certain changes in the modern world signify progress and, as Alpyağıl argued, modern interpreters tend to approach historical texts from the viewpoint of the present. Since there is an inherent conflict between the archaic values of the text and those espoused by modernity, various interpreters resort to hermeneutical bifurcations—such as ideal–contingent, historical–transhistorical, and universal–particular—as a kind of camouflage for dealing with the dissonance between the values of the present and past. In other words, these interpreters create a framework that allows them to acknowledge Sharia's higher, universal aims, since they are too abstract to conflict with modern sensibilities, while simultaneously ignoring and moving past those historical implementations that have been deemed archaic and out of place.

As we discovered earlier, Alpyağıl challenges this dualistic approach to the Qur'an by arguing that we should not apply a progression bias to evaluating the meaning of verses, but instead should assess them on the grounds of whether they are context appropriate. For example, in verse 8:60 it is said that believers should prepare for combat by readying "steeds of war." It is easy to see how a Qur'anic historicist might argue that such verses were meaningful only in their own times, since by the standards of modern warfare and artillery, war horses

27 Musfir bin Ali Al-Qahtani, *Understanding Maqāṣid Al-Shari'ah: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2015), 18.

are an outdated choice when one can employ tanks and fighter jets. However, as Alpyağıl argued, while this advice might feel out of place in the United States of today, it is undoubtedly relevant, or may even be necessary, in some parts of the world, such as Afghanistan. Accordingly, verses must be appreciated according to the situation, and not in the light of a modernist bias and belief in progression.

Besides, rather than favouring a model based on present-day values, Alpyağıl advocates an approach best described as a fusion of horizons. Interpreters should avoid discarding the historical aspects of the Qur'an simply because they seem alien or outdated, but should attempt to draw parallels with the contemporary context. A modern Turkish reader and an ancient Arabic text will have different horizons of meaning. For example, from the cultural horizon of seventh-century Arabia, a 'camel' was viewed very differently in Turkey from how it is today. It has moved from being an important part of the cultural and biological ecosystem, to a novelty observed in a zoo. As such, to understand a camel as it was understood in the Qur'an, a Turkish reader would have to find an equivalent in his or her own cultural context.

Öztürk was also in favour of seeking out parallel examples to fit the new settings. It fact, it is noteworthy just how similar the hermeneutical premises of the two authors are. For a start, Alpyağıl and Öztürk agree that the Qur'an does not claim to solve all humanity's problems. On the contrary, it addresses only a limited number of issues with a specific set of solutions. Moreover, when it does produce a solution, it is only in the form of a model and not an attempt to provide an answer to every kind of situation. Öztürk supported this principle in the context of his claim that a linguistic form is incommensurate with the intent of an utterance. Alpyağıl, however, whose endorsement was somewhat less refined, felt that the provisional nature of solutions should be read between the lines of the Qur'an. As he put it, "if I may say so, the Qur'an is a book that states 'for example' between the lines (*söz arasında*)."[28] Hence, to return to the earlier example of preparing horses for war, Alpyağıl would propose being open minded about the possibility of the verse containing a higher didactic message—namely that, in war, one uses one's best military resources.

Alpyağıl and Öztürk share the conviction that not all verses in the Qur'an are relevant to contemporary experiences. For example, verse 33:6 argues that the Prophet's wives are the mothers of believers. However, since this indirectly means that Muslims cannot marry the Prophet's wives, some Muslims might

28 Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik?*, 158.

question if such verses can have a futurity given that the Prophet's wives are now long dead. A similar case could be made about miracles. The verses that report on the various miracles of prophets are hardly re-enactable with analogous situations. In such cases, Alpyağıl hopes that they can be appreciated as matters of faith or as part of the overall identity of Muslims. Also, such verses are part of the history of Islam's cultural consciousness: prophets did perform miracles, and Muhammad's wives were considered to be the mothers of believers.

Despite their substantial hermeneutical claim that the Qur'an provides examples rather than solutions, neither Öztürk nor Alpyağıl directly address the implications of their theories on the futurity of meaning. The often-discussed dichotomy between hermeneutics and exegesis can explain this to a point, thus making it unfair to expect a fully-fledged exegesis of the Qur'an when the question is not about what it says but how the limitations of our understanding affect how we interpret it. Nevertheless, one might expect some of the practical consequences of a theory to be part of its exposition, especially when they are so important to any reader of Alpyağıl and Öztürk. The architects of these theories would be unlikely not to think of their implications, unless they either lacked foresight or left some conclusions equivocal on account of their delicate nature. Nonetheless, the fact remains that these authors still need to provide answers to some pertinent questions.

Alpyağıl argued that changing the context could still render certain practices stipulated in the Qur'an meaningful or, for that matter, even necessary. However, as crass and rhetorical as this might sound, does this mean that in different contexts, perhaps even in the future, men should be allowed to engage in extramarital intercourse with female slaves? After all, as the Qur'an states, believing men may only have intercourse with "those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess."[29] Does this means that in some circumstances it is still possible for men to have slaves and, by extension, the institution of slavery could be reinstated? If we are to apply the earlier example of how preparing horses for war might be irrelevant for an American infantry, but relevant for an Afghan one, we have to assume that a similar scenario might exist for having extramarital intercourse with female slaves.

Alpyağıl could argue that the presence of slavery in the Qur'an requires us to set aside our modernist biases in favour of a sympathetic attempt to fuse the different horizons to which the present and past interpreters of the text belong.

29 Qur'an 23:6.

However, in such a case we would need to find an equivalent of seventh-century slavery in our contemporary world to understand the verse in both its historical and contemporary contexts. We know that the Qur'an acknowledges the existence of slaves, but we also know that the Qur'an advocated the emancipation of slavery because righteousness is described as spending one's substance "for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves."[30] Inversely, can an interpreter go so far as to read the Qur'an in a way that draws an analogy between seventh-century slavery and the present-day exploitation low-paid workers, and then regard an improvement in appalling working conditions as akin to the act of manumission? Alpyağıl's work seems to suggest this possibility. However, we cannot know for sure whether he intends this outcome, since he did not clarify the exact parameters or limits of his analogical approach.

It is possible to mount a similar critique of Öztürk, especially since he believes that future circumstances will make it easier to implement the Qur'an's injunctions. Take, for example, the following verse in the Qur'an, which reads: "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested."[31] Here, it is not difficult to infer that the higher intent behind the injunction is that the Islamic dress code serves to protect women from being molested. Consequently, given Öztürk's belief in the possibility of better implementation, can women who have found better ways of protecting themselves from molestation forego the classical Islamic dress code? Öztürk's work clearly implies that they can. The logic behind this is very similar to his proposal that a better modern solution to correcting thieves would be through recourse to the social services rather than cutting off their hands. Reminiscent of Alpyağıl, Öztürk's work suggests new interpretative possibilities that are thematically left undeveloped.

5 Conclusion

If we are to sum up the earlier discussions on the status of variant readings in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey, we would have to start with the assessment that they maintain an outlook that is both insulated and, paradoxically, very porous. Thus, while they contain a strong tendency to limit the

30 Qur'an 2:177.
31 Qur'an 33:59.

extent to which the Qur'an can be subjected to modern interpretations, they simultaneously—and almost unintentionally—seem to want to open up avenues for reading the Qur'an in other than traditional ways. However, given that the authors have failed to addressed the preliminary implications of their theories, they necessarily remain incomplete.

With regard to the insulated dimension of these theories, all three authors clearly rejected anachronistic readings of the Qur'an. In other words, interpreters who circumvent the original historical context in which the Qur'an was set to promote an interpretation entrenched in modern frames of references, is by default implicating themselves in a hermeneutically illegitimate reading of it. For example, one cannot claim that the Qur'an can throw light on quantum mechanical theory. Likewise, to argue that its references to slaves is really to employees rather than slaves, is similarly out of place.

Yet, despite wanting to limit the number of modernist ideological frameworks through which to read the Qur'an, such as scientific positivism or reformism, the theories of the Turkish thinkers have explicitly or implicitely opened up new and different ways of reading it. Cündioğlu's theory is implicitly open to non-traditional approaches to reading the Qur'an, as long as one is able to justify them in terms of expressing God's sole, objective intention. Likewise, but more explicitly, Alpyağıl is also open to new interpretations on the grounds that the practical significance of words can change over time. Moreover, one can read the Qur'an heuristically by finding contemporary equivalents for the examples presented in it. Finally, Öztürk holds that it is possible to express the objective, higher intent behind the verses with better examples taken from contemporary situations than with the more antiquated historical ones.

Contemporary Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics no doubt contains a lot of potential for reading the Qur'an in new ways, but it is only a potential and its rough edges still need to be rubbed off. Cündioğlu drew attention to the historical-critical method, but failed to address its finer inconsistencies, such as the absence of theoretical tools with which to tackle the discrepancies in the historical data. Likewise, Alpyağıl argued that meaning can be recovered analogically in the present, but did not ask what the limits of these analogies are? Can the Qur'an's reference to slavery be analogically understood, or, what is more, implemented in the present? Finally, as Öztürk asked, are there limits to applying the Qur'an in better ways in the present? Can one alter the Islamic dress code, or, for that matter, other rituals of the Qur'an? Despite their urgency, all these questions need further answers from the Turkish thinkers.

CHAPTER 8

Final Reflections on the State of Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Turkey

I now wish to conclude this book with my final reflections on the state of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Turkey. I present and compare these reflections with the findings and conclusions drawn from two other seminal studies in the field—Körner's *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology: Rethinking Islam*, and Wilkinson's *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue*.

In his conclusion, Körner compared Turkish thought to a thriving young jungle without much "bio-diversity." This, he concluded, was because Turkish authors restricted themselves to only one type of question, namely ethics—in other words, the question of how the Qur'an could again be made ethically acceptable. However, this focus stifled Qur'anic hermeneutics in two ways. First, it made it only serve a mechanical function: "we know what is there in the Koran, ethics; and we know what must come out, modern ethics. The only question left is, how do we get it out? Hermeneutics has [hence] become a tin-opener."[1] Second, since the focus of Turkish hermeneutics is on proving that the "Koran can keep up," it put Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics at risk of "producing nothing but apologetics."[2]

Having brought Körner's findings into this study, I now agree that Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics is indeed a young field. However, I have also come to realize that the works of the Turkish thinkers studied in this book are more diverse and compelling than a simple introduction to or apologetic defence of the Qur'an's relevance to modernity. Unlike Körner, who only studied modern university theology and the works of the Ankara School, I put forward a case in Chapter 1 also to include historicist (*tarihselci*) discourses that did not belong to the Ankara School (Öztürk), university theology (*ilahiyat*) originating from places other than Ankara (Alpyağıl), and research conducted outside a university environment (*araştırma yazarci*) (Cündioğlu). This resulted in findings that present a picture of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics that is quite different from the one that Körner depicted—it is a picture that shows the active depri-

1 Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology*, 204.
2 Körner, 204.

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oritizing or even rejection of attempts to instrumentalize hermeneutics simply to make the Qur'an more palatable to modern sensibilities.

Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu and Öztürk have each made a hermeneutical case for appreciating the historical particularity of the Qur'an, even if it goes against the grain of contemporary sentiments. Their hermeneutics is rooted in the wish to respond to excesses in contemporary Qur'anic studies. For Öztürk, one such excess is the tendency to over universalize the Qur'an's address and, as such, he claims that some verses are simply particular to an historical context and that one should not be forced to instil into them a transcendental, universal ethics. Likewise, Cündioğlu explicitly criticizes interpretations that abuse the polysemy of Arabic for the sole purpose of apologetically advancing new, politically correct readings of the Qur'an. Finally, Alpyağıl suspects that historicist readings are underhand attempts to replace the norms and values espoused in the Qur'an with ones considered more befitting to modern times. Accordingly, he presents a counter hermeneutics that, rather than seeing the Qur'an in supersessionist and apologetic terms, approaches it in an intercultural and cyclical way. Preparing horses for war was indeed historically relevant, but that does not mean that, even if we now have tanks at our disposal, there are no cultures for which the message is still pertinent, or that we might enter a future in which preparing horses for war could again become relevant in developed countries. Thus, Alpyağıl does not even apologetically wish to acknowledge that some verses are only relevant to the past. He also has no wish to read these verses in alternative ways to make them comply with modern norms and values. He does not regard the era in which we now live as better positioned than any other in the past or future to judge or define what wisdom and meaning the Qur'an can offer.

Körner was also disappointed by the limited ambitions of the Turkish thinkers. As he put it, "how can one study Koran hermeneutics, and then complain that what one has found is only hermeneutics?"[3] For Körner, the answer to this question lies in the vagueness of the term itself: "here, one should be reminded of the ambiguity of the word 'hermeneutics'."[4] In Körner's work, hermeneutics pertains not only to the theory of interpretations but also to the actual interpretation. Since the latter is underdeveloped in the works of the Turkish thinkers, it follows that he is still hopeful that one day the Turkish "theological workshop" will produce "an even more theological Islam, which casts new light on our questions, visions and lives."[5]

3 Körner, 205.
4 Körner, 205.
5 Körner, 205.

In this study, I have specifically redirected and tempered such an expectation by divorcing hermeneutics from interpretation. In Chapter 2, I described hermeneutics as a contemplation on the procedures and conditions that make the meanings of things intelligible, expressed at its lowest threshold in a statement. I made this separation on account of the genealogy of Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics, which, in recent decades, has become a response to a sprawl of perceived arbitrary interpretations. Hence, by its very nature, Turkish Qur'anic hermeneutics provides a meta-level critique and pedagogy on how the Qur'an should be read. Its starting point, as I demonstrated throughout the first half of the book is to insulate the Qur'an from arbitrary readings by specifying certain subjective and objective requirements. Its ambition is fundamentally philosophical, and to a lesser extent exegetical. If there is any exegesis, it is only to drive a theoretical point forward.

Turkish thought is fundamentally theoretical and dialectical. Wilkinson extensively assessed its dialectical aspect by arguing that it is at its most creative when, as a dialectical enterprise, it seeks to look at Western sources with the help of Turkish and Arabic ones, or vice versa[6] and, in this book, I further defend his claim. For example, Cündioğlu used Saussurean and Chomskyan concepts to navigate the classical debates on the status of polysemic expressions (*lafz-i müşterek*) in the Qur'an. Conversely, Öztürk came to the defence of Dilthey by arguing that the psychologization of God's will was possible despite the ontological difference between humans and God. His evidence was the *muvafakat-i Ömer*, which is how often the Prophet's companion 'Umar voiced an opinion on a matter that was subsequently reiterated, and thereby vindicated, by revelation. Öztürk thus demonstrated that ontological difference is not an impediment because history proves that God and humans share the capacity to reason.[7]

This dialectical engagement is, however, not always as constructive or deep. As Wilkinson put it, "[dialectical] responses vary and include negative, positive, and constructive elements; they include clichés, generalizations, critical insights, and points of active dialogue."[8] Indeed, the cross-cultural dialectics of Turkish thinkers can vary considerably, from Alpyağıl's exceedingly dense

6 Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters*, 227.

7 'Umar's suggestions were based on rational deliberations in that their vindication in the Qur'an proved that God accepted the rationality behind them. However, it is hard to think that God would accept the rationality of a rule that 'Umar had suggested when God Himself has not rationalized it. If God indeed reached the same conclusion, that would mean that man and God—despite being ontologically different—to a certain extent share the same type of reasoning.

8 Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters*, 227.

engagement with Wittgensteinian thinking, through to Öztürk's simple citation of Heidegger's comment that language is the home of being. However, while Turkish theology is learning a lot from the Western philosophical discourse, will the latter learn anything from Turkish theology appropriating some of its ideas? The answer seems to favour vindication over evolution—in other words, the Turkish thinkers' engagement in creative appropriation, which itself relies on imaginative arguments, becomes a way of vindicating and applying certain Western ideas. However, because the Turkish thinkers are focused more on using the Western ideas to drive their own points forward, their endeavour does little to develop the Western discourse from which the ideas are borrowed.

Ultimately, it is not so much the purely theoretical nature of Turkish hermeneutics, or the weaker aspects of its dialectics, that I hold most critically accountable, but its theoretical open-endedness. As Wilkinson states, "Turkish theologians range in a continuum from taking on more prescriptive roles to more explorative roles."[9] Hence, if I relate this statement to this study, we had similarly noted the prescriptive elements of Turkish thought in the delineation of objective and subjective requirements needed to interpret the Qur'an. However, to delineate these requirements, the Turkish authors also explored the philosophical problems of objectivity and subjectivity and, while doing so, some reached conclusions with critical consequences for future new readings. However, despite some authors being aware of their full philosophical implications, these were only ever implied and the answer often deferred for the future.[10] Öztürk, for example, extended *ta'wīl* to jurisprudence and theology, which suggested that renewed subjective mediations could potentially produce new, more contemporary metaphors for God, and better applications of the injunctions of the Qur'an. However, the extent and limitations of what could be done better were left ambiguous—they were something that in all good conscience the interpreter had to figure out. Can we, for example, find better ways of being chaste and protecting ourselves from harassment than by wearing a head scarf? Or, can Muslims revitalize the Judeo-Christian metaphor of God as father in full compliance with Islam's strict monotheism? Öztürk fails to explore any of the questions that would really test the limits of the theories. Likewise, Alpyağıl argues that historical implementations of the Qur'an could become meaningful again in the future. However, does this really mean that we can imagine a future in which slavery becomes relevant again? Alpyağıl, who

9 Wilkinson, 235.

10 The Turkish authors were aware of the heavy implications of the conclusions they reached, but immediately adopted a rhetoric that would deflect the question.

was aware of such questions, followed Öztürk by choosing to defer the answer to such controversial questions to the prudence of a future interpreter.

I assume that this reticence is solely to do with the conservative sensibilities of some readers of the Qur'an in Turkey. In 2020, following complaints about the controversial nature of his statements, Öztürk was removed from his position as a researcher at the Kur'an Araştırmaları Merkezi (Qur'an Study Centre). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the answers the Turkish authors deferred must still be resolved, either in subsequent works by the same scholars or by newer generations of thinkers. Nonetheless, these authors have at least laid the foundations and created a futurity for Qur'anic hermeneutics.

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General Index

Index of Qur'anic Verses

YUSUF ÇELIK,
Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities and Islam, and member of the research group Digital Approaches to Sacred Texts at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh on Qur'anic hermeneutics.

The Turkish market of Qur'anic translations and studies is exceedingly oversaturated. Critics find some of these lacking in proper hermeneutical judgement, impelling them to reflect on the conditions of judicious Qur'anic exegesis. These reflections have remained relatively unexplored in English academic literature. In *Critical Hermeneutics*, Çelik explores and compares the hermeneutical philosophies of three Turkish intellectuals, namely Alpyagil, Cündioglu, and Öztürk. By exploring their philosophical views on subjectivity and objectivity in the context of interpreting the Qur'an, Çelik draws major implications for reading the Qur'an in new and different ways.

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