

New Approaches
to Human Dignity
in the Context
of Qur'ānic
Anthropology

New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology:

The Quest for Humanity

Edited by

Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Çiçek

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Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity

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This volume owes its genesis to a symposium on “*Approaches to the notions of dignity and deficiency in the context of Qur’ānic anthropology*” held in September 2015 at the Chair for the Study of Religions at the University of Erlangen (FAU). Twelve Muslim and non-Muslim scholars accepted our invitation to present and discuss their respective contributions on Islamic theological anthropology, and entered into a series of vigorous and memorable debates and discussions concerning the different hermeneutical and systematic-ethical perspectives regarding the concepts of human dignity and deficiency in the context of Qur’ānic anthropology.

Their presentations on Qur’ānic and Islamic theological anthropology exhibited quite divergent views concerning this issue and bore witness to the diverse referential and multiperspective nature of the anthropology of the Qur’ān, which deserves to be continually rediscovered. As a contribution to this rediscovery, the present volume contains three sections (*grammars, translations, hermeneutics*), which differ considerably in length, structure and methodological approach but give a vivid testimony to the significance and complexity of theological issues relating to man and his dignity in the context of Qur’ānic anthropology. We hope that this volume will stimulate further contributions to this fascinating field.

As the editors of this volume, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to all collaborators for their contributions – not only to the abovementioned symposium but also to this volume. We would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), and (especially with regard to the symposium itself) by the Dr. German Schweiger Foundation of the University of Erlangen. Without this support the symposium could not have taken place and this volume could not have been published.

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The Editors
February 2017

CHAPTER ONE

DYNAMICS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN ISLAMIC CONTEXTS: AN INTRODUCTION

RÜDIGER BRAUN

The ambivalence of human nature and theological anthropology

“If nobody asks me about it, I know it, but if I should tell it to someone who asks me, I do not know.”¹

Saint Augustine’s famous ‘confession’ on the nature of time may also be valid for the question of the essence of human nature. It is a question in which the basic philosophic questions of metaphysics, ethics and politics or, as Kant said, of what we should know, do and hope, seem to culminate.² Aristotle was less reserved than Augustine and described a

* The publication of this anthology, as well as the writing of my own contributions for this anthology, was made possible with the generous support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Dr. German Schweiger Foundation. My gratitude also applies to the (unknown) reviewers, without whom my related research application would not have been successful. Finally, I would like to thank Tracey Translations (Bern/Switzerland), which took on the challenging task of proofreading all contributions to this volume.

¹ *Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio*: St. Augustine, Confessions, Book XI, Ch.14,17, in: Augustinus, Bekenntnisse, Latin-German, tr. Joseph Bernhart, Frankfurt 1987, 629.

² “Metaphysics answers the first question; morality the second, religion the third and anthropology the fourth. Basically, however, all this could be reckoned with as anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last”, Immanuel Kant,

man devoid of virtue as “the most unholy and savage of animals, and most viciously disposed towards sensuality and gluttony”.³ In this he comes close to what Sophocles might have meant in his *Antigone*, when the choir sing that nothing is “as monstrous (*δεινός*) as man”,⁴ “monstrous” as a reference to the “ambivalent potentiality of man to be just as capable of the highest virtues and cultural achievements as of the most abominable crimes against humanity”.⁵ The complexity of this anthropological enigma and the fact that any discussion of man has *normative* implications provokes scholars who deal with anthropological questions into a dispute about their interpretations of humanity and human dignity. This is particularly true for the *theological* anthropology of religions, due mainly to the expectations of pluralistic societies that strive for cohesion of different religions and cultures.

The clearly *religious* understanding of the relationship between man and the transcendent Absolute (‘God’) is the pivotal point of theological anthropology and touches the core of every constitutional order⁶, due to the inevitable political, social and economic implications of this interpretation. For this and other reasons, religious and cultural interpretations of humanity and human existence are constantly questioned and assessed as to how they promote a constructive approach to cultural plurality by trying to reconcile the inviolability of man’s individual dignity with the politics of religious identity – or in other words, reconciling one’s own understanding with the normative understanding of a pluralistic society. Anthropologically speaking, the challenge is to relate one’s own religious concept of man to the demands of human rights,

Logik. Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen, in: Kant’s Werke vol. IX, Berlin 1923, 1-150, here 25; tr. (all further translations) by the author (noted below as ‘tr. RB’).

³ ὁ δ’ ἄνθρωπος ὅπλα ἔχων φύεται φρονήσει καὶ ἀρετῇ, οἷς ἐπὶ τὰ πάντα ἐστὶ χρῆσθαι μάλιστα. διὸ ἀνοσιώτατον καὶ ἀγριώτατον ἀνὲν ἀρετῆς, καὶ πρὸς ἀφροδίσια καὶ ἐδωδὴν χεῖριστον., Aristotle, *Politics*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 1253a 27, with an English translation by W.E. Boland, London 1877, 114.

⁴ Πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ, κοῦδὲν ἀνθρώπων δεινότερον πέλει (‘monstrous are many, and none is more monstrous than man’), Sophocles, *Antigone*, Greek and English, translated by R.C. Jess for the University College Toronto, Boston 1894, 31f.

⁵ Wolfgang Schoberth, *Einführung in die theologische Anthropologie*, Darmstadt 2006, 31; tr. RB.

⁶ Cf. for this context especially Harry Noormann, *Menschenrechte und die Religion/en* in: Friedrich Johannsen (ed.), *Die Menschenrechte im interreligiösen Dialog. Konflikt- oder Integrationspotential?* Stuttgart 2013, 24-40.

which inevitably challenge religions and their adherents with regard to their contribution to 'social humanisation'.⁷

But can sacred scriptures be regarded as factual sources from which humanitarian ideas of a definite character can be deduced? It would undoubtedly be anachronistic to project the modern notions of human rights and human dignity (the outcomes of positive and 'universal' legal decisions) onto antiquity or the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Human rights and human dignity pre-empt the question of human *nature* by setting a universal *norm*: 'All human beings are born and remain free and equal in rights'.⁸ The universal acknowledgement of these norms or notions is not the result of a special (religious) understanding of 'human nature' or the logical outcome of an evolutionary process of human history, but in Eva Kalny's words, "the fragile product of a tragic and at the same time fortunate moment"⁹ of human history. According to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, it was "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind"¹⁰ that led to the decision to protect 'human dignity' by legal decree.

Is there any need for a material determination of the concept of humanity and dignity, or for an appropriation of these *secular* notions from *religious* sources? Although answers to this question may differ widely, relating secular and religious notions to each other is a challenge that has been taken seriously by religious people, for example with the formulation of a universal charter such as the UDHR. In recent decades, there has been growing awareness among Muslim scholars that the functioning of a globalised society depends in part on the mobilisation of *religious* resources for the recognition of a religiously independent humanity (the secular *topos* 'human dignity') and the appreciation of a *religious* plurality and difference.¹¹ Some of these scholars even see the

⁷ Noormann speaks about the contribution of religions "zur gesellschaftlichen Humanisierung", Noormann, Menschenrechte, 25.

⁸ French 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' (1789), Art. 1.

⁹ Eva Kalny, Der 'Westen' und die Menschenrechte: Abschied vom Ursprungsmythos einer Idee, in: *Peripherie* 28 (2008), no. 109/110, 196-223, 218f.

¹⁰ Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ed. by Jan Brownlie, Oxford 1994, 21.

¹¹ Cf. Sardar Ali Shaheen, Religious Pluralism, Human Rights and Muslim Citizenship in Europe: Some preliminary reflections on an evolving methodology for consensus, in: M.L. Loenen/J.E. Goldschmidt (eds.), *Religious Pluralism and Human Rights in Europe: Where to draw the line?* Antwerp/Oxford 2007, 57-79.

religions (or their representatives and adherents) confronted with an ‘epochal challenge’ in legitimising human rights and dignity from a religious point of view.¹² In particular, scholars who live in pluralistic societies of the West see themselves as subject to special expectations with regard to a scientific, open-minded and pluralistic interpretation of Islam’s symbolic system, especially in the context of the newly emerging ‘Islamic theology’ co-financed by the secular state, and consider going beyond the traditional boundaries of the systematic, anthropological and philosophical field as particularly urgent. The research and teaching activities of the first centres for Islamic theology in Germany¹³ have already entered the second half of their first decade and are obviously aimed at transforming Islamic thinking in the context of Muslim life in non-Muslim societies. However, the dynamics of transformation in academic theology could also be observed in Muslim countries, at least before the threatening developments that followed the Arab Spring. In Turkey, for example, half a century after the reopening of state-financed faculties for Islamic theology (1949), the first germs of a hermeneutic breakthrough became apparent, whose dynamic has also influenced the recently established Muslim theology in Germany.¹⁴

It is these discursive dynamics, both in the controversial debate on the alleged or contested dichotomy between the ‘religious’ vs. the ‘secular’ as well as in religious authentication of secular achievements such as notions of ‘human dignity’ and a ‘common humanity’ that aroused my research interest in the specific hermeneutical strategies and concepts by which these discursive dynamics are shaped. This research interest was

¹² For Ahmet Cavuldak (*Gemeinwohl und Seelenheil. Die Legitimität der Trennung von Religion und Politik in der Demokratie*, Bielefeld 2015, 594) the religion of Islam “steht [...] vor der epochalen Herausforderung einer Begründung der Menschenrechte von der religiösen Warte aus”.

¹³ Cf. the establishment of Centers for Islamic Theology in Germany, recommended by the Council of Science (Federal Ministry of Education and Research) in 2010 and located in Münster/Osnabrück, Frankfurt/Gießen, Tübingen and Erlangen. Other centres are planned in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

¹⁴ An example is the foundation of the theological journal ‘İslamiyat’ in 1996, the final communique of the Turkish Diyanet (2002), with the surprising demand that a new hermeneutics of the Qur’ān be established, focusing on the context and intention of its discourse, and finally the establishment of the ‘Qur’ān Research Center’ (Kur’an Araştırmaları Merkezi) in Istanbul in 2014, cf. Necmettin Gökçir, *Modern Türkiye’de Kur’an’a yaklaşımlar*, in: Mehmet Akif Koç/İsmail Albayrak (eds.), *Tefsire Akademik Yaklaşımlar II*, Ankara 2013, 187-222; Kuramer Bülten, ed. by Ahmet Baydar, Nr. 1, Istanbul 2014, 1-67.

heightened by the observation that the hermeneutic premises and references of anthropological concepts that were formulated in studies dedicated to this authentication, were only made the subject of reflection in exceptional cases.¹⁵

Such a reflection on the humanising potential of religions would certainly require good theological reasons, general frames of reference and religious paradigms that would lead a religion to adopt the concept of a universally applicable and anthropologically determined humanitarianism. Of course, all religions and their adherents would claim to derive humanity from their own traditions. But is it only the affinity to the biological species *homo sapiens*, or personhood as such, that makes someone ‘humane’ in a certain *religious* frame of reference? Is the universal dignity of (individual) man unconditionally acknowledged, or is it dependent upon certain *qualities*? Of great interest in this regard is the analysis of the constructions and deconstructions of the ‘Other’ as a category of exclusion and limitation that opposes and endangers the universal ideal of the humanity of mankind. Rightly or wrongly, successful and rational ‘authentication’ of universal, culture-independent norms seems likely to become an important quality criterion of religions with universal claims of truth. This is mainly because there will inevitably be an ambivalence or tension between *absolute* religious interpretations of the world and *individual* human rights.¹⁶ In the words of Katell Berthelot, the challenge for religions is to “articulate [their] universalistic perspective with the more narrow concern for the cohesion and unity of their respective religious communities”.¹⁷

It is this challenge that prompted Muslim scholars (not only in Germany) to develop new designs and concepts for a theological anthropology that is not only firmly anchored in questions of (qur’anic) hermeneutics, but can only be systematically understood or represented with an awareness of the contours and dynamics of contemporary hermeneutical discourse. In order to examine the related dynamics and associated challenges, it makes sense

¹⁵ A deeper exploration of the premises and references of the contemporary Muslim hermeneutics of qur’anic anthropology, especially in the Sunnite discourse, is made in my forthcoming monograph “Humanity and normativity. Contours, dynamics and perspectives of theological anthropology in contemporary Muslim discourse” (to be published in 2018).

¹⁶ Cf. Otfried Höffe, *Menschenrechte im interkulturellen Diskurs*, Berlin 2009, 49f.; Vernunft und Recht, Frankfurt 1996, 21f.

¹⁷ Katell Berthelot/Matthias Morgenstern, Introduction, in: *ibid.* (ed.), *The Quest for a Common Humanity. Humanity and otherness in the religious traditions of the Mediterranean*, Leiden/Boston 2011, 1-20, 3.

to bring Muslim and non-Muslim perspectives of both Qur'ānic and Islamic anthropology into a fruitful dialogue. The present anthology is a step in this direction.

Before I present the basic features of the sections and chapters in this volume, I will highlight a few points regarding the context and potential of this discourse in order to place the chapters and anthropological concepts in the anthology in a broader context. I will start these reflections on religious strategies of appropriating relevant 'secular' notions with some remarks on the epistemological problem of the partial indeterminacy of secular normativity and the question of the inevitability of substantial images of human nature in general (I.1). With a closer look at the basic features of Islam, I will attempt to access the variety of Muslim anthropological positions, exemplified here by concepts of an 'Islamic anthropology', by following Talal Asad's understanding of Islam as a 'discursive tradition' (I.2). In order to grasp this discursive aspect more firmly, I will also examine the disputed dichotomy of 'Islam' and 'secularism', especially with regard to explorative dynamics (I.3). Against this background, and in relation to semiotic reflections on a living language's 'parole', we can briefly approach the qur'ānic discourse as a responsive exegetic discourse that refers to former traditions with a dialogical quality (I.4). This intertextual quality of the Qur'ān's discourse is a common reference in the contributions that are presented in the second section of this introduction, and which indicate the broad diversity of this hermeneutic discourse. After remarks on the challenge of an Islamic topology of 'human nature' (II.1), there is a brief introduction to the sections of this anthology, which focus primarily on the *grammar* (II.2), *translations* (II.3) and *hermeneutics* (II.4) of qur'ānic anthropology in the light of textual, exegetical, ethical and legal questions. Concluding remarks will highlight some of the overarching insights and perspectives of research that can be derived from the discourse in the anthology.

I. Appropriating human dignity in religious anthropology

I.1 Indeterminate normativity and substantial anthropology

The inviolable dignity of the *individual* is undoubtedly a very challenging human ‘right’¹⁸; rooted in the concept that every life is absolutely unique, it not only challenges the religious ‘truth’, but also the religious communities themselves, which may perceive the autonomy of the individual person as a threat to the theological and political order. It is also remarkable that this ultimate principle of a politico-legal order ultimately originates from a semantic void: the *unconditionality* of the supreme norm of civil society is paradoxically bound to its *indeterminacy*.¹⁹ The intention of this indeterminacy can hardly be to leave this fundamental norm, which is so essential to the coexistence of people in a pluralistic society, as simply abstract and ineffective from a political and practical viewpoint. A universal morality, which it should be possible to experience, must be linked with narratives and beliefs that are personally *binding* in nature. In other words, the reasons for adapting and implementing this apparently abstract norm in one’s own daily life must necessarily involve a person or community at the deepest level of their (also religious) identity.

However, this assertion that the politico-legal concept of human dignity is hardly possible in the absence of religious or metaphysical assumptions could also be seen as a theoretical threat to human dignity. Shouldn’t the values of *humanism* be the “chief guiding principle of a rule set with a culturally invariable claim to validity”²⁰ or the starting point for a dialogue between the religious and the non-religious (e.g. agnostics and atheists) – a dialogue that gains in importance as religion loses its significance, particularly in Europe? Ideological determinations that are applied to mankind by an explicitly *religious* concept of humanity cannot

¹⁸ Although human dignity is primarily understood as the foundation of ‘human rights’ and not as a ‘right’ itself, ‘right’ is understood here in the context of Hannah Arendt’s definition of dignity as “the right to have rights”, cited by Christoph Enders, *Die Menschenwürde in der Verfassungsordnung. Zur Dogmatik des Art. 1 GG*, (Ius publicum 27), Tübingen 1997, 159.

¹⁹ Cf. the valuable study of Michael Moxter, *Unterwegs zum Recht. Eine Vorerinnerung an die Horizontale des Würdebegriffs*, in: Bahr Petra (ed.), *Menschenwürde in der säkularen Verfassungsordnung. Rechtswissenschaftliche und theologische Perspektiven*, Tübingen 2006, 73-91, 89f.

²⁰ Franz J. Wetz, *Illusion Menschenwürde?* in: Christian Thies (ed.), *Der Wert der Menschenwürde*, Paderborn et al. 2009, 45-62, 52.

be universally generalised. But by the same token, one can also suggest that such objections may also apply to a ‘humanistic’ or ‘rational-philosophical’ understanding of dignity.

Various attempts have been made to justify the inviolability of human dignity, mainly on ontological, anthropological or ethical-normative grounds. The ontological and anthropological approaches have been criticised since they are subject to a ‘naturalistic fallacy’: norms are derived from what exists (the ‘is-ought’ problem) and therefore cannot be used to argue for a *universal* human dignity.

Kant’s *ethical-normative* concept, which has been regarded until recently as a ‘general’ justification of this dignity, seems to introduce a universality that is independent of particular traditions. But the question is still open as to whether Kant’s formula of ‘human nature’ as an end in itself and his concept of *reason* are ultimately less confounded by historical and ideological factors than the other arguments. In the final section of his “Critique of Practical Reason” Kant contrasts the nullity of man in a cosmological context with his “infinite dignity in a moral sense”²¹, and states that only a being who is “an end in himself” and thus subject to morality (to reasonably justifiable normative claims) can be granted human dignity.²² Kant’s twofold concept of man as a heterogeneous *sensual* and an autonomous *reasoning* creature, the latter standing *apart* from nature and thus endowed with dignity, is also embedded in a speculative metaphysical framework of interpretation and a decidedly *ethical-normative* concept of human nature – a concept that is hardly possible without a substantial image of man.

I.2 Humanity and the idea of an Islamic anthropology

In view of this background, the question arises as to whether one can speak of a distinctly *Islamic* image of man? The highly divergent Muslim positions, which characterise the controversial Muslim discourse on a

²¹ This perspective “erhebt dagegen meinen Wert als einer Intelligenz unendlich durch meine Persönlichkeit, in welcher das moralische Gesetz mir ein von der Tierheit und selbst von der ganzen Sinnenwelt unabhängiges Leben offenbart” (‘in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animal life and even of the whole world of senses’, tr. RB), Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Beschluss cit. 289, ed. by Karl Vorländer, Hamburg 1993, 186.

²² “Also [...] die Sittlichkeit und die Menschheit, sofern sie derselben fähig ist, dasjenige [ist], was allein Würde hat”, Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, BA 78, 32, in: ed. by K. Vorländer, Hamburg 1962³, 400.

distinct ‘Islamic anthropology’²³, hardly seem to justify a positive answer to this question. The essential positions that determine its frame of reference will be outlined briefly here. Akbar S. Ahmed exemplifies the conservative position, which gives Islamic anthropology a distinctly *metaphysical* basis. He describes its task as the study of Muslim groups by scholars “committed to the ideal universalistic principles of Islam – humanity, knowledge and tolerance” and interprets it as an instrument that assists man “to illuminate ‘the right path’” in the “struggle towards better humanity”.²⁴ Ahmed distances himself clearly from suggestions of ‘many Islams’, and attempts to position the multitude of Muslim societies in the framework of “one universal Islam”²⁵. Paradoxically, he thus supports the anthropological model of the Western anthropologist Ernest Gellner from a Muslim perspective – very similar to Merryl Wyn Davies, who speaks of the (Muslim) community as “a system that facilitates the harmonious embodiment of moral values as a constructive environment for right action”²⁶. In Gellner’s anthropological model, social structure, religious belief and political behaviour interact with each other “in an Islamic *totality*” as summarised by Asad, or in ‘Islam’ as “the *blueprint* of a social order”.²⁷ Contrary to this approach, the Muslim anthropologist Abdul Hamid el-Zein has radically questioned the existence of *universal* concepts together with the whole concept of Islam, which for him

²³ Cf. in this context especially Richard Tapper, ‘Islamic Anthropology’ and ‘Anthropology of Islam’, in: Jens Kreinath (ed.), *Anthropology of Islam Reader*, New York 2012, 294-306.

²⁴ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Toward Islamic Anthropology: Definition, Dogma and Directions*, Ann Arbor/MI 1986, also published in: Kreinath (ed.), *Anthropology of Islam*, 279-293, 279. See also id., *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, London 1988.

²⁵ All previous citations Ahmed, *Toward Islamic Anthropology*, 286-288. “This sentiment is reflected in the last great address of the Holy Prophet of Islam at Arafat: ‘Allah has made you brethren one to another; so be not divided ... An Arab has no preference over a non-Arab, [...] nor is a white one to be preferred to a dark one, nor a dark one to a white one, except in righteousness.’” (291).

²⁶ Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing one another. Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*, London 1988, 129.

²⁷ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Washington/DC 1986, 93-110 (also in: Kreinath (ed.), *Anthropology of Islam*, 93-110), 94 in: Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge 1981; emphasis RB.

“dissolves as an analytical category”²⁸. Islam is what Muslims say it is. El-Zein sharply criticises approaches that do not conceive the present “as a particular historical reality in its own right”²⁹, and regards the concept of a single, absolute reality as severely challenged by “the mere fact of a multiplicity of possible meanings at the fundamental level of the nature of Man, God, and the world”. According to El-Zein, “this total focus on the sacred text” in traditional Islam:

“[...] led to the development of a strong formalism and traditionalism, a common language and the construction of a bounded universe of meaning. [...] The Qur’an and prophetic tradition prescribed an absolute reality expressed in a privileged language in which true meaning exists. [...] Therefore folk theology and formal theology developed from the same principle: that both nature and the Qur’an reflect the order and truth of God. [...] Thus both attempt to contain the flux of experience: formal theology seeks to control space by fixing time, and the other to control time by fixing space. [...] All begin from positive assumptions concerning the nature of man, God, history, consciousness, and meaning”.³⁰

To summarise El-Zein’s position, terms such as ‘Islam’, ‘economy’, ‘history’ and ‘religion’ do not exist as things or entities with inherent meaning, but rather as “articulations of structural relations”, and “the outcome of these relations”: “[...] the logic of the system is the content of the system in the sense that each term, each entity within the system, is the result of *structural relations between* others, and so on, neither beginning nor ending in any fixed, absolute point.” An ‘anthropology of Islam’ needs to explore and develop:

“[...] the multiplicity of cultural meanings [...]. There are no privileged expressions of truth. ‘Objectivity’ must be bound to the shared structures

²⁸ Abdul Hamid El-Zein, *Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam*, in: Kreinath (ed.), *Anthropology of Islam*, 77-92, here: 90 (orig. in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977) 227-54).

²⁹ El-Zein, *Beyond Ideology*, 84; with reference to C. Geertz and D.F. Eickelman: according to El-Zein the most significant constraint in Geertz’ analysis of Islam in ‘Islam observed’ (New Haven 1968, 20) is “the nature of the social order into which religious symbols and ideas must naturally fit in order to seem authentic” (ibid. 80). Eickelman (*Moroccan Islam*, Austin 1976) suffers from the same problem in shaping “a stable social and religious reality” (ibid. 84).

³⁰ All previous citations El-Zein, *Beyond Ideology*, 86-89.

of both the analyst and the subject regardless of the content of their respective cultural systems.”³¹

Talal Asad took a third position and argued for a conceptualisation of Islam as a *discursive tradition*, “starting with its own foundation in the Qur’an and hadith”.³² Asad’s viewpoint is that “forms of interest in the production of knowledge are intrinsic to various power structures, and they differ not according to the essential character of Islam or Christianity, but according to historically changing systems of discipline”. He distances himself from Gellner, Geertz and Lewis, and rejects the idea of a “*coherent* anthropology of Islam”, founded on “the notion of a determinate social blueprint, or on the idea of an integrated social totality in which social structure and religious ideology interact”.³³ On the other hand he prefers not to imagine ‘Islam’ without speaking of:

“[...] the centrality of the notion of ‘the correct model’ to which an instituted practice - including ritual - ought to conform, a model conveyed in authoritative formulas in Islamic traditions as in others. [...] A practice is Islamic because it is *authorized* by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims whether by an ‘ālim, a khātib, a Sufi *shaykh*, or an untutored parent. [...] Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions”.³⁴

However, in Asad’s view anthropologists like El-Zein, who denies any special significance to orthodoxy, and those like Gellner, who see it as a specific set of doctrines “at the heart of Islam”, are both:

“[...] missing something vital: that orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy.”

Consequently Asad’s ‘Idea of an anthropology of Islam’ sees the moral person not as an isolated individual, but, as Davies puts it, “a microcosm of the Islamic vision of the moral universe”.³⁵ The task of a genuine

³¹ All previous citations El-Zein, *Beyond Ideology*, 90f; emphasis RB.

³² Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 93; emphasis RB.

³³ All previous citations Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 96.98.100.104; their “schematisation of Islam as a drama or religiosity expressing power is obtained by omitting *indigenous* discourses”, *ibid.*; emphasis RB.

³⁴ This and the following citations: Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 105f.

³⁵ Davies, *Knowing One Another*, 169.

Islamic social science (*‘ilm al-umrân*) and anthropology (*‘ilm al-insân*) must therefore be to explain the consequences resulting from the respective identities of the *person* and the *community* as *moral* entities³⁶ and at the same time to avoid the “essentialist reduction of a diverse religious tradition across cultures into an ideal *essence*”.³⁷ Transferred to our topic, a theological anthropology in the ‘Islamic’ context would need to approach religious symbols such as Muḥammad, Adam and Eve, Iblīs or the Qur’ān, as El-Zein rightly puts it, “[not as] entities or fixed essences” but rather as “vehicles for the expression and articulation of changing values in varying contexts”.³⁸ Consequently there may be as many different answers to questions of the meaning of ‘islām’, ‘humanity’ and ‘dignity’ as there are Muslims (individuals, groups, societies, nations) who present or understand themselves as Muslims.³⁹ Nevertheless the challenging question remains how the conceptuality and preservation of a religiously independent ‘humanity’ and ‘human dignity’ can be incorporated into the Islamic symbolic system in a form that is hermeneutically and critically reflected in the context of a conceptual qur’ānic anthropology? This is because the progressive dynamics of the Muslim discourse on human rights and human dignity will only be convincing when these dynamics are made hermeneutically plausible by linking them with an approach to the Qur’ān that goes beyond the *instructive-theoretical* understanding of revelation with respect to both methodology and constructive criticism.

1.3 Social humanisation and exploratory trajectories

The Muslim perception of the secular discourse on human dignity and human rights can hardly be separated from the heteronomous Muslim perception of secular modernity and its globalising power. From a defensive theological perspective, ‘breaking’ modernity is perceived by many Muslims as an attack on the morality of a socially integrated way of life – somehow, in Habermas’ words, as “a force of social

³⁶ Cf. Davies, *Knowing One Another*, 174; emphasis RB.

³⁷ Daniel Varisco, *Islam obscured. The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation*, in: Kreinath (ed.), *Anthropology of Islam*, 322-343, here 334: on Asad’s ‘Idea of an Islamic anthropology’; emphasis RB.

³⁸ El-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town*, Evanston 1974, 20; cited by Varisco, *Islam obscured*, 335.

³⁹ Cf. Richard Tapper, ‘Islamic Anthropology’ and ‘Anthropology of Islam’, 303f.

disintegration".⁴⁰ It is also important to keep in mind that secularism in the Islamic world is not the result of social upheaval and processes of negotiation, as in Western Europe or the USA, but rather a violent enterprise of colonial and postcolonial elites.

"In the Muslim Middle East and Asia, secularism was not a product of socio-economic, technological or cultural change – it was not associated with any internal social dynamic. In fact, it was not even an indigenous force. Secularism was first and foremost a project of the state – first the colonial, and later the postcolonial state. It was a Western import, meant to support the state's aim of long-run development [...] Secularism in the Muslim world never overcame its colonial origins and never lost its association with the postcolonial struggle to dominate the society".⁴¹

The picture becomes even more complex if one regards the modern tradition of human rights as fully absorbed or taken over by the advocates of the 'Judeo-Christian West' as a genuine outcome of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Muslim commentaries often criticise a Christian co-option of the Western tradition of human rights, which ultimately interprets this tradition as an achievement of Christian-Western culture, subliminally suggesting that adoption of Christian-European culture is a prerequisite for the resurgence of human rights and dignity.⁴² To this extent, the Muslim discourse on religious authentication of secular norms must also be seen against the background of increasing tensions between the 'West' and the 'Muslim World', which emerged as a new 'Other' after the breakdown of the Soviet Union.

"More than any other single religious or political tradition, Islam represents the nonsecular in European and American secularist thought and practice. The concept of a modern (laicist and Judeo-Christian) secular West was constituted in part through opposition to the idea of antimodern, anti-Christian, and theocratic Islamic Middle East. Opposition to Islam is built into secular political authority and the national identities with which it is associated. This suggests that negative associations of Islam not only

⁴⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essays*, Frankfurt 1998, 201; cited by: Geert Henrichs, *Islam und Aufklärung. Der Modernediskurs in der arabischen Philosophie*, Darmstadt 2009, 352.

⁴¹ Vali Nasr, *Lessons from Muslim World*, in: *Daedalus* 112, 3 (2003), 67-72, 68f.

⁴² Cf. Sönmez Kutlu, *Stellungnahme*, in: Richard Heinzmann et al. (eds.), *Menschenwürde. Grundlagen in Christentum und Islam*, Stuttgart 2007, 237.

run deep in Euro-American secular political traditions but help to constitute them".⁴³

Several incidents have cemented Islam's violent reputation in the West and have helped to ideologise the partly hegemonically charged discourse on human rights and human dignity. The current *Muslim vs West* or *Islam vs secularism* conflict is well summarised in '*Who speaks for Islam?*':

"At the heart of the problem is the tendency to believe that a monolithic West – a coherent unit defined by democracy, human rights, gender equality and the division of church and state (secularism) – is pitted against a monolithic Muslim world that has sharply different values and aspirations that are incompatible with 'Western' values".⁴⁴

Notwithstanding this highly problematic initial condition of discourse, the challenge of relating one's own theological concept of man and his destiny to secular topics such as the inviolability of human dignity has generated a dynamic discourse in the Islamic world on the question of how Islamic anthropology can contribute to the cultivation and perfection of the individual self as well as to social 'humanisation', especially as compared with the anthropologies of Judaism and Christianity. This applies not only to Muslim scholars in the non-Muslim world, but also to those who work in nations where the population is predominantly Muslim. For example, it applies to theological scholarship in Turkey and the developments that took place there, especially in the early years of the new millennium. It was obviously the peculiar historical development of modern Turkey as a simultaneously Islamic and laicist (not secular!) state that led some scholars to regard Turkey as a historical pioneer in demonstrating the compatibility of secular democracy, human rights and Islamic piety.

"The ability of Turkey to strike a balance among secularism, human rights, Islam, and constitutional rights that will work for all citizens is not only of great importance to Turkey itself but will also play an important role in informing this debate throughout the Muslim world. If Turkey is able to show that a secular regime can still find a place for religious discourse and

⁴³ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, Princeton/Oxford 2008, 149.

⁴⁴ John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, New York 2007, 152.

human rights for all, then it will go a long way toward rehabilitating the term 'secular' among Muslims everywhere".⁴⁵

As regards such a rehabilitation of the 'secular' not only in Turkey, but also in the Muslim world as a whole, there is, with few exceptions⁴⁶, a consensus among contemporary Sunni scholars that incorporation of current human rights theory and legislation into Muslim societies will hardly succeed without taking into account the Muslim *Shari'a*⁴⁷, considering its importance in Muslim identity politics. At the same time, they are convinced that the dynamism of a humanising discourse can be legitimised, even if the concrete determination of 'humanity' and 'dignity' remains an open process with recourse to the sacred sources of Islam, especially the Qur'ān. For progressive scholars at least, it is beyond question that the "norms and procedures of modern democracy" as well as the secular concepts of human rights and dignity "can also be found within the Islamic tradition".⁴⁸ Thus the challenge of founding the religious legitimisation of secular notions (both exegetically and hermeneutically) on Qur'ānic anthropology has led to a growing realisation among Muslims that "the task of re-interpretation of Islam has to begin with the Qur'ān itself".⁴⁹ However, such a re-interpretation should take place "beyond the choice of an anti-Qur'ānic modernisation and an anti-modern Qur'ānism".⁵⁰ With these words Ömer Özsoy unconsciously drew attention also to the discursive strategies and references with which Muslim scholars confront the tension between religious normativity on the one hand and religious-independent appreciation of humanity on the other; in other words, the

⁴⁵ Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State. Negotiating the Future of Sharia*, Cambridge/Ms. 2008, 222. However, the coup attempt by Erdoğan in July 2016 and current developments in Turkey significantly weaken this hope.

⁴⁶ Cf. especially protagonists of the Shiite discourse such as Soroush, Shabestari, Kadivar or Qaleb described recently in the study of Abbas Poya, 'Denken jenseits der Dichotomien – Religiöse Diskurse im postkolonialen Kontext,' Bielefeld 2014.

⁴⁷ Cf. Lutz Richter-Bernburg, *Gottesebenbildlichkeit und Gottesstellvertreterschaft in Islamischen Menschenrechtsbegründungen*, in: Hans-Christian Günther, Andrea Aldo Robiglio (eds.), *The European image of god and man*, Leiden 2010, 107-121.

⁴⁸ For Cavuldak (*Gemeinwohl und Seelenheil*, 556) these include, in particular, the Islamic "principle of consultation, public welfare, [...] the need for consensus [...]."

⁴⁹ Mustansir Mir, *The Sura as a unity. A twentieth century development in Qur'ānic exegesis*, in: Gerald R. Hawting/Abdul Kader Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, New York 1993, 211-224, 218.

⁵⁰ Ömer Özsoy, *Erneuerungsprobleme zeitgenössischer Muslime und der Qur'ān*, in: Felix Körner, *Alter Text – Neuer Text*, Freiburg 2006, 16-28, 19.

hermeneutical questions of *positionality* in and *criteriology* for the determination of the *normative*. Contemporary scholars like Özsoy, Öztürk, Ahmed or Moosa⁵¹ draw attention to the diversity and versatility of the qur'ānic *universa* that the Qur'ān has produced in the course of history, and are exceptionally critical of conservative 'text-fundamentalism' with its epistemological restriction to the qur'ānic 'text'. In reaction to this restriction they promote re-institution of a whole range of readings – in the words of Shahab Ahmed, “the full palette of non-prescriptive” or “explorative trajectories and discourses of Islam”.⁵² The objects of rehabilitation are the symbolic *universa* that the performative discourse of the Qur'ān has generated – within epistemologies that are seen as derived from exactly these *universa*.⁵³ Scholars who feel that they are subject to special expectations of the primarily non-Muslim society in the West (or the secular state which finances them)⁵⁴ are convinced of the urgent need to go beyond the limits imposed by traditional theology regarding systematic, anthropological and philosophical questions. But the transformative dynamics that they encounter in their systematic-anthropological as well as their legal-philosophical approaches, and that are reflected in their re-reading of classical concepts such as the 'common good' (*maṣlaḥa*) or the 'intentions' (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law⁵⁵, do not always correspond to a problem-oriented hermeneutic approach related to recent debates on scriptural hermeneutics.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Cf. to these thinkers my own contribution to this anthology in Chapter Seven.

⁵² Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton 2015, 538-540.

⁵³ These epistemologies range from more philosophical-rational to more Sufi-oriented ones (cf. different forms of 'rationality' or psycho-physical 'experience') and pre-empt the qur'ānic text and its interpretation pre-textually.

⁵⁴ For the five newly established university centres for Islamic theology in Germany, cf. Mouhanad Khorchide, Klaus von Stosch (eds.), *Herausforderungen an die Islamische Theologie in Europa*, Freiburg et al. 2012.

⁵⁵ Cf. Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Islamic Modernism*, in: M. Masud/A. Salvatore/M. von Bruinessen (eds.), *Islam and Modernity. Key Issues and Debates*, Cairo 2009, 237-260; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Law and ethics in Islam – The role of the maqāṣid*, in: K. Vogt/L. Larsen/C. Moe (eds.), *New Directions in Islamic Thought. Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, London 2010, 23-46; for the Turkish discourse cf. Recep Kılıç, *Die islamische Offenbarung im Lichte aktueller Diskussionen*, in: Richard Heinzmann/Mualla Selcuk (eds.), *Offenbarung in Christentum und Islam*, Stuttgart/Ankara 2009, 31-47.

⁵⁶ Theological drafts that fundamentally transcend traditional boundaries in anthropological, systematic or ethical questions frequently lack a critical

1.4 Semiotics and pragmatics in reading ancient texts

The methodological debate on the context of Islam's authoritative source, the Qur'ān, is undoubtedly one of the most significant theoretical debates in contemporary Islamic theology, especially in Turkey.⁵⁷ The endeavour to re-interpret Islam can be thought of as an attempt to reverse the historical process that led from the qur'ānic to a *juridical* discourse and resulted in a radical transformation of the linguistic and semiotic process of the Qur'ān, as well as the concept of *revelation*.⁵⁸ What is to be rediscovered is the *mythic, symbolic* discourse of the Qur'ān, which is eliminated by reading it as a *denotative, normative* code of rules for administrative and political purposes. One of the main obstacles to a wider Muslim acceptance of the need for a fresh and *desacralizing*, non-legalistic reading of the qur'ānic revelation seems to be the Muslim misunderstanding of the historical-critical method in Western biblical research – an understanding that is merely a caricature of the enormously complex methodological landscape of recent biblical research.⁵⁹ One reason that historic-contextual exegesis (and possibly historic-critical exegesis) has such a poor reputation among modern Muslim theologians in Europe and especially in Muslim countries is their conviction that certain aspects of exegesis (such as demythologisation) fundamentally undermine the status of religion. One must be aware that many Muslims fear that modern hermeneutical approaches would surrender the canonical

hermeneutical consciousness. For the German Islamic discourse, see the numerous works of Mouhanad Khorchide, e.g. id., *Humanistische Ansätze in der islamischen Ideengeschichte*, in: Bülent Uçar (ed.), *Islamische Religionspädagogik zwischen authentischer Selbstverortung und dialogischer Öffnung*, Frankfurt 2011, 167-176; or id., *Gott glaubt an den Menschen. Mit dem Islam zu einem neuen Humanismus*, Freiburg et al. 2015.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Bülent Şenay, *The Study of Religion, the History of Religions and Islamic Studies in Turkey. Approaches from phenomenological theology to contextualism*, in: Antes Peter et al. (eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion. Volume 1: Regional, Critical, Historical Approaches*, Berlin 2004, 63-100, particularly 93f.

⁵⁸ Cf. Muhammad Arkoun, *The notion of revelation. From Ahl al-Kitab to the societies of the Book*, in: *Welt des Islams* 28 (1988), 62-89, 74f.

⁵⁹ For the contemporary debate, see the valuable contributions in: Eve-Marie Becker/Stefan Scholz (eds.), *Auf dem Weg zur neutestamentlichen Hermeneutik des NT*, (Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Oda Wischmeyer), Tübingen 2014; especially the contribution of Oda Wischmeyer herself: id., *Kanon und Hermeneutik in Zeiten der Dekonstruktion* (ibid. 13-70).

revelation of the Qur'ān to a *contextualist* re-interpretation oriented towards the ontological premises of 'modernity' (*çağdaşlık*).⁶⁰ They are concerned that modernist scholars are reading elements of modernity into an Islamic framework and may cross the border between an acceptable *contextuality* of the qur'ānic message to an extreme *contextualism*. And one must remember that it is not only Muslim scholarship that opposes such approaches to their Holy Scripture. Almost all of Oriental Christianity – the Copts, the Armenians, the Orthodox Syrians, in fact the majority of Christian groups in the Middle East – have similar objections to this form of scriptural interpretation. With regard to the classical historic-critical method in biblical studies, Rudolf Bultmann showed that the apparent unconditionality of a purely *historical* interpretation lacks the purpose of the sacred texts. These texts should not be historically neutralised, but are intended to provide an understanding of human nature that *transforms* man and humanity. Ricoeur, who considered history as always permeated by fiction and sacred texts as a “crossover of history and fiction”,⁶¹ added a fourth linguistic category, the *discours*, to de Saussure's triplet of *langue*, *langage* and *parole*, and may undoubtedly be regarded as one of the main protagonists of the '*linguistic turn*', which finally marked the replacement of historical science as a guiding discipline. Compared to the dominant paradigm of historical enquiry for the history *behind* the texts, a growing exegetical consciousness led to increasing acceptance of literary-theoretical, linguistic, and social science approaches and methods, which called the historico-critical method's status as an exclusive representation of biblical hermeneutics into question.⁶²

The numerous attempts in Western literary studies to mediate between the Scylla of the *New Criticism*, which makes the text an immutable object⁶³ and the Charybdis of the all-too subjective interpretations of *reader-response criticism*⁶⁴ are a sign of increasing awareness that

⁶⁰ For the turkish debate, see the concise presentation by Mehmet Akif Koç, The Influence of Western Qur'anic Scholarship in Turkey, in: Journal of Qur'anic Studies 14,1 (2012), 9-44, esp. 37f.

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, Zeit und Erfahrung, Bd. 3: Die erzählte Zeit, München 1991, 294.

⁶² Cf. e.g. the study edited by Hansjörg Schmid et al. (eds.), “Nahe ist die das Wort” Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam, Regensburg 2010, 17.

⁶³ Cf. e.g. the programmatic sub-title ('In Defense of the Author') of the first chapter of Eric Donald Hirsch's (1928-) seminal work 'Validity in Interpretation' (New Haven 1967).

⁶⁴ Cf. Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature, Ithaca/NY 1975, 113-130.

extreme positions in literary theory may be unassailable, but they are not very productive. Beyond the alternatives of the ‘death of the author’⁶⁵ and ‘holistic lectures’ in the form of a ‘close reading’, a consensus has been reached about several insights, which no one should reject. One of these is Stanley Fish’s emphasis on the ‘interpretive community’ to which one belongs and which guides us in how a text is read and interpreted: “Meanings that seem clearly expressed and literal are rendered so by forceful interpretive acts and not by the properties of language”.⁶⁶ So the dynamics of the controversial literary and linguistic discourses seem to approach a certain mediating middle position between one concept that gives the author complete power over his text, and another that displaces the author completely in favour of the reader. The richest and most stimulating experiences are achieved when literature is looked at from as many different perspectives as possible. Scriptural hermeneutics and literary theory can thus help to exploit the sacred scripture’s intellectual, philosophical, and aesthetic richness, and provide new possibilities for the interpretation of its sources and its sacred traditions. The systematically incomprehensible context and lively diversity of the living language’s *parole*, which was emphasized especially by Mikhail Bakhtin,⁶⁷ calls for a new awareness – not only of the importance of the *exotropy* (‘external viewpoint’) of perception for a more fully dialogical perception of oneself and the text,⁶⁸ but also for the *polyphony*⁶⁹ of the literary text itself, which

⁶⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Iser’s assertion that the meaning of a text lies in the *reading experience* (“Leseerfahrung”), in: Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, München 1984², 63-67; Roland Barthes strives in his essay about the ‘death of the author’ for the total liberation of the reader, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, Paris 1966-1973, 491-495.

⁶⁶ Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally. Change, Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, Durham 1989, 9; cf. also id., *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge/MA 1980, 331.

⁶⁷ Michael Bakhtin, *Die Ästhetik des Wortes*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, 185f.

⁶⁸ Cf. with regard to this surplus at Bakhtin the passage in Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtine, *Le Principe dialogique. Suivi de: Écrits du cercle de Bakhtine*, Paris 1981, 145-165.

⁶⁹ Cf. Julia Kristeva (Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse, Paris 1969 [cited in the series *Points*, Paris 1978], 84; German in Jens Ihwe (ed.), *Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*, vol. 3 *Zur linguistischen Basis der Literaturwissenschaft* 2, Frankfurt 1972, 347), for whom each word has to be defined by means of two axes: horizontally as the link

results from the *crossover* of textual surfaces and the *intersection* of pre-existent discourses.

The characteristics mentioned above also apply to the Qur'ān, even if the post-qur'ānic process of canonisation, through which the qur'ānic tradition has been authorised historically, has tended to obscure its intersectional and intertextual reality. However, the history of this process of canonisation is unquestionable. It is a continuation from a discourse to a codification, from a formative (ritual-devotional use) to a *normative* canon, from the early dislike of exegesis to a bible-related interpretation with the help of the *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Ibn Qutayba, al-Ya'qūbī) to the *classical* exegesis by the prophetic Sunna, which argues (at-Tabarī, -923) for the unique and inimitable nature of the Qur'ān (confronted by the polemics of the Jews and Christians, who saw the Qur'ān as merely *derived* from the Bible). Since Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064), who shifted the accusation of *taḥrīf/tabdīl* from interpretation to *textual corruption* (*tagyīr*), the Qur'ān has been interpreted primarily in terms of the tradition of Islam and its prophetic *Sunna* (Shahab Ahmed's 'Con-Text'). The underlying dynamic of this process is clearly explained by Sheldon Pollock's differentiation between the two aspects of a text: while the '*verum*' marks its true 'shape' in historical perspective, the '*certum*' marks the 'safe' meaning, which the text continuously acquires throughout history from different contexts and recipients.⁷⁰ These two aspects are different, but deeply connected with each other. The phenomenon of continuous attribution and segregation⁷¹, which characterises this process of canonisation, also applies to the *historical* qur'ānic revelation itself. Evidence for this is the Qur'ān's pronounced self-referentiality, in other words the fact that the Qur'ān presents itself as a form of *exegetical speech*, taking its reception by its listeners (sometimes well-educated) into account.⁷² As an *exegetical*

between text and recipient, and vertically, as the link between text and its preceding literature.

⁷⁰ Sheldon Pollock, *Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 931-961.

⁷¹ The privileging of a text that is related to this process is finally, as Peter Heath has emphasised, a *social* decision: the community determines "textual hierarchies", such that "radical changes in the privileging (...) cause comprehensive hierarchical restructuring", Peter Heath, *Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of three Islamic Approaches*, in: *Arabica* 36 (1989), 173-210, 177.

⁷² Cf. especially the valuable works of Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als exegetischer Text. Die Geburt einer neuen Religion im Spiegel der koranischen Textgestalt*, in: Siegfried Grillmeyer et al. (eds.), *Eins im Eifer? Monismus,*

discourse the Qur'ān focuses not only on placing a new interpretation alongside others, but rather on persuading its readers of the truth of its own interpretation with arguments and conviction. This feature of the Qur'ān is not unique. A successive religion (such as Islam) must, as Rodney Stark puts it, be 'authentic' (by incorporating *realia* of previous religions) and also 'deviant' (but not too deviant). "It must demonstrate its authenticity through an identification with authentic religion but at the same time attract followers by establishing its positive *uniqueness*".⁷³ This tension between authorising referentiality and positive uniqueness seems to be in fact a significant feature of the Qur'ān, whose highly performative and (speaker- and listener-related) multi-layered polyphonic discourse is deeply determined by a historical-cultural dimensionality.⁷⁴

The accompanying phenomenon of *expropriation* of scripture already occurred before the Qur'ān. It is therefore not only the Hebrew Bible – let alone the first chapters of Genesis – that presents itself as a multi-layered kaleidoscope of exegesis, but also the post-canonical and post-biblical exegetical tradition itself. The rabbinical understanding of the *homo imago dei* 'topos', to mention only one example, clearly shows a lack of coherence in its different interpretations, which vary, as Morgenstern has emphasised, "from 'humanistic' or 'universalist' to 'elitist' or 'particularistic' interpretations". Even the apparently *universalistic* concept of the Noahide laws, which were first given – according to rabbinic interpretations – "as the first commandment (...) to Adam", implies a reference that is critical of the Christian doctrine of the fall of humanity and so reveals "especially in the tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud [...] an outspokenly anti-Christian context".⁷⁵ This controversial *responsiveness* of interpretation is also encountered, to mention another example, in the Pauline reading, which gives biblical events, scenarios, and persons a new interpretation as *typologically* looking forward to the work of Christ. We

Monotheismus und Gewalt, Würzburg 2010, 105-128; id., Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang, Berlin 2010.

⁷³ Reuven Firestone, The Qur'an and the Bible, in: John C. Reeves (ed.), Bible and Qur'an. Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality, Atlanta 2003, 1-22, 2; with reference to Rodney Stark, How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model, in: D.G. Bromley/P.E. Hammond (eds.), The Future of New Religious Movements, Macon/GA 1987, 13.

⁷⁴ For this debate cf. Suha Taji-Farouqi (ed.), Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an, Oxford 2004.

⁷⁵ Katell Berthelot/Matthias Morgenstern, Introduction, in: id. (eds.), The Quest for a Common Humanity, Leiden 2011, 1-22, 5f.

may therefore agree with Mitchell about the “invention of Christian hermeneutics”,⁷⁶ attributed to the Apostle Paul. With regard to theological anthropology as the topic of this anthology, we may point out that Christian theological anthropology is already characterised by a very *specific* reading of the Genesis texts, which does *not* arise from the Old Testament texts. The fact that there is not a single reference to sin (Hebrew *khataṭ*, *peshaʿ*, *awon*) in the first three chapters of Genesis (including the narrative of the temptation in the Garden) has repeatedly caused Christian theologians to ask to what extent the story concerning the tree and the serpent might be read in a manner different from that in the traditional ‘orthodox’ interpretation.⁷⁷

The renowned Syrian scholar Aziz al-Azmeh is convinced that the ‘Paleo-Muslim’ religion of Islam is only conceivable in the dialogical structures that determine Late Antiquity, understanding this epoch as an era of thought and spiritual exchange, in which the ancient and canonical sources are re-read in the context of *monotheism*. According to al-Azmeh, the Qurʾān represents, in “a process of performative communication, persuasion and pressure, responding to developing circumstances, thereby bearing repetition, reiteration, inflection, self-abrogation and other forms of self-reflectivity”⁷⁸ a radical *re-reading* of the biblical and post-biblical tradition or (in the words of Sidney Griffith) an “interpreted Bible”.⁷⁹ The new answers that are given by the Qurʾān to fundamental theological and anthropological questions do not leave Christian theology untouched, but its theological consequences have scarcely been taken seriously by Western theologians. The reason for this is not only the early heretification of Islam, which was initiated by the last chapter of *de haeresibus* (101: *heresy of the Ishmaelites*) in John of Damascus’ πῆγῃ

⁷⁶ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics*, Cambridge 2010, here 10.

⁷⁷ In his “Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity”, J.G. Herder read the narrative as the “transition from natural history to the history of man’s freedom”, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in: *Works in 10 vol.*, vol. 6, ed. by M. Bollacher, Frankfurt/M. 1989, esp. 636-646 = Ch. 15/II; cf. also Immanuel Kant, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, in: *Works in 10 vol.*, ed. by W. Weischedel, vol. 9., Darmstadt 1975, 83-102.

⁷⁸ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The emergence of Islam in late antiquity. Allāh and his People*, Cambridge 2014, esp. 431-497; here: 451.

⁷⁹ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic. The scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the language of Islam*, Princeton 2013, 91.