

Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm

*Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy
in Comparative Perspectives*

الأخلاق الإسلامية ونسق الثمانية

مقاربات في فلسفة طه عبد الرحمن

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تحرير وتقديم
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*To the philosophers who think differently,
for the sake of a better world;*

*To the scholars who write about unknown philosophies,
for the sake of a better world*



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Notes on Style, Transliteration and Dates

For referencing, this volume follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* author-date in-text citation system.

Arabic words and names are transliterated according to the system used in Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, which is also adopted in the *Journal for Islamic Ethics (JIE)*:

Consonants: ʾ, b, t, th, j, h, kh, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, ʿ, gh, f, q, k, l, m, n, h, w, y.

Short vowels: a, i, u.

Long vowels: ā, ī, ū.

Diphthongs: aw, ay.

Tāʾ marbūʿa: -a, -at (construct state).

While classical proper names are fully transliterated (e.g. al-Ghazālī), modern names, i.e. since 1800, are left without transliteration, and their official or common spellings are adopted (e.g. Ahmad Amin instead of Aḥmad Amīn). The “l” of the definite article “al-” is always retained, regardless of whether it is assimilated in pronunciation to the initial consonant of the word to which it is attached (*idghām*).

Common words, like Qurʾan, Muhammad (the Prophet), Sharia, and Sufism, are not transliterated, unless found so in original citations.

As for the name of the philosopher under study, we spell his name as he first did when he published in French, i.e. Taha Abderrahmane, without transliteration. However, it should be noted that his first name is Abderrahmane, as appears from letters in Latin script regarding his first published PhD thesis in French in 1979 and his second State PhD in 1985; his family name is Taha. In English, “Abderrahmane” is used as the family name by which he is referred to in the text. In the Arabic section, he is often referred to by his first name “Taha,” since it is common to refer to his thought as “Tahaʾian” (*ṭahāʾiyya*) instead of “Abderrahmanian.” In some publications, however scarce they are, the name appears as Taha Abdul Rahman, or Abdurrahman Taha. In the bibliography and references, we give a full transliteration of his name for his Arabic works, i.e. Ṭāha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, in order to match the language of the publication.

The dates given in this volume are Common Era (CE) dates. If two dates are provided (e.g. 505/1111), the first one is the year according to the Islamic Hijri calendar (AH) and the second, the CE date. For all dates after 1800 only the CE date is provided.

1

The Trusteeship Paradigm

The Formation and Reception of a Philosophy

Mohammed Hashas

Introduction

The trusteeship paradigm critiques both modernity and the tradition, and in doing so it navigates between what is commonly referred to as the “religious” and the “secular.” As a critique, it proposes itself as an alternative to both. This chapter traces the development of the paradigm by outlining its major themes and intellectual stages as developed by Taha Abderrahmane since the 1970s. First, it provides a biographical-intellectual sketch of Abderrahmane. Then it synthetically outlines the following five stages: 1) logic, 2) philosophy of language, 3) assessing the tradition, 4) spiritual modernity and moral philosophy, 5) political theology and political philosophy. Finally, it presents a review of the scholarly reception of this project. The chapter concludes with three reflective notes on language, Sufism, and ethics.

1 Taha Abderrahmane: A Biographical-Intellectual Sketch

Taha Abderrahmane was born in 1944, in the coastal city of El-Jadida, Morocco. His father was a “*faqīh*,” or religious teacher, in the pre-schooling system called “*masīd*” or “*kuttāb*,” and he received his basic religious education through him. He obtained his Baccalaureate in Sciences in Casablanca after which he enrolled in the Philosophy Department at Mohammed v University in Rabat, where he received his BA Degree, before pursuing his first French doctoral title (*troisième cycle*) at the Sorbonne in 1972, and his PhD (Doctorat D’État) in 1985 on language, logic and philosophy (Abderrahmane 1979, 1985). He joined the university in Rabat as a lecturer in the early 1970s and retired as a professor in 2005. He introduced the study of modern logic at the Mohammed v University, and other Moroccan universities soon followed suit. Besides Arabic he has an excellent command of French, and he has also learnt English, German, Latin and ancient Greek for direct access to philosophical works. He started publishing in Arabic in 1985.

Abderrahmane loved poetry in his youth. He was one of the youngest and earliest contributors to the Moroccan Writers Union founded in 1960. However, the 1967 Six-Day War was a macabre shock to him, to the extent that it made him trade his youthful interest in poetry for philosophy. To describe this shift he composed a poetic verse, alluding to a classical line of Imru' al-Qays (d. c. 550): "today poetry, and tomorrow thought" (*al-yawma shi'r, wa-ghadan fikr*) ('Abd al-Rahmān 2014, 17). He joined the university when two formidable scholar-philosophers had just preceded him in publications and fame, i.e. Abdellah Laroui (b. 1933) and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010). He developed his philosophical project against the backdrop of the 1967 event and also partly to contest the scholarly contributions of these two scholars. As a young professor at the university with a religious tendency, his focus on the study of logic, language and philosophy methodologies proved not very appealing in a context dominated by Marxists and neo-Marxists, recounts Abbas Arhila, one of his close students, "followers" and a university professor of philosophy (Arhila 2013, 11–40, 111–132). Ibrahim Machrouh, another student and professor of philosophy, narrates that the religious ethos underscored by two prominent Moroccan scholars influenced Abderrahmane, i.e. Allal al-Fassi (1910–1974), a renowned political and religious leader and scholar of al-Qarawiyyin University, and Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi (1922–1993), the first Moroccan professor of philosophy at the modern University of Mohammed v in Rabat. Moreover, Ali Sami al-Nashar (1917–1980), the Egyptian philosopher who was influenced by Mustafa Abd al-Raziq (1885–1947) and his argument for an "Islamic philosophy" (see the introduction of this volume), was residing in Morocco and taught philosophy in Rabat, where he died in 1980.¹ Abderrahmane was his student, and it has been reported that the professor was impressed by Abderrahmane's work on language and philosophy before it was published, and predicted that it would have an impact on modern Arab thought (Mashrūḥ 2009, 27–29).

The religious ethos in Abderrahmane's project stems from his personal experience. In the first edition of his book *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason* (1989),² which drew the attention of more Arab intellectuals to

1 The fact that al-Nashar defended Islamic philosophical authenticity in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, logic and theology might have influenced Abderrahmane who further digged into this strand of thought and later on rendered the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh* part of the courses of modern logic that he introduced at the university.

2 All the works of Taha Abderrahmane are written in Arabic, except his two university dissertations referred to earlier. Here reference is to the English translation of the titles for ease of reference.

him, he acknowledges the important role in his life of Sidi Hamza al-Qadiri al-Boutchichi (1922–2017), the spiritual guide of the Boutchichiyya order in Berkane, Morocco. He omitted this reference in later editions of the book, maybe for the critique he received for being an intellectual-philosopher and disciple in a Sufi order (‘Abd al-Rahmān [1989] 2006, 11). This acknowledgement would only find its way back to the public in a longer concluding chapter in the third volume of his trilogy *Dīn al-Ḥayā’* (2017)—of which the literal rendering is *The Religion of Humility* or *The Religion of Decency*—, which can better be translated as *The Religion of Testimony and Sight* (2017), since testimony and sight impact one’s worldview and ethos, which is the core idea of the trilogy.

Abderrahmane has lectured as a visiting Professor at the Al al-Bayt University in Jordan, in Sfax in Tunisia and Constantine in Algeria. He received membership of the Moroccan Royal Academy, besides other international bodies, like the Arab Philosophical Association in Amman, the Society for Intercultural Philosophy in Germany (Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie), Bayt al-Ḥikma in Bagdad, the International Society for the Study of Argumentation in the Netherlands, and the International Union of Muslim Scholars. He was the editor of *al-Munāzara* philosophical magazine (1989–1993). He has presided over the Wisdom Forum for Thinkers and Researchers in Rabat since 2002. Abderrahmane received the Moroccan Writers Award in 1988 and 1995 for his two works, *On the Foundations of Dialogue and Renovation of Islamic Theology* (1987), and *Renewing the Method of Assessing the Tradition* (1994), respectively. He also received the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) Award in 2006, for his book *The Question of Ethics* (2000), and the King Mohammed VI Award in Islamic Thought in 2014 for his overall contributions to Islamic scholarship (Mashrūḥ 2009, 27–32).

Abderrahmane became known to the Arab public through Aljazeera Channel shows broadcast from Doha. His first appearance was on 03 May 2004, in *al-Shar‘a wa-l-Ḥayāt* (Sharia and Life) a famous TV show, at the time presented by Mahir Abdallah to speak about modernity and religion. Then on 09 March 2005 he figured in the TV programme *al-Kitāb Khayr Jalīs* (The Book as Best Company), presented by Khalid al-Harroub, to speak on the Arab right to philosophical difference. His most important appearance started on 19 May 2006 in the intellectual TV documentary *Masārāt* (Trajectories) consisting of six episodes, presented by Malik Triki, to speak on various aspects of his project. These encounters are chronicled and published in *Dialogue as a Horizon for Thought* (2013). Al-Jazeera Documentary channel also broadcast a documentary on him on 15 July 2017, in which he appears speaking and during which he visits the spiritual leader Sidi Hamza al-Qadiri al-Boutchichi in the city of

Berkane (Morocco), where the headquarters of the sufi brotherhood are located (Aljazeera Documentary 2017).

During the month of Ramadan in 2006 Abderrahmane lectured as part of the International Lecture Series, known as *al-Durūs al-Ḥasanīyya*, in front of king Mohammed VI who is the patron of these lectures in his capacity of “spiritual leader,” and “commander of the faithful” (*amīr al-muʿminīn*). He also lectured in the Carthage Palace in post-Arab Spring Tunisia in 2013, in front of Mouncef Marzouki who was the president of Tunisia at the time, and various Arab politicians and intellectuals. During the last few years, three annual conferences have been organized successively in his honour at the universities in Agadir, Marrakesh and El-Jadida in 2014, 2015 and 2016, respectively. Students and young scholars interested in his work have established various media outlets and websites to discuss and disseminate his ideas. Despite his health problems, and preference for writing over public visibility, he appears annually to give a public lecture in the national library in Rabat organized by the Maghreb Center for Civilizational Studies, a center consisting of senior and junior scholars and researchers influenced by his ideas (Hashas 2014, 2019b). On 21 October 2017, he gave a lecture at the Ibn Khaldun University in Istanbul. On 19 April 2017 a conference on “Taha Abderrahmane: Views and Horizons,” was organized by reseachers at the International Institute for Muslim Unity at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in Malaysia. In January 2019, he appeared in the French *Le Nouveau Magazine Littéraire* among the most influential thirty-five thinkers in the world. He appeared along with Azmi Bishara, based in Doha, from the Arab world, besides figures like Amartya Sen, Bruno Latour, Gayatri Spivak, Axel Hanneth, Judith Butler, Richard Dawkins, Chantal Mouffe, Alain Badiou, and others (*Le Nouveau Magazine Littéraire*, 2019).

This being said, what is it that makes of Taha Abderrahmane a remarkable philosopher? Abderrahmane aims not only to be a reformer but also an innovator in the Arab-Islamic philosophical tradition. He is critical of most major classical Muslim philosophers for one major reason: they mostly stopped at the achievements of Greek philosophy, and their reading of it was not innovative enough. He considers Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 595/1198) to be a mere “imitator” of Aristotle, and therefore the future of Arab thought should not be Averroest, as al-Jabri and many other modern Arab scholars call for (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2003, 119). The philosopher-theologians that tried to break away from the the dominance of Greek Aristotelian logic and that have earned his respect are al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), not because they were anti-philosophy, but because they mastered it and tried to propose other pathways based on Arab-Islamic scholarship, particularly

based on their readings of *uṣūl al-fiqh* as an authentic intellectual discipline in the tradition. He is also critical of the *fuqahāʾ*, the jurists, both in the past and present. He argues that they have focalized legal prescriptions of the Sharia at the expense of the moral and spiritual ethos behind them. Abderrahmane speaks of the “Rabat School” of philosophy, which aims at developing a philosophy that is productive, engaging, critical, innovative and ethicist in perspective (Hashas 2015, 71–74).

At the heart of his philosophical project lies the question of ethics. For him, the core of the Islamic message is ethical and reason is not a means to achieve and realize this *élan*. That is why philosophical and religious reasoning should make ethics their axis of thought. Human beings are first and foremost ethical beings, unlike the common Greek view that they are rational or political beings. He sees religion as the source of ethics. Revealed religion—and not human reason or man-made religions—are the ultimate source of human ethics, and he views Islam as the religion *par excellence* that champions this core value for human well-being. Human beings are either ethical or not. He puts it as follows in *The Question of Ethics*: “there is no man [i.e. humanity] without ethics”, “there is no ethics without religion”, “there is no man [i.e. humanity] without religion” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2000, 147–149). For him, and this summarizes his ethical theory as well as his philosophy of religion, “religion and ethics are one; there is no religion without ethics, and no ethics without religion” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2000, 52). “Ethicality” (*al-akhlāqiyya*) is the essence of man, without which he is not human. Ethicality is simply the search for the good *per se* (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2000, 14).

2 The Formation of the Trusteeship Paradigm

Abderrahmane’s project of the trusteeship paradigm can be introduced by discussing five major intellectual interests and themes, which I list in chronological order, though at times they intertwine, from the 1970s until present (mid-2019): (1) logic, (2) philosophy of language, (3) assessing the tradition, (4) spiritual modernity and moral philosophy, (5) political theology and political philosophy.

First: logic. Abderrahmane immersed himself into the study and teaching of modern logic, for which he became known at first. Besides his university dissertations published in French in 1979 and 1985, he published *Formal Logic and Grammar* (1983), *On the Fundamentals of Dialogue and Renovation of Islamic Theology* (1987) and *Language and Balance, or the Multiplication of Reason* (1998). In these works, he calls for introducing modern logic and mathemat-

ics in the study of rhetoric, linguistics, and particularly in Islamic studies, in the study of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the interpretation of the sacred text. His major critique of Islamic political movements as well as traditional Islamic universities and seminaries is that they have neglected the study of logic, especially modern logic; they kept teaching Aristotelian logic at best, and the dialogical logic of Marxist leanings for socio-political reasons during the heydays of Marxism in the Arab world. He praises the use of logic by classical Muslim theologians in their *munāẓarāt* tradition and reclaims it for a modern ethical communication theory he calls “*ḥiwāriyya*,” which can be translated as “entangled or deliberative dialogue,” in *On the Fundamentals of Dialogue*.

Most importantly, it is the study of logic that enabled Abderrahmane to realize the limitations of human reason, and to consider it as an act among acts, and not as an independent entity or essence, which led him subsequently to develop his three-level categorization of reason: “abstract reason” (*al-ʿaql al-mujarrad*), “guided reason” (*al-ʿaql al-musaddad*), and “supported reason” (*al-ʿaql al-muʿayyad*). Reason is an act like any other act, like the seeing that the eye exerts, or the hearing that the ear enables. Briefly, abstract reason is an act that one exercises to explain and justify the act, based on particular proof, often concrete.³ As to guided reason, it is the rational capacity that takes into account three conditions in the process of activation: it should abide by Sharia law, bring benefit and prevent harm, be practical and practiced and not remain a mere thought or call for action. As for supported reason, it explores the capacity of knowing the internal identity and meaning of things, acts, or forms. It explores the objectives of revealed law and intentions beyond abstract rational and legal or functional explanations. It fuses the other two levels of reasoning to form a comprehensive understanding of being and existence. This level of rational practice that is open to the infinite inspiration from the unknown world(s) is akin to the world of scholarly—i.e. rational—practice of Sufism. The Sufis do not only know, and constantly strive to know, but also do practice what they know, with abundance, excellence, and humility (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 1989, 17–18, 58–66, 121–156).

In *The Question of Practice* (2012) Abderrahmane revisits the issue of reason and its relation to revelation and practice, and distinguishes eight relations that have contributed to the modern emphasis on “abstract reason.” Briefly, these relations exist in the form of dichotomies: reason and (1) speech, (2) essence, (3)

3 In an inaugural address entitled “The Pluralism of Values” for the new academic year at the university in Marrakech, Abderrahmane explains what he means by abstract reason by saying that it disregards revelation and the transcendental in the study of “things” of the concrete world; it is descriptive reason (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 2001, 37, n. 30).

sense, (4) heart, (5) ethics, (6) *sharʿ*; (7) revelation, and (8) faith. Abderrahmane thinks that human reason is not confined to these eight limitations or opposing definitions. Human reason does not limit itself to language, though it is its most expressive form. It is also not the essence of human beings, nor can the senses alone capture its vast horizon that can be as inspiring as the senses themselves, which do not work within a limited space or time or in one direction. Opposing the work of the heart to that of reason, or the brain, is the dichotomy most critiqued by Abderrahmane, and is also the most important critique in his overall project. He takes the heart as the center of human rational practice. Rational expansion happens when the heart is able to embrace a horizon that is infinite and open to non-concrete inspiration. The heart harbors guidance to ethical practice. As to ethics, Sharia laws, revelation, and faith, these do not oppose nor antagonize rational choices if they are guided by the heart, by its indepth, natural, i.e. *fiṭrī*, inclinations (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 2012, 55–110).

Second: philosophy of language. Abderrahmane worked on the philosophy of language, first of all for his Master's thesis, published as *Language and Philosophy: An Essay on the Linguistic Structures of Ontology* (1979), but most importantly in the following two volumes: *The Essence of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Philosophy and Translation* (1996), and *The Essence of Philosophy, Vol. 2: On Philosophical Discourse* (1999). In the latter work he coins the term of "*fiqh al-falsafa*," calls for the study of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the sciences it requires, to comprehend (*faqaha*) the philosophical genius in the Arab-Islamic tradition. If the Greek tradition is kept as a model, no originality would be found in the Arab one. It is also in these works that he makes a case for creativity in the practice of philosophical translations, otherwise mimicry and "tasteless" translations result in sterile and meaningless concepts in Arabic. To illustrate this, he gives examples from erroneous translations in classical as well as modern Arabic translations of Greek or European concepts. It is at this stage that he emphasizes the vital role of the native language for any philosophical, and consequently cultural, renewal (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 1996; 1999). For example, in a lengthy section he argues that each language structure and logic expresses its rationality differently. He proposes the Arabic "*unḥur tajid*" (literally, "See(k), you find") as the equivalent of the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am." This Arabic rendition of modern Cartesian philosophy of the assertion of the Self (Subject) as a capable existential entity received harsh critique from the Lebanese thinker Ali Harb. The latter states that Abderrahmane with this cultural translation "decapitated" the subjective assertion of the modern Cartesian Self, and replaced it with an obedient Self that "finds" what has already been destined to it, or revealed to it through orders "See(k)!" (Harb 1996, in Bin ʿAddī 2012, 180–184; I will return to this point below).

Third: assessing the tradition. When al-Jabri appeared on the Arab intellectual scene with his project of the “critique of Arab reason” and distinguished between the rational Maghreb and the mystical Mashreq (Eyadat, Corrao and Hashas 2018), Abderrahmane responded with a heavy critique of this “reductionist” and “divisionist” approach of reading the tradition. As a first reply, he published *Renewing the Method of Assessing the Tradition* (1994), to be followed afterwards by texts that belong to this stage—i.e. assessing the tradition and critiquing contemporary Arab philosophical projects—*The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference* (2002), and *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference* (2005). It is in these texts already that the contours of his trusteeship critique begin to show. Major Arab-Muslim theologians-philosophers are critiqued for being imitative, uncreative, and uncritical of modernity. In *The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference*, for instance, he problematizes the modern role of philosophy and the philosopher. He says that philosophical questioning no longer needs to seek the “truth”, or to nurture “critique” only, but it has to raise the “responsible question”, which can certainly be put in plural too. What is required of the modern philosopher is to remain responsible with his abstract theoretical questions and productions. That is, s/he has to be accountable for what he says and theorizes. Here, he underscores the ethical and practical role of the philosopher. He states that practice is fundamental to the process of philosophizing, a point with which he challenges the ethical agency and engagement of the philosopher. Moreover, in the same work he also reverses the question of universality of reason and philosophy at large and argues that in modern globalized times, in which one form of philosophy dominates, universality has to pass through local (i.e. geographical) and cultural questions. Philosophy has to be local first, and with its local needs and questions the universal becomes apparent, while starting by claiming universality may be a form of disregarding local traditions and championing hegemonic ones that are supported by economic and military means. In the Arab context he says, “we, the Arabs, want to be free in our philosophy” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2002, 22).

In *The Islamic Right to Difference* (2005) Abderrahmane critiques hegemonic thought, with major reference to the American cultural and political dominion. He presents an Islamic ethical critique of consumerism and the alternative principles of plural co-existence. In his common way of detailed argumentation and counter-argumentation, he presents three major principles that celebrate diversity of thought: the principle of tolerance, the principle of recognition, and the principle of rectification (*mabda’ al-taṣwīb*). He supports these principles with an argumentative form of the meaning of ethical jihad and the path to spiritual and ethical excellence (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2005).

Fourth: spiritual modernity and moral philosophy. It is already with *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason* (1989) that Abderrahmane's emphasis on ethics, and not reason, as the core of his project starts to take shape in his philosophy. After having produced theoretical texts on the role and tasks of philosophy and translation and after having seen the development of various theoretical reformist projects in the Arab-Islamic contexts, he appeared not to be satisfied. He would synthesize this and launch it in a new line of thought: ethics. He does this in a twofold manner: first, he deepens his critique of Western modernity and he builds his trusteeship paradigm, or trusteeship critique as he also calls it, in its aftermath as its replacement or correction.

I present a few notes for each stage of this work on ethics. It is in *The Question of Ethics* (2000) at first that ethics become not only the essence of man, and of Islam, but also the essence of any human change to a better future, or what he calls a "civilization of ethos" ('Abd al-Rahmān 2000, 146).

Abderrahmane's core philosophy is that man is first and foremost an ethical being, and the more he develops his "ethicity" or "ethicality" (*akhlāqiyya*), the closer he gets to the level of humanity. Rationality is only a means to this end. As noted earlier, for him religion is the source of ethics, there is no man (i.e. humanity) without ethics, i.e. man without ethics is not man, though he can still be considered to be man if his rationality (*'aqlāniyya*) alone is measured. The existence of man parallels the existence of ethics, and vice versa. They are not chronologically distinct. Ethics is what renders human beings human. It is their identity and essence. He differentiates between three levels of ethics, like the categorization of reason above: abstract ethics, guided ethics, and supported ethics. The first remain functional and utilitarian, at the surface of what they render human beings. Guided ethics cling to (religious) laws, without reaching their spirit, which supported ethics teach and aim at. The latter beget benefit not only to the self but especially to the other, and to the inanimate world as well. Supported ethics fuses spiritual teachings with practice, and expand their benefit to the rest of the world, and this is the message of Islam. This is what makes Islamic ethics universal ethics, according to Abderrahmane.

Among his various concepts, sub-concepts, principles, and pillars, four principles of "supported ethics"—the third and highest stage in Abderrahmane's categorization—can be briefly mentioned here. The first is the principle of obligation (*mabda' al-ijāb*): this means that ethics in this stage are not optional. They are the core of human identity, without them evil or wrong occurs. The second is the principle of reproduction (*mabda' al-takthīr*): that is, ethics do not have one shape, or one form, or one place. They change according to time, space, and the consequences they engender. The third is the principle of organization (*mabda' al-tartīb*): that is, ethics are infinite in their scope. The more the

individual is committed to them, the more ethical attitudes and satisfaction they engender. This means that ethics do not all have the same value and can be classified. The fourth is the principle of expansion (*mabda' al-ittisā'*): that is, the ethicist feels overwhelmed and completely encompassed by the ethical message he carries. No space of thought or behavior is left uncovered. Ethics are expansive, comprehensive. Without ethics the individual feels life is meaningless ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2000, 81–84).

In the same vein, Abderrahmane develops his modern ethical theory further in *The Spirit of Modernity* (2006), where he presents his possible “Islamic” modernity, which he also calls “spiritual modernity” ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2006, 56–59, 67). Abderrahmane distinguishes between the spirit or essence of modernity, which in his view can be multiple in accordance with the diversity of world traditions and how they approach it, and the fact of modernity, or *le fait accompli* of modernity, as it manifests itself in the Euro-American version. The vertical man—in contrast with the modern secular-atheist horizontal man—invokes his creative efforts for a modern modernity from his fields of energy that are spiritual in the first place. It is also in the same work that he proposes a modernist and creative reading of the Qur'an, one that is innovatively (1) “historicist,” (2) “rationalist,” and ethically (3) “individualist” ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2006, 175–206). In this three-level interpretation of the Qur'anic ethical cosmology, Abderrahmane presents a detailed critique of Western modernity, how it desacralizes the sacred and how modern Muslim philosophers and intellectuals have followed such desacralizing paradigm of differentiating, which brought them the opposition of reason and revelation, religion and politics, the individual and society (Hashas 2013, 2015, 2019a, 2019b).

Second, Abderrahmane charts a new territory for Western modern scholarship with critique, as a way of solidifying his proposal of a new paradigm of thought. He engages with some prominent European philosophers in *The Misery of Secularism* (2014) where he especially discusses four approaches of modern separation of ethics from religion: the naturalist, the critical, the social, and the humanist, with major reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Luc Ferry (b. 1951), respectively. Abderrahmane suspects that secularism—which he translates in Arabic as *dahrāniyya*, and which can also be translated back to English as materialism—is about the separation of religion and politics, or vice versa, which in his view is/was a European historical problem. He rather considers secularism to be a philosophical project that separates ethics from religion, knowing that he sees the latter as the source of ethics. He furthers his critique in *Post-Secular Loss* (2016) in which he argues that deserting religion is the result of the secularism he critiqued earlier. In this book he presents and

afterwards debunks some five major approaches of man and humanity in modernity: the sadist man, the superman, the sovereign man, the Oedipus man, and the neurotic-obsessionist man, with major reference to Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), respectively. Overall, Abderrahmane argues in detail that the ethics these philosophies defend are driven by human whims, relativism, and have no central source or authority for (ethical) guidance, which is why, again, he finds in revealed religion(s) the answer and the source of his ethical theory and paradigm he calls the “trusteeship paradigm,” and the “trusteeship critique.” In these books, and others, Abderrahmane also engages with other contemporary moral philosophers of international acclaim, who may appear close to his views on the importance of ethics, like Hans Jonas (1903–1993), Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), and Hans Küng (b. 1928), but he critiques their approaches since he considers them “too secular,” thus unable to truly transform human beings from within.

As noted earlier, the seeds of such a paradigm can already be found in different chapters in *The Question of Ethics*, and *The Spirit of Modernity*. Two other major books have bolstered his critical project: *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference* (2005) referred to above, and *The Spirit of Praxis* (2012). In the first, he underlines the fact that ethics equals (good) acts or practice, and that theoretical ethics that remain in the abstract are useless. Ethics are intended for this world, to be lived and practiced, and not only preached or theorized. In the second, he defends the “Islamic culture(s)” in general against the hegemony of modern consumerism and self-gratification.

In 2017, Abderrahmane published the trilogy of *The Religion of Testimony and Sight* (2017), or literally *The Religion of Decency*. Here he wraps up his ethical theory in new concepts and foundations, which have appeared earlier in various texts. He devotes the first volume to the sources of this paradigm of trusteeship, the second to studying the case of the new media and technology in the light of this critical paradigm, and the third to the case of what the veil (*ḥijāb*) connotes and denotes in modern Western philosophies and what it connotes and denotes in this Islamic ethical paradigm. Apart for some minor digressions, only some relevant notes on the first volume will be made here. Abderrahmane restates the Qur’anic cosmology that is behind his project. He refers to two worlds: *‘ālam al-malakūt*, and *‘ālam al-mulk*, or simply put, the metaphysical world and the physical world. The second is the space where humans are responsible vicegerants, and the first is the original world from which humans obtain their values, and after which they quest. Three sources or concepts bind human beings to this metaphysical world: *shahāda* (testimony), *amāna* (trust), and *tazkiya* (self-critique, or, more literally, self-purification).

Testimony is the first pact humans have had with the divine, and it is based on the Qur'anic story (al-A'rāf, Q 7:172–174) wherein the human being (*insān*) not only testified (*shahida*) but also saw (*shāhada*) the moment in which they pledge allegiance to God that He is the Lord of all worlds. This act of visualized testimony makes humans responsible on this physical world to this ancient pact made in the metaphysical world, and preserved in human memory, thus human's constant search for the divine and connection with the transcendent.

Trust, as a second principle in this paradigm, is essential too for the maintenance of human contact with a higher source of values and ethics. It is based on a Qur'anic verse (al-Aḥzāb, Q 33:72–73) wherein man willingly accepted the divine message of belief and being a vicegerent on earth. For Abderrahmane, this makes human beings free to believe or not, and also free to maintain the responsibility over the cosmos, and earth in particular. In all cases, they have to be accountable for their choices, since they are originally free, and they have the capacity of reason to judge. Failing to be responsible means that man either falls in treason (*khīyāna*) or possession (*hiyāza*) of that which is not his/hers. For Abderrahmane, modern man has betrayed the original pact, the “pact of trust”, and has thus fallen prey to the curse of excessive possessions, i.e. excessive consumerism without ethics, at the expense of sharing with “others”—sharing, a great value of “excellence”, or *iḥsān*, and belief. The “pact of trust” has a positive impact on the individual, society, and the world at large. It seeks goodness *per se*, hence the earlier equation of belief = ethics = practice.

As to self-critique, or self-purification, the third principle of this ethical paradigm, it is a means either to boost the benefits of doing good, and being good, or a means to correct wrongs. It is a principle that emanates from a Qur'anic verse (al-Baqara, Q 2:151–152). It stands between the world of “witnessing” or “testimony,” and the world of “seeing,” i.e. between the metaphysical and the physical. Self-purification is a discipline that incites humans to restrain their desires, wishes, and appetites. It is a mode of self-critique, self-elevation, and self-realization. This discipline cannot be ethical if it does not take a higher example for good behavior. The divine names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*) are the major source of such a discipline for Abderrahmane. It is through them that human beings can be creative, innovative, and open to newness. Their teachings are infinite. They liberate human beings from themselves and from their peers.

Fifth: political theology and philosophy. Abderrahmane has also written on politics, political theology and political philosophy. The first work that traces this strand of writing in his overall project goes back to *The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference* (2002). The book was published after the second Palestinian Intifada of 2000 and used this political event to speak of the dire need for an

“Arab philosophy,” based on its socio-political status quo, needs, and aspirations—as referred to above in “assessing the tradition” section. It was already noted that to defend the plurality of philosophical practice and worldviews, Abderrahmane argues that it has to start locally, however cosmopolitan or universal it becomes. It is here that he speaks of the Greekization, Europeanization, Judaization, and Germanification of philosophy, and calls for Arab philosophers to build their freedom based on their own domain, language, and tradition. He speaks of a “philosophical awakening” (*qawma falsafiyya*). Next, Abderrahmane speaks of a “political awakening” (*qawma siyāsiyya*) and he introduces different levels of this awakening, based on ethical empowerment. He also introduces the concept of “awakend youth” to speak of different humanity levels—i.e. *insāniyya* (humanity), *rujūla* (wo-manhood), and *murūʿa* (magnanimity)—based on ethical enrichment and the ability to give to the other. It is this ethical element that can impart Arab philosophy a universalist perspective again (Hashas 2019b). In the same book, he pays special attention to the Palestinian cause and argues for resitance at all levels, philosophic and political, including physical resistance against Israeli dehumanization of the Palestinians and their rights to freedom and liberation. He speaks of different levels of the “awakening” and the different reactions of Arab political regimes to the Palestinian Intifada and its youth awakening. He does also engage with these concepts and the Palestinian cause in another shorter book, entitled *Modernity and Resistance* (2007).

In *The Spirit of Religion* (2012), a voluminous work, the political theology and philosophy of Abderrahmane starts to take clearer theoretical grounds, based on a critique of both modern secularism that takes the place of religion, according to him, and the Islamic use of religion in politics exemplified by the theorists of Sunni and Shia political Islams. He launches his critique of political Islamic Salafists and their superficial understanding of Sharia law, their inability to pay attention to the overall ethical message of Islam, and their inability to fathom what secularism means, i.e. submission of the religious ethos to utilitarian ethics that can endanger human collective flourishing. He argues that the religionists (i.e. practitioners of political Islam) and the secularists do in the end use the same means of reaching power, clinging to it, and subduing to it, one through *fiqh* law and the other through democratic means that does not take the spiritual dimensions of human beings into account. Both versions of practicing politics seek power (*tasayyud*). It is in this work that he introduces the two dimensions of *fiqh*: one purely legal, thus rigid, (*fiqh ʾitimārī*), based on rituals and obligations, and the other ethicist (*fiqh ʾitimānī*), based on the general ethics of Islam, thus changeable according to human needs, but in the end still within Sharia limits. These differences he develops

especially in the first volume of his trilogy referred to earlier, *The Religion of Testimony and Sight* (2017).

His most recent *Posts of Resistance* (2018) is an engaged critique of especially Saudi Wahhabism and Shi'i Khumeinism, this time not only because they have usurped what *fiqh* means in politics, but also because with their failures they have given space to Western hegemony in the region, especially to the US and Israel, have manipulated their defense of the Palestinian cause, and have, consequently, weakened national Arab and Islamic societies at large. This work can be considered to be the most direct and critical of state regimes among his overall writings. With this work he challenges the stereotype that Sufis or Sufi scholars are "silent" in the face of state institutions and regimes. Even though he was criticized for "Salafising philosophy" [from Salafism], for the remarkable emphasis on religion in his project, he published two works in defence of dialogue, and in refutation of violence: *Dialogue as a Horizon for Thought* (2013), and *The Question of Violence* (2017). Some of his ideas, originally short lectures on education, youth, and renewal, are published in a booklet in simple language for the wider public: *From Sterile to Generous Humanity* (2017). At the heart of these texts, internal ethical jihad is given the credit for any desire for change, be it socio-political or intellectual.

3 The Reception of Trusteeship Paradigm

Despite his many publications (25 books so far, in the beginning of 2019), Abderrahmane is hardly known in the international scholarly community in the field of Arab-Islamic studies. Notable edited volumes and anthologies dedicated to contemporary Arab and Islamic scholarship hardly refer to him and his project in European languages (English, French, German, and Italian, to name only these) (Hashas 2015). Reference to his project has emerged only since the 2000s (Lahoud 2005; Hallaq 2013, 2019; Hashas 2013, 2014, 2015, 2019a, 2019b; Moosa 2014; Kigar 2015; Bevers 2016, 2018; Borik 2016; Mimouni 2016; Belhaj 2018; Tais 2018). As to the works that study his project in Arabic, they too are not many, and are mostly synthetic so far, written by his students or academics influenced by his ideas (Mashrūḥ 2009; Bū Zabra 2011; Bin 'Addi 2011; Arḥīla 2012; Humām 2013; Ḥarī 2014; al-Naqqarī 2014; 'Abd al-Raḥmān and Marḥūm (intr.) 2015; Maqūra 2015; al-Shabba 2016; Bal'aqrūz 2017; Amaqdūf 2018; Ḥabbāsh 2018).

Despite his wider readership in the Arab world, only a few well-known Arab philosophers and scholars have commented on his thought in some journal articles or newspaper articles, instead of fully engaging with him in a scholarly

exchange. For instance, al-Jabri did not reply to the harsh critique levelled at him especially in *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason* (1989), and in *Renewing the Method of Assessing the Tradition* (1994). The two philosophers never participated in the same events or at the same table, with the exception of one conference that dates 21–23 April, 1978, in the Faculty of Letters at their university in Rabat. The conference was a celebration of the 800th anniversary of Ibn Rushd and his legacy. It is there that Abderrahmane started his critique of al-Jabri and his reading of Averroes and the tradition in general (Ḥarī 2014, 7). Despite their intellectual disagreement, cooperation between the two philosophers is not non-existent. At least there is one trace that is found: al-Jabri contributed a chapter to *al-Munāẓara* magazine that Abderrahmane edited between 1989 and 1993, precisely to issue n. 6, of 1 December 1993 (Al-Jābrī 1993, 9–24). Abdallah Laroui did not engage with him either, apart from his critical notes in some of his memoirs in which he accuses Abderrahmane of introversion, of refutation of any idea that is “Western” and “modern”, and of being harsh in critiquing modern and classical Arab-Muslim philosophers. Laroui believes that using the tradition and its classical methods for modern renewal is not the path to follow. An epistemological break is needed, which, according to him, Abderrahmane does not seek (al-‘Arwī 2005). Kamal Abdellatif, who generally pursues the line of thought of Laroui, joins the critique, and thinks that Abderrahmane’s spiritual ethos does not serve historicist studies nor Arab changing societies (‘Abd al-Laṭīf 2018). As to Abdelilah Belkeziz, a political theorist and Arabist à la al-Jabri, his disapproval of the project of Abderrahmane made him not mention him at all in his thick volume on critical Arab thought (Balqazīz 2014).

In the Mashreq (Levant), some renowned contemporary Arab scholars have engaged with Abderrahmane in various journal and newspaper articles. For example, in reaction to Abderrahmane’s two volumes on philosophy, in which he tries to theorize the practice of both philosophy and translation, the Lebanese Ali Harb accuses him of misusing philosophy and logic to simply refute whatever is not “originally” Arabo-Islamic. He also refuses the way Abderrahmane translates the Cartesian *cogito* into Arabic, as seen earlier (Harb 1996; 1999). His compatriot Ridwan al-Sayyid, too, shows great respect for the scholarship of the philosopher, and the profound ethical weight he has put in his project. However, commenting on Abderrahmane’s *The Spirit of Religion*, published in 2012, a delicate moment in the Arab Spring revolts, al-Sayyid expressed his fear in a newspaper article against the staunch critique the author levelled especially against the notion of the modern state, be it secular or religious. In the article, al-Sayyid warned that focalizing individual ethics, and refuting the notion of the state that Arab societies need for change can

pave the way for violent extremists to emerge as an alternative for a sovereign authority (al-Sayyid 2012). Al-Sayyid continued his critique of the philosopher when he published *Posts of Resistance* (2018), since the book launches another strong refutation of alliance with hegemonic powers (American and Israeli) in the region, using religion in politics. Al-Sayyid took this as an introvert and isolationist attitude towards the world from an important Arab philosopher, an attitude the troubled Arab world does not need (al-Sayyid 2018). The Jordanian Fahmi Jadaan does not stand far from this critical reception of Abderrahmane. In an article on ethics and politics, he thinks that the religious ethics of the studied philosopher does not respond to the complexity of societies and their differing, or opposing, moral views (Jad'ān 2014, 13–23). The Mauritanian scholar Abdellah Seyyid Ould Bah, however, makes a different note in his scholastic book about influential Arab scholars of the second half of the 20th century. Out of 33 figures, to whom he refers as “thinkers”, it is only Taha Abderrahmane that he refers to as “philosopher” (Sayyid Wald Abāh 2010, 71–79).

4 Reflective Closure

This chapter has synthetically chronicled the development of Taha Abderrahmane’s philosophical project of the trusteeship paradigm. Besides the intellectual stages synthetically outlined above, three further points will be made below as a form of closure: on language, “spiritual self-criticism,” and ethics.

First, Taha Abderrahmane’s philosophical language is unique. In every book, he develops various new concepts and sub-concepts that are originally Arabic or derive from an Arabic root, to the extent that a whole dictionary devoted to his philosophy could be collected. He argues for each concept in a logical manner. He often presents three arguments of a certain idea that he wishes to critique, then he presents his own replies to them. Often each of them consists of three other sub-arguments, and each sub-argument is often further subdivided. This makes his argumentation unprecedented among contemporary Arab philosophers and scholars. He states that he does not wish to be a historian of ideas as most contemporary scholars are. His background in the study as well as teaching of logic must have had this lasting influence on him. It is true that it is an excessive dictionary that he has accumulated over the years, that many of his concepts overlap and at times bear the same meaning put in different words, but this is justifiable if we bear in mind that one of his projects is not only to propose a new and argumentatively sophisticated ethical theory in Arab-Islamic philosophy but also to revive Arabic as a language of

philosophy. For him, philosophizing and practicing philosophy freely, can only happen within a rich linguistic tradition. With his over-argumentation in his books he wishes to raise the level of philosophical practice in the Arab and Islamic world at large, and to coin terms that belong to this linguistic tradition and its worldview. With this feature of his work he stands as a genuine philosopher of his time.

Second, and this relates to the private sphere and to the meaning of spirituality in modern times, applied ethics in the trusteeship paradigm are rooted in the tradition, however rationally expounded. Ethics without consistent practice are null and void in Abderrahmane's project. Being a philosopher of logic and at the same time a devout man who belongs to the Boutchichiyya Sufi path has been received with critique from some Arab "secular" thinkers, as referred to above. The personal life of Abderrahmane may be a manifestation of his philosophy, but he also says this is his personal life and choice, and it does not bind his "readers" or "disciples." What could be deduced from this is that he rejects modern spirituality that is individualist, bound by no tradition or limits. For him, Sufism is a connexion to the ethical limits taught by the tradition. The future *homo moralis* knows the self and its powers and desires, and knows on what grounds it stands as well as its limits, before he can "save" the future. This is a form of liberation theology in the trusteeship paradigm, but the challenge facing it, especially in the Arab-Islamic context it focalizes, is that *belonging* to the tradition now has diverse manifestations. While it could remain a challenge at the abstract level, for the realization of the "perfect being" or "perfect modern wo/man," on the ground, with which the trusteeship project remains bound, it may be too challenging. Being Muslim and being Islamic has been disrupted by the Euro-modern secularist paradigm for over the last two centuries, and reclaiming it now with such a highly complicated Sufi philosophy may not be embraced by the Islamic worldviews whose belonging to the tradition takes different paths. *Al-'amal al-tazkawi*, or "spiritual self-criticism" as I translate it, is too demanding to be adopted by everyone in society for renewal for Muslims, and for reforming modernity in non-Islamic societies, for a shared better world. Spiritual paths have always been diverse in Islamic history. In modern times they have also taken different political and apolitical attitudes. However, it should be understood that Abderrahmane's Sufi dose for internal renewal, before any external change, challenges popular, and at times folkloric, Sufism, as well as modern individualist spirituality that is self-centered, and praxis-less. The trusteeship's use of "spiritual self-criticism" is learned, philosophic, as well as pietist. It navigates between the secular and religious, the public and the private, to create a third worldview that is neither secular nor religious as commonly understood.

Third, the trusteeship paradigm seeks the formation of a modern Islamic theory of ethics that keeps the core of the tradition alive, i.e. practical faith, in the age of modernity in which faith and practice have generally been separated due to the secular versus religious dichotomous thought. Trusteeship seeks the restoration of faith to the modern issue of ethics and its variegated theories and tendencies, mostly the secular or atheist ones. Here, Abderrahmane moves the debate on ethics and religion in general to a new focus, which is already traditional but based on the modern context and needs, i.e. that Sharia's core message is ethics, and not law, without justifying the disregard of law (*fiqh*) because modern times requires it, as a number of other modern Islamic projects of reform aim at. Abderrahmane rather turns Islamic legal theories, and Sharia objectives in general, into fields of energy for genuine philosophical thought about modernity challenges and the future of humanity at large. He does this with confidence from an Islamic perspective, which critics of religion in the public sphere of the modern liberal-secular state may find traditional, archaic, and may then just ignore it without further ado. Spiritual modernity as presented in the trusteeship paradigm is a staunch critique of what has become common and dominant Western modernity, and a staunch critique of Arab-Islamic thought that does not think differently and creatively from this "Western" modernity. The trusteeship paradigm tries to overcome the status quo by reinvigorating what it means to be free, human, rational, ethicist in attitude and ethical in practice. If there is a role for religion to play in the future, it is to fix some modern arrogance through applied ethics.⁴

However, while this is a well grounded argument, it does not solve the predicaments of modernity, either in the Islamic majority contexts or in modern contexts with which the trusteeship paradigm struggles intellectually. The interpretation of Islamic ethics differs. That is, freedom of thought and the rational faculties human beings enjoy do allow for a variety of appropriations of what it means to be ethical and ethicist, and what it means to be *Islamically* so (see, for instance, Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 2015). To put it differently, if Abderrahmane critiques most classical Islamic philosophical scholarship for being mimetic of Greek thought, and critiques most modern Islamic intellectual scholarship for being mimetic of Euro-American (i.e. Western) thought, why would he propose his interpretation of Islamic thought not only as the most faithful to the core of religion, but also as the most capable of resolving

4 There is no need to mention that religion has its own forms of arrogance, and modernity has played a major role in addressing some of them, like the abolition of slavery, and equality of all before the law, despite one's religious or moral beliefs, ethnicity and appearances.

its modern crises? And why would he make the whole classical “Islamic civilization” and current question of “Arab renewal” in particular bound to religious ethos, at a time when religiosity in modernity has transformed and has taken new forms that are different, if not unfaithful, to the classical tradition, even in the same domain he wishes to reform (i.e. the Arab world)?

Put otherwise, one would say that Abderrahmane is not pluralist, since a religious ethos does not give space to other “secular” forms of being and doing. While this argument could be understood, it is not tenable if the whole project of Abderrahmane is taken into account. His trusteeship paradigm, as I understand it, especially if read in the secular-liberal contexts of Europe for example, is anchored in religious ethos, and in Islam, but there is space for the other in it. Ethics, however *Islamic* they appear, are humanist, and universalist, as the different concepts and levels of spiritual elevation he speaks of show. The different other is part and parcel of this ethical paradigm of trusteeship.

Abderrahmane moves from the particular to the universal, and in this way he actually dismisses his own critique of “mimicry” since he cannot be universalist without founding his approach on the thought of his classical as well as modern predecessors. Systematic thought starts somewhere, and his starts locally before it moves to theorize for the future of humanity universally. This engagement with modernity and theorization for a future “civilization of ethos” as he calls it is what colours his project with universality. He goes beyond the local to the universal, unlike a lot of his contemporaries who do the opposite. They start universally then go local, and in doing so they lose contact with the local they wish to reform. Their universal discourse remains lost in abstraction, deprived of praxis. It is easy to talk of ethics but hard to apply them, that is what the trusteeship paradigm simply reminds us of. This proposed paradigm is a fertile scholarly endeavour, linguistically and argumentatively rich, spiritually profound. It will reverberate for generations to come, especially as change takes place in Arab societies, because of gradual secularization, industrialization, and technologization. Further critical study will unveil its scope and limitations.

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