

did not recognize these territories north of the Mediterranean as one religious and political unit; for them, “Europe” was not a meaningful term. Ducène’s quasi-encyclopaedic volume reflects both the disjointed nature of Europe at the time, and the multiplicity of Islamic perspectives. This balanced, erudite study should become the reference point for future research on Muslim knowledge of European territories.

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ALIREZA DOOSTDAR:

The Iranian Metaphysics: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny.

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Alireza Doostdar’s *The Iranian Metaphysics* intervenes in questions of Islamic reason (*‘aql*), rationalization, metaphysics and the uncanny, and the everyday lives of modern religious subjects. The book draws on ethnography and interviews (largely from 2006 and after), archives to explore earlier twentieth-century state and popular practices, and secondary material in earlier and contemporary Islamic studies. Significantly, Doostdar insists that readers should not take his interlocutors to be primarily representative of an Iranian “underground” that attempts to escape and circumvent the authority of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, aside from the divergent personalities and politics of his interlocutors themselves, *The Iranian Metaphysics* both relies on and sidelines questions about Iranian politics and government. This book is not, in other words, strictly about the Islamic Republic as a political system, but it is about a much broader phenomenon: the rationalizing forces of the modern state. Here, Iranians engage metaphysics *as* state subjects (pp. 231–2), regardless of whether or not their practices are sanctioned or censured by the Islamic Republic.

Doostdar argues that metaphysics – as rationalized attempts to understand the unseen (*al-ghayb*) – “have constituted a fundamental element of Iranian thought since the nineteenth century” (p. 4). Theoretically, this work contributes to conversations about the utility of “belief” and “reason” as anthropological – and more broadly analytical – categories. As he suggests in the Introduction, many scholars (those invested in the “ontological turn”) “call for moving away from epistemological questions so that we can open ourselves up to our interlocutors’ radically different ‘ontologies’”; however, Doostdar argues, this bracketing of “rationality . . . relies on an assumption that rationality matters more to the analyst than to her interlocutors” (p. 15). In contrast, Doostdar argues that reason and rationality are not only “outsider” categories of the anthropologist, but also constitutive of contemporary Iranian practices and debates.

This is so, Doostdar convincingly suggests, in at least two ways. The first is via theological reason; that is, the long-standing Shii Islamic commitment to *‘aql* (reason). This commitment matters not only to many Iranians, but also organizes the boundaries of acceptable discourse and practice after the formation of the Islamic Republic. The second is via modern reason, or a kind of rationality indebted to scientific discourses. Modern reason too, Doostdar argues, is not external to Iran

or Iranians' engagements with the metaphysical, but rather animates them – as it has much of Iranian life since the nineteenth century.

The Iranian Metaphysicals explores the modes of rationality that organize Iranian encounters with the uncanny, including both theological and modern reason. Rather than tracing the ways in which contemporary Iranians do and do not live up to a specifically Islamic tradition of reasoned argument, Doostdar demonstrates that the “reasoning of Shi‘as” does not overlap neatly with Shii Islamic reason (234). At the same time, he suggests that the metaphysical explorations of contemporary Iranians never completely succeed at rationalizing the unseen. This movement, between success and failure, maps contestations over superstition, science, and moral reform.

The Iranian Metaphysicals explores this argument in three parts. Part I explores the figure of the *rammal*, a term that signifies a “diverse range of occult specialists” including practitioners of geomancy, fortune-tellers, palm readers, exorcists, talisman makers, sorcerers, and healers (38–39). As Doostdar explains, *rammals* occupied “an inconspicuous and relatively unproblematic existence before the twentieth century”, but have since been “relegated to the margins of respectable inquiry” (21). Here, Doostdar traces both the Iranian state’s “accommodation” of practices associated with *rammals* and the legal censuring of those practices as well as of the *rammals* themselves. The space between the miraculous and heretical organizes the activities and discourses of state figures, reformist critiques, and explorers of the unseen who, Doostdar summarizes, chart a quasi-rationalized path by “practicing virtuous caution” in relation to the *rammal* and inhabiting “a skeptical position that is open to wonder” (92).

Part II turns to a different form of rationalization: the scientific. Here Doostdar focuses on a period beginning with the late 1980s and the end of the Iran–Iraq war. As the economy liberalized it fostered discourses of self-realization. In addition, the end of the war saw a lessening of restrictions on the press, including translated texts. Both of these changes, Doostdar argues, opened up a therapeutic approach to self-help, psychiatry, and a “scientific path to metaphysical inquiry” (101). Again, as in the question of the *rammal*, Doostdar shows that attempts to rationalize the unseen through scientific discourses were not entirely successful and instead consistently contested by scientific rejoinders. Finally, in Part III the *Iranian Metaphysicals* turns to hagiography, saintly figures, and specifically Shi‘i Iranian debates over Sufism. Here, Doostdar discusses veneration of the (posthumously) well-known figure Ayatollah Haq Shenās, as well as the proliferation of texts detailing the lives of little known twentieth-century mystics and myriad attempts at “pious self-fashioning” based on these models.

This book is a fantastic (in more ways than one) exploration of Iranians' attempts to explore, draw on, and circumscribe the hidden powers of the unseen. This work should be of interest not only to those vested in modern Iran, but also experts in Islamic studies and – most broadly – the contemporary uncanny across geographic, cultural, and religious settings. Some readers may be put off by the organization of the book. Doostdar divided the argument not only into three major parts, but into much smaller subsections often of only a few pages. The downside of this delineation is that at times his argument feels truncated. On the positive, however, it does make the book eminently teachable even, if one were to excerpt small sections, across a spectrum of undergraduate classrooms and levels.

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