
Divine Sovereignty—Some Reflections¹



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Abstract

I offer some reflections here on the set of articles gathered in this special issue on divine sovereignty and further develop some thoughts first adumbrated in a piece published in JRAS 25/3 (2015).

Keywords: God; sovereignty; Mawdudi; jahiliyya

Few ideas in modern Islamic political thought can compete, in their apparent simplicity, intelligibility, rhetorical force, and influence, with the sovereignty of God. Though it has been invoked in varied Muslim circles, the idea is especially prominent in Islamist thought, and Sayyid Abu'l-A`la Mawdudi's formulation of it has had an enduring influence on how Islamists and many others have understood it. To Mawdudi, there is no one but God who possesses legal and political sovereignty, and any failure to recognise this, in word or in deed, is tantamount to the cardinal sin of *shirk*, of setting up partners with God. God is the only source of law, the exclusive locus of power and authority, and any worldly dispensation that is not founded on this recognition is a manifestation of *jahiliyya*.²

Jahiliyya refers, in common Islamic parlance, to the age of Arab paganism preceding the rise of Islam in the seventh century. To Mawdudi, however, *jahiliyya* is not the name of a particular era, reassuringly supplanted, so far as Muslims are concerned, with Islam. It is the mirror image of everything true Islam, and indeed all revealed religion, have ever represented. While Islam is anchored in the sovereignty of God, *jahiliyya* (which Mawdudi often uses in its adjectival form: *jahili*) is founded on the denial of it. The effects of this core difference are wide-ranging:

[The doctrine of the sovereignty of God] generates an independent philosophical system (*nizam*), one that is fundamentally different from *jahili* philosophies. It organizes whatever is known of the universe and human existence itself in a manner that is utterly different from how the *jahili*

¹I am grateful to Humeira Iqtidar and Oliver Scharbrodt for organising the workshop that has led to this special issue and for their comments on this piece.

²For references to Mawdudi's writings on this score, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought," *JRAS*, 25/3 (2015), pp. 389–418, especially pp. 394–395. Also see Sayyid Abu'l-A`la Mawdudi, "Mansib-i tajdid ki haqiqat awr tarikh-i tajdid main hazrat Shah Wali Allah ka maqam," *al-Furqan* (Bareilly), vol. 7, nos. 9–12 (1940), pp. 41–98, especially p. 52.

sciences take shape. It charts a distinct path to the growth of art and literature, one entirely different from those of the *jahiliyya*... It creates a separate system of morality, which bears no comparison with *jahili* morality. The civilizational edifice that rises from these intellectual and moral foundations is different in its very essence from those of the *jahili* civilizations. Sustaining that edifice requires a system of education and upbringing whose core principles, too, stand in total contradiction with all educational systems of the *jahiliyya*.³

It is not just the all-pervasiveness of the *jahili* dispensation, like that of Islam itself, that threatens the latter. Nor is it only the fact that, in the modern world, *jahiliyya*, as represented by the West, has come to enjoy great political, economic, technological, and military power. It is also that Muslims, too, have come to be afflicted with all the ills that *jahiliyya* represents. For all the starkness of the contrast between Islam and *jahiliyya* as systems of thought, there are no neat boundaries between the peoples of *jahiliyya* and those of Islam.⁴ This obviously makes the threat the more insidious, the need to respond to it the more pressing.

This formulation of the sovereignty of God, of a world sharply yet invisibly divided between Islam and *jahiliyya*, and of large segments of Muslims—ordinary believers as well as their political and *religious* leaders—as part of the *jahiliyya*, were major influences on Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) of Egypt, whose writings, in turn, did much to broaden the reach of these ideas. Though Mawdudi was not the first to speak of the sovereignty of God in an Islamic context,⁵ his seminal role in giving it an influential articulation has long been recognised by scholars of Islamic thought. Yet it is only recently that Mawdudi's formulation of this idea has begun to receive serious scholarly attention. The essays in this special issue are a significant further step in that direction.

Humeira Iqtidar's contribution provides an illuminating discussion of Mawdudi's critique of the idea of social equality in the sense of an exchangeability of roles. Mawdudi found the implications of such equality unacceptable insofar as they concerned the position of women in relation to men: it was contrary not just to Islam but also to human nature and Muslims needed to resist rather than embrace this pernicious Western innovation. A surprising influence on Mawdudi's social conservatism, as Iqtidar shows, came from Marxist analyses of colonialism and of capitalist commodification. Yet Mawdudi was also critical of Marxism for its materialism, its class conflict, and its marginalisation of individual human agency. Islam alone, anchored in divine sovereignty, provided the perfect balance between the individual and the community, the material and the spiritual; it guaranteed religious equality to women and men without rendering them interchangeable in social, economic, and political terms. A good deal of Mawdudi's views on women, and on gender segregation, sounds traditional but, as Iqtidar argues, a novel twist to them is discernible in his writings. That consists not just in how Mawdudi was able to muster Marxism to his purposes while ultimately discarding the Marxist vision of society and economy, but more importantly in how he foregrounded biological difference, much more so than many others before him, in making his case.

³Mawdudi, "Mansib-i tajdid, p. 52.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵See Zaman, "Sovereignty of God".

It is tempting, in the light of Iqtidar's discussion, to raise the question of the relationship between Mawdudi's conservative view of fixed gender roles and the medieval Islamic ethical tradition, which, despite substantial egalitarian trends, tended to see clearly delineated social roles as a fundamental condition for a well-ordered society. As Nasir al-din Tusi (d. 1274), one of the most influential figures in the history of ethical thought in the eastern Islamic lands, had explicated it in his treatise on ethics, a just ruler knew, and so did the head of a household, where everyone belonged and he strove to keep them there.⁶ In some important respects, Mawdudi did not subscribe to Tusi's social vision, of course. His critique of racism and of nationalism is predicated precisely on their negation of the equality of all humans, which is why, as Iqtidar observes, his rejection of gender equality seems initially to be surprising. Yet, inasmuch as he affirmed an unequal and non-negotiable place for women in the household as key to a well-functioning society, he did continue in the tradition of pre-modern ethics. The crucial difference was that, to Mawdudi, the sovereignty of God—the moral framework of his analysis of gender relations, as indeed of everything else—was also a great equaliser. Except in certain specific cases, as in that of gender (though scarcely in all respects relating to it either), there were no legitimate grounds for social differentiation between and among human beings. To the likes of Tusi, on the other hand, a well-ordered society and polity were based precisely on the recognition and maintenance of such differences. The power of Mawdudi's idea was that it could justify social difference as needed but, unlike Tusi's, it could also be wielded in the service of radical social change.

Though the idea of divine sovereignty had originated in Sunni Islamist circles, it has had significant purchase among the Shi'a of Iraq and Iran, too, as the contributions by Oliver Scharbrodt and Simon Wolfgang Fuchs demonstrate. Scharbrodt provides an insightful account of the political and intellectual contexts in which the idea of divine sovereignty entered Shi'i Islamism in Iraq, notably through the writings of Taqi al-Mudarrisi. By the late 1960s, pan-Arabism was no longer a winning cause and a severely authoritarian state was in place, as contrasted with the rather greater possibilities for free expression that had existed a decade earlier. It was in that repressive context that al-Mudarrisi was drawn to, and became an advocate of, the ideas of Mawdudi and Qutb. Those ideas were inflected, however, by the Shi'i juristic context in which al-Mudarrisi wrote. Thus, as he saw it, divine sovereignty was not represented by the state or the people; rather, it was the jurists qua deputies of the hidden imam and, among them, the jurist enjoying preeminence in the Shi'i religious hierarchy, who symbolised it. This idea of the guardianship of the supreme jurist, *wilayat al-faqih*, would become enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, too, following the revolution of 1979. By contrast, though the Iraqi jurist Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr would be a notable contributor to debates, in the wake of the Iranian revolution, on the nature of juristic authority in an Islamic state, his early writings had stopped well short of requiring that the state be based on the principle of divine sovereignty if it were to qualify as

⁶Nasir al-din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, (ed.) Mujtaba Minawi and `Ali Riza Haydari (Tehran, 1982), esp. pp. 305 (on the king's justice), pp. 205–244 (on the household); G. M. Wickens, translation, *The Nasirean ethics* (London, 1964), pp. 230, 153–184. On this work and its influence, see W. Madelung, "Nasir ad-din Tusi's ethics between philosophy, Shi'ism, and Sufism," in Richard G. Hovannisian, (ed.), *Ethics in Islam* (Malibu, 1985), pp. 85–101; Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and egalitarianism in Islamic thought* (Cambridge, 1997); Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The importance of being Islamic* (Princeton, 2016), especially pp. 211–216, 463–467.

Islamic. Instead, he had been content to accord legitimacy even to a state that professed adherence to Islamic norms but otherwise had rather limited religious aspirations. This, of course, is very different from the prescriptions of Mawdudi and Qutb, though it accords well with long traditions of both Shi'i and Sunni political thought.

Implicit in Scharbrodt's discussion is the question of how al-Mudarrisi was able to ground the idea of divine sovereignty in Imami Shi'i law, theology, and political thought. What were the resources in terms of which this idea was explained and justified in a Shi'i context, beyond its being presented as an extension of juristic claims to authority in the absence of the imam? Put another way, what difference did the specifically Shi'i intellectual context make to al-Mudarrisi's articulation of this idea? Though Shi'i debates on juristic authority have received considerable scholarly attention, Scharbrodt's study shows that approaching them from the perspective of divine sovereignty helps illuminate them in some new directions, as indeed does the much needed attention to the case of Iraq.

Fuchs's contribution to this special issue brings us back to revolutionary Iran, but from the distinctive vantage of Mawdudi's *Jama'at-i Islami*. Many leaders of that organisation in Pakistan, and no doubt its rank and file, too, had been excited by the Islamic revolution next door. It was not that they had failed to notice that the revolutionary movement was deeply suffused with Shi'i motifs and that it was led by Shi'i religious scholars. Rather, as Fuchs argues, they were drawn to it by the recognition that, of all those who had been calling for the sovereignty of God, the Iranians were on their way to actually putting it into effect. Yet over the years, a good deal of that initial enthusiasm came to be tamped down. Though one might think that the patronage of oil-rich Sunni Arab regimes had had a significant role in this development, Fuchs offers a more nuanced explanation. Quite apart from its Shi'ism, the model of the Iranian revolution had been a matter of debate within the *Jama'at-i Islami* leadership. There were those who had wearied of the party's cautious and gradualist approach to political change and they looked to the success of the Iranian revolution as an inspiration. But others were concerned that the gains the party had made over the years, precisely by demonstrating its commitment to the political and electoral process in Pakistan, would be lost with too enthusiastic an embrace of the revolutionary model. Then there was the rise of sectarian militancy in the Punjab and elsewhere in Pakistan from the mid-1980s, with much bloodletting by both Sunni and Shi'i organisations. Votaries of the premier Sunni organisation of the time, the *Sipah-i Sahaba Pakistan* ("Pakistan's troops of the Prophet's companions"), alleged that the *Jama'at-i Islami* was soft on Shi'i Iran's excesses against its own Sunnis, that Iran was planning a Shi'i revolution in Pakistan and, perhaps most grievously, that the fulminations of Khomeini even against the most revered of people, the companions of the Prophet, were paralleled by Mawdudi's own criticism of several of those companions. As a polemical treatise briefly discussed by Fuchs had it, Mawdudi and Khomeini were brothers.

The *Sipah-i Sahaba* belonged to the Deobandi doctrinal orientation, one of several that had emerged among South Asian Sunnis in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. It would be worth exploring further the pressure that the Deobandi *ulama* and their followers, some of whom had a presence in the *Jama'at-i Islami* itself, had been exerting on this Islamist organisation so far as its attitude towards the Iranian revolution was concerned. While Deobandi sectarian militancy represented the sharp edge of that pressure, its roots

were deeper. Though many Deobandi *ʿulama* in Pakistan and in India would have disavowed the ways of the Sipah-i Sahaba, they, too, found many Shiʿi beliefs to be beyond the pale. Deobandi *ʿulama* have, moreover, long castigated Mawdudi for his criticism not just of the Prophet’s companions but also of other major figures in the Islamic tradition, including many Sufis. As observed by the influential Indian scholar Sayyid Abu’l-Hasan ʿAli Nadwi (d. 1999), discussed in this special issue by Usaama al-Azami, Mawdudi had seemed to mock even core ritual practices when not tied to political ends.⁷ In all these respects, the Sipah-i Sahaba’s view of Mawdudi’s allegedly new-fangled Islam was that of many Deobandi and like-minded *ʿulama*, too. Although the idea of the sovereignty of God has made its way into the writings of many contemporary *ʿulama*, their criticism of what they see as Mawdudi’s single-minded focus on political goals is also an expression of their misgivings about the implications of that idea. Yet, as Fuchs observes, that idea also had the power to at least temporarily transcend sectarian boundaries, as it did in case of the Jamaʿat-i Islami and revolutionary Iran.

Whereas Fuchs, Iqtidar, and Scharbrodt are concerned with critically exploring the various modern and contemporary contexts in which Mawdudi’s idea of the sovereignty of God came to be deployed, al-Azami’s contribution to this special issue addresses the question of its premodern roots. Most of those who have written on Mawdudi and Qutb believe that *hakimiyya*, as these Islamist ideologues understood it, is an idea new to Islamic thought. Al-Azami argues rather that God’s legal sovereignty is broadly accepted in the Islamic tradition. As he sees it, Mawdudi’s novelty consists largely in his giving this idea a clearer articulation, which in turn was necessitated by his desire to reject the wide-ranging claims that modern states of a Western provenance made on the lives of those living under their sovereign power. Mawdudi’s response to such claims was to underline the fact that God alone possessed legal and, by extension, political sovereignty, and that submission to anyone else’s claims to such power was idolatry.

Al-Azami’s survey of some relevant facets of the Islamic exegetical and legal traditions is informative and very useful. It is worth noting, however, that the point at issue is not the pre-modern tradition’s denial of God’s ultimate legislative authority. The point is rather that Mawdudi was doing much more than merely affirming such exclusive authority for God. His understanding of the state was deeply indebted to the model of the modern Western states and their claims to supreme power. He was scarcely mistaken in seeing that such claims contravened the exclusive entitlement of God to overarching power—to sovereignty. Consequently, such states, in the West and in the European colonies, were embodiments of *jahiliyya*.⁸ At the same time, however, Mawdudi’s model of a properly Islamic state, viz., one affirming the sovereignty of God, was patterned precisely on the modern European state. That model lacked none of the powers any modern state possessed, but the recognition of divine sovereignty served to Islamise those powers. The state’s ability to regulate and, as needed, to shape people’s lives was now to be exercised as the putative instrument of divine sovereignty. This understanding of an all-encompassing (*hama gir*) sovereign state,⁹ albeit

⁷Sayyid Abu’l-Hasan ʿAli Nadwi, *ʿAsr-i hazir main din ki taftim wa tashrih* (Karachi, n.d.), pp. 85–91.

⁸See, for example, Mawdudi, “Mansib-i tajdid,” pp. 96, 98.

⁹Sayyid Abu’l-ʿA la Mawdudi, *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi* (Lahore, 1955; first published in 1939), pp. 35, 41–42.

one subservient to the sovereignty of God, is indeed very different from the pre-modern Islamic recognition of God as the source of all legislation. The second point to note here is that even as medieval and many modern Muslim scholars affirmed the principle of God's legislative and other authority, there are important nuances that such affirmations can contain and these are not adequately captured by Mawdudi's conception of divine sovereignty.

Taken together, all four papers provide much insight into Mawdudi's influence even as they place the idea of divine sovereignty under critical historical and conceptual scrutiny. It seems worthwhile to broaden the scope of that inquiry a little further by noting how some related issues figure in the work of a pre-colonial thinker who wielded great influence on later debates. In some of his writings, the eighteenth-century Sufi, *hadith* scholar, and jurist Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (d. 1762) has observed that the Prophet Muhammad had taught two kinds of sciences to people: the science of the sacred laws (*'ilm al-shara'i*) and the science of things beneficial to humans (*'ilm al-masalih*; singular: *maslaha*). The Prophet had made it clear that people were accountable to God on both counts, but that matters relating to the sacred law were more "firmly regulated" (*mazbut-tar*) than those of the other category, and that they were what was taken into account in "commanding right and forbidding wrong" (Q 3.104 and elsewhere) and in the ruler's upholding of the law. Matters of human benefit, for their part, were the "spirit of the sacred laws" (*ruh-i shara'i*), which tended to remain hidden unless given a determinate form through particular shari'a norms; and they were essentially between God and the individual.¹⁰

In his discussion of *maslaha*, Wali Allah draws not just on *hadith* and law but also on Sufism and ethics, and his conception of it accordingly goes well beyond much of the pre-modern juristic writing on it. Though this aspect of Wali Allah's thought has not been much studied so far, it points, in our present context, to a more subtle understanding of the sacred law than simply the affirmation that God is the author of it and to not submit to it is tantamount to unbelief. The Prophet Muhammad, under divine guidance, had taught the science of *maslaha*, too, and shari'a norms encapsulate considerations of *maslaha*. Indeed, it was Wali Allah's project, in his famous *Conclusive Argument from God* (*Hujjat Allah al-baligha*), to demonstrate how they did so. Yet the very fact that the science of *maslaha* stands parallel to the science of the shari'a suggests that matters of human benefit are not fully absorbed by the shari'a, that they have a broader remit than the sacred law itself. Indeed, as Wali Allah had put it, whereas shari'a rulings are definitively known only through revelation, matters of *maslaha* are knowable through reason; and they are prior to revelation.¹¹

Wali Allah had also argued that God's law was tailored to the circumstances of the people who were the immediate recipients of a prophetic mission and that this was a facet of God's

¹⁰Shah Wali Allah, *Musaffa* [and] *Musawwa* (Delhi, 1876), i, p. 330. For some other discussions of this distinction, see Shah Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah al-baligha*, (ed.) Sa'id Ahmad Palanpuri (Karachi, 2010), i, pp. 363-371; translation Marcia K. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God* (Islamabad, 2003), pp. 376-382; and Shah Wali Allah, *Anfas al-'arifin*, (ed.) Muhammad 'Abd al-Ahad (Delhi, 1917), pp. 80-81.

¹¹Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, i, pp. 365-367; Hermansen, *Conclusive Argument*, pp. 377-379. On *maslaha* in pre-modern juristic thought, see Felicitas Opwis, *Maslaha and the purpose of the law* (Leiden, 2010). For a discussion of *maslaha* with reference to Tusi and subsequent writers in the ethical tradition, see Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, pp. 466-471, 478-486, 492-505. Ahmed's focus is on the ruler's law-making authority, as the medieval ethicists envisaged it; and he does not discuss Wali Allah.

mercy, for it helped people adhere to divine commandments without undue hardship.¹² The other side of this coin, and more remarkable for its sociological insight, is his argument that some of the norms that had developed among a people were eventually stamped with divine approval and that God made people accountable for proper adherence to those very norms.¹³ In such formulations, there is no denying that God is the ultimate judge: of what the law would be, how it might be tailored to people's circumstances, whether some of the norms that had emerged from long historical practice were to receive divine sanction, and so forth. Yet, human societies, too, had a role in the shaping of what became divinely mandated norms. Although Mawdudi commented at some length on Wali Allah, as will be seen presently, he seems not to have engaged with this point. His view of it would not, however, have been favourable.

It is unlikely that Mawdudi would have been any more well-disposed towards Shah `Abd al-`Aziz's (d. 1824) exegesis of Qur'an 1.4, which, depending on the reading of the verse that one adopts, translates as the "Master (*mālik*) or Ruler (*malik*) of the Day of Judgment". `Abd al-`Aziz was a son of Wali Allah and a noted *hadith* scholar of late Mughal Delhi. He observes that insomuch as God is the creator of everything, He is also its true master or possessor (*mālik*); likewise, taking account of the other reading (*malik*), he notes that the attribute of kingship truly belongs to God alone. On the Day of Judgment, all possessions and all rule (*milk wa mulk*) would, literally and metaphorically, belong to God, for it is from Him that all reward and punishment are to come on that day. Until then, however, God does give a share of mastership and rule to people so that they could be judged according as they have conducted themselves. Among `Abd al-`Aziz's several examples here is the power with which some people are endowed to govern others. Without it, people would be able to excuse themselves on the Day of Judgment by saying that they had had no ownership and no power and could therefore not be held accountable for their behaviour.¹⁴ God's ultimate power is not in question here anymore than it was in Wali Allah's formulations. Nor, however, is there any suggestion in this theological discussion that the power and authority that humans might possess in the world are illegitimate unless they be an extension of the sovereignty of God, that one exercising them with anything other than that recognition is an infidel.

Even Nasir al-din Tusi, who spent many years in the service of the pagan Mongols, although the *Nasirean Ethics* was composed earlier under an Isma`ili Shi`i patron, had affirmed the reality of "divine governance" (*siyasat-i Rabbani*). The immediate context of that affirmation was the perfection of the human soul rather than politics.¹⁵ But when he spoke of government later in the treatise, he saw no contradiction between a category of rulers who enjoyed divine support (*ta'yidi-yi Ilahi*), and yet were "absolute king[s]" (*malik `ala'l-ittlaq*), in the language of the ancients, by which he meant the Greek philosophers;

¹²See, for instance, Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, i, pp. 294, 337; Hermansen, *Conclusive Argument*, pp. 297–298, 341–342.

¹³Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, i, p. 209; Hermansen, *Conclusive Argument*, pp. 210–211.

¹⁴Shah `Abd al-`Aziz, *Tafsir-i `Azizi* (Delhi, 1894), p. 6. (This volume comprises exegesis of the first two chapters of the Qur'an, till Q 2.184.)

¹⁵Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 79; Wickens, *Nasirean Ethics*, pp. 58–59.

and imams, in the language of the moderns, by which he meant the Muslim philosophers.¹⁶ Jalal al-din Dawani's (d. 1502) treatise on ethics, though closely following Tusi's and almost as widely-studied as his, was considerably more attentive to the claims of the shari'a, but he, too, retains the terminology of "absolute king[s]."¹⁷ By contrast, Mawdudi's theory of divine sovereignty is premised, of course, on the idea that any human claiming to be an absolute ruler (*hākim `ala'l-ittlaq*) was making a claim to divinity.¹⁸ That Mawdudi would have seen Tusi and his likes as expressions of a pseudo-Muslim *jahiliyya* is beside the point. The point is rather that Mawdudi's conception of the legal and political sovereignty of God is an idea far more indebted to how the sovereign state has been conceptualised in modern Western thought than it is to how Muslims in pre-modern times tended to think about the power and authority of God. Its rhetorical force and its ability to adapt itself to varied political contexts—as shown, for Shi'i Iraq, by Scharbrodt—is such, however, that even some of those with a deep grounding in the religious tradition have preferred to put it to their own use rather than to subject its premises or its implications to serious questioning.

Although Mawdudi never acknowledged the influence that his understanding of the modern state had had on his idea of divine sovereignty, he did little to conceal his admiration for the dynamism and power of modern Western societies. This is remarkable when considered in light of his dim view of *jahili* societies and his conviction that modern Western societies and states were prime examples of such *jahiliyya*. There is perhaps no better illustration of this grudging admiration, and of the concomitant critique of Muslim reformist efforts, than a long article he had published in 1940 on "The true nature of revivalism and Shah Wali Allah's place in its history".¹⁹ In my discussion here, I have already drawn on this article, which was published as part of a special issue on Wali Allah to which many Indian luminaries of that era had contributed. I conclude these reflections by briefly commenting on it.

As its title promises, Mawdudi's article is a survey of revivalist initiatives in the history of Islam, with brief evaluations of key revivalists such as the Umayyad caliph `Umar b. `Abd al-`Aziz (r. 717–20); the great jurist, Sufi, and theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111); the Hanbali jurist and theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328); the Indian Naqshbandi Sufi Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624); and Wali Allah and his successors, notably his grandson Shah Muhammad Isma`il and the latter's spiritual guide, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareli, both of whom died,

¹⁶Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 253; Wickens, *Nasirean ethics*, p. 192. I am guided in my understanding of the "moderns" as Muslim philosophers by Madelung, "Nasir ad-din Tusi's ethics," p. 94.

¹⁷Jalal al-din Dawani, *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, (ed.) `Abdallah Mas`udi Arani (Tehran, 2012), p. 222. See *ibid.*, p. 223, on the ruler's obligation to uphold the shari'a while exercising his authority in particulars, which he does in light of *maslaha* and in accordance with the shari'a's general principles. This point is absent in Tusi. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, pp. 467–471.

¹⁸Sayyid Abu'l-`A'la Mawdudi, *Qur'an ki char bunyadi istilahun* (Lahore, 2000; first published in 1941), pp. 36–37. The echo of the *malik ala'l-ittlaq* of Tusi and Dawani is worth noting here.

¹⁹Mawdudi, "Mansib-i tajdid". This article was subsequently published in the form of a small book: Sayyid Abu'l-`A'la Mawdudi, *Tajdid wa ihya-i din*, 5th edition, (Lahore, 1952; first published in 1940). An English translation was published in 1963: *A short history of the revivalist movement in Islam*, trans. al-Ash`ari (Lahore, 1963). The 5th edition of the book in Urdu, and subsequent re-printings, contain some modifications in light of the criticism that had been directed at this work as well as an appendix clarifying some of Mawdudi's views. A systematic review of those modifications and clarifications would be illuminating, though I have not attempted it here. My references are to the original version, published in *al-Furqan*. For a brief discussion of this work, see Jan-Peter Hartung, *A System of Life: Mawdudi and the Ideologisation of Islam* (New York, 2014), pp. 78–83.

together with their followers, fighting the Sikhs in India's northwest frontier in 1831. This survey is preceded by a detailed delineation of what Mawdudi takes to be different types of *jahiliyya*, including one that plagues Sufism and other forms of asceticism, and how those types contrast with Islam proper. Even as he commends the achievements of the various revivalists, his judgment on them is severe and his overall view is that none of them was more than a "partial" revivalist, with much that had held each of them back. It is this kind of criticism of Islam's revered figures that would be highlighted by Deobandi polemicists, including those discussed in Fuchs's article. Wali Allah comes in for an especially harsh assessment. Mawdudi does commend him for being the first to help articulate the idea of Islam as a system (*nizam*) and, indeed, to delineate the conception, albeit a "blurred" one, of the historical contest between Islam and *jahiliyya*.²⁰ Yet Wali Allah was a mere theoretician who could not eliminate un-Islamic practices even from his own household.²¹ However, what really doomed Wali Allah's revivalist initiatives, and those of his successors, was their miniscule scale in comparison with developments in the contemporary West: it was less than an ounce as against 5,000 pounds of European power.²² In the age of Wali Allah, of `Abd al-`Aziz, and of Shah Isma`il, scholars, discoverers, and inventors in the West were busy transforming the world. Mawdudi mentions several names in this regard, among them Hume (d. 1776), Rousseau (d. 1778), Adam Smith (d. 1790), Lavoisier (d. 1794), Kant (d. 1804), Hegel (d. 1831), Goethe (d. 1832), Malthus (d. 1834), Comte (d. 1857), and Darwin (d. 1882). Whereas Wali Allah and his sons had written a few books for a limited audience, books being produced in Europe in each field of knowledge amounted to entire libraries. The awakening of a select few "among us" bore no comparison with *national* awakenings in Europe. As if that were not enough, Wali Allah and his successors did not even realise that the real threat was represented by Europe rather than by an indigenous foe, and this at a time when the British were already a well-established power in India. They made no effort to learn the secret behind European success, to understand the nature of their institutions.²³

Irrespective of the persuasiveness of this analysis, it leaves no doubt that, for Mawdudi, it was power—political, military, economic, intellectual, scientific—that constituted the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful revival. One of his key conclusions regarding this defeat in the face of "Western *jahiliyya*" is that a proper religious revival required much more than a revival of only the religious sciences or even, remarkably—in view of Mawdudi's concern with the implementation of the sacred law—"just ... the reinvigoration of the spirit of following the shari'a".²⁴ Rather, it required a transformative movement that would reshape all facets of life. As he had memorably put it in the same article, we should not expect that the promised *mahdi*, the messianic figure awaited, with different specifications,

²⁰Mawdudi, "Mansib-i tajdid," pp. 89, 91. At this and other points, Mawdudi's discussion of Wali Allah does not reveal any deep familiarity with the latter's writings.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 80. See *ibid.*, p. 80, n. 1, for the editor's rejoinder to this statement. The editor of *al-Furqan*, in which this article was published, was Muhammad Manzur Nu'mani. On him, see the article by Fuchs. The remark about un-Islamic practices in Wali Allah's household was quietly omitted in the 5th and subsequent editions of the book: cf. Mawdudi, *Tajdid*, p. 100 (for the place where that remark would have been expected to occur).

²²Mawdudi, "Mansib-i tajdid," p. 96.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 96–98.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 98.

by the Imami Shi'a and by the Sunnis, would emerge from a mosque or a madrasa, rosary in hand. Rather, he would be "an altogether modern type of a leader".²⁵ The paths that the earlier thinkers had charted had had severe limitations already in their own times; and they had become more inadequate still in the modern age. As he had observed in concluding that article, "the modern *jahiliyya* has arrived with numerous new resources and it has created innumerable problems of which Wali Allah and other ancients (*qudama*) had not had the faintest inkling".²⁶ The only two sources that Muslims could unreservedly rely on in their revivalist initiatives were the Qur'an and the normative example of the Prophet. And to be guided by them required a "new power of *ijtihad*" (*na'i ijthadi quwwat*),²⁷ by which he seems to have meant something considerably more far-reaching than the jurists' disciplined derivation of legal norms in light of the foundational texts, on matters on which those texts and the consensus of earlier scholars were silent. The idea of sovereignty was not just a problem but also, arguably, one of those "numerous new resources" that the modern *jahiliyya* had brought with it.

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²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 98.