HOSSEIN KAMALY, *God and Man in Tehran: Contending Visions of the Divine from the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). pp. 256. $60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780231176828

REVIEWED BY ESKANDAR SADEGHI-BOROUJERDI, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; e-mail: eskandar.sadeghi@orinst.ox.ac.uk
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Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the many varieties of religious life and experience in modern Iran have at times found themselves flattened in both scholarship and the popular imagination. While perhaps understandable in the aftermath of the demise of the United States' most powerful regional ally and its replacement with a populist Shiʿi theocracy, which in turn gave rise to a historiographical genre declaring the "failure" of secularism and the volcanic eruption of "Islamic fundamentalism" across the Middle East, it is also quite unfortunate and has arguably led to obscuring far more than it illuminates. Casual observers as well as those who watch Iran more closely have often fallen into the grip of a Manichean picture of austere clerics demanding the uncompromising execution of the shariʿa versus intrepid reformers slated to emerge as Islam's very own Luther. Such depictions seamlessly find an audience in media and popular representations of Iran as they come to embody the unfolding of a cosmic battle for the country's "soul" pitting "fundamentalists" against "modernists."

Circumventing the metanarratives and temporalities of irrationalism, disenchantment and the triumph of reason, Hossein Kamaly's *God and Man in Tehran* provides a rich, learned and erudite conceptual history of the manifold meanings, representations, and imaginings of God in Iran's capital city and beyond over the course of two centuries. This deeply researched work of intellectual history proceeds to map God's innumerable iterations through philosophy, poetry, law, Sufism, and even skepticism, and relies upon a huge reservoir of primary source material in the process. While comparable to other distinguished monographs such as Mangol Bayat's *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982) or Farzin Vahdat's *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002), it is in certain respects both broader and more expansive than the former, while eschewing the meta- and all-encompassing narrative of the latter. In this respect, it might be regarded as an exercise in "thick description" providing a layered and plurivocal account of the many varieties of divine conception, albeit shorn of a grand theory geared toward resolving their inherent tensions and incommensurate perspectives on God and the world. Indeed, if there is a hidden normative vision buried in the many vignettes and transitions of *God and Man in Tehran*, it might well be that Iranians' understandings of God and the sacred have always been profoundly variegated, and that figures of "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" have never been stable or cut-and-dried, but rather should be seen as perpetually ebbing, flowing, crystallizing and dissolving in the flux of historical time and memory.

The opening chapter illustrates the gradual semantic shifts and slippages which led Iranian intellectuals to rethink the meaning of "Nature" and its metaphysical standing. Beginning with the celebrated singer, Qamar al-Muluk Vaziri's rendition of the constitutionalist poet Muhammad-Taqi Bahar's poem "Ode to the Morning Bird," penned during

the Minor Despotism (1907–9), Kamaly aims to show how "the belief that supplicating Nature was on par with supplicating God and that knowing Nature was akin to knowing God was becoming more commonplace" (p. 3). Classical Persian literature would never have placed Nature and the heavens on par, let alone regard the former as synonymous with the Divine. Rather, it was held that Nature was something to be transcended in one's ascent toward the firmament and reunion with the one true God. But during the 19th century this long-established series of associations quickly began to change as both philosophical naturalism and empirical science came to locate human beings themselves as objects of scientific investigation. This discovery of science, moreover, was inseparable from the ever-increasing encroachment of European powers and a desire on the part of Iranians to understand how Europe had emerged as an overwhelming center of industrial, military and economic might. In Iran many members of intelligentsia of this period came to believe, in a refrain that would be eerily familiar to readers of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), that "mastery over Nature constituted the cornerstone of progress" (p. 7). This new understanding of Nature was accompanied by other novel ways of thinking about politics, reason, legitimacy, law, and civilization. And it is here that Kamaly examines the ideas of notable late Qajar intellectuals such as Fath-ʿAli Akhundzadah, who unflinchingly declared: "The *philosophe* excels in rational sciences and discerns the causes of things in terms of the law of nature: never believing in extraordinary acts, miracles, or revelation; not falling for magic works" (p. 10). Much of *kalam*, namely Islamic doctrinal theology and the Aristotelian and neo-Platonic metaphysical systems upon which a lot of it rested, and which had dominated intellectual life for centuries, would be thrust aside without a second thought. In its stead, "the universal law of causation was acknowledged as a nonpersonal principle that is manifest in the grand design of Nature" (p. 12). More traditional forms of religious belief too, would be replaced with a kind of deism emphasizing the "rational nonpersonal source of natural order" (p. 12). A small and influential elite within the intelligentsia was convinced that the world could be conceived in terms of natural and rational laws, which human beings could discover, providing they availed themselves of the proper epistemic wherewithal and scientific method. Expatiating upon the intellectual milieu of late 19th century modernists, Kamaly effortlessly traverses the contributions of Mirza Malkam Khan, ʿAbd al-Rahim Talibuf, Mirza Yusuf Mustashar al-Dawlah, and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, as well as other sociocultural changes of considerable import including the impact of photography and the turn to naturalistic realism in painting (pp. 25, 95). In short, we observe Kamaly's careful delineation of the emergence of a new *episteme* and way of *being-in-the-world*. This extended even to the occasional, unthinking embrace of social Darwinism, as when the poet-prince Iraj Mirza playfully quipped, "one should become strong, for in the system of Nature the weak get pummeled" (p. 27). As implied in the subtitle of the book, however, such views were met with vehement resistance in more traditional quarters by several of Tehran's leading ʿulamaʾ, such as Mulla ʿAli Kani and Hajj Mirza Muhammad Hasan Ashtiyani.

This is, however, only a small part of the story which *God and Man in Tehran* seeks to tell about the religious life of Iran's capital. A key notion in Kamaly's exposition is that of "mediatory theology," in his words, "any postulation of agents that may enact or embody divine will, disclose revelations, or somehow do God's work" (p. 30). Mediatory

theology can take stronger and weaker forms, and its agents might be angels, imams, prophets, and saints, or still manifest themselves more abstractly. Given the centrality of *wilāya* and *walāya* in Shiʿi theology, the category of mediatory theology can certainly be said to play an important role in Shiʿi belief and practice, but as Kamaly ably shows, it is also readily apparent in supposedly "heterodox" movements in the mid-nineteenth century such as the Shakhyis, Babis, Niʿmatullahi Sufis, and the dervishes of the Ahl-i Haqq.

It is impossible to convey the enormous range of thinkers, sociopolitical ideas, and themes covered in this eminently readable work, but in these final paragraphs it is worthwhile drawing attention to one of its particularly notable achievements. This is Kamaly's very able demonstration—and to the best of my knowledge, the most extensive one in English to date—that those claims littering the scholarship asserting a coherent 19th century philosophical "School of Tehran," have little basis in reality (Chapter 5). While they were surely major intellectual figures in their own time, thinkers such as Aqa ʿAbd Allah Zunuzi, Aqa ʿAli Mudarris, Aqa Muhammad-Rida Qumshihʾi, and Abuʾl Hasan Jilvah had profoundly different philosophical presuppositions and approaches. Besides all having spent a considerable portion of their careers in Tehran, overseeing the development and flourishing of what is broadly known as "madrasah philosophy" under Qajar patronage, they can hardly be said to form anything like a unified school (p. 127). As Kamaly adeptly argues, one is ultimately hard-pressed to meaningfully reconcile Jilvah's uncompromising rationalism and Qumshihʾi's mystical intonations.

In sum, I can only recommend this panoramic work to readers in search of insight into the intellectual vicissitudes of Tehran and modern Iran more broadly. Beyond conveying the sheer abundance of thinkers, intellectual trends, and cultural movements, Kamaly deftly shows the extent to which Iranian intellectual history has always been characterized by syncretism, eclecticism and complex and conflicting genealogies. Rejecting the common impulse to compartmentalize, Kamaly reads socialists like Taqi Arani and the great modernist poet Ahmad Shamlu, alongside the nihilistic despair of Sadiq Hidayat and perennialism of Sayyid Hossein Nasr (p. 142), the fulminations of Ayatollah Khomeini in tandem with the anticlerical interjections of Ahmad Kasravi. In this way, he is not only able to exhibit the agonistic quality of the Iranian life of the mind, but also its inveterate dynamism, in stark contrast to those who are always quick to speak of desolation, stagnation and inexorable decline.

WILLIAM HARRIS, *The Quicksilver War: Syria, Iraq, and the Spiral of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Pp. 230. $29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190874872

REVIEWED BY DAVID S. SORENSON, Department of International Security, Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.; e-mail: david.sorenson@us.af.mil
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The literature on the Syrian civil war, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the post-2003 Iraq conflict seems to grow daily, but books that connect these overlapping struggles are not as common. However, *The Quicksilver War* by William Harris of New Zealand's Otago examines this "shape-shifting pattern of interlinked conflicts across Syria and Iraq" (p. 3), managing to carefully synthesize these complex fights by locating and exploring their connections. Harris argues that if the Syrian civil war had