

Review Essay

Is an Intra-Islamic Theological
Ecumenism Possible? A Response
to Sherman Jackson

Atif Khalil

It is rare to find within contemporary Islamic thought writers who are conversant in both the classical Islamic theological heritage and recent developments in philosophy and theology. More often than not, those who do attempt to engage in Islamic theology display either an ignorance of the past or the present. This is not, however, the case with Sherman Jackson, who joins a small handful of others, such as S. H. Nasr, Khalid Abou Fadl, and Abdal Hakim Murad, whose works – diverse as they are – reflect a grasp of both the Muslim intellectual tradition and modern thought.

Jackson's recent *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002) is not only a translation of al-Ghazali's *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqah* (*The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Masked Infidelity*), one of the most significant medieval attempts to formulate a method to definitively delineate "orthodoxy," but is prefaced by a highly original essay in which, among other things, he ventures to extend al-Ghazali's project by redefining and expanding the limits of Islamic orthodoxy within a contemporary context. In this sense, the introduction is a creative and laudable attempt by a serious Muslim thinker to do Islamic theology rather than merely exposit the dogmatic formulations of his medieval predecessors. As such, the introductory essay is the most original part of the book,¹ since it is here that Jackson argues, among other things, for the possibility of an intra-Islamic theological ecumenism, one in which creedal schools that pre-

Atif Khalil is affiliated with the Center for the Study of Religion, the University of Toronto, Canada. He would like to thank B. Ibrahim, Rabbi S. Slabodsky, M. Rustom, Dr. E. Winkel, and A. Khan for their critical feedback on this review's clarity and coherence.

viously saw each other as misguided might come to a greater recognition of their mutual legitimacies.

This is, indeed, an ambitious project. Yet, few of the book's reviewers seem to have fully appreciated the magnitude of Jackson's project as laid out in his introductory essay – virtually an independent piece in its own right – and devoted, instead, the bulk of their reviews to the rest of the work.² What I intend to do in the few pages that follow is to respond briefly to some of his arguments insofar as they pertain to his ideas on intra-Islamic theological ecumenism.³ My purpose is to show that despite the ingenuity with which he tackles the issue of doctrinal and theological diversity, many of his central arguments are beset by internal contradictions and incongruencies that might otherwise evade the casual reader.

Jackson sets out to achieve his ecumenical project by reconceptualizing notions of rationalism and tradition; historically contextualizing theology; and drawing distinctions between revelation, which he sees as transcendent, and historically contingent interpretations, and between exegesis and eisegesis. He does this not only by utilizing al-Ghazali's ideas as he lays them out in the *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, but also by employing contemporary developments in philosophy, history, Christian theology, and African studies.

One of the reasons for theological discord within Islam, Jackson argues, is that creedal schools such as those of the traditionalist Hanbalites or the rationalist Ash`arites see themselves as articulating ahistoric transcendent truths that, in their eyes, embody the naked intent of revelation. The "rationalist theologians," namely, the *mutakallimūn* (e.g., Ash`arites, Mu`tazilites, and Maturidis) do this by filtering scriptural statements through a specific understanding of rationality, which they consider universal but which, in fact, represents a historically specific strain of Aristotelian logic that no longer holds the same authority within philosophical or even non-Muslim theological circles.

On the other hand, the Hanbalite theologians, namely, the "traditionalists," claim to represent revelation as revelation untempered by flawed human logical explanations, yet fail to realize that revelation can never be theologically mapped out without appeal to specific criteria that stand outside of revelation. In other words, even though the Hanbalites are not engaging in a hermeneutics that resorts to Aristotelian logic, they are still falling back upon certain *a priori* presumptions about the nature of God (their "master principle") and how scripture should be understood. However, these presumptions are, contrary to their own pretensions, extra-revelatory (pp. 12-13). Moreover, the Hanbalites claim to represent the beliefs of the

earliest Muslims in their totality. But such beliefs could not have been passed down without mediation, because tradition – and here Jackson invokes the thought of African studies scholar Kwame Gyekye – is not simply the transmission of the past to the present, but rather “the process of selectively endorsing and suppressing old and new ideas and practices” (p. 27).

Jackson also argues that the Hanbalites, far from being anti-rational, resort to a certain form of logic that is simply not Aristotelian. In this regard, they are just as rational as the supposed rationalists. When, for example, the *mutakallimūn* denounce anthropomorphic ideas of God as irrational, they do so simply because of particular ideas about the nature of God rooted in an Aristotelian-Neoplatonic tradition. However, the logical necessity of absolute divine transcendence or dissimilarity (*tanzīh*) is not as philosophically watertight as they might otherwise presume. Jackson cites Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000), the student of Alfred Whitehead and founder of Process Theology, who argues that the medieval philosophical idea of an unchanging and totally transcendent Deity, exclusively actual and in a state of being, is inherently flawed and that a more perfect Deity would be both transcendent and immanent, both actual and potential, characterized by both being and becoming. On these grounds, Jackson contends that the Hanbalites can make a fully rational case for their insistence on accepting the literal meaning of scriptural references to divine immanence, such as His mounting the throne, descending into the lowest heaven, or possessing hands.

Yet Jackson does not commit himself to Process Theology or even to its notion of God.⁴ He simply presents Hartshorne’s ideas to justify his position that in light of modern and postmodern thought, there are different models of rationality and that the theologians can no longer lay sole claim to it. Jackson’s own use of Process Theology, however, seems to pose some difficulties for his position’s overall coherency. This is because Hartshorne is not suggesting that his view of God is one possible interpretation, but that it is the most coherent and reasonable one, and that a theology that only posits divine transcendence, or, more generally, one that is subsumed under the premises of what Hartshorne labels “classical theism,” is mistaken.⁵

Jackson, on the other hand, selectively uses Hartshorne for an ecumenical project in which an anthropomorphic notion of God would be seen as equally if not more legitimate as an Ash`arite one,⁶ because both groups use different models of rationality that are themselves historically contingent. These models, as he writes, should be “better understood as different traditions of reason” (p. 17). To speak of “different traditions of reason,”

however, is problematic because it begs the question of what criteria we can use to differentiate legitimate traditions from illegitimate ones. As long as there is no over-arching transcendent model of rationality to which one can resort – and for Jackson there is no such model – the unavoidable implication remains: All forms of rationality are legitimate within their own spheres, and moreover, all interpretations of revelation, insofar as they operate within different modes of reason, are legitimate.

In this light, it is difficult to see how Jackson can escape, by the logic of his position, the dilemma of having to accept as valid all possible doctrines in the absence of a universal criterion to differentiate authentic from inauthentic methods of rational interpretation in relation to scripture. This, in turn, opens the door to an acceptance of not only Process Theologian Hanbalites and Aristotelian-Neoplatonic Ash`arites, but anyone who simply claims to speak on behalf of Islamic revelation, no matter how convoluted their logic might seem. The irony is that al-Ghazali suggests the exact opposite in his *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, when he argues for the need of a common and agreed upon methodology to eliminate flawed interpretations (pp. 93-96).

This doctrinal relativism, while not explicit but which seems to be lurking in the background, finds further evidence in Jackson's argument that revelation *qua* revelation, insofar as its source is ahistoric, remains forever inaccessible to the historically contingent theologian (of any school) and that the most people can do is engage in limited, fallible attempts to interpret and understand the divine intention behind scripture insofar as they attempt to construct a coherent doctrine of faith. For any such attempt, writes Jackson, "being grounded in human thought, can never be transcendent" (p. 9). In other words, it is impossible to reach the universal truth contained within revelation at a comprehensive doctrinal level.⁷ But if no school can claim comprehensive doctrinal truth, then are we not forced to accept that all schools can, in the absence of an agreed upon method, claim it at the relative level?

Paradoxically, Jackson does contend that it is possible to reach some ahistoric doctrinal religious truths, those that comprise the Islamic *`aqidah* (creed), but not through theology:

To have religion is to have belief in and hence belief about God. But this is not the same as engaging in theology. For theology entails a commitment to a particular process via which beliefs about God are arrived at and sustained. It is perfectly possible, on the one hand, to arrive at and sustain beliefs about God independent of this process. This raises an important

point about the aforementioned term, *aqida*. For *aqida* [...] denotes only what one holds to be true, not the process via which one arrives at or sustains that belief. The fact that one has an *aqida*, in other words, does not at all imply that one has engaged in the activity of theology. One simply does not have to have theology in order to have an *aqida*. Moreover, to the extent that one accepts the proposition that revelation comes from beyond history, one must also accept the possibility that *aqida* can be transcendent. (Indeed, a Muslim would insist that the *aqida* of the Prophet was transcendent.) (p. 9).

There are a few problems here. First of all, can one truly have an *‘aqidah* that includes “sustained beliefs about God” without having employed some kind of systematic method?” Revelation does not, in its purest form, explicitly spell out these beliefs. Were that so, it would be possible for Muslims of all denominational backgrounds to arrive at an agreed upon core set of beliefs.⁸ However, this has never occurred. A casual perusal through some of most rudimentary medieval creedal primers quickly reveals each author’s theological allegiances.⁹ This is so because the process of distilling “sustained beliefs” invariably calls for interpretation, an undertaking that cannot dispense with presumptions about language, hermeneutics, and logic.

Second, these “sustained beliefs” – provided we could arrive at them without theology – would require making sense of diverse and seemingly contradictory revelatory assertions about God, something that can be achieved only through a methodological process. *‘Aqidahs* entail not only assent but also some form of understanding, however vague, and this understanding requires theology. Take, for example, the Qur’anic verse: “There is nothing like unto Him. And He is the Hearing, the Seeing” (42:11). In a single statement, the Qur’an affirms both divine dissimilarity (*tanzīh*) and similarity (*tashbīh*). But the self-evidence and immediacy of the seeming contradiction, for God affirms and denies the same thing in one sweep, is too immediate to forestall the next step: making sense of the divine assertion. In other words, theology so suddenly enters the process of apprehending the verse’s meaning that it is almost inseparable from encountering it altogether. It is virtually impossible for a human being, as *homo rationalis*, not to attempt comprehension. If this were not the case, one would be reading without understanding.

Now if it is suggested that a universally true understanding of the nature and interrelation of one’s creedal propositions can never be realized because the process invariably requires the use of historically contingent tools, one might as well make no effort because of its elusiveness. But this approach

would mean that deciphering the meaning of the religious concepts to which we hold would remain forever limited. All we could attain in regards to their truths would be a kind of mindless assent to a very small and specific set of assertions about God that are explicitly spelled out in revelation. This may have been the position of a small number of Muslims in history, the “we-believe-without-asking-how” group, but this is not al-Ghazali’s position as he articulates it, for example, while defending the theological enterprise in the second section of *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* (*The Principles of the Creed*), the second book of his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. (pp. 167-85).¹⁰ Nor do I think that Jackson would advocate this kind of anti-intellectual fideism, even though the logic of his perspective appears to lead us to it.

Finally, to invoke the Prophet as an example of *'aqidah*-without-theology is misleading because he had, from the Muslim perspective, direct access to transcendent truth by virtue of his prophethood. He had no need for a theological method to understand revelation because he was in a state of constant communion with God. One might further argue that the Prophet had no theology for the same reason that he had no *fiqh* (jurisprudence), since, for Muslims, his understanding of the law was the product of direct divine instruction. But just as the Muslim community cannot dispense with *fiqh* in order to reach practical truth, it should not consider theology inefficacious for realizing, or at least approaching, theoretical truth.

Closely related to Jackson’s problematic distinction between *'aqidah* and theology stands the one he sets up between scriptural exegesis and eisegesis. For him, the former comprises explanation (the process of “bringing out” meaning) while the latter is a form of interpretation (“reading meaning into a text”) (p. 11). Theology is tied to eisegesis because it operates “on the basis of some pre-existing or external criterion,” while exegesis simply “explain[s] the meaning of a text, much like a dictionary does in the case of individual words” (p. 11).

But this exegesis/eisegesis explanation/interpretation dichotomy is dubious, for it presumes that exegesis is not bound to historical contingences, as in the case of theological interpretations, or that the exegete is not also resorting to “pre-existing or external criterion.” Does not knowledge of Arabic, for example, constitute exactly such an external criterion? The meanings of Qur’anic terms, as we know, are not spelled out in revelation. Exegetes have to go to great lengths to understand the language of revelation, ranging from scrutinizing pre-Islamic poetry and grammar to exploring the sense of foreign words. Exegesis is comprised not merely of rudimentary explanation, but also of filtering the Qur’anic text through a particular understanding of Arabic.

Moreover, this understanding may vary from one exegete to another, giving rise to an extremely wide range of conflicting “explanations.” Take the Qur’anic verse: “He it is that has revealed unto thee the Scripture. Some of its verses are precise in meaning (*muḥkāmāt*) – they are the foundation of the Book – and others are ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*)” (3:7). Al-Tha`labi, an eleventh-century Qur’anic exegete distinguished for his close attention to language, understands *mutashābih* not as “ambiguous,” like many of his predecessors, but as “similar in content.” This reading has far-reaching implications on how the Qur’an is to be understood, since it leads him to conclude that nothing therein is ambiguous or closed to human comprehension.¹¹ If exegesis does not rely on external criterion, how could exegetes hold to such starkly conflicting opinions with such far-reaching ramifications, very much like the theologians? Would it not be more appropriate to consider these conflicting explanations as different interpretations?

If Jackson were to respond that a diversity of conflicting meanings does not necessarily imply eisegesis, as long as these meanings lie within the parameters of Arabic, then one might ask why all meanings faithful to the language should be accepted, *de facto*, as legitimate. Is not this view itself based on some kind of extra-revelatory hermeneutic principle? For example, Ibn Taymiyyah raised objections to this lingua-centric view because he saw how various theological schools used Arabic philology to justify their own unique Qur’anic interpretations in order to argue their respective theologies. The Mu`tazilites were perhaps best known for this method, but they were not alone. Numerous other Islamic thinkers, like Ibn Taymiyyah, saw how one’s knowledge of Arabic could be used with equal force by competing theological schools, and thus sought to limit the role of philology in *tafsīr* (Qur’anic commentary).

But even if, for argument’s sake, one were to concede that accepting all conflicting but philologically sound Qur’anic expositions does not take us beyond the domain of exegesis, this would seem to discredit Jackson’s view that doctrinal and theological diversity rests on the use of extra-revelatory principles to understand the sacred text. If, on the other hand, one argued for filtering out some otherwise philologically sound explanations, this filtering would necessarily require an extra-revelatory principle and thus take one into the domain of eisegesis.

Contrary to what Jackson argues, it seems that exegesis is also not free of extra-revelatory theological presuppositions. To demonstrate his own view, he cites two examples from al-Tabari:

In treating Quran 89:22 [...] “And your Lord and the angels come, line after line,” al-Tabari explains the meaning of this verse in simple dictionary fashion, limiting his additions to a few details surrounding the occasion of God’s coming. He makes no attempt to reconcile this with any preconceived criteria, such as the avoidance of anthropomorphism or the duty to pass on problematic verses without attempting to attribute any concrete meaning to them [...]. The same basic approach is repeated in the case of *istawa*, which was at the center of the controversy over God’s mounting the Throne [...]. Here, however, al-Tabari notes that there was a controversy, and after a brief digression aimed at establishing the propriety of his simple explication, he stops and says: “Were it not for my disdain for dragging this book out to great lengths by filling it with matters *that do not belong to this genre*, I would point out the falsity of every statement that contradicts the view of the People of Truth.” In other words, according to al-Tabari, exegesis, or *tafsir*, is, strictly speaking, a genre for *explaining* scripture... (pp. 11-12).

Yet if we look at al-Tabari’s commentary on verse 9:67, which, speaking of the hypocrites, reads: “They have forgotten God (*nasū Allāh*), and He has forgotten them (*fa nasiyahum*),” he does not give us a simple dictionary explanation, which would suggest that God in some form or another literally “forgot” or became “heedless” of those who forgot or became unmindful of Him. Rather, divine forgetting means that “God cast them away from His Providence, Guidance, and Mercy” (*fa tarakahum Allāhu min tawfiqihī wa hidāyatihī wa rahmatihī*).¹²

In this interpretation, we discern at least three theological presuppositions: (1) That the idea of an actual loss, temporary or permanent, of a previously held knowledge is inapplicable to God. There seem to be few other reasons why divine “forgetting” would be understood as an “abandoning” (*tark*); (2) That human “forgetting” cannot be the same as divine “forgetting.” This is why al-Tabari interprets “They have forgotten God” to mean that they abandoned bearing witness to and worshipping Him¹³; and (3), that God is an ever-present Actor in the drama of cosmic existence. Note that al-Tabari does not say that God abandoned them totally, but that He abandoned them *qua* His graces – those that lead to ultimate felicity. The presupposition here seems to be that God would not (or cannot) withdraw Himself from total participation in the destiny of a human being, even a hypocrite.¹⁴ Thus, contrary to what Jackson and al-Tabari claim, the latter’s supposed exegesis is not free of presumptions about the nature of God.

My point in noting the weakness of the exesis/eisegesis dichotomy is to highlight the difficulty in formulating an explanation that does not, in some form, resort to an external presupposition or authority, be it linguistic, logical, or theological. If, as Jackson says, an appeal to an external authority transforms a particular understanding into an interpretation, then invariably all explanations of the revealed text are no more than interpretations. Now since external presuppositions are, for him, accidents of history that cannot claim universal, transcendent truth, this, in turn, means that interpretations can never claim universal truth, unlike presuppositionless explanations. But these latter, as we have seen, do not exist. What remain, therefore, are simply different interpretations. The unavoidable conclusion is that the truth of revelation remains forever inaccessible to the historically entrenched human being. In the absence of a transcendent link to epistemologically connect the reader to the text, revelation becomes an “empty text” – in the most deconstructionist sense – capable of generating an infinity of equally authentic meanings.

In Jackson’s attempt to expand the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy, he has, it seems, ruptured the boundaries altogether. Despite the unsettling implications of his project, his efforts are praiseworthy because he is grappling with pressing concerns facing western Muslims struggling with issues of intra-communal pluralism, in a way that is neither dogmatic nor entirely removed from the tradition. Some of the dilemmas he encounters in his attempt to formulate a coherent theory of theological diversity seem to lie in his use of diverse and conflicting strains of thought, which range from al-Ghazali and African studies to Christian theology and postmodernism. It was perhaps only inevitable that a project that synthesized ideas from such a wide range of disparate sources would encounter its own incoherencies – interestingly, the same dilemma al-Ghazali’s own writings face.

Considering the tremendous range of sources he brings to his ecumenical project, there is at least one omission that deserves mention: the rather striking absence of recent scholarship on Ibn al-ʿArabi. This is particularly perplexing because the Andalusian mystic’s ideas about God are almost identical to that of Charles Hartshorne.¹⁵ That Jackson should utilize the thought of a twentieth-century Christian theologian but not so much as mention such an “indigenous” giant, and one whose fame is spreading rapidly in the West, warrants, at the least, some explanation.

More importantly, Ibn al-ʿArabi’s ideas have substantial bearing – arguably more than any other classical Islamic thinker – on theological pluralism, both at the level of inter- and intra-religious dialogue. This was

most clearly illustrated by William Chittick in his seminal monograph *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: SUNY 1995). For many admirers of *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, the Akbarian weltanschauung offers what may be the most coherent “theology of difference” for the modern world, one capable not only of tolerating but celebrating doctrinal diversity without falling prey to the kind of relativism that accompanies so many philosophies of pluralism.¹⁶ More than a few modern thinkers have made strong arguments suggesting that Ibn al-`Arabi’s writings offer the richest resources for a truly holistic understanding of theological and religious pluralism. For Jackson not to have mentioned, even in passing, Ibn al-`Arabi’s relevance was, to say the least, an oversight that marred an otherwise creatively researched and copiously referenced essay.

To close, I should note that perhaps the strongest defense Jackson can make to the charge of doctrinal relativism is that I have not acknowledged the importance of the hadiths in delineating the limits of “orthodoxy.” As Jackson notes, al-Ghazali assigns to specifically *tawātur* (diffusely congruent) prophetic traditions a key place in his own overall argument because, in his eyes, to deny their truth is, in effect, to accuse the Prophet of lying – the very essence of unbelief (*kufṛ*) (6:46-48). My response to Jackson, were he to raise this very argument, would be simply to ask: Through what hermeneutic and rational principles can we understand the prophetic traditions? Without appealing to extra-revelatory principles, even the Hadith literature would, like the Qur’an,¹⁷ lend itself to a vast range of doctrinally conflicting interpretations and thereby prevent us from coming any closer to defining the boundaries of theological tolerance in Islam.

Endnotes

1. Jackson notes that the *Fayṣal* was translated by R. J. McCarthy as an appendix to his *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston: 1980). McCarthy did not, however, seem to recognize the truly ecumenical nature of the text. Frank Griffel also recently translated it into German (Zürich: Spur, 1998).
2. This is evident in Devin Stewart’s review in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 1 (2004): 113-15; and Tony Street’s review in the *Journal of Islamic Studies* 16, no. (2005): 211-13. Feras Hamza’s review in *Transcendent Philosophy* 4, no. 4 (2003), <http://iranianstudies.org/philosophy15.htm>, comes closest to discerning this aspect of Jackson’s work. However, I must confess that this aspect is not explicitly spelled out in the essay; it requires some distillation.

3. Technically, the work actually has two introductions, the second of which can be characterized as the “introduction proper,” since it is here that Jackson lays out the historical background to the work. This article is only a response to the first introduction.
4. If he did, he would *de facto* align himself closer to the Hanbalities. But I do not believe that this is his intention. Moreover, he specifically points out that “Process Theology includes a number of tenets (explicitly and implied) that any Muslim – Traditionalist or Rationalist – would definitely reject” (p. 23).
5. See Hartshorne’s preface to *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: SUNY, 1984), ix-x.
6. It seems highly unlikely that the Hanbalites would be willing to resort to Process Theology, a philosophy that is only open to anthropomorphism because it envisions all of existence as part of an inclusive divine reality. Given this, Hartshorne’s God can include human qualities (Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 28-30; 122-23). Such views would unquestionably be anathema to the Hanbalites, and they would probably be the first to declare any Muslim who holds to such views to be an unbeliever. For example, this is evidenced by their hostility toward Sufis who adhere to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). See Alexander Knysh’s *Ibn Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany: SUNY: 1999) for a good historical survey of these hostile attitudes.
7. Jackson does concede that theology can lead to truths, but this is an accident of inquiry and not the result of a specific methodological procedure. Hence, he writes that “one can arrive at the same conclusions with theology as one arrives without it” (p. 9).
8. There seem to be only three doctrines that Muslims have unanimously agreed on: belief in God, Muhammad’s prophethood, and the Last Day. But these are too limited to comprise “sustained beliefs about God.” Moreover, abstracting the nature of each of these beliefs requires the use of hermeneutic and rational principles, without which the only agreement that could be reached about them, among Muslims, is their semantic truths. For example, can belief in God exclude a pantheistic notion of the divine? Can belief in the Last Day exclude the possibility of cycles of reincarnation before the final resurrection? Answering these questions requires, as I argue below, extra-revelatory principles.
9. See Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994). The contents of the creedal texts translated by Watt vary, depending on the theological school with which the author was affiliated.
10. It is true that al-Ghazali considers the Sufis, and not the theologians, the true heirs of the prophetic knowledge of God and the mysteries of revelation. But for him, this understanding is confined by pre-mystical or pre-*dhawqī* theological beliefs that constitute the correct *‘aqīdah*. This is why al-Ghazali, in the beginning of the *Qawā’id*, lays out a fairly standard Ash`arite understanding

of the divine attributes in his summary of the orthodox Muslim *ʿaqidah*. This *ʿaqidah* serves as a doctrinal foundation for the mystical journey. See al-Ghazali, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Damascus: Dar al-Waʿi, 1998), 1:160-68. Watt translated al-Ghazali's introductory creedal primer in *Islamic Creeds*, 73-79.

11. Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qurʾan Commentary of al-Thaʿlabi (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 92-95.
12. Al-Tabari, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 30 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Maʿrifah, 1992), 10:121. Likewise, al-Suyuti in his *Jalālayn* interprets "He has forgotten them" to mean "His benevolence left them" (*tarakahum lutfuhu*) (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1998), 197.
13. Al-Tabari, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 10:121.
14. I would like to thank Donald Smith for drawing my attention to this third presupposition.
15. Such as Hartshorne's simultaneous postulation of divine transcendence and immanence, which, within Muslim intellectual history, was most exhaustively explicated by Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240). Thus, he wrote in a couplet in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Bezels of Wisdom): "If you speak (only) of His transcendence (*tanzīh*), you are one who restricts Him (*kunta muqayyidan*) / If you speak (only) of His immanence (*tashbih*), you are one who limits Him (*kunta muhad-didan*) / But if you speak of both, you hit the mark! / You are an imam and a *sayyid* in (the sciences of) gnosis!" (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, n.d.), 70. Like Hartshorne, Ibn al-ʿArabi criticizes the "rationalist theologians" for their inability to comprehend divine immanence. Unlike him, however, he argues that divine immanence is most fully realized not through the rational, but through the imaginative, faculty. See the relevant translations from *The Meccan Revelations* in Chittick's *Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY, 1989) 59-73. See also the penetrating analysis of this topic in the chapters on Ibn al-ʿArabi in Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
16. See, for example, Vincent Cornell's recent article, "Practical Sufism: An Akbarian Foundation for a Liberal Theology of Difference," *Journal of the Muhiyuddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 36 (2004): 59-84. Cornell utilizes Jackson's present work. The ecumenical approach to religious, philosophical, and theological diversity in the writings of S. H. Nasr, James Morris, Huston Smith, and Sachiko Murata, to name but a few well-known scholars, is heavily indebted to Ibn al-ʿArabi.
17. For a few examples of philologically sound but "unorthodox" explanations of some prophetic traditions, see the relevant sections in Michel Chodkiewicz's inspired study, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ʿArabi, The Book, and the Law* (Albany: SUNY, 1993).