

# The Perceptions of God in the Intellectual History of Islam: A Plurality of Perspectives

*Routledge Studies in Islamic Philosophy*

## THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

CONTEMPLATING ALLAH

Edited by  
Mansoorah Khalilizand

**Start: Tuesday,  
June 11, 2024 at 4 pm**

UK (London) time: 3 pm  
USA (NYC) time: 10 am

*Livestream and Discussion available  
on the AIWG YouTube Channel*

The debate over Allah's attribute — the "nature" and the inner articulation of Allah — is one of the focal debates in the intellectual history of Islam. The planned event, based on the edited collection "The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought. Contemplating Allah" (Mansoorah Khalilizand (ed.), 2024), aims to introduce some aspects of this multifaceted debate. By showing that even an apparently self-evident concept such as Allah, which lies at the heart of every reading of Islam, is highly contentious and polysemous, the rich plurality that has always existed in Islamic thought, is to be emphasized and exposed. The extensive array of approaches and perspectives in conceptualizing Allah, the cornerstone of Islam, signifies the profound richness embedded within the tradition. This not only underscores the tradition's potential for innovative interpretations in response to modern challenges and questions, but also emphasizes the freedom individuals possess in comprehending and shaping the religion.

By revealing the inherent complexity and ambiguity surrounding the concept of Allah, the event seeks, on one hand, to create a space for reflection on a notion traditionally regarded as self-evident by the majority of Islamic faith followers. On the other hand, it aspires to engage the curiosity of students and scholars specializing in Islamic theology, philosophy, studies, and related disciplines, thereby directing their focus to a significant segment of Islam's intellectual tradition.

## Discussion by International Scholars

moderated by Muhammed Ragab Ahmed (AIWG)



### Mansoorah Khalilizand

Research fellow at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in Germany. She is currently focusing on the philosophy of the 17th-century Iranian philosopher Šadr al-Dīn Shirāzī. Her research interests encompass metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology in Islamic philosophy, as well as feminism in Islamic societies.

### Mohammad Gharaibeh

Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. A recent focus of his research has been the commentarial tradition on the Muqaddima of Ibn al-Šalāh and its role in the context of scholarly networks in Damascus and Cairo in the Mamluk period.



### Sajjad Rizvi

Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the University of Exeter. He is the author of *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics* (2008), and co-editor of *Knowledge and Power in Muslim Societies* (2023). He is currently collaborating on a volume on philosophy in contemporary Iran and completing a monograph on maximalist Imamology.

### Angelika Brodersen

Research fellow at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. She authored "Der unbekannte kalām. Theologische Positionen der frühen Māturīdīya am Beispiel der Attributenlehre" (2014); "Tradition und Transformation in der Māturīdīya des 6./12. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer kritischen Edition des Kitāb al-Kifāya fi l-hidaya des Nūr ad-Din aš-Šābūnī al-Buḥārī" (2022).



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# ABSTRACTS



## **Dr Mansooreh Khalilizand**

### **The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought. Contemplating Allah**

The debate over Allah's attribute – the “nature” and the inner articulation of Allah – is one of the focal debates in the intellectual history of Islam. This edited collection aims to highlight and examine some aspects of this debate in their original context, based on the relevant primary literature. By showing that even an apparently self-evident concept such as Allah, which lies at the heart of every reading of Islam, is highly ambiguous and polysemous, the chapters also emphasise the plurality that has always existed in Islamic thought. The book also attempts to demonstrate the relevance and the actuality of the tradition and to stress its contemporaneity.

This volume makes a significant part of the intellectual tradition of Islam accessible for students and scholars of Islamic theology, Islamic philosophy, Islamic studies and the like, as well as providing a secondary source for teaching on the debate in question.

## **Dr Angelika Brodersen**

### **Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī and the Divine Attributes: Māturīdī kalām in a Nutshell**

The theory of divine attributes is a key issue in which the Māturīdiyya differs fundamentally from the second Sunni kalām school, the Ashʿariyya. Abū Maṣūʿ al-Māturīdī (died 333/944) and his followers built their doctrines on Ḥanafī theology. According to this view, divine attributes have an independent existence that is not identical with God's existence. For the Māturīdites, the eternal existence of God's attributes is not restricted to the attributes of the essence. Rather, they also understand attributes relating to divine activities as pre-eternal. The question to which extent an attribute can be interpreted as eternal formed the starting point of the disputes with the Ashʿarites since the late 5th/11th century.

The discussions of the Māturīdī scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī al-Bukhārī (died 580/1184) with the famous Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (died 606/1210) represent an interesting landmark in this dispute. Al-Ṣābūnī's argumentation is not only a summary of the attribute doctrine of earlier Māturīdites, but also demonstrates that the discussion of the divine attributes forms the quintessence of Māturīdī theology. For the image of God that emerges affects not only the nature of God but also his actions in the world, so that divine action on humans also experiences a specific Māturīdite interpretation.

# ABSTRACTS

## **Prof Dr Mohammad Gharaibeh**

Constructing the True Islam. The Wahhābī Scholar Ibn 'Uthaymīn (d. 2001) on the Divine Attributes and the Path of the Pious Ancestors (salaf)

Claiming to represent the true Islam and to follow the path of the Pious Ancestors (salaf), the Wahhābī movement makes huge efforts in spreading their views among other Muslims. In the 20th and 21st century, the matter of the divine attributes has become an important subject within Wahhābī religious thinking. One of the most productive Wahhābī scholars in this field was Muḥammad b. 'Uthaymīn (d. 2001) who was one of the leading scholars of Saudi Arabia during the second half of the 20th century especially with regard to the formulation of the *correct* Islamic creed. Although his teachings lead to an image of God that could be defined as anthropomorphism as an analytical concept, which represents a marginal position within the Islamic Intellectual history, he claims to represent the true Islam. This paper shows how Ibn 'Uthaymīn supports his position by projecting his views onto the writings of other scholars and authorities as well as onto the two Islamic sources, the Qurān and the Sunna.

## **Prof Dr Sajjad Rizvi**

Divine Simplicity, the deus revelatus, and the Divine Names in the Philosophical Theology of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (1571–1636)

The fundamental problem of monotheism lies in the challenge posed by the utter transcendence of the One. How can the One be present and causally efficacious in the cosmos while retaining its simplicity? Avicenna's postulation of the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) with respect to God identifies it as a perfect necessary existent who only possesses a single attribute of necessary existence and all that we might ascribe to God is made true by that single attribute. On this broad point, he is followed by the Safavid Shīi thinker Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1636). However, the latter effects an extension of necessary existent theology by presenting the Shīi Imams as the vital divine names, who in a processual manner, act as divine immanence in the cosmos, hence proffering a solution to the dilemma of transcendence and immanence. This Imamology as a theology of the divine names allows for a tempering of the utter transcendence of the doctrine of divine simplicity.