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Towards New Perspectives on

Ethics in Islam

Casuistry, Contingency, and Ambiguity

Guest editor

Feriel Bouhafa

ISSN 0806-198X

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) **IsEh**

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The Interplay of Religion and Philosophy in al-Tawḥīdī's Political Thought and Practical Ethics

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Abstract

Although modern scholars tend to be sceptical of the role of religion in the formation of ethical and political thought in the Būyid period (334/945–440/1048), this article argues that both philosophy and religion, as envisioned by al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries, played an integral role in its creation. The analysis shows that modern concepts such as ‘humanism’ and ‘political philosophy,’ as applied to these authors and their texts, are not felicitous to the social and intellectual contexts in which they were produced. Through analysing al-Tawḥīdī's ethical and political thought, certain modern assumed dichotomies, including scientific enquiry versus religious teaching, theoretical ethics versus practical ethics, and the social versus the personal, are reconsidered. The article argues that a contextual approach to al-Tawḥīdī and his peers should consider the encyclopaedic system of knowledge that shaped their thought and the interdisciplinary nature of their work where religious, philosophical, and literary elements are intertwined. The article highlights al-Tawḥīdī's political thought, his active role as an intellectual and his attempt to disseminate knowledge based on two main beliefs: the role of knowledge linked to action in social life and reform, and a solid sense of the religious and moral responsibility of the scholar to offer advice to the leaders of the community. The concepts that he uses, such as *maḥabba* (love) and *ṣadāqa* (friendship) with its four foundational components, namely the soul (*nafs*), intellect (*ʿaql*), nature (*ṭabīʿa*), and morals (*khulq*), addressed social and political challenges in Būyid society and produced alternative moral and intellectual responses to sectarianism, social disintegration and the decline in morality, which were characteristic of the Būyid era.

Keywords: Ethical political thought, Būyid, Humanism, Political philosophy, *ʿilm* (Knowledge), *ʿamal* (action), *ṣadāqa* (friendship), al-Tawḥīdī, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ

Introduction

Although modern philosophy tends to be suspicious of the role of religion in morality and ethics, a serious scrutiny of ethical discourse in the Muslim context, especially in the pre-modern period, cannot afford such a dismissive attitude towards the impact of the religious discourse of Islam. The essential connection of religion with moral concepts that play an important part in social life and reform is crucial for any attempt to examine political thought

and ethics produced by fourth/tenth century Muslim scholars in their writings during the Būyid period (334-440/945-1048).¹

Numerous modern scholars who have studied this literature, particularly the writings of the philosopher and *littérateur* Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (circa 315-414/927-1023), have neglected the close affinity between religion and true morality in the formation of his ethical thought for the political realm. These scholars often perceive religion and ethics as worlds apart.² This modern reading of the literature is influenced by their understanding of the classification of various disciplines of knowledge and conceptions from the eighteenth century onwards when criteria to define philosophy were taken primarily from ancient Greek culture and later European developments.³

Thus, certain western categories and definitions, namely ‘political philosophy’ or ‘humanism’ have often been applied by scholars as lenses to analyse al-Tawḥīdī’s writings and the broader literature of Islamic ethical and political thought, assuming rigid dichotomies between religion and philosophical activities and those of the *littérateurs* in the period.⁴ This reductionist view produces a misreading of pre-modern Arabic tradition by considering that a conflict between religion and philosophy were the core dynamic behind the study of Islamic morality in the fourth/tenth century.⁵ Such a view overlooks the complex relationship between philosophy, religion, and *adab* traditions in this period. It isolates Būyid authors, like al-Tawḥīdī, from their historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts by overlooking the encyclopaedic system of knowledge that shaped their thought and the interdisciplinary nature of their work where religious, philosophical and literary elements are intertwined. Thus, adopting a secular approach to al-Tawḥīdī as an *adīb* (man of letters outside of the scope of religion) does not only ignore the role of Islam in shaping his views but also the role of *adab* in shaping the discourse on ethical and religious norms.⁶ Instead of perceiving of al-Tawḥīdī as rejecting traditional Muslim beliefs, this paper will contextualise him and his writings in regard to religion, philosophy, ethics and the political realm, and highlights his active role as an intellectual, showing that while he was original in many ways, his outlook was firmly rooted in the Islamic culture in which he was educated.

¹ On the Būyid period, see ALSHAAR 2015, DONOHUE 2003, MOTTAHEDEH 2001.

² See KRAEMER 1986a and 1986b, BERGÉ 1990: 112-24, and BERGÉ 1979. For secondary scholarship on al-Tawḥīdī, see ALSHAAR 2015: 3-20.

³ Key supporters of this position were some of Immanuel Kant’s students and later Georg W.F. Hegel, who insisted that for any system to be qualified as true philosophy, it had to be independent of religion; see HEGEL 2007-8. Kraemer and the Straussians, however, go a step further to argue that the relationship between religion and philosophy at the time of al-Tawḥīdī was one of conflict; see below discussion.

⁴ See KRAEMER 1986a and 1986b, BERGÉ 1979, ARKOUN 1970. For an assessment of the application of Western categories into this period, see ALSHAAR 2015: 1-27.

⁵ The concepts of ‘humanism’ and ‘political philosophy’ are not exclusively modern. Plato coined the term political philosophy. Al-Fārābī in his classification of science used moral and political philosophy as representative of what he described as ‘practical philosophy’ in opposition to ‘theoretical philosophy.’ However, my criticism of the use of ‘humanism’ and ‘political philosophy’ as lenses to study al-Tawḥīdī and his context is due to their malleability over many centuries. Both terms are used by many scholars when treating al-Tawḥīdī in order to impose a conflict between philosophy and a supposedly rigid Islamic orthodoxy in the literature of this period; see ALSHAAR 2015: 5-14.

⁶ For a critical study of how *adab* is constructed in Islamic studies, see ALSHAAR 2020: 167- 203.

Before moving into this discussion, I will address the limits of a secular approach on Islamic political thought and the need for a comprehensive contextual approach to the study of these ideas in their own historical reality.

1. The Limits of Secular Approach on Islamic Political Thought

While a number of scholars, such as Leo Strauss and his followers applied the tradition of political philosophy to the study of ethics and politics in Muslim contexts, arguing that this tradition penetrated the three monotheistic religions,⁷ others, including, Dimitri Gutas rejected this use with reference to classical Islamic writings, stating that such tradition did not exist before Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406).⁸ Strauss spoke of the “theological-political problem,” underlining an essential struggle over authority, namely the nature and justification of political authority and whether it is based on claims of reason or revelation.⁹ For him, the way to understand Arabic philosophy, which he construed as the conflict between religion and philosophy, is politics. Strauss defines two different systems: one based on unaided reasoning and natural law; and the other founded on divine revelation and religious laws.¹⁰ This suggests a separation between politics and the religious sphere.

As I have contended, this Straussian approach and its repercussions on grasping Arabic political ethical thought is problematic and produces vague generalisations since it lacks a sufficient understanding of the nature of Arabic philosophy and its historical contexts. Gutas and Carter have already argued against the position that all Arabic philosophy is about the conflict of reason and religion, and that philosophers operated in a hostile environment.¹¹ In fact, such an idea is alien to the Būyid context, where different emirs and viziers became avid patrons of learning and sponsored the activities of many scholars from numerous disciplines, including philosophers. Some of these scholars played an effective role in offering a rational argument within the context of religion to legitimise the Būyids’ rise to power, as will be discussed below.¹²

Philosophers of this period freely voiced their views on a range of topics in society. Debates were held in vibrant intellectual gatherings of official court-sessions (*majālis*) sponsored by various Būyid emirs and viziers, at the residences of some scholars, and in the book market (*sūq al-warrāqīn*). Al-Tawḥīdī reported many ethical discussions such as the scholarly receptions for jurists, littérateurs, theologians and philosophers that the Būyid vizier

⁷ Strauss and his followers, including Muhsin Mahdi defined political philosophy in an Islamic context as the study and interpretation of revealed religion; see STRAUSS 1959: 10, MAHDI and LERNER 1963: 1, MAHDI 2001: 2-3.

⁸ GUTAS 2002 and 2005.

⁹ STRAUSS 1997: 453-56. Strauss’s understanding is based on his reading of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (d. 1204), which he then applied to all medieval philosophy.

¹⁰ ID. 1959: 13.

¹¹ CARTER 1989: 304-305, GUTAS 2002: 19-21.

¹² See also ALSHAAR 2015: 28-9, 36-9.

Abū l-Faṭḥ b. al-‘Amīd (d. 366/976) held during his visit to Baghdad in 364/975.¹³ He also described a number of public debates that took place in the book market about the validity of revelation, reason, and philosophy as paths to truth in which Abū Sulaymān al-Maḡdisī, a member of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (the Brethren of Purity), Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 375/985), the intellectual mentor of al-Tawḥīdī, and others took part.¹⁴ In one such debate, although al-Sijistānī put forward views concerning the relationship between philosophy and religion, he still distinguishes the two as separate fields and shows how these two spheres could be considered in their connections and autonomy. Members of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ argued for a harmonious relationship between the two spheres of religion and philosophy and postulated their agreement as path to truth.¹⁵ Furthermore, al-Tawḥīdī, himself, was as a member of a wide circle of renowned scholars and was deeply enmeshed in the politics and intellectual currents of his turbulent age. He actively discussed ethical themes with the Būyid vizier of Baghdad Ibn Sa’dān (d. 375/985) and thereby was involved in shaping the political discourse of his time.¹⁶

One could also argue that the secular approach to “virtue ethics” and political thought in the Būyid period falls short of understanding the originality of its thought and imposes a number of assumed dichotomies that may not necessarily exist in the literature or reflect how al-Tawḥīdī and a number of his contemporaries perceived their own writings. For example, when Kraemer, influenced by Mez, applied the terms ‘renaissance’ and ‘humanism’ with all their political and philosophical connotations to what he describes as the birth of scientific and philosophical legacy of Greek traditions in Būyid Baghdad,¹⁷ he fails to understand the specificity and originality of the context in which al-Tawḥīdī operated. Similar to Bergé and Arkoun, he wrongly projects a reading of the political and religious history of Italy in the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries onto the ideas of philosophers and *littérateurs* that he gathers from al-Tawḥīdī’s writings.¹⁸ This attempt to integrate al-Tawḥīdī’s writings into a western narrative of the development of secular intellectual thought maintains that a commitment to reason and philosophy in opposition to revelation was the driving force behind the study of philosophical and moral ideas in the Būyid period.¹⁹ This viewpoint is mistaken in the Arabo-Islamic context of these scholars and results in artificial boundaries between what was described as literary humanism (as epitomised in *adab* works, which supposedly followed the path of ‘rationalism’ as opposed to ‘traditionalism’), a more philosophical type of humanism, and religious works. This distinction and the placement of *adab* and religious writings as opposing poles is questionable and particularly difficult in al-Tawḥīdī’s context, whom Kraemer struggled to place in any of these categories, and thus described as marginalised and in opposition to the religious orthodoxy of his time.²⁰ Religion, however,

13 AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1965: 410-416, 495-496; ID. 1964: 206-207.

14 ID. 1953: II, 4-15; see GRIFFEL and HACHMEIER 2010-2011: 223-257.

15 See al-TAWḤĪDĪ 1953: II, 4-49.

16 See further discussion below.

17 See KRAEMER 1986a and 1986b.

18 ID. 1986a: 5-20.

19 ID. 1986b, x-xiv; ID. 1986a: 2, 8, 19, 11-13; GOODMAN 2003: 7, 108.

20 KRAEMER 1986a: 16, 25.

was central in al-Tawḥīdī's active career, which included, among other examples, two letters on religious jurisprudence: *Risālat Nawādir al-Fuqahā'* and *Risāla fī Ṣilāt al-Fuqahā' fī l-Munāẓarāt*.²¹

Furthermore, the association of *adab* with rationalism, as expressed by Kraemer, limits *adab* to a secular context, which again mistakenly draws boundaries between the religious and the profane, following theories of *adab* that had been developed by modern scholars.²² Although these theories highlight the pragmatic and social function of *adab* works and the interest of the elites in these works in an age of cultural transformation, especially in the 'Abbāsīd period, they overlook the historical development of *adab* and the religious elements inherent in *adab* works. The *adīb*, as perceived by scholars from this period such as Ibn Qutayba (d. ca. 275/889), was a person who embraced all forms of knowledge, non-religious or religious, including the Qur'ān, its language, stylistic, and literary features, Ḥadīth and *fiqh*.²³ Thus, *adab* as an intellectual enquiry avoided specialisation and came to imply the sum of knowledge that existed in this period, including the developing Arabic sciences as well as Persian and Greek traditions, which played a role in advancing discussions on morality. Such knowledge became available as a result of the transformation of an oral literary culture to an increasingly written and book-based culture sponsored by interested rulers.

Authors of *adab* transmitted a canon of knowledge offering all-encompassing moral education and contributing to the social discourse. *Adab* in this sense as envisioned by classical authors offers a system for studying and disciplining the soul and society through learning and the acquisition of knowledge be it religious traditions or a compilation of saying by sages, prophets, and philosophers alike.²⁴ Knowledge existing in *adab* works is then instrumental to derive benefits for a person and society and to promote ethics since it draws on religious explanations for the next life and aspects of how this world operates and the moral qualities approved as the best by all cultures.²⁵

Thus, such categoric dichotomies, including, scientific enquiry versus religious teaching, theoretical ethics versus practical ethics, and the social versus the personal overlook the encyclopaedic nature of some of the key literary productions that created Islamic ethical and moral thought in this period.

Given the encyclopaedic nature of writings in the 4th/10th-century, al-Tawḥīdī, Aḥmad b. Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' produced expositions of ideas to reflect on the nature of political matters and the morality of their society and current beliefs and practices in various places in their books rather than in one specific study devoted to this subject.²⁶ For example, al-Tawḥīdī, in his encyclopaedism that characterises his *adab*,

²¹ YĀQŪT 1928-1937: XV, 5,8.

²² Among those who held this position are Karl Vollers, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Francesco Gabrieli, Fritz Meier, Charles Pellat and Gerhard Böwering; cf. ALSHAAR 2017: 7-8.

²³ See IBN QUTAYBA 1982: VII, 13-14.

²⁴ See ID., 5-20; al-JĀHIZ 1964-79: I, 95; II, 143-82.

²⁵ ID.: I, 95.

²⁶ GUTAS (2002: 2-25) denies the existence of any independent study within Arabic philosophy that examines political order, agents, and institutions.

discussed a number of intellectual themes and political ideas concerning the tensions between different Būyid viziers, namely Ibn Sa'dān and Ibn 'Abbād (d. 385/995) as will be discussed below, as well as how best to rule the community. These ideas are scattered in his books and especially found in his books *al-Imtā' wa-l-Mu'ānasa* (the Book of Delight and Conviviality), *Akhlāq al-Wazīrayn* (The Morals of the Two Viziers), and *al-Ṣadāqa wa-l-Ṣadīq* (Friendship and the Friend). Under the glittering prose style and the scintillating rhetoric in *al-Ṣadāqa wa-l-Ṣadīq*, which al-Tawḥīdī composed at the request of the Būyid vizier of Baghdad Ibn Sa'dān, there is a consistency and even a coherence to his ethical thought. Furthermore, al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries seem to be more concerned with matters related to the everyday experience of Būyid social and political situations rather than with a coherent analysis of the theory of polity. Thus, even if al-Tawḥīdī or the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' for that matter were not systematic thinkers in the same way as al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā, the consistency of their contributions to reshaping an influential corpus of Islamic ethics, scattered as it may appear, should be given serious consideration.

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In a context like al-Tawḥīdī's Būyid society, there was a link between political discussions and the religious domain. To be more precise, the Būyid military officials not only replied with philosophical arguments to justify their rule, but they also portrayed it as a sign of God's will to save the 'Abbāsīd caliphate and the Muslim community from the state of anarchy and decline.²⁷ Thereby, they preserved the 'Abbāsīd caliphate for its value as a public religious symbol and continued to evoke religious justification for their rule. Thus, political power and the claim of preserving religious authority were embodied in a single institution in this period.

Pre-modern treatment of moral virtue and refinement of character was important and emerged as a result of vibrant discussions of Islamic law and theological matters.²⁸ Therefore, questions concerning the divine and man's relation with the universe were not avoidable even by philosophers, including al-Tawḥīdī. Indeed, for scholars operating in the fourth/tenth century, the nature of inquiry appears to have been especially about finding additional ways to connect different forms of knowledge to discuss man's relationship with God and to manage a society governed by God's laws and divine scriptures. Al-Tawḥīdī, in his discussion of moral virtues, including, *ṣadāqa* (friendship), described the nature of good governorship in terms of the relations of a ruler to God and how best to manage society in accordance with God's command. In this context, it is difficult to separate the political from the theological or religious.

Furthermore, theological questions about man's relation to God and to the world around him often concern moral conduct and behaviour. This leads to another difficulty associated with the lens of political philosophy, namely the assumed dichotomies between two categories: practical ethics and theoretical ethics. Practical ethics is concerned with ways in which people ought to live, while theoretical ethics is interested in the nature of things. In the context of pre-modern philosophical and moral inquiries, such a separation is elusive since they were concerned with practical matters, even if they were presented in apparently theoretical form.

²⁷ Cf. MADELUNG 1969: 94.

²⁸ Cf. ZARGAR 2017: 2-9.

For al-Tawḥīdī, a true scholar is a person of action and counsel, who strives for the common good since knowledge cannot be perfect without being implemented. Having moved between different intellectual circles, including those of Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, the Christian Aristotelian philosopher Yahyā b. 'Adī (d. 363/974) and members of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', whose encyclopaedic epistles and lectures he knew, he was in conversation with numerous others concerning intellectual and political concerns of the time. In order to have a practical impact on society, he believed that knowledge and philosophy should not be restricted to the educated elite, but it should be applied in society at large. There is a spiritual reward, eternal praise (*dhikr*) from God, an enduring repute, and delight in spreading wisdom.²⁹ In this, al-Tawḥīdī seems to have re-evaluated the role of philosophers within wider Islamic culture, and to have found a readership beyond the confines of rigid intellectual disciplines.³⁰ This position resonates in al-Kindī's and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's attempts to offer *falsafa* to a wider public and turn it into a legitimate *madhhab*.³¹

In order to gain a wider application for his ethical ideas, al-Tawḥīdī endeavoured to practice his philosophical ideas at various Būyid courts such as that of vizier Ibn Sa'dān in Baghdad as will be discussed below. This resulted in a new scholarly genre or form of writing that combines philosophical thinking with *adab* (*al-fann al-adabī*), which may well have been a way to adhere to a literary form common in court-sessions and to make philosophy more accessible in court circles.³² Therefore, it should be possible to speak about the popularisation of philosophical ideas through this form of *adab* in order to educate their audiences and offer practical solutions drawing on philosophical ideas as well as other sources, including religion.

Moral concepts were explored by al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries to provide a form of intellectual guidance for all, especially through the influence of rulers.³³ This attitude can be ascribed to their strong commitment to link knowledge to action and is probably also due to their familiarity with and adoption of Platonic ideas, namely here his concept of philosopher-king, which al-Tawḥīdī seems to have appropriated in his discourse of *ṣadāqa*,³⁴ as I will discuss below.

The last discussion shows that the restrictive modern meaning of political philosophy is not consistent with al-Tawḥīdī's cultural and intellectual context. Rather, the term political thought offers a more inclusive approach to the entire body of his works, especially his political ethics, and does not restrict his activity to a particular sphere. This provides a contextual approach to Islamic political ethics as applicable to all social activities within a community. This understanding corresponds to the broader conception of politics that was popular among al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries, which can be traced back to Aristotle,

²⁹ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1968: 67.2-3.

³⁰ See ALSHAAR 2015: 82, ROWSON 1990: 51.

³¹ AL-KINDĪ 1953: 172-73; cf. ALSHAAR 2015: 82, MARQUET 2012: 1071-76.

³² Cf. ROWSON 1990: 50-92.

³³ AL-TAWĀTĪ (1999: II, 233) explores these philosophers' efforts to discuss social issues, calling them *al-tayyār al-iṣlāhī* (reform movement).

³⁴ Plato's concept of the philosopher-king was popular in the fourth-tenth century. It is worth mentioning that before al-Tawḥīdī, al-Fārābī adopted this concept, and that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' also assimilated this concept with their views of an infallible Imām; see BAFFIONI 2002: 4-12.

who declared that man is a political animal by nature and that only within a political community can humans achieve the good life.³⁵ These positions widen the scope of politics in a Būyid context to include the personal realm, and it will be understood in terms of power-structured relationships between members operating within social and cultural structures. In other words, commitments were based on formal and informal ties between individuals, which provided the basis for the shape of political life in the Būyid period.³⁶ These ties involved various forms of obligations, and responsibilities. A person's participation in a community involved a strong sense of belonging. The community functioned as a necessary paradigm in which individuals cooperated to achieve common interests. For example, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' were a community of learned individuals who, as al-Tawḥīdī stated, were "knit together by companionship and purified [their souls] by friendship towards each other. They had resolved upon holiness, purity, advice."³⁷ Members of this community defined their identity and commitment to one another on the basis of *ṣadāqa*, mutual help, and sharing knowledge. These themes were crucial to how these members thought that people should relate to one another, and thus considered them as conditions for society's survival as a whole. Therefore, the ethical ideals of a community according to this contextual approach reside in the reciprocal commitments of the group members, which are arguably able to guide action without being explicitly presented as rules and to define societal norms.

In this sense, al-Tawḥīdī's political thought and that of his contemporaries, despite some divergence between them, should be considered as eminently practical ethical activity embodied in everyday life and concerned with their interaction with each other and with members of other social groups. These activities are ways in which he and other members of the groups developed their own sense of commitments to their own groups and viewed their relations to the structure of the polity in their specific society. Thus, their ethics are dialogue to put forward intellectual arguments to advance a better society and communal living.

Treatment of moral virtue, including, *ṣadāqa* and related themes, such as befriending enemies, love (*maḥabba*), and the best form of ruling are ethical political issues related to matters of behavior, character, and the cultivation of virtue. These discussions by al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries intimately connect personal and social realms, and thus can be seen as social acts or their intellectual responses to challenging moral questions in their own settings, which were extended to how others may respond, in order to implement alternative ethical discourses of a practical nature.

2. Contextualizing al-Tawḥīdī in his Political Sphere

In order to overcome the limitations of a secular approach towards Islamic ethical and political thought, I will analyse al-Tawḥīdī's ideas in these two areas, treating them as his

³⁵ ARISTOTLE 1946: I, 1253a.

³⁶ On the nature of these commitments, see MOTTAHEDEH 2001.

³⁷ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1953: II, 5; IKHWĀN al-ṢAFĀ' 1957: Ep. 45 (4: 4-60).

response to resolve cultural, political and social tensions.³⁸ I will, therefore, also set forth the relevant contexts of the Būyids' rule. Their rise to power resulted in a new political structure, namely the establishment of a minority non-Arab Shī'ī kingship and the reduction of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate to merely a spiritual and religious authority. As Shī'īs, Būyid military commanders wielded political power but enjoyed no claim to prophetic succession as a source of authority.³⁹ The Būyids were not able to identify themselves completely with either the Shī'īs or the Sunnīs of the Arab population that they ruled, and therefore they portrayed themselves as a socially-sanctioned institution and guardian of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate to establish their authority.⁴⁰

The Būyids promoted their own policies, which would shape the nature of social life. Having inherited many of the cultural trends and tensions that existed under the late 'Abbāsīds, they found it to their advantage to keep society fragmented, to further intensify divisions between different groups, and to remain somewhat aloof from society's affairs. Thus, Būyid cultural and political policies facilitated certain patterns of social conduct, mainly a rise in materialism that was accompanied by a decline in morality and sectarian tensions and rivalry for survival between different groups and individuals. The interaction between these groups revealed a society in which boundaries were reinforced across intellectual, religious, and ethnic lines.

Būyid emirs themselves and their viziers competed with each other for power, glory, and wealth and their relationships were marked by shifting political alliances. In such a climate of uncertainty, knowledge was seen as a tool to establish political legitimacy for the ruling elites. Therefore, military commanders, who were without religious claims of prophetic succession, fostered the career of professional scholars and intellectuals who could provide arguments in support of their guardianship of Islam.⁴¹ Hence, the production of knowledge itself was strongly linked with changing political and cultural attitudes.

In this context, al-Tawḥīdī developed relationships with various Būyid viziers and different courts. According to sources, he developed links with al-Muhallabī (d. 352/963) who was the chief vizier of the Būyid emir of Iraq, Mu'izz al-Dawla (d. 356/967). He also tried to make a connection with the Būyid Abū l-Faḍl b. al-'Amīd (d. 360/970) during his trip to Rayy in 357/967 and later with his son Abū l-Faḥ b. al-'Amīd (d. 366/976). Al-Tawḥīdī was also admitted to the court of the Būyid vizier Ibn 'Abbād in Rayy in 367/978.

However, al-Tawḥīdī differed in his relationship to rulers from the standard model of a courtier or a boon-companion.⁴² At times influenced by his sense of his own intellectual worth and his entitlement for respect, which often clashed with court protocol and courtesy, he generally found it hard to have good relations with the ruling elites. His efforts, however,

³⁸ I have previously discussed extensively the relevance of "the social imaginary approach" as a framework for al-Tawḥīdī's context, see ALSHAAR 2015: 14-20.

³⁹ It is unclear which branch of Shī'ism the Būyids followed. However, it was suggested that they were either Zaydīs or Twelver Shī'īs; see MADELUNG 2012: 477.

⁴⁰ For the Būyids' relationship with the 'Abbāsīd caliphate see, ALSHAAR 2015: 27-31.

⁴¹ For further discussion, see ALSHAAR 2015: 36-49; al-TAWĀTĪ 1999: I, 199-236, MOTTAHEDEH 2001: 90-96, 108-10.

⁴² For al-Tawḥīdī's relationship with different Būyid viziers and of the nature of Būyid circles, see ALSHAAR 2015: 82-89.

were successful in 370/981 with the Būyid vizier of Baghdad Ibn Sa'dān, to whom he was introduced by his friend the mathematician Abū l-Wafā' al-Muhandis (d. 388/998). Ibn Sa'dān appears to have had similar intellectual concerns to al-Tawhīdī, who appreciated having found a willing listener.

Ibn Sa'dān was concerned to ensure that he had a talented entourage to compete with other Būyid viziers. His court embraced both Muslim and Christian scholars, including Miskawayh and Zayd b. Rifā'a (d. circa 400/ 1011), a member of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Zayd b. Rifā'a made Ibn Sa'dān aware of al-Tawhīdī's lectures on friendship,⁴³ as will be discussed below. There are reports that Ibn Sa'dān was aware of the need for vibrant intellectual discussions and advice concerning matters of rulership and individual and societal welfare. According to al-Tawhīdī, Ibn Sa'dān was concerned about how he was perceived by people and scholars, including al-Sijistānī in relation to the management of the vizierate, and he insisted that by investigating these matters, he was following the example of the Prophet and the caliphs after him who made similar inquiries.⁴⁴ This concern was potentially a source of anxiety for leaders like Ibn Sa'dān in an age that was permeated with political, social, and religious uncertainties. This context also explains certain themes to which al-Tawhīdī drew the attention of Ibn Sa'dān, such as patronage (*iṣṭinā' al-rijāl*) and the need for the ruler to select for his entourage and companions people of knowledge who apply their erudition to ensure the proper running of the vizierate.⁴⁵

Al-Tawhīdī freely discoursed with Ibn Sa'dān on ethical topics as his nightly confidant, having been allowed to use the second person (*kāf al-khiṭāb and tā' al-muwājahha*) when addressing the vizier. This attitude challenged existing court protocols and created an atmosphere of equality, which allowed al-Tawhīdī to voice his social vision openly.

Al-Tawhīdī mentioned Ibn Sa'dān's interest in the welfare of the people and in learned scholars and that the latter held a number of philosophical discussions on ethical qualities in his court (*majlis*).⁴⁶ Al-Tawhīdī also acted as an intermediary between Ibn Sa'dān and members of the Baghdad philosophical schools, especially al-Sijistānī and Ibn Khammār to whom Ibn Sa'dān sent a long list of philosophical questions through al-Tawhīdī.⁴⁷ This attitude may be seen as an attempt to disseminate the knowledge and the thought of philosophical circles and to influence people in power in order to shape the thinking of a large part of society and initiate reform.

Al-Tawhīdī's attempt to influence people of power may be ascribed to two fundamental beliefs: the role which knowledge should play in the context of the court and its link to action, and a solid sense of religious and moral responsibility of the scholar to offer advice to the leaders of the community. Addressing Ibn Sa'dān, al-Tawhīdī said:

It is a duty upon everyone, to whom God has granted a solid opinion, enduring advice and useful intuition, to serve you with the intention of helping you to manage the

⁴³ Al-Tawhīdī 1964: 63-72.

⁴⁴ Al-Tawhīdī 1953: I, 29, 42-9.

⁴⁵ ID.: III, 212.

⁴⁶ Al-Tawhīdī 1970: 85-89; ID., 1953: I, 198-206, 222-26; III, 61-66, 127-47.

⁴⁷ These questions covered topics, including the purification of the soul and its perfection, human nature, intellect; see ID.: III, 106-26.

foundation, and the leadership of your kingdom. By so doing, one performs God's duty in strengthening and protecting you.⁴⁸

For al-Tawḥīdī, two types of people should perform their duty to help society: the ruler and the righteous scholar. Since the ruler alone cannot oversee every aspect of society, it is the religious responsibility of the learned and trustworthy men to help the ruler manage the society's affairs and oppose the sectarian tension prevalent in Baghdad. Therefore, moving between different political, philosophical, and religious groups, the learned man uses his knowledge, rhetoric, and affiliation with one group to influence another. This position underlines the role of al-Tawḥīdī as an intellectual in his society and his attempt to make philosophical ideas accessible through the use of rhetoric and dazzling prose in order to shape politics in this period. This rhetoric could be seen not only as a mechanism to reinforce or justify the authority of rulers, but it can also be seen as an intellectual and practical response by al-Tawḥīdī to persuade rulers of his time to change certain existing social and political practices and offer alternatives as will be discussed in the section on *ṣadāqa* (friendship) below. Al-Tawḥīdī's use of rhetoric may then be seen as a form of social action to promote practical application of knowledge and wisdom and move rulers to action with arguments informed by all available forms of knowledge, including religious and philosophical themes.

In this context, al-Tawḥīdī and some of his contemporaries, including members of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and of the Baghdad philosophical schools, and Miskawayh came together collectively beyond their impersonal entities to form a political entity, playing a major part in shaping the ethical discourse of the time by introducing a set of moral norms and concepts of friendship and love as measured responses to the moral decline and the social disintegration, which characterised the Būyid post-caliphate society.

These individuals had a set of expectations, including moral obligations in regard to one another, to perform collective practice to achieve communal benefits and to imagine a better moral order for society. Therefore, their ideas of friendship, love, brotherhood, and *insāniyya* (humanity) were related to how persons connect to one another, and to other groups.⁴⁹ They included personal questions, such as, 'What should I do?' As a result, action-guiding, personal responses to similar ethical questions included a more general element: 'What should one (in my circumstances) do?' Thus, as I discussed elsewhere, al-Tawḥīdī and his colleagues were concerned "to promote truly human behavior in society by encouraging people to realise the common essence of their humanity, which is divine in its nature, and not strictly the realisation of the perfection of man qua man on the basis of the exercise of pure reason."⁵⁰

The common use of *tahdhīb*, which is often rendered as "refinement" or "cultivation" (of character)" by these scholars was not a purely personal matter or a form of self-improvement. The quest for this improvement and the purification of one's self was encouraged within the framework of social cooperation, for they were perceived as the key for the happiness and betterment of society at large. Such refinement through friendship, brotherhood, and *insāniyya* was not purely an epistemological exercise, but can be seen as an attempt to bridge

⁴⁸ ID.: III, 212.

⁴⁹ For a study of these terms, see ALSHAAR 2013: 25-39.

⁵⁰ ALSHAAR 2015: 206.

the gap between the person and the community and to foster a common interest in the good in a society that was made of competing ethics and religious groups.⁵¹ In this way, such ethical questions allow for contact between the personal domain and the socially broad frame. The stress on the divine origin of humanity, the idea of sociability as the grace of God, and religious practices and ceremonies as means to promote friendship proposed by these scholars⁵² may also be seen as an attempt to reform religion intellectually from dogmas and sectarianism and argue for its place in the formation of public morality and in addressing contemporary challenges.⁵³

3. The Practical Basis for al-Tawḥīdī's Moral System and Perception of *ʿilm* (Knowledge)

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Intellectually, al-Tawḥīdī moved between religious, philosophical, and official Būyid circles, using his knowledge, rhetoric and affiliations with one to influence another. This is evident in the statement made by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) who wrote an eloquent biographical sketch of al-Tawḥīdī, describing him as *ḥaylasūf al-udabāʾ wa-adīb al-falāsifa* (the philosopher of litterateurs and the litterateur of philosophers), “a Sheikh among the Sufis,” “the investigator (*muḥaqqiq*) of the *kalām* and the *mutakallim* (theologian) of the investigators,” and “the leader of the eloquent.”⁵⁴ These statements are, as rightly suggested by Bergé, fundamental for understanding al-Tawḥīdī's thought and ethical theory, and indicate the difficulty of applying a single label to al-Tawḥīdī.⁵⁵

In his early childhood, al-Tawḥīdī regularly attended the circle of the leading Shāfiʿī jurist Abū l-Ḥasan al-Qaṭṭān (d. 359/960), where he studied the religious curriculum, including the recitation of the Qurʾān, Ḥadīth, as well as jurisprudence, eloquence, and rhetoric.⁵⁶ He also studied under Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāfiʿī (d. 365/976), the well-known Shāfiʿī jurist Abū Ḥamid al-Marwarrūdhī (d. 362/973), under whose teaching al-Tawḥīdī learned to appreciate the qualities of *ʿarabiyya*, or the science of Arabic, integral in this school to a textual examination of the Qurʾān.⁵⁷

This appreciation for *ʿarabiyya* became more structured when al-Tawḥīdī studied under Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī (289/902-368/979) and Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿIsā al-Rummānī (296/909-384/995), who introduced him to the nature and function of grammar and its connection with logic—an approach which would later shape his vision of how society should reform itself and his arguments of how different fields of knowledge relate to each other, e.g., religion and philosophy, as will be discussed below.⁵⁸

⁵¹ See ALSHAAR 2013: 37.

⁵² ID.: 31-33.

⁵³ ID.: 37.

⁵⁴ YĀQŪT 1928-1937: XV, 5.

⁵⁵ BERGÉ 1990: 113.

⁵⁶ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: II, 475; I, 284-5.

⁵⁷ See ID.: I, 100, 258, 376, 304, 418-19, 549-51; II, 48-49; III, 167, 178; IV, 285; ID. 1965: 476-77.

⁵⁸ See ID. 1953: I, 129-30, 133, 222; ID. 1965: 411-13; ID. 1964: I, 170-72.

Furthermore, as a scribe, al-Tawḥīdī was introduced to many forms of knowledge, and in *sūq al-warrāqīn* he met members of the school of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. He was also admitted to the philosophical and political circles of Baghdad, including the court of the Būyid vizier Ibn Sa'dān, the school of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and that of Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī.

This training and study of religion, language, grammar, and philosophy must have influenced al-Tawḥīdī's moral vision and conception of knowledge by which issues of good and evil and societal good would be determined.

The Sources of Knowledge

For al-Tawḥīdī, religion (*dīn*) and reason (*'aql*) are tools to reach the truth. He divides knowledge into religious and human categories. According to him, God has granted his creatures two clear paths for the acquisition of knowledge: The first is through sense-perception (*ḥiss*) and reason, asserting the ability of reason for making moral decisions; reason is a divine benevolence "created by God in this world" (*al-'aql khalīqat Allāh fī hādihā al-'ālam*),⁵⁹ and is capable of identifying good human actions. The second path is through intuition (*al-badīha*), which is associated with the revelation.⁶⁰ In this context, al-Tawḥīdī acknowledged the value of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as a practical source to determine matters of commanding right and forbidding wrong. *Fiqh* elaborates rules of ritual practices, duties, and social relations and welfare.⁶¹ The Qur'ān is the decisive source that determines such knowledge, as stated by the righteous ancestors, and the *sunna* is subordinate to it and clarifies it.⁶² For al-Tawḥīdī, the *sunna* is a source for positive action and demands rules of behaviour and therefore, he associated the Prophet's sayings and practices with wisdom (*ḥikma*).⁶³ Thus, he saw the practices, values, and morals (*khulq*) of the Prophet and the first Muslim generation (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) as guidance and examples that should be emulated to achieve the greatest good.⁶⁴

This understanding and the association of the Prophet's *sunna* with wisdom may be seen as al-Tawḥīdī's attempt to reaffirm the status of prophetic traditions (from which in his opinion society had strayed) as a value system and a source for moral enquiry.⁶⁵ It also reflects al-Tawḥīdī's engagement with contemporary debates on religion and philosophy, and the diversification and fragmentation of knowledge, especially the skepticism about revealed and non-revealed knowledge as valid paths to truth and for the wellbeing of society.⁶⁶

Al-Tawḥīdī's approach to knowledge in all its forms seems to have been guided by a hermeneutical quest for meaning and an essential belief in the practical value of knowledge and its link to pious action (*'amal*); a belief that is substantiated by religious and philosophical arguments common in his time. This includes the Aristotelian idea that "knowledge was the

⁵⁹ ID. 1970: 119.

⁶⁰ ID. 1953: II, 19-20.

⁶¹ ID. 1968: 106.

⁶² Ibid: 106-107.

⁶³ ID. 1964: I, 515.

⁶⁴ ID. 1965: 290.

⁶⁵ ID. 1953: I, 16-18.

⁶⁶ On al-Tawḥīdī's classification of knowledge, see ALSHAAR 2010: 153-173.

beginning of action, and action the entelechy of knowledge”, which was often cited by many scholars, including al-‘Āmirī with whom al-Tawḥīdī interacted.⁶⁷

For al-Tawḥīdī, knowledge is noble in its essence and this can be applied to all its branches. Thus, knowledge is linked to virtue and its basic goal is to reach perfection through action.⁶⁸ The purpose of this connection between knowledge, virtue, and action is to obtain holiness, which everyone in society should strive to fulfil.⁶⁹ Therefore, all valid knowledge and action should lead to “the declaration of God’s oneness (*tawḥīd*), manifold wisdom, and an invitation to His worship.”⁷⁰

In determining the usefulness of knowledge, al-Tawḥīdī evaluated it not so much on the basis of its source, structure, or limits, namely revealed or non-revealed, but on the basis of its moral and practical function for the well-being of society. This conciliatory approach between reason and revelation was at the heart of his moral thinking and criteria for classifying knowledge.

In his Epistle *On the [Classification] of Knowledge*, al-Tawḥīdī challenged the unattributed statement:

Logic should not interfere with jurisprudence, nor should philosophy have a connection with religion, and wisdom should have no influence on juridical verdicts.⁷¹

Unlike some contemporary scholars, including al-Sijistānī, al-Tawḥīdī held that enquiries into religious matters are not independent of the domain of logic and philosophy, and that revealed and non-revealed knowledge should not be treated as disconnected epistemological realms. This attempt by al-Tawḥīdī to show how religion, reason, and philosophy complement each other may have been inspired by contemporary and previous philosophers, including Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934), who was the student of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Kindī (d. 259/873).⁷² Al-Tawḥīdī also allied with al-‘Āmirī (d. 381/991), the student of al-Balkhī, who discussed religious legal matters, such as the permissibility of wine-drinking and theological topics, using philosophy and logic.⁷³ Al-Tawḥīdī especially considered valuable al-‘Āmirī’s treatment of free will and predestination in his book *Inqādh al-Bashar min al-Jabr wa-l-Qadar* (The Deliverance of Mankind from the Problem of Predestination and Free Will).⁷⁴ Al-‘Āmirī attempted to resolve tensions concerning free will and predestination, using (Aristotelian) physics rather than the usual *kalām* methods, namely dialectics (*jadal*).⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Cf. ROSENTHAL 1970: 66-67, especially 67, note 1, 240-322.

⁶⁸ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1968: 105-6; ID. 1970: 274.

⁶⁹ ID. 1950: 254.

⁷⁰ ID. 1953: III, 135.

⁷¹ ID. 1968: 105.

⁷² Al-Tawḥīdī mentions al-Balkhī’s *Kitāb Aqṣām al-‘Ulūm*, *Kitāb Iqtisāṣ al-Faḍā’il* and *Kitāb Tashīl Subul al-Ma‘ārif*, which are helpful to appreciate the existence of various fields of knowledge; see al-TAWḤĪDĪ 1968: 106; ID. 1970: 95; ID. 1953: II, 15-16.

⁷³ For further description, see ID. 1965: 413-14; ID. 1964: III, 545.

⁷⁴ ID. 1953: I, 222-23.

⁷⁵ Cf. ROWSON 1988: 10.

Furthermore, al-Tawḥīdī does not put the world of reason in opposition to that of the senses, arguing that this approach leads to good action he states:

[One] should accept all that which is not rejected by reason, and which maintains the rule of justice, and suits the foundation of *sharī'a* and the basis of religion (*mā lā yantaftī min al-'aql wa-yulā'im asās al-sharī'a wa-mabnā al-dīn*).⁷⁶

Al-Tawḥīdī extended his holistic approach to knowledge and perfection by attempting to integrate Arabic religious sciences with logic and philosophy in a broader context. For him, a person who has:

The facility of language (*luḡha*), and is competent in grammar (*naḥw*), becomes the most skilful in [the art of] speech and composing meanings. He will also acquire further insight into the value of man... If, after this, he were to speak some logic, he would exceed all rivals.⁷⁷

Logic is a decisive element of a truth claim; it is “an instrument like a scale, which can measure everything that is subject to disagreement and agreement...” and helps to refine meanings and purify utterances.⁷⁸ Al-Tawḥīdī proposed an approach that synthesises language, grammar, and logic as conditions for a valid inquiry. For him, “[elements in] the world are dependent upon one another, related to one another, and compared to one another....”⁷⁹ Therefore, enquiries on logic should involve aspects of grammar, and vice versa.⁸⁰ Knowledge derived from reason and knowledge derived from religion are means for discovering God’s wisdom and the need for His worship.⁸¹ He says:

Does not wisdom confirm religion? And does not religion perfect philosophy? Is not philosophy the form of the soul? Is not religion the course of the soul?⁸²

Thus, philosophy and religion complement one another in pursuit of the purification of the soul, the refinement of moral character (*khuluq*) and the perfection of human conduct for knowledge has no merit by itself but only when it is accompanied by virtuous action. According to al-Tawḥīdī, “Knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and action (*‘amal*) are the two ends of philosophy.”⁸³ The function of knowledge, including philosophy, is not only to contemplate the nature of things but also to help one obtain practical knowledge for leading the best possible life. A true philosopher is a person of action and counsel, who strives for the common good since knowledge cannot be perfect without being implemented, as al-Tawḥīdī stated:

⁷⁶ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: IV, 25; ID. 1970: 203-4.

⁷⁷ ID. 1968: 111.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ ID. 1968: 112, 132.

⁸⁰ ID. 1968: 15, 132.

⁸¹ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1953: I, 195-6.

⁸² ID. 1970: 167-68.

⁸³ Ibid: 280-81.

If action falls short of knowledge, knowledge then is a burden on the scholar. I seek refuge in God from knowledge that becomes a burden and bequeaths disgrace, and becomes a chain on its master's neck.⁸⁴

Thus, to conclude, four elements mainly formed al-Tawḥīdī's social idealism and moral vision by which perfection can be reached (*yuntahā ilā l-kamāl*): religion (*dīn*), morals (*khuluq*, informed by religious traditions and reason), knowledge (*ilm*), and reason (*ʿaql*), which supervises the first three elements. "Religion contains guidance and benefits," while "morals are the order of good and well-being."⁸⁵ As al-Tawḥīdī stated:

Religion comprises the commandments from God, while virtue comprises moral conduct among people. There is no morality except that which is refined by religion, and no religion except that which is purified by virtue.⁸⁶

For the moral agent, valid knowledge linked to pious action (*ʿamal*) is what brings the two together and helps set religion right and makes morals prevail.⁸⁷ Al-Tawḥīdī thinks that humans gain the ability to reach perfection and the eternal in a material world when religious beliefs are established on the basis of reason and purified from doubt, confusion, and hypocrisy, and when morals are purified from filthy habits, greed, baseness, and meanness. The perfection of all three components, religion, morals, and knowledge can be achieved through reason; it is the greatest gift from God and the door to happiness in this life and the next.⁸⁸

The remainder of this article will show how these four elements were manifested in al-Tawḥīdī's moral vision, especially his discourse of *ṣadāqa* within the wider context of his political and ethical thought.

4. *Ṣadāqa* (Friendship) as the Ideal of Politics and Moral Society

Ṣadāqa seems to be the highest moral value that links religion, reason, and morals in theory and practice in al-Tawḥīdī's thought. Influenced by his sense of the self and moral world, he promoted *ṣadāqa* as the crucial bond that ties his views on ethics and politics into a coherent whole. He composed a lengthy epistle on this theme, *al-Ṣadāqa wa-l-Ṣadīq* (Friendship and the Friend), at the request of Ibn Sa'dān in 371/982 after he heard about al-Tawḥīdī's discourses on *ṣadāqa* from Zayd b. Rifā'a, and he re-edited the work in 400/1011.⁸⁹

External and internal threats, as well as shifting political allegiances, seem to be behind Ibn Sa'dān's choice of al-Tawḥīdī to be his close associate. In an attempt to lessen the tension

⁸⁴ ID. 1968: 162-63.

⁸⁵ ID. 1965: 27.

⁸⁶ ID. 1964: 48.

⁸⁷ ID. 1965: 27.

⁸⁸ ID. 1965: 28.

⁸⁹ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 1; see also ALSHAAR 2015: 119-57.

between the successors of the Būyid king ‘Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 373/983), Ibn Sa’dān (acting on behalf of Ṣamṣam al-Dawla (d. 388/998), who was appointed as a successor to his father, ‘Aḍud al-Dawla) attempted to establish an agreement with Fakhr al-Dawla (d. 387/997), the ruler of Rayy and Jurjān, by making overtures to his vizier of Rayy, Ibn ‘Abbād. Thus, al-Tawḥīdī's intimate knowledge of the court of Rayy and of Ibn ‘Abbād, who is described as arrogant and corrupt in his book *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, was crucial for Ibn Sa’dān as he exchanged diplomatic letters and negotiated an agreement with Ibn ‘Abbād.⁹⁰ Apparently, Ibn Sa’dān's interest in al-Tawḥīdī's discourses on *ṣadāqa* was not only for their literary amusement or intellectual qualities but also driven by the political and social situation in the midst of the power struggle between various Būyid emirs. In this context, the subject of a useful friend and the unavoidable friendship with an enemy to help to keep danger under control were important themes that run through the epistle.⁹¹ In circumstances of conspiracy and shifting political alliances, the practice of befriending an enemy, built on self-interest, was common in Būyid courts.

Al-Tawḥīdī opened his epistle with a moving prayer in which he decried the state of moral decline among his contemporaries and requested God to grant them intimacy to cleanse them.⁹² His epistle was based on lectures that he delivered on friendship and related matters in the philosophical circles of Baghdad at the end of 370/980, which included members of Ibn ‘Adī's and al-Sijistānī's schools.

In order to set his epistle within the wider genre of intellectual enquiry and to offer Ibn Sa’dān guidance, al-Tawḥīdī drew upon previous ideas of friendship, be they religious or philosophical. He included:

The sayings of the people of excellence (*al-faḍl*) and wisdom, and of the possessors of piety and virtue, in order that all this should form a complete epistle from which benefit could be derived in this life and the next.⁹³

His analysis of *ṣadāqa*, however, is not fixed or defined solely by these ideas. Rather, he sifted through these ideas, made his own synthesis, and introduced major conceptual changes. He added new meaning and significance to friendship beyond its conventional meaning.⁹⁴

Main themes that al-Tawḥīdī discussed in the formal gatherings of Baghdad were “what is *ṣadāqa*” and “what should a friend do,” which are both normative and action-guiding ethical questions. These questions define the nature of this virtue, *ṣadāqa* which al-Tawḥīdī placed at the heart of an alternative moral order not found in the existing social context.⁹⁵ They also define the forms of obligations and responsibilities on which members who participated in these circles based their sense of commitments towards one another. For al-Tawḥīdī, *ṣadāqa* as a lived experience promotes the rise of moral practices, including intimacy (*ulfa*), brotherhood (*mu’ākhāt*), generosity (*al-jūd*), caring (*al-ri’āya*), and aid (*al-*

⁹⁰ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1953: I, 53; ID. 1965: 9.

⁹¹ See, for example, ID. 1964: 31-32, 123.

⁹² ID. 1964: 1.

⁹³ ID. 1964: 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

musā'ada) as alternatives to the existing social context governed by strife and selfishness.⁹⁶ Therefore, this form of *ṣadāqa* does not apply to all the political and social strata in society. While the possessors of piety who quest for true salvation are capable of *ṣadāqa*, kings and their entourage are not because of their corruption, greed, selfishness, and love for power.⁹⁷ The men of baseness and local gangs (*ʿayyārūn*) are also not capable of *ṣadāqa* because of “their slender ambition, their baseness of spirit and their vile nature”.⁹⁸ This view challenges the widely-held belief that “friendship” is a form of social interaction to which everyone in society is entitled.

In another place, al-Tawḥīdī introduced *ṣadāqa* as a means for the combination between the life of knowledge and the life of virtuous action, and the life of senses.⁹⁹ Thus, *ṣadāqa* as an action promotes an experience that embodies everything that is essential to restore social order: it restrains human nature from involvement in anything, which infringes concord, and generates affection among people, enabling them to achieve a state of purity and godliness (*ṣalāh*), through both moral refinement and religious adherence. It is the foundation of harmony and agreement on what is goodness.¹⁰⁰ Thus, “*ṣadāqa* has an inclusive function that transcends exclusionary boundaries of intellectual, religious, and ethnic categories.”¹⁰¹ This emphasises *ṣadāqa*’s universal applicability and its potential to change society.

The Theory and Practice of *Ṣadāqa* Based on Religion and Reason

In order to oppose the moral decline in his society, al-Tawḥīdī proposed, as discussed above, that knowledge, e.g., philosophy, should have two parts: the theoretical that discusses the nature of things, and the ethical action, or how knowledge can be applied in order for one to act morally. In this context, al-Tawḥīdī introduced to his intended recipients, be they philosophers, religious leaders, or rulers, his theory of applied and practical *ṣadāqa* that appears to be the link between reason, religion, and morals as a measured intellectual response to societal tensions.

From the outset, al-Tawḥīdī introduced a possible medium of communication in which knowledge of philosophy is blended harmoniously with religious knowledge through the example of the true friendship between al-Sijistānī, a master of logic and Greek philosophy, and the judge Ibn Sayyār, a learned man in *sharīʿa* (religious law).¹⁰² This example is possibly an attempt to offer Ibn Saʿdān a model of effective polity that replaces the pattern of competing politico-military commanders or kingship, the person-centered approach to ruling. Indeed, when discussing the concept of *mulk* (rulership), al-Tawḥīdī advised Ibn Saʿdān to implement *sharīʿa* in order to manage people with knowledge, reason, and justice.¹⁰³

In his question to al-Sijistānī about his friendship with the judge, al-Tawḥīdī identifies four key components of *ṣadāqa*: soul (affinity of the soul), intellect (intellectual friendship),

⁹⁶ Ibid; see also ID. 1968: 72.

⁹⁷ ID. 1964: 5; ALSHAAR 2015: 168-73.

⁹⁸ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 6.

⁹⁹ ID. 1968: 72.

¹⁰⁰ ID. 1964: 1.

¹⁰¹ ALSHAAR 2015: 160, altered slightly.

¹⁰² AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 1-12.

¹⁰³ ID. 1953: II, 33.

nature (natural assistance), and morals (moral unanimity).¹⁰⁴ Al-Sijistānī adds two more components: reciprocated trust and astrological ideas of friendship.¹⁰⁵ Trust is indispensable in the context of mistrust, shifting loyalties, and religious and political conflicts of Būyid society. *Ṣadāqa* is then of an intellectual nature based on a shared interest in the love for knowledge. It implies a pedagogical conception to secure a person's perfection and happiness, since it consists of soul (which determines a person's moral qualities and has control over the body to direct it to goodness)¹⁰⁶, reason,¹⁰⁷ nature, and morals.

To define the nature of *ṣadāqa* further, al-Tawḥīdī gave the example of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', his contemporary community of friends, who purified their souls through embracing friendship as their doctrine (*madhhab*).¹⁰⁸ Thus, *ṣadāqa* is a reciprocal virtue that motivates forms of loyalty based on reason, trust, shared interests, and loving the good for the benefit of each member of the community.

Al-Tawḥīdī also reported al-Sijistānī's explanation of the Aristotelian definition of a friend:

Someone said to Aristotle the wise man and the tutor of Alexander [the king]: "What is a friend?" He responded: "It is a man who is yourself, but who, however, as far as he is an individual, is different from you."¹⁰⁹

For Aristotle, *philia* (friendship) describes the respect and support of humans for one another,¹¹⁰ but in this quote, as stated by al-Sijistānī, Aristotle referred to the final stage of harmony and unity between friends.¹¹¹ Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Nushajānī, another member of al-Sijistānī's school, argued that this definition of unity is understood by reason and not through the senses, and this unity is ideal for accepting.¹¹²

Ṣadāqa offers alternative forms of fidelity that "is not defined by race, social category, authority, or even religion."¹¹³ This fidelity is still evident within al-Sijistānī's distinction between friends and acquaintances; the latter:

... conjoined by country, neighbourhood, profession, or descent, but despite all that has joined you, organised you... you are at the peak of division because of envy

¹⁰⁴ ID. 1964: 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. – Most of al-Sijistānī's views concerning the intellect and epistemology are recorded by al-Tawḥīdī in his *al-Imtā'* and *al-Muqābasāt*; cf. ALSHAAR 2015: 76.

¹⁰⁶ On the soul, see al-Tawḥīdī's account of al-Ṣaymarī's answer to his question about the closeness of a person's soul "...in the soul is all that makes a person human.... he [a person] is she [the soul] and she [the soul] is he [a person]..."; al-TAWḤĪDĪ 1970: 110, 288; ID. 1953: I, 147.

¹⁰⁷ Reason illumines the soul and nature, and it is through reason that the soul derives knowledge necessary to achieve perfection; ID. 1953: III, 110; ID. 1970: 288.

¹⁰⁸ ID. 1953: II, 5.

¹⁰⁹ ID. 1964: 55.

¹¹⁰ ARISTOTLE 1985: VIII, 1159a, 221.

¹¹¹ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 55-57.

¹¹² ID. 1970: 449-52.

¹¹³ ALSHAAR 2015: 184.

creeping among you, competition cutting off your relationships, and opposition infringing on concord among you.¹¹⁴

These unions, whether political, religious, or professional dominating the social fabric of Būyid society, seem inferior to the natural type of fidelity bond that results from true *ṣadāqa*. People drifted away from their first “greatest nature,” which is not contaminated by competition, enmity, envy, or greed.¹¹⁵

Thus, there is another distinction between *ṣadāqa* and other forms of emotions, such as romantic love, and desire (*shahwa*). In line with his four components of *ṣadāqa*, al-Tawḥīdī stated that *ṣadāqa* is higher than other forms of love since it emanates from the virtuous [rational] soul, suits the path of reason, is nearer to the nobility of character, is more removed from the tendencies of sensuality, and is raised above natural influences.¹¹⁶ Al-Tawḥīdī stressed that reason and pure religion within the paradigm of *ṣadāqa* purifies human nature from contamination.¹¹⁷ Thus, “al-Tawḥīdī’s view of friendship diagonally counters a fundamentalist view of religion”¹¹⁸ where dogmatic and exclusive considerations govern “friendship” or loyalty between members of an extremist religious group.

The difference between *ṣadāqa* and other forms of relationship and desires shows that al-Tawḥīdī did not simply take over the Aristotelian understanding of *philia*. He scrutinised it critically, excluding what did not correspond to his views while embracing ideas from other sources. More precisely, while accepting disinterested friendship, which should include an interest in the good of a friend as an end in itself,¹¹⁹ al-Tawḥīdī and al-Sijistānī disapproved of the other two types based on utility and pleasure.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the Aristotelian usage of *philia* covers basic sociability, all sentimental family ties, and one’s political community that enables people to exist together, but not necessarily harmoniously.¹²¹ Al-Tawḥīdī added a more profound spiritual dimension to the Aristotelian definition, voicing a unique experience of unity, self-disclosure and self-annihilation between the two friends by citing a verse by the Sufi poet al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), referring to his Sufi concept of *ḥulūl* (unity and merging):¹²² “The mystical union with God is replaced by a unity between persons.” Therefore, al-Tawḥīdī’s *ṣadāqa* exceeds the scope of Aristotle’s friendship since it involves not only that the two friends wish the good for each other, but that they become united as one soul, seeking knowledge and perfection on a large scale. Therefore, *ṣadāqa* introduces a form of loyalty that allows society not only to coexist but to do so harmoniously.

114 AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 55.

115 Ibid.: 56.

116 ID. 1964: 102; ID. 1953: III, 105-6.

117 ID. 1964: 57.

118 MAHALLATI 2019: 244.

119 ARISTOTLE 1985: IX, 1166a, 245.

120 ID., VIII, 1157a-b, 215-216. Al-Tawḥīdī reported al-Sijistānī’s answer to Ibn ‘Aṭā’s comment, stating that a friend is not someone from whom to acquire benefit but someone to encourage, rely on, with generosity and without envy; see al-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 54.

121 Aristotle admits the term *philos* or friend in respect to all forms of relationships whether personal or civil; ARISTOTLE 1985: VIII, 1155a, 208.

122 The verse cited is “His soul is my soul, and my soul is his soul...If he wants, I want, and if I want, he wants;” see al-TAWḤĪDĪ 1964: 55; cf. al-ḤALLĀJ 1955: 69.

These last points highlight the transcendent character of al-Tawḥīdī's disinterested *ṣadāqa* (between a philosopher and a judge or a ruler), since it exceeds the limitations of specific categories and combines religion and philosophy in an ideal political framework. He seems to be establishing a balance between the role of knowledge (scholars) and law in reforming and organising society, a point which he also made clear by encouraging Ibn Sa'dān to select people of knowledge as his companions, as discussed above. This description of the friendship between the philosopher and the judge and al-Tawḥīdī's complaints about loss of friends and his disappointment in people can be seen in part as a rhetorical technique to instruct his audience and to appeal for patronage, especially to the judge Abū Sahl in Rajab 400/1011 when he finally re-edited the epistle.¹²³ Therefore, the relationship between the man of knowledge and the man of religion and authority remains essential in al-Tawḥīdī's theory of the connection between knowledge and politics.

Al-Tawḥīdī's views on *ṣadāqa* can be related to his wider project to persuade people in authority, namely Ibn Sa'dān, of the indispensability of a wise and just ruler and the Platonic notion of a "philosopher-king" as the best model for ruling.¹²⁴ Thus, the friendship between a "philosopher" and a "judge-ruler" (which can be seen as an attempt to assimilate the platonic concept into Islamic context), as well as al-Tawḥīdī's constant references to the ideal friendship between Alexander (the enlightened ruler) and Aristotle (the philosopher tutor), shows the importance of knowledge in the human struggle to organise society.¹²⁵ Thus, these models are designed to reflect the type of ruler that Ibn Sa'dān should become, a "ruler-friend," which al-Tawḥīdī saw as a moral form of ruling that could improve the community.

In order to further clarify the moral character of "ruler-friend" and the virtues proper to a ruler who adheres to *ṣadāqa* for justice and compliance with God's rule, al-Tawḥīdī included reports of authoritative religious figures, particularly the Prophet. As already discussed, for al-Tawḥīdī, the Prophet acquired a normative value, namely being considered a model for proper behaviour and the correct ruler. Equality is highlighted as important for the "ruler-friend" through the example of the Prophet, who was reported by al-Tawḥīdī as

eating dates and someone was sitting with him. When the Prophet saw a rotten one, he set it aside. Then his companion said to him: "O messenger of God, give me the rotten one so that I may eat it." He [the Prophet] said: "I would not wish for my companion (*jalīsī*) anything which I would not wish for myself."¹²⁶

Al-Tawḥīdī replaces 'believers' (which is strictly associated with a Muslim context) in the original version¹²⁷ with "companion," in order to widen the scope of this ḥadīth to communicate a universal brotherhood within the framework of friendship, embracing all members of society, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Al-Tawḥīdī used reports about the Prophet to establish the authority of his ideas. Therefore, in developing his ethical framework

¹²³ For further discussion of al-Tawḥīdī's context in the final stage of re-editing the epistle, see ALSHAAR 2015: 130-173. It is also worth noting that in this later period al-Tawḥīdī also contemplated the notion of friendship with God, especially in his book *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*.

¹²⁴ AL-TAWḤĪDĪ 1953: II, 32-33.

¹²⁵ ID. 1964: 41.

¹²⁶ ID. 1964: 18.

¹²⁷ Cf. al-BUKHĀRĪ no date: I, 12.

of *ṣadāqa*, he drew upon this tradition conceptually. As a reader, he seems to have molded this tradition to create a new “aesthetic” meaning driven by his purpose to provide a universal discourse that transcends religious boundaries of his time.

In another report, al-Tawḥīdī cited the Prophet saying “treating people in a morally correct manner is charity.”¹²⁸ This example provides a religious dimension to the theme of “befriending people” to which al-Tawḥīdī also drew the attention of Ibn Sa’dān when he advised him to invest in his relationship with the *‘amma* (the commoners); a relationship which al-Tawḥīdī considers divine.¹²⁹

By portraying the Prophet’s moral conduct as the best producer for a head of community, al-Tawḥīdī evoked a traditional example of a pious, divinely-guided ruler as an alternative model to kingship and the politico-military commanders’ pattern run on the basis of power, oppression, and passion. Thus, the inclusion of Prophetic reports offers a practical example of the tools and techniques for educating and organising the community in line with God’s teachings and shows the role of these authoritative narratives in the construction of ethical paradigms in Islamic traditions. It also underlines the link between the moral nature of friendship and the juridical teaching of Islam.

Conclusion

The exploration of al-Tawḥīdī’s life and work led to three main areas in this article: first the study of ethical and political thought under the Būyids in the fourth/tenth century; second the need for an approach to Islamic ethical and political thought that considers their contexts and the encyclopaedic system of knowledge that shaped their formation; third the interdisciplinary nature of works produced in this period. The article comes to revisionist results, especially about the role of both religion and philosophy as essential in the formation of ethical and political thought in this period. It establishes that in these two areas, al-Tawḥīdī crossed the boundaries between disciplines that modern scholars and theories of ethics often consider hostile to one another, especially *adab*, philosophy and religion. *Adab* writings can be singled out as a venue where philosophical and religious ideas meet to provide readers with enquiry into moral principles of human action and with materials that educate their souls to maintain their well-being.

Al-Tawḥīdī was an original thinker and yet he was rooted in the Islamic culture in which he was educated. He approached knowledge with a spirit of openness drawing from all types of sources to produce a new moral order for the benefit of his society. Not only did he show that different forms of knowledge can be reconciled, but he also came into contact with other like-minded persons who also actively debated ethical ideas and responded to socio-political changes and the increasing pluralisation of Islamic cultures. The combination between the ruling class and intellectual guidance is key to al-Tawḥīdī’s political thought and his views of moral and social reform. This morality included a new set of norms and ways to make them happen. One could call this a type of “practical *falsafa*” where the value of knowledge

¹²⁸ Al-Tawḥīdī 1964: 63.

¹²⁹ Id. 1953: III, 87.

is determined by its ability to practice challenging ethics while transcending existing boundaries.

Al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries taught the importance of adopting *ṣadāqa* and love to promote truly humane behaviour, and for spiritual purification, which was not isolated from concern for reforms in the political and social order. Questions concerning “what is a friend,” “what types of affiliations should exist in order for people to live harmoniously” and “can one befriend an enemy” established a connection between politics and the study of morality and between the private and the public sphere in al-Tawḥīdī's context.

Al-Tawḥīdī and his contemporaries used formal rhetoric with arguments from both religious and philosophical sources to offer a theory of applied moral concepts as a form of social action to shape politics and societal practices. The presence of virtues, such as *ṣadāqa*, qualifies moral outcomes, and they appear to be the linchpin between religion and reason theoretically as well as practically. Based on his commitment to reason and religion, al-Tawḥīdī sought to widen the scope of these virtues from the personal realm to the political as well in order to introduce reform and link people to common ethical action.

This analysis of al-Tawḥīdī's moral thinking shows that despite modernists' skepticism, religion contributed at the deepest level to the formation of morality in the Būyid period. Therefore, in order to do justice to the study of Islamic ethics, its characteristics and distinctiveness should be analysed in their historical, intellectual, cultural, and religious contexts.

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