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The Epistemological Role of the Fiṭra

Vis-à-vis Western Proofs for The Existence of God

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Note: The purpose of this paper is to act as a useful introduction and basic primer to Imams, Muslim youth directors, and othesr engaged in preaching Islam.
It is NOT mean to be an exhaustive or advanced research paper.

"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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All praise is due to Allah who knows what the hearts conceal, and what the tongues do not reveal; the One to Whom All shall appeal, and in front of Whom the believers kneel.

Introduction

The concept of the *fiṭra* is a key notion found in the Quran and Sunnah. This paper argues that it is the primary mechanism that Muslims should keep in mind regarding the discussion of God's existence. In fact, a majority of arguments, and all of the most effective ones that have been proposed by Western philosophers, can be linked directly to the concept of the *fiṭra*.

This paper will therefore summarize the primary Western proofs for the Existence of God, then discuss, primarily through the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, the notion of *fiṭra*. After this section, a correlation between the Western proofs and the *fiṭra* will be given. In the conclusion, the main findings, along with some advice for those dealing with atheists, will be given.

1. The Primary Western Proofs for the Existence of God

It is possible to summarize the key Western proofs for the existence of God as follows:

1.1 The Ontological Argument.

Unique out of all arguments because it is an *a priori* arguments (i.e,. assumes no previous knowledge or experience). All that is required is the definition of God, 'A being regarding which no greater being can be conceived.'

If this is the definition of God, then if God *didn't* exist, clearly a real, living God would be a greater being than in imaginary God. Hence, an *imaginary* God can't be the greatest conceivable being, because an *imaginary* God is not as great as a real one. Therefore, there can be no such thing as an *imaginary* God, hence, by definition, God must exist.

This proof was first proposed by St. Anslem; developed by Descarte and Alvin Plantinga. While interesting, it hasn't really gained any converts to any faith tradition.

1.2 The Cosmological Argument

Most common argument in medieval Western and *kalam* schools; has many sub-variations. Argues from the universe (cosmos) and claims that since the universe exists, it must have had a Creator who brought it into existence. For our purposes, the *kalām* Cosmological Argument, first formulated by the early Muʿtazilites and then adopted and modified by the Ashʿarites and other groups, is particular relevant, as it is the backbone of the *kalam* groups in their mechanism for proving God's existence. In its simplest form, it goes as follows:

Premise A: Everything that began existence must have been caused by something.

Premise B: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: The Universe must have a cause (viz., God) that brought it into existence.

First proposed in some form by Plato; taken up by Abu al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf and developed by the Muʿtazilites; transferred into Christianity from Thomas Aquinas's copying of Ibn Rushd's arguments; Aquinas's work *Summa Theologica* posits five variations of the cosmological argument.[1]

1 All five are based within a paradigm of Aristotelian ontology and make use of *the infinite regression argument (ʿadm imkāniyya tasalsul al-ḥawādith).* Aquinas' Five Ways argued from the unmoved mover, first cause, necessary being, argument from degree, and the teleological argument.

- The *unmoved mover* argument asserts that, from our experience of motion in the universe (motion being the transition from potentiality to actuality) we can see that there must have been an initial mover, *viz.,* God. This is the most common manifestation of the *kalam* cosmological argument.

1.3 The Teleological Argument

Argument from design ('telos' = end goal). The universe is simply too well-designed to come from nothing. The world as we observe it infinitely complex, and yet exhibits such an inter-connected efficiency and exquisite pattern that is impossible for this ordered universe to have come about randomly. Rather, there is clearly a *design* (hence: Teleological argument is also called '*Argument from design'*), and this implies a Being who has the capacity and power and knowledge to bring about this perfectly superb design. Such a being must be God Himself.

This argument is also called *Paley's Watch*, or *The Watchmaker Argument*.

In our times, there is a modern revision of this argument called ***The Fine-Tuned Argument***, in which specific examples in physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences are brought forth (for example, certain 'constants' such as the strength of gravity and the gravitational constant ($G \approx 6.674\times10^{-8}\ \mathrm{cm}^3\cdot\mathrm{g}^{-1}\cdot\mathrm{s}^{-2}$), or the strong nuclear force, or the mass density of the universe, which work in tandem with each other to bring about the conditions necessary for life to exist.

1.4 The Argument from Miracles

In Western literature, 'miracles' here refer to personal experiences that are clear breaks from the laws of nature. The fact that people have experienced miracles, it is argued, is a clear indication that God exists, as that is the only explanation of miracles. Note that one can also include in this category all arguments based on personal experience or anecdotal evidence

This argument has never had strong support from within the circles of philosophers and deists; Davide Hume was particularly skeptical and wrote a treatise against the existence of miracles.

1.5 The Argument from Morality

Primary argument for many Reformation-era thinkers, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Locke, Berkley and others. Gained even more currency in modern times via Karl Barth, Reinhold Neibuhr, and C. S. Lewis (who wrote *'…conscience reveals to us a moral law whose source cannot be found in the natural world, thus pointing to a supernatural Lawgiver*.)'

It is still used in common debates (when, for example, someone suggest something extremely disgusting or indecent and demonstrates that morality is a human trait).

1.6 Argument from Consciousness

The very fact that humans have a non-physical state that we call 'consciousness' implies that an entity (viz., 'God') wanted us to be conscious. Relatively modern argument typically associated with J. P. Moreland, Richard Swinburne, and others.

- Aquinas' argument from *first cause* started with the premise that it is impossible for a being to cause itself (because it would have to exist before it caused itself) and that it is impossible for there to be an infinite chain of causes, which would result in infinite regress. Therefore, there must be a first cause, itself uncaused.
- The argument from *necessary being* asserts that all beings are contingent (meaning that it is possible for them not to exist). Aquinas argued that if everything can possibly not exist, there must have been a time when nothing existed; as things exist now, there must exist a being with necessary existence, regarded as God.
- Aquinas argued from *degree*, considering the occurrence of degrees of goodness. He believed that all things which are considered 'good' clearly have a relation to a standard or degree of good— in other words, there is a scale of 'good' and there must be a maximum. This must imply a Creator.
- The *teleological* argument is discussed in the next point.

1.7 Argument from Transcendence

This argument claims that since we rely on logic, reason, common sense, morality, and other clear universals to live a meaningful life, and these universals do not seem to come from a materialist source, clearly there is a Higher Power that placed these values within us.

It was first proposed by Immaneul Kant; elaborated on by the Dutch philosopher Cornelius van Til.

1.8 Argument from Beauty

That we inherently recognize certain creations or actions or feelings as 'beautiful' is itself an indication that a Higher Power implanted this concept within us.

Plotinus (~ 240 CE) considered God to be the ultimate manifestation and perfection of 'Good' and 'Beauty'. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 AD) wrote, "Who made these beautiful changeable things, if not the one who is beautiful and unchangeable?"

Richard Swinburne writes,

> God has reason to make a basically beautiful world, although also reason to leave some of the beauty or ugliness of the world within the power of creatures to determine; but he would seem to have overriding reason not to make a basically ugly world beyond the powers of creatures to improve. Hence, if there is a God there is more reason to expect a basically beautiful world than a basically ugly one. A priori, however, there is no particular reason for expecting a basically beautiful rather than a basically ugly world. In consequence, if the world is beautiful, that fact would be evidence for God's existence.

1.9 The Pragmatic Argument (or 'Pascal's Wager')

Argues that believing in God just makes more logistical sense: one 'might as well' believe, as the stakes are simply too high if one rejects God (in case God does exist), whereas one potentially loses nothing by believing in God even if God doesn't exist.

First proposed by Blaise Pascal (d. 1662) and remains a pragmatic argument utilized by many preachers especially in Christian circles.

1.10 Argument from destiny

People are born in circumstances beyond their control. Some are rich, others poor. Some have inherent talents and skills, others seem to suffer for no reason. Some theologians, particularly those who believe in *karma*, use this to prove there is some Divine Force that 'rewards' or 'punishes' people for past lives and reincarnates them according to those lives.

2. The Qur'anic Argument: The *Fiṭra*

Since both the Qurʾān and ḥadīth corpus affirm the notion of a human '*fiṭra*',[2] it is not surprising to find Islamic theologians, regardless of background, interested in defining the role and scope of this element of human

2 The primary Qurʾānic reference is Q. 30:30, "*And so, turn your face singlemindedly to the true faith – this is the fiṭra of Allah that He moulded (faṭara) mankind upon.*" And in ḥadīth literature, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Every child is born upon the *fiṭra*. Then, his parents make him a Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian – just as an animal gives birth to an unbranded animal. Do you find any brandings on it, until you yourselves brand it?" See: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *The Book of Predestination*, Chapter: Every child is born on the *fiṭra*, vol. 4, p. 138.

Also see: *EI2*, *s.v.* '*Fiṭra*' (D. B. Macdonald); A. Straface, "La *fitra* come espressione di iman," *Oriente Moderno* XI (LXXII), pp. 2-12; L. Holtzman, "Human Choice: Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya" in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, Yossef Rapoport (*ed*.) (Oxford: OUP, 2010); F. Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102 (Jan., 2012), pp. 2-5; C. Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭra*

existence. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya gave particular prominence, perhaps more than any theologian preceding him, to the role of the *fiṭra*, especially in its epistemic authority in deriving knowledge of God. Hence our discussion will primarily center around his writings.

The Arabic word *fiṭra* is derived from the verb *fa–ṭa–ra*, which, as referenced in pre-Islamic poetry, was used to indicate a 'cutting or splitting in half of an object'.[3] Based on this meaning, the term *fiṭra* has primarily been interpreted to mean some type of predisposition or natural order that has been ingrained into man before creation.[4]

The *fiṭra* has, at least in Sunnī sources, been traditionally linked with the 'Verse of the Covenant' (*āya al-mīthāq*), also known as 'The Day of Am-I-Not' (*yawm alast*), referenced in Q. 7:172.[5]

2.1 Pre-Ibn Taymiyyan Conceptions of the fiṭra

It is appropriate to start off a discussion of the classical *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* understanding of the verses pertaining to the *fiṭra* and the Adamic Covenant by mentioning the views of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923). Al-Ṭabarī regards the *fiṭra* that is referred to in Q. 30:30 as a reference to the 'model' (*ṣunʿa*) that God fashioned man upon, and says that this is the religion of Islam. The very first narration that he cites as support of this, from Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798), interprets the *fiṭra* as being "…the Islam that was with them since God created them all from Adam." Furthermore, he also relates this concept with that of the *mīthāq* in Q. 7:172.[6]

Commenting on Q. 7:172, al-Ṭabarī quotes a staggering thirty-three narrations, from Companions such as ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Ubayy b. Kaʿb and Ibn ʿAbbās, and Successors such as Mujāhid, Saʿīd b. Jubayr, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ, al-Suddī and Muḥammad b. Kaʿb al-Quraḍī. Combined, these narrations offer a majestic image of God rubbing His (right?) Hand on the back of Adam (or, according to other narrations, merely extracted from the loins of Adam), near the sacred plain of Arafat, and extracting from him all of his seed (or his progeny) that would follow him until the Day of Judgment. He then collected these souls (which, we are informed, were not yet in their physical bodies) in front of Him as one audience, and addressed them directly, asking, "Am I not your Lord?" to which they collectively responded, "Yes, you are!" It was also at this juncture – according to al-Ṭabarī – that God determined (or identified) whom from these descendants would be destined for Heaven, and whom for Hell.[7] Al-Ṭabarī quotes Ibn ʿAbbās expressing this Covenant as being embodied in the *fiṭra* that God created mankind upon.[8]

In al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, there is one clear and decisive interpretation: the Covenant with Adam was an actual physical occurrence enacted after Adam's fall to Earth, in which God reaffirmed and mankind acknowledged that He is the only true God. The *fiṭra*, for al-Ṭabarī, internally and subconsciously represents that *mīthāq.*

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in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21:2 (2000), pp. 392-95; F. Hussain, "Understanding the Role of the *Fiṭrah* in Resistance to Behavioral Change," *The Islamic Quarterly* 54:2, pp. 142-146; Gwynne, Rosalin Ward, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qurʾān: God's arguments* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 1-7.

3 Muḥammad b. Mukrim b. Mandhūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār al-Sādir, 1994), vol. 5, p. 55. See also: C. Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," p. 393.

4 *Ibid*., vol. 5, pp. 56-58.

5 This connection has been made in almost all classical *tafsīrs*, as shall be demonstrated in the next section.

For a helpful overview of some of the main interpretations of this verse, see: Wadad Kadi, "The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qurʾān," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147:4 (Dec, 2003), pp. 332-338. There are alternative Ṣufī interpretations to this verse also, but these need not concern us here. For such interpetations see: L. Massignon, "Le 'jour du covenant' (*yawm al-mīthāq*)," Oriens 15 (Dec. 31, 1962), pp. 87-90; U. Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 67-72; A. Jeffrey, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*," *Studia Islamica* 11 (1959), pp. 113-115; G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp.145-57.

For a discussion of this Covenant in other traditions, see: Leigh N. Chipman, "Mythic Aspects of the Process of Adam's Creation in Judaism and Islam," *Studia Islamica*, 93 (2001), pp. 5-25, and especially p. 22.

6 Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿa Muṭafa Babī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.) vol. 21, p. 40.

7 While each of these narrations obviously only mentions parts of these details, and a more critical and detailed research is certainly warranted on this issue, the key point for our chapter is that all of al-Ṭabarī's narrations join almost seamlessly together to paint a grand narrative of a primordial scene where God speaks to all of the souls of mankind. See: al-Ṭabarī, *ibid*, vol. 9, pp. 110-9.

8 *Ibid*, vol. 9, p. 115.

Another early authority who commented on the notion of the *fiṭra* is Ibn Qutayba al-Daynūrī (d. 276/889).[9] In explaining the ḥadith "Every child is born on the *fiṭra*…", Ibn Qutayba quotes Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783) as saying that this was referring to the Covenant that was extracted from them while they were in the loins of their forefathers.[10] Ibn Qutayba then comments that what Ḥammād meant by this is Q. 7:172, and states,

> …and so you shall not find anyone except that he admits that he has a Creator and Sustainer, even if he calls Him by another name or worships other than Him in order to get to Him, or describes Him in a manner that is not [befitting] Him.[11]

He then proceeds to clarify that the *fiṭra* upon which every child is born is nothing other than the acceptance of God as His Creator. He claims that the Muʿtazilīs consider the *fiṭra* to be the religion of Islam itself, and that this is problematic,[12] but "…for us, the *fiṭra* is accepting and knowing God, not the religion of Islam."[13]

Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim (d. 287/900), an early Ḥanbalī theologian, has an entire chapter in his theological work *Kitāb al-Sunna* entitled, "*Regarding the Covenant that God took from His Servants.*"[14] In it, he lists over half a dozen narrations that mention God extracting Adam's progeny from Adam's loins, and then questioning them rhetorically about His existence. The chapter preceding this one mentions Prophetic traditions referencing children being born upon the pre-determined plan of God.[15]

The concept of the Adamic *mīthāq* became so widespread by the third Islamic century that the most famous creedal work of this era, the *Creed* of al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/935), lists belief in the Covenant that God took from Adam as a fundamental pillar of faith.[16]

Yet another Ḥanbalī theologian was Ibn Baṭṭa al-ʿUkbarī (d. 387/997)[17] who spent considerable time collecting the numerous narrations regarding the *fiṭra* and *mīthāq*.[18] He mentions that some Muʿtazilīs grossly misunderstood these traditions, claiming they refer to a child being born Muslim, and that his non-Muslim parents change this original religion to another; al-ʿUkbarī points out that this meaning is not tenable in light of the fact that this implies a child of non-Muslim parents who died in infancy would effectively not be permitted a burial in the graveyard of his faith, or be allowed to confer his inheritance on his non-Muslim relatives, as Islamic law forbids this on the Muslim. Yet, there is unanimous agreement that such a child can and will be buried in the graveyard of his people's faith, and that his inheritance, if he has any, will be rightfully inherited by his non-Muslim relatives.[19] Hence, the meaning of *fiṭra* is in fact the Covenant that is referred to in Q. 7:172, which is to say that the *fiṭra* is the innate belief of every soul in the existence of a Lord and the perfection of His Lordship (*rubūbiyya*).[20]

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9 For Ibn Qutayba, see: Isḥāq Musa Ḥusaynī, *The Life and Works of Ibn Qutayba* (Beirut: American University Press, 1950). For an example of Ibn Qutayba's attempt to defend traditionalism, see Michael Cook's "Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 43-74.

10 Al-Daynūrī, *Iṣlāḥ Ghalaṭ Abī ʿUbayd*, p. 57.

11 *Ibid*., p. 58.

12 He does not elaborate here on these problems; however, al-ʿUkbarī, a later theologian, does elaborate on some of these 'problems', as we shall quote below.

13 *Ibid*., p. 59.

14 See: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAmr b. Abī ʿĀṣim, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, ed. Bāsim al-Jawābira (Dār al-Ṣumayʿī, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 156-162.

15 See *ibid*., *Kitāb al-Sunna,* vol. 1, pp. 149-155.

16 See: William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 51. Note, however, that al-Ṭaḥāwī makes no mention of the *fiṭra* in his Creed.

17 For his life and theology, see the seminal, although outdated, work of Henri Laoust, *La Profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa* (Damascus: Institut Francais De Damas, 1958), esp. pp. xlii - liv. Note that Laoust did not have access to some of Ibn Baṭṭa's works that have only recently been published in the last decade.

18 See: ʿUbayd Allah b. Muḥammad Ibn Baṭṭa al-ʿUkbarī, *al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyya*, ed. Walīd b. Muḥammad b. Sayf Naṣr (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Rayah, 1998), vol. 3, p. 298; and his *Kitāb al-qadr*, ed. ʿUthmān ʿAbd Allah al-Ithyūbī (Riyāḍ, Dār al-Rayah, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 295-319, and vol. 2, pp. 146-8. Ibn Taymiyya quotes from Ibn Baṭṭa and his definition of the *fiṭra* in *DT*, vol. 8, p. 360.

19 There are other legal issues that can be raised from the theological doctrine of the *fiṭra*. For one such discussion, from the works of Ibn Ḥazm, see: Adang, Camilla, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21:2 (2000), pp. 403-8.

20 Ibn Baṭṭa, *Kitāb al-Qadr*, vol. 2, p. 72.

Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 425/1034), in his Qurʾānic lexicon *Mufradāt al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, echoes a similar position when he defines the *fiṭra* as a knowledge that God has ingrained and planted in man. This knowledge, he says, is what is referred to when even those who reject Islam acknowledge God as their Creator.[21]

Another early commentator on the issue of the Covenant and *fiṭra* was Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071).[22] In his lengthy commentary on the ḥadīth of the *fiṭra*,[23] he states that people have differed over the interpretation of the *fiṭra*. For Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, the *fiṭra* represents a knowledge (*maʿrifa*) that God has implanted in the soul of every child, without exception. This knowledge is unique to humankind, being absent from animals, and will lead a child, once he or she comes of age, to recognize his or her Lord as being the true God, and ultimately – when adhered to – towards submission to Him.[24] This *fiṭra* represents the pure state of man – and this is why the Prophet compared such an untouched, pure state with an animal that is born unmutilated, and shall remain unmutilated, until its owners mutilate it.[25]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr strenuously rejects the Muʿtazilī interpretation of the *fiṭra* as constituting the religion of Islam since the religion entails actions and beliefs that a child cannot have. Rather, he links this *fiṭra* to the *mīthāq* (Q. 7:172), and references statements from earlier authorities that mention God's speaking to all of mankind.[26] He also rejects, as the interpretation of 'deviant groups', those who deny that God actually extracted all of mankind and spoke to them on grounds that this was impossible and illogical.[27] As far as Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr is concerned, the texts are unequivocally clear: each and every soul had been extracted by God, and made to verbally testify in front of Him, which they did, based on their *fiṭra*-endowed knowledge of the Creator.

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 598/1202),[28] perhaps the most important Ḥanbalī of his generation,[29] also interpreted the *fiṭra* as being a model upon which God created all of mankind. He rejects the interpretation that the *fiṭra* is the religion of Islam, and instead quotes Ibn Quṭayba, claiming that it is the acknowledgment of God's existence.[30] Regarding the verses pertaining to the Adamic Covenant, he quoted the narration from Ibn ʿAbbās that al-Ṭabarī recorded previously, without making mention of any alternative hypothesis. He, too, affirms a literal reading of the extraction of all men from the loins of Adam.[31]

From all of the preceding quotations, it is safe to conclude that the dominant and uncontested interpretation in pre-Taymiyyan Ḥanbalī scholarship was the understanding that God undertook an actual verbal Covenant from Adam and his progeny, and that this Covenant entailed recognizing the existence and Lordship of

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21 Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Mufradāt al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* p. 640. The theology of al-Rāghib still needs to be studied; however, his writings seem to indicate that he was influenced by the classical *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. For more on his literary achievements, see: Joseph Sadan, "An Admirable and Ridiculous Hero: Some Notes on the Bedouin in Medieval Arabic Belles Lettres, on a Chapter of *Adab* by al-Râghib al-Iṣfahânî, and on a Literary Model in Which Admiration and Mockery Coexist," *Poetics Today* 10:3 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 471-492.

22 For a reason that is not apparent to me, it seems scant research has been done amongst Western circles on this towering figure of Andalusian Islam. For an overview of his life and theology, see: Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAbd Allah al-Ghuṣn, *ʿAqīda al-Imām Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr fī al-tawḥīd wa-l-īmān* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1996). For a brief, and somewhat incomplete, discusson on Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's views on the *fiṭra*, see: M. Yasien, "The Interpretations of *Fiṭrah*," pp. 134-5. Yasien incorrectly assumes that Ibn Taymiyya disagrees with Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's notions of the *fiṭra*; however, as I will show in the next section, the two views are so consistent as to actually indicate that Ibn Taymiyya was heavily influenced by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's interpretations.

23 His commentary runs almost fifty pages of print. See his *al-Tamhīd lima fī Muwaṭṭa min al-maʿānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. Usāma b. Ibrahīm (Cairo: Dār al-Faruq, 1996), vol. 6, p. 349-397.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 355-6.

25 The reference to mutilation deals with the type of 'branding' that pre-Islamic Arabs would do to mark their animals. Rather than brand with a hot iron, the Arabs would slit the ears or face of the animal with a sharp knife, leaving a distinct pattern that would be recognizable to all. In the hadith, the *fiṭra* is compared to a new-born that does not have any such mutilations, and then the owners mutilate the baby, meaning society corrupts and mutilates the *fiṭra*. If the new-born were left alone, it would not have such markings, and thus remain pure '…on the *fiṭra*'. See: *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 358.

26 *Ibid.*, vol 6, pp. 359-63.

27 *Ibid.,* vol. 6, p. 368. He claims that these are not the opinion of the scholars who are within the *Jamāʿa*, the 'Group' that is referenced as being the Saved Sect in Prophetic literature. This is a significant point, as, later, Ibn Taymiyya will state this very position that Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr deems heretical.

28 For Ibn al-Jawzī, see: Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt*, pp. 3-32 (Brill, Leiden: 2002), and Stefan Leder, *Ibn al-Gauzī und seine Kompilation Wider Die Leidenschaft* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 1984), pp. 15-42.

29 For Ibn Taymyya's views on Ibn al-Jawzī, see: *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 169.

30 Ibn al-Jawzī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī, *Zād al-Masīr fī ʿilm al-Tafsīr* (Damasus: al-Maktab al-Islamī, 1987), vol. 6, pp. 300-1.

31 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 283-5.

God.[32] It is equally clear that the predominant interpretation of the *fiṭra* (*sans* al-Ṭabarī) is that it is some type of inherent knowledge, but not quite yet the actual religion of Islam. Only al-Ṭabarī claimed that the *fiṭra* is precisely synonymous with the actual religion of Islam. For all of the other theologians and authors mentioned, the *fiṭra* is understood as a type of knowledge that informs man of the existence and perfection of God, but cannot, in and of itself, confer a detailed knowledge of Islam's pillars and principles.

It is useful to point out that none of these earlier theologians developed a systematic theory of the *fiṭra*, nor did they attempt to discuss its relationship with the human soul and intellect. All of this was something undertaken by Ibn Taymiyya in his writings, without prior precedent.

In contrast to these *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* theologians, the scholars of *kalam* seemed to have glossed over or completely ignored the notion of *fiṭra* as it pertains to proof of God's existence.[33] Both al-Bāqillānī[34] and al-Juwaynī[35] seem not to mention this notion in their primary theological works, and in fact explicitly state that knowledge of God's existence is *not* innate, but rather one that must be derived through rational inquiry, the very first obligation of the one who comes of legal age (*mukallaf*) according to Ashʿarī theology. Al-Bayhaqī interprets the traditions of *fiṭra* as being related to the issue of God's predetermining (*qadar*) of the people of Heaven and Hell, thus negating the notion that *fiṭra* is related to a knowledge of a Creator or a disposition to the religion of Islam.[36] Al-Ghazālī's understanding of the *fiṭra* has been the subject of a detailed study.[37] For him, the *fiṭra* does not in itself provide any knowledge; rather, the true *fiṭra* forces man to question what is true, and thus leads to a rational quest for ultimate truths, all the while providing him with a set of universal judgments by which to grasp the veracity of these truths. Therefore, in al-Ghazālī's understanding, the *ʿaql* is the one true and ultimate source of knowledge, and the *fiṭra* is subservient to it.[38]

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32 Wadad Kadi's interpretation of these events is slightly different, as she understands Sunnī theologians positing a third existence of man, between his temporary sojourn in Heaven and his worldly existence. She also links these two verses (*viz*., the verse of the *fiṭra*, and the verse of the Covenant) with a third, and that is the 'Verse of the Trust' in Q. 33:72. In my readings of early Sunnī *tafsīrs*, I was not able to find evidence for her interpretations or connection between these verses, hence even if some Ṣufī or Shīʿī interpretations do exist, I feel it is a bit of a stretch to paint as broad a picture as she has. See: Kadi, Wadad, "The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qurʾān," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147:4 (Dec 2003), p. 333, and pp. 336-7.

This section of course concentrated on Ḥanbalite interpretation; there is an entire genre of Ṣūfī interpretation which, while worthy of study, is not directly related to our topic. One such figure whose interpretation of the *mīthāq* and *yawm alast* has been studied in great detail is that of Sahl al-Tustarī (see: G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp.145-57). Tustarī affirms four primordial events before the creation of man. Firstly, the human race issues forth from the light of Muḥammad; secondly, this race is extracted from the prophetic stereotypes and exists in the form of specks endowed with intellects; thirdly, at this stage God enacts the primordial covenant with the prophets; and, lastly, God summons mankind from the loins of the prophetic prototypes and addresses them with the *alast* question. See: *ibid*, pp. 156-7. Another work that deals with a Ṣūfic interpretation, this time of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid's younger brother, is: Gramlich, Richard, *Der reine Gottesglaube: Das Wort des Einheitsbekenntnisses* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983). For this younger al-Ghazālī, the profession of God's Unity is the beginning and end of human existence, as manisfested on *yawm alast*; it was on that day that God's elect were chosen, and they alone replied in the affirmative. See: *ibid*., pp. 23-6.

There has also been a thorough study done of Ibn Ḥazm's views on the *fiṭra*. Ibn Ḥazm sees the *fiṭra* as being synonymous with the religion of Islam, which was also the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī above. See: C. Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fiṭra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21, no. 2 (2000): 396-99. The theology of Ibn Ḥazm is worthy of independent study, for he cannot easily be classified into any of the major groups. He combines elements of Ḥanbalism and Muʿtazilism, but is vociferously anti-Ashʿarī.

33 See: Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Disposition' (*Fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 102 (Jan., 2012), p. 4. Griffel states that earlier Ashʿarīs did not discuss the notion of human *fiṭra* – however this is not completely accurate, as al-Bayhaqī does present his interpretations of the *fiṭra* traditions, as we shall see.

34 Al-Bāqillānī, al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib, *Kitāb tamhīd al-awāʾil wa talkhīṣ al-dalāʾil*, ed. ʿImād al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Muʾassasa al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1993), p. 26, where he discusses innate knowledge (God's existence not being listed among these), and p. 43 where he discusses the necessity of proving God's existence via inspection and rational inquiry. Also see: B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 21.

35 Al-Juwanī, *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 120.

36 Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*, ed. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah Āl ʿAmir (Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-ʿUbaykān, 2000), pp. 140-142 and pp. 337-352.

37 See: Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Disposition' (*Fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102 (Jan., 2012), pp. 1-32.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7, p. 28. Griffel correctly points out that al-Ghazālī was influenced by both al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna in this understanding. As far as I can tell, there seems to be one explicit mention in al-Ghazālī's writings of the *fiṭra* in connection with God's existence: see, Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 118

2.2 Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of the Kalām Arguments

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya was a strong proponent of the fact that this entire exercise of attempting to prove God's existence was highly exaggerated. For Ibn Taymiyya, God "…created His creation with an innate knowledge affirming His existence and acknowledging Him – it is a part of one's being, and necessarily ingrained in them."[39]

While the *fiṭra* was, for Ibn Taymiyya, the primary mechanism of affirming God's existence, it was not the only one. He felt that the strongest Qurʾānic proof, after the innate knowledge of God's existence, was the proof from the ephemeral nature of creation, including the createdness of man. Man knows instinctively that he is created, just as he knows that the other animals, plants, minerals, clouds and objects around him are created, and that every creation is in need of a Creator. Thus, the very fact that man is a created object is evidence of the existence of a Creator, which is not in need of evidence itself. From the Qurʾānic proofs for the existence of God, according to Ibn Taymiyya, are the miracles of the prophets, such as the miracles given to Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad.[40] This was the primary method that God used to prove His existence to those who claimed to deny it,[41] for not only does it inform of His Existence, it also informs of His Unicity, and the truth of His prophets.[42] Ibn Taymiyya writes,[43]

> The miracle itself informs of the truth of the Messenger, which necessitates the existence of the One who has sent him. So the miracle *qua* miracle is a sign of the Creator who causes it, and that He has caused it in order to provide evidence for the truth of His Messenger. And the story of Moses [with Pharaoh] is an example of this.

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the presence of these authentic, simple, and accessible Qurʾānic evidences circumvented the need to resort to convoluted methods that neither the prophets nor the early Muslims (*viz.* the *salaf*) ever called to. He was, as is known to all advanced students of theology, a vocal critic of the *kalām* cosmological argument, for multiple reasons.[44]

For Ibn Taymiyya, God did not command His creation to seek out knowledge of a Creator; rather, what a person is legally obliged to do is to know that God alone is worthy of being worshipped, and to avoid worshipping other beings (*shirk*).[45] In fact, the most famous person to claim that God does not exist was Pharaoh, and the Qurʾān explicitly points out that he was lying in this claim, and that internally he did believe that God had sent Moses as a Prophet.[46] All of this proves, for Ibn Taymiyya, that atheism is an atypical and unnatural phenomenon that does not deserve the consideration given to it by his interlocutors.

Since he argued that knowledge of God was innate in man, he claimed that "…God's existence can be proven neither through syllogistic and inductive inference, nor, for that matter, by means of any other inference."[47] For Ibn Taymiyya, if a person's intuition (i.e., *fiṭra*) was not sufficient to affirm God's existence, the only other recourse to 'correct' this corrupted intuition would be via exercising a sound understanding of the faculty of reason.[48] And since necessary knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*) is of course superior to acquired knowledge (*ʿilm muktasab*), ***any proofs offered by the scholars of kalām that require introspection can never attain the level of certainty enjoyed by the inherent, natural, necessary knowledge of God that God placed in man (via the fiṭra)***.[49]

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39 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 46. Also see: Abrahamov, Binyamin., "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20:1 (1993) p. 26, where he briefly contrasts al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya on this point.

40 See *DT*, vol. 3, pp. 308-318; vol. 7, pp. 299-300, and p. 241; vol. 8, pp. 238-239. Also see: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," pp. 59-61.

41 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 352.

42 *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 299-300.

43 *DT*, vol. 9, p. 41. Also see: *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* vol. 11, pp. 378-9.

44 This section is adapted from my PhD dissertation *Reconciling Reason and Revelation in the Writings of Ibn Taymiyya*.

45 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 398.

46 *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 38-9. He uses a number of verses to prove his point, in particular Q. 17:102 and Q. 27:14.

47 W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Oriental*, LII (1991), p. 54.

48 Some examples of this have preceded in the previous section; we shall have the opportunity to elaborate yet more on this notion in the section on Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra*.

49 See: *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, pp. 15-6; W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Oriental*, LII (1991), p. 57. Again, we shall return to this point in more detail in the next section.

Ibn Taymiyya demonstrated that the cosmological argument was overly complicated in its premises, while its conclusions were self-evident and manifest, claiming that most of the proofs that the scholars of *kalām* used to prove God's existence were either faulty or extremely convoluted and complex.[50] In contrast, he advocated, the Qurʾānic proofs for God's existence are not only indubitable, but also simple and non-complex.[51]

It is possible to summarize Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms against the *kalām* Cosmological Proof – and indeed against most of the philosophical proofs for the Existence of God – in the following points:

- God created man with the intuitive knowledge that He exists, hence there is no need for laypeople to be instructed in the proofs for His existence (the argument based on the existence of the *fiṭra*)
- The Qurʾān addresses those who deny God, and Qurʾānic proofs yield full certainty, in contradistinction to the *kalām* proofs
- The Qurʾānic proofs are simple and easy to understand, whereas the *kalām* proofs are overly complicated, with intricate premises that the masses would not understand
- The *kalām* proofs have no basis in the religion of the prophets of God, or in the religious understanding of the best generations of Islam (the *salaf*)
- The practitioners of *kalām* scarcely agree on fundamental points relevant to the *dalīl*
- These same *mutakallimūn* frequently regret having propagated this *dalīl*
- The *dalīl* deliberately employs vague and ambiguous vocabulary
- The *dalīl* is founded on incorrect premises (for example the claim that an infinite regression is not possible)
- One of the necessary corollaries of this *dalīl* is to strip God of His Divine Attributes and Divine Actions that are affirmed in the Sacred Texts
- The *dalīl* opens up the door for others to reject the Divine Texts
- The *dalīl* was *the* direct cause of the formulation of al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*

2.3 Ibn Taymiyya's Epistemological Fiṭra-Revolution

Analyzing Ibn Taymiyya's views on the *fiṭra* is not an easy task. This is because, while he references the notion of *fiṭra* many dozens of times in the *Darʾ*, not to mention his other works, he did not compile a structured and dedicated work on the topic. Therefore, one can only extrapolate Ibn Taymiyya's views by piecing together the many references he makes to the notion of the *fiṭra*, analyzing the contexts of these various references and Ibn Taymiyya's reason for using it.[52]

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50 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 72.

51 *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1, p. 256.

52 The task of locating every reference to the *fiṭra* was a challenging one; as I have alluded to, Ibn Taymiyya references the *fiṭra* more than one hundred times in the *Darʾ* alone, yet he has not written a separate treatise detailing his views on it. In my own readings of the *Darʾ*, I attempted to record every reference Ibn Taymiyya makes to this word. Additionally, since this topic has been of interest to me for some years, I had collected other references within Ibn Taymiyya's writings (in particular, those preserved in the *Majmūʿ al-Fatawā*).

It is useful to note that there is one section in the *Darʾ* where Ibn Taymiyya discusses the concept of the *fiṭra* in great detail: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 358-468. Also note that there is a treatise in the *Majmūʿa al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā* entitled *Risāla fi-l-kalām ʿalā al-fiṭra wa maʿrifat Allah*; however, this is not a treatise authored by Ibn Taymiyya, but rather a collection of quotes and opinions by a certain Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Munabijī who does include some quotes from Ibn Taymiyya, but these are without any reference to the original writings that he extracts these from. Additionally, this treatise does not provide any new material from what I have referenced directly from the *Darʾ* and *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*. See: *Majmūʿa al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā*, pp. 315-335.

Also it is worthy of note that Ibn Taymiyya quotes directly and extensively from Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's work *al-Tamhīd*, approving his interpretations of the *fiṭra* and commenting on them. See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 366-390, and p. 417. M. Yasien concludes, after referencing Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr and other scholars from the traditionalists, that "…Ibn Taymiyyah … has remained remarkably faithful to the traditional interpretations of the relevant passages on the *fiṭra* in the Qurʾān and hadith. [His] views accord fully with those of other orthodox scholars…" See: M. Yasien, "The Interpretations of *Fiṭrah*," p. 148.

The aim of this section, therefore, is to provide a more complete picture regarding Ibn Taymiyya's conception of the *fiṭra*. What emerges is a remarkably consistent and well-thought out epistemological and psychological faculty that dovetails perfectly with Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms of the *kalām* proofs for the existence of God, and provides a powerful alternative to these proofs, rendering them, in effect, superfluous. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya was able to utilize his multi-faceted theory to bolster his views on human morality, psychology, and cognition. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it provided Ibn Taymiyya with a supra-rational source of authentication that effectively limited the role of the human intellect and acted as a verifying agent for what was and was not legitimate rational thought. With this, he was able to accomplish what he had set out to do: limit the perceived rational excesses, under the guise of intellectual proofs, of the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* via a mechanism that was equally accessible to all of mankind, namely the Divinely ingrained and pure *fiṭra*.

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the *fiṭra* is an actuality that can be proven to exist not just from the Sacred Texts, but also from human experience.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya invokes three textual references to the *fiṭra*: firstly, he quotes Q. 30:30 which proves two points, that God created all of His servants on the *fiṭra*, and that He also sends the prophets with Revelation to affirm this same *fiṭra*. He posits this because the verse begins by mentioning the *fiṭra* that man was created upon, and then concludes by mentioning the true religion revealed by God. He follows this verse by quoting the ḥadith, "Every child is born on the *fiṭra*, and then his parents make him a Jew, Christian or Magian, just as an animal gives birth to an unbranded animal, so do you see any animal born branded, until you yourselves brand it?"[53] Lastly, he uses the tradition in which the Prophet quotes God as saying, "I created my servants in a pure form (*ḥunafāʾ*)[54] but then Satan misguided them, and forbade for them what I had allowed for them, and commanded them to worship others besides Me."[55]

Thus, the source of the *fiṭra* is very clear: for Ibn Taymiyya, God created His servants on the *fiṭra*,[56] and implanted (*maghrūr*) it in them.[57] This is the framework that God created all of mankind upon, the framework of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya also believes the primordial Adamic Covenant (*mīthāq*) indicates the existence of the *fiṭra*.[58]

However, Ibn Taymiyya assures his readers that the existence of the *fiṭra* is not just proven through textual sources. He goes into a somewhat lengthy discussion proving, through rational means, that the *fiṭra* is embedded in every child. He mentions eight proofs,[59] most of which revolve around the reality of the human situation and psyche. For example, he says that it is known by necessity that every human has beliefs and desires. These beliefs are sometimes true and sometimes false; likewise, his desires are sometimes beneficial and sometimes harmful. And if a person were to be presented with the option of having correct beliefs and beneficial desires, he would

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Ovamir Anjum has also done some research on Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fiṭra*, especially its ramifications in Islamic political science. See: Anjum, Ovamir, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 215 – 32. I have benefitted from some of his terminologies and ideas.

53 This tradition is reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, The Book of Funerals, 'Chapter: If a boy embraces Islam', vol. 2, p. 100.

54 The term *ḥanīf* is used many times in the Qurʾān, almost always to apply to the methodology of the Prophet Abraham. It has generally been understood in classical sources to mean 'one who turns away from idolatry and towards the worship of God'; there has also been a significant amount of modern research regarding possible parallels of this word in other languages and faith traditions. See: *EI2, s.v.* 'Ḥanīf' (W. Montgommery Watt); de Blois, François, "Naṣrānī and ḥanīf: Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BSOAS* 65:1 (2002), pp. 1-30; F. Griffel, "The Harmony of Natural Law and *Sharīʿa*," p. 43.

55 This tradition is reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the Book of Paradise and Its Blessings, Chapter: Charactersitics by which the Inhabitants of Paradise can be Dsicerend from the Inhabitants of Hell in this World, vol. 4, p. 162.

See: *DT*, vol. 6, pp. 67-8; also, in *DT*, vol. 9, pp. 374-5 he quotes all of these texts together as well.

56 *DT*, vol. 1, p. 377; *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 30.

57 *DT*, 10/244.

58 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 220; also see *DT*, vol. 9, p. 330.

In the next section, we shall see how precise Ibn Taymiyya was when he claims that the *mīthāq* indicates the existence of the *fiṭra*. For most Sunnī authorities, these two terms are different notions; for Ibn Taymiyya, they are one and the same.

59 See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 457-468.

intrinsically opt to always have correct beliefs and beneficial desires – even without an external factor informing him of this. Therefore, there is clearly within man an indication of a *fiṭra* that wishes good for its possessor.[60]

Another indication of the existence of the *fiṭra*, argues Ibn Taymiyya, is that man yearns for higher ideals. Bodily pleasures and animalistic instincts do not make up the sum total of humanity. Even though man has been conditioned to love food, drink and many other matters, the *fiṭra* requires man to go beyond these sensual pleasures, for the soul will continue to yearn for something to worship and a higher goal to strive to, and something to find complete comfort in.[61] In fact, the soul's need for spiritual sustenance is greater than the body's need for food, and this need is a part of the *fiṭra* that God created mankind with.[62] This spiritual sustenance that the soul seeks is the knowledge and worship of God.[63] For Ibn Taymiyya, the existence of the *fiṭra* is manifested in man's spiritual needs and psychological desires.

Lastly, Ibn Taymiyya argues that a clear manifestation of the existence of the *fiṭra* is the fact that man turns to God at times of need. Even if, during times of ease, man ignores this urge, during times of distress, his *fiṭra* forces him to call out to his Creator for help.[64] And this is a phenomenon that can be witnessed amongst all nations and peoples still upon their *fiṭra*, from the Bedouins, old ladies, and children, and from the Jews, Christians, Muslims, and pagans.[65]

Now that its existence is proven, the question arises as to what the *fiṭra* represents.

For Ibn Taymiyya, there is an inherent, divinely-ordained relationship between the *fiṭra* and the religion of Islam. The essence of the *fiṭra* is the essence of Islam, meaning submission to Allah. It is for this reason, he points out, that on occasion the term is used by the classical scholars synonymously with the actual religion of Islam.[66] However, Ibn Taymiyya stresses that the *fiṭra* is *not* synonymous with the religion of Islam, meaning the detailed theology and laws of the *Sharīʿa*.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that some of the earlier scholars interpreted the *fiṭra* as being the religion of Islam, and this interpretation has many evidences for it.[67] For example, some narrations mentioned "Every child is born on the religion (*milla*)…"[68] Also, if the meaning of the *fiṭra* had not been the religion of Islam, why would the Companions ask after hearing it, "What about the children of the pagans?"[69] And the Prophet mentioned that his parents "*…make him into a Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian*," not *"…make him into a Muslim."*[70] Lastly, the Prophet compared a child to a fully-formed, unbranded animal, and this demonstrates that changes occur to the *fiṭra* after the child is born; such changes can only be the child's religion.[71]

This does not, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, imply that when a child is born, he already believes in the religion of Islam and professes faith in God;[72] no doubt, God causes children to be born without knowing anything, as He himself mentions in Q. 16:78.[73] Rather, the *fiṭra* is the purity of the heart, and its willingness to accept the truth,

60 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 458.
61 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 10, pp. 72-3.
62 *DT*, vol. 9, p. 374.
63 N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 67.
64 He quotes a number of verses from the Qurʾān that mentions this phenomenon. See: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129.
65 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 12.
66 As was demonstrated in the previous section, this was the position of al-Ṭabarī and a handful of early Sunnī scholars.
67 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 22, p. 539.
68 Meaning: some versions of the ḥadīth have the word 'religion' instead of the word *fiṭra*, thus indicating their synonymous usage.
69 In the version of al-Bukhārī that has preceded, the Companions asked, after hearing the Prophet say that every child is born on the *fiṭra*, "But what of the children of the pagans?" Ibn Taymiyya infers from this that the Companions understood the *fiṭra* to indicate the religion of Islam, hence their question regarding the children of the pagans.
70 Meaning: the ḥadīth mentions three other faiths that a child born on the *fiṭra* might potentially be corrupted into, yet it does not mention the religion of Islam. Hence, the *fiṭra* (at least for these scholars) is synonymous with Islam.
71 *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 371-2. He then quotes half a dozen authorities from the *salaf* who held this position; see *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 373-7.
72 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 460.
73 The verse reads, "*And God has caused you to come out of the wombs of your mothers, not knowing anything, and He has blessed you with hearing, and sight, and intellect – little thanks do ye give!*" Q. 16:78.

such that if it were left to itself and not corrupted, it would have no other path except that of Islam.[74] In another passage, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the *fiṭra* is 'general Islam', meaning, the acknowledgment of God, and loving and worshipping Him.[75]

Ibn Taymiyya is fully aware that it is impossible to argue that *fiṭra* provides elaborate knowledge of the religion. He states that the *fiṭra* knows matters in a generic manner, and the *Sharīʿa* explains and elaborates on this generic knowledge. Thus the *Sharīʿa* is able to inform of matters that the *fiṭra* in and of itself would not be capable of deriving. For example, the *fiṭra* informs one that God is above and transcendent to the creation; but it is the Qurʾān that informs man that God possesses a Throne and has risen over it.[76] The *fiṭra* informs mankind of God's existence and some of His Attributes, but it is the Sacred Text that informs him on the details of this.[77]

In one tradition, Ibn Taymiyya states, the Prophet compared the *fiṭra* to milk, and this dovetails perfectly with the tradition of every child being born on the *fiṭra*, for every child intrinsically wants milk and yearns to drink it from his mother. Similarly, every child will yearn to know God and worship Him, unless something prevents this from occurring.[78]

Where the *fiṭra* is interpreted to be the actual religion of Islam, there are a few legal issues that need to be resolved, and Ibn Taymiyya touches upon some of these in his writings. Of these issues is: what is the status of a child born to non-Muslim parents and who subsequently dies in infancy – is the child considered a 'Muslim' for the purposes of inheritance and burial rites?[79] And there is also the theological issue of the fate of such a child in the next life – will he go to Heaven or Hell?[80] Or if a child is orphaned, and his parents were non-Muslims, should the child be raised as a Muslim, or according to the religion of his parents?[81] Lastly, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that while technically it is conceivable that someone is forced to acknowledge Islam (i.e., forced to outwardly convert), it is inconceivable that the *fiṭra* is forced into acknowledging God.[82]

Since the *fiṭra* is 'general Islam'[83] for Ibn Taymiyya, it follows that it transcends the message of any one prophet, and in fact embraces all of the prophetic messages and Divine Revelations. This is precisely what Ibn Taymiyya posits.

He writes, "The message of the prophets, all of them, is in conformity to the *fiṭra* and cannot be in opposition to it."[84] In fact, the role of the prophets and God's purpose in sending them is in order to purify the *fiṭra* from the corruptions of Satan.[85] Prophets are sent by God to perfect (*takmīl*) the *fiṭra* and solidify it.[86]

Ibn Taymiyya mentions that the existence of a prophet is not necessary to bring out what the *fiṭra* has, just like the presence of food is not necessary for a person to feel hungry. No doubt, he says, the presence of food might elicit hunger, but hunger will exist even in the absence of food. Similarly, the knowledge of God and a desire to submit to Him exists in the soul regardless of extraneous knowledge. And this is the *ḥanīfiyya* that the Qurʾān calls mankind to.[87]

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74 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 247.
75 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 16, p. 205.
76 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 45.
77 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 308.
78 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 448.
79 Since a detailed discussion of this point is not relevant to the this section, suffice to point out here that Ibn Taymiyya does not give such a child the legal status of a Muslim. See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 361-2.
80 Ibn Taymiyya quotes some positions that say that all such children are going to Heaven, or that they are going to Hell, but then concludes that such children will be tested, as adults, on Judgment Day, based on a tradition of the Prophet. See *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 398-401 and pp. 433-436
81 See *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 390-393. Ibn Taymiyya follows the position that in such a case, the child is raised as a Muslim.
82 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā* vol. 8, p. 49.
83 Meaning: the Islam of all the prophets, which includes believing in God, submitting to Him, and living morally upright lives in accordance with the basic morality that the *fiṭra* entails, as the next section will show.
84 *DT*, vol. 1, p. 133.
85 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 132 – here he is quoting from al-Shahrastānī. Also see *DT*, vol. 7, p. 400.
86 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā* vol. 5, p. 260; see also *ibid*., vol. 8, p. 313, vol. 10, p. 135, vol. 10, p. 466
87 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 451. Also see: F. Griffel, "The Harmony of Natural Law and *Sharīʿa*," p. 43, 46.

God's Revelation, says Ibn Taymiyya, nourishes what is inherent in the *fiṭra*, and affirms and completes it. Therefore, each and every commandment of God, in fact the entire Revelation, affirms and completes the internal *fiṭra*.[88]

Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fiṭra* is one of the ways that God has blessed mankind, and it is an inherent and internal blessing. But God has also graced man with external blessings that conform with the *fiṭra*, most importantly the prophets and the Divine Books.[89]

Therefore, for Ibn Taymiyya, God created man with an inherent knowledge of Him, and an innate capacity to love Him and submit to Him, and then, out of His Divine Mercy, He complemented that capacity by sending prophets and revealing Books, all of which brings out this knowledge and affirms these tendencies. The *fiṭra* and the *Sharīʿa*, for Ibn Taymiyya, are like a seed and nourishing soil: both are needed in order for one to be a Muslim, and both complement and feed off of one another.

It is by now obvious that of primary importance for Ibn Taymiyya was the epistemological role that the *fiṭra* played, and in particular, in the knowledge of the existence of God.

For Ibn Taymiyya, acknowledging the existence of God is a matter that is ingrained in the *fiṭra*, as evidenced by the ḥadīth, "Every child is born on the *fiṭra*."[90] Since belief in God is already ingrained in the heart, this clearly demonstrates the speciousness of the Ashʿarī position holding that 'the first obligation upon the one of legal age is to rationalize (*wujūb al-naẓar*) [God's existence],' for there is no need to rationally prove what is already known by necessity.[91]

In fact, the knowledge of God's existence is so soundly incorporated into the *fiṭra* that it is more apparent than even basic mathematical or physical facts, such as the knowledge of one being half of two, or the knowledge of the impossibility of the same object being present in two different places at the same time. This is because some people might be unaware of such mathematical and physical knowledge, yet it is inconceivable that any *fiṭra* would turn away from a knowledge of the Divine.[92]

Another illustration of this fact for Ibn Taymiyya is the claim that the existence of God was already known to those whom the Qurʾān addressed; hence there was no need to evidence His existence.[93] That is why, Ibn Taymiyya states, the Qurʾān asks rhetorically, "Is there any doubt regarding God?" [Q. 14:10].[94] And there is no doubt that a created being could, if need be, prove the existence of a Creator from the fact of his own createdness, yet even before such a need arises, the existence of a perfect Creator is known from the *fiṭra*, and this knowledge is ingrained, necessary, and obvious (*maghrūra fi-l-fiṭra, ḍarūriyya badīhīyya awwaliyya*).[95]

It is crucial to note that Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes this *fiṭra*-knowledge as being inherent and ingrained – it is not deduced, or inferred, or acquired through introspection, but rather it simply exists, placed there by God Himself.[96]

Responding to the complicated premises upon which the Proof of God from the Createdness of Accidents is built, he writes that the *fiṭra* informs every created, sentient being that it is created, and hence there is a Creator, without the need of discussing cosmological concepts such as 'accidents' and 'possibilities'.[97] Just as every person,

88 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 45, and vol. 10, p. 135.
89 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 8, p. 205.
90 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 6.
91 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 328.
92 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, pp. 15-16.
93 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 71.
94 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129.
95 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 324. Also see *DT*, vol. 7, p. 300, where he says that affirming God's existence is '*…fiṭrī ḍarūrī*.'
96 W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 56. The question arises whether this knowledge is *a priori* or not. Hallaq seems to think so (*ibid*., p. 54). However, Griffel feels that this *fiṭra*-based knowledge only comes after inspection of and exposure to one's surrounds; see: F. Griffel, "*The Harmony of Natural Law and Shariʿa in Islamist Theology*" p. 46. I believe that a case can be made for either interpretation. In some of the quotes that I have compiled, Ibn Taymiyya clearly suggests that the *fiṭra* analyzes one's surroundings and concludes there is a God, which would make knowledge of God *a posteriori*. Yet, in others, he seems to suggest that the *fiṭra* inherently and innately supplies this knowledge without any need for introspection.
97 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 10.

when he see some writing or a building, knows that there must have been a writer or a builder, similarly, the *fiṭra* inherently informs man of the existence of the Creator simply from the observation of creation. And this is why even a young child is aware of this fact, before studying any of the *kalām* proofs for God's Existence.[98]

In fact, Ibn Taymiyya states, the very theologians who derived such proofs already believed in God because of the *fiṭra*, even before they brought forth such proofs, and this is a matter that they themselves must acknowledge to be true. This pre-cognition proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that certainty in God's Existence is not dependant on these proofs, regardless of whether one claims them to be valid or not.[99]

So strong is this *fiṭra*-belief in God, writes Ibn Taymiyya, that even those who outwardly denied God's existence – such as Pharaoh – knew from their *fiṭra* that He existed.[100]

But this does not imply that belief in God stems solely from the *fiṭra*: belief is both *fiṭra*-based and faith-based. And the *fiṭra*-based belief, which in essence is recognizing His Existence, is ingrained in a person, and not in need of external evidence. It is the deepest-rooted of all knowledge, and the most solid of all facts, and the foundation of all other foundations.[101]

Crucially, for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fiṭra* does not only affirm a generic belief in a God, but also informs one of some of the main Attributes of God. It informs him of monotheism: the fact that the Creator must be One – not two, nor a plurality. Ibn Taymiyya claims that a belief in a plurality of creators is something that the *fiṭra* knows to be illogical and nonsensical.[102]

Additionally, the *fiṭra* affirms each and every perfection for God. For Ibn Taymiyya, "…all that the heart intrinsically admires and finds to be perfect, the *fiṭra* informs one that to God belongs this perfection in the most ideal manner."[103] Thus, the *fiṭra* informs man that God knows, sees and hears all things, open and secret,[104] and that the One who is all-powerful is more perfect than the one who is not.[105] The pure *fiṭra* informs man that because of God's perfect nature, He is worthy of being loved, obeyed and worshipped.[106] It also informs one of the Perfection of God's Attributes,[107] that He must have Divine Attributes worthy of Him,[108] and that He is Generous and Munificent, and responds to the prayer of the one in distress, and helps and aids him.[109] It is for this reason that Abraham was able to challenge his father's idolatry by asking him, "O father! Why do you worship that which cannot hear, see or benefit you in the least?" [Q. 18:42][110]

In another passage, Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fiṭra* bestows on man three matters: knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*), the feeling of loving Him (*maḥabba*), and realizing that He alone is the most beloved of all beings, which is the essence of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). And all of this is embodied in the testimony of faith: *la ilāha illa Allāh*.[111] Hence, the *fiṭra* incorporates both belief in God's existence and turning to Him in submission.[112]

98 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 119. Also see: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 124, where he mentions that it is known by the *fiṭra* every change (*ḥādith*) in nature must have a Being that caused it (*muḥdith*).
99 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, pp. 461-2.
100 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 39.
101 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 72.
102 *DT*, vol. 9, p. 375. In *DT*, vol. 9, pp. 362-365 he gives a more detailed argument for the fact that God must be One, and then claims that this argument is ingrained within the *fiṭra*. He states that all changes that occur indicate that there must be One Being who is capable of bringing about that change. If there were two, then both of them could not bring about the exact same change, else one of them would not be effective.
103 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 73.
104 *DT*, vol. 10, p. 76.
105 *DT*, vol. 10, p. 153.
106 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 85.
107 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, 73.
108 *DT*, vol. 10, p. 154.
109 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 85.
110 *DT*, vol. 10, p. 155.
111 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 344-5; also see *ibid.*, vol. 16, pp. 350-1, and *DT*, vol. 7, p. 427, and *DT*, vol. 8, p. 449.
112 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 6.

The *fiṭra* also causes one to venerate God and imbibes a desire to worship Him. He writes, "…and the *fiṭra* of His servants are ingrained (*majbūla*) to love Him, but there are those whose *fiṭra* has been corrupted."[113] The *fiṭra* causes the heart to turn to God alone, and worship and love Him.[114] For Ibn Taymiyya, the Qurʾān shows that all peoples, from all societies, turn to God at times of need. The *fiṭra* forces one to seek help from his Creator, and call out to Him at times of distress.[115]

Ibn Taymiyya believes that the heart is intrinsically conditioned (*mafṭūra*) to always be in need of its Lord and Creator,[116] and this knowledge always leads a pure *fiṭra* toward action that will permit him to connect it to his Lord, such as worship, submission, and prayer.[117]

Ultimately, for Ibn Taymiyya, the best and most thorough proof for the existence of God is the knowledge of Him that each and every soul has, even before it comes into this world. This knowledge is neither derived nor inferred; rather, it is implanted, inborn, necessary and immediate. So powerful and efficacious is this knowledge that many who verbally deny God internally know of His existence, and only those who have corrupted their *fiṭras* need waste time with speculative proofs and syllogisms that attempt to prove God's existence.[118]

In light of the previous section, it is clear that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fiṭra* as being more than just knowledge – not only does it bestow on man necessary knowledge, it also bestows emotions and desires as well.[119] Ibn Taymiyya claims that the *fiṭra* comprises both the internal knowledge and the capacity of action (*al-quwwa al-ʿilmiyya al-ʿamaliyya*) needed to submit to God, as long as no external factor prevents it from doing so.[120] So the very desire and motivation to love God and worship Him stems from the *fiṭra*, just as the desire to eat, drink and procreate stems from the body.[121]

Also, for Ibn Taymiyya, it is the *fiṭra* that causes man to want to attain the truth. Uncorrupted intellects (*al-ʿuqūl al-salīma*) are innately created (*mafṭūra*) to acknowledge the truth as long as there are no impeding factors.[122] The *fiṭra* intrinsically loves the truth and rejects falsehood:[123] a pure *fiṭra* will, in fact, be repulsed by blatant falsehoods,[124] and no one with a pure *fiṭra* will be convinced by the specious arguments of any who oppose the truth.[125] In another place, Ibn Taymiyya writes that a person with a pure *fiṭra* will necessarily follow the truth and love it once it is presented to him; however, if it has been corrupted, then it will not accept the truth.[126]Crucially for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fiṭra* entails not only an absence of false beliefs, but also a willingness to accept correct beliefs.[127]

Ibn Taymiyya also believes that the *fiṭra* informs man of the basis of morality – such as being truthful, and honest, and loving one's relatives.[128] The *fiṭra* has within it the capability to deter one from telling lies, and the

113 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 67. On the next page, he writes that this love of God increases with the purity of the *fiṭra*, and decreases the more corrupted it is. See: *DT*, vol. 6, p. 68.
114 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 135.
115 He quotes a number of verses from the Qurʾān that mentions this phenomenon. See: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129, vol. 6, p. 12.
116 *Majmūʾ al-*Fatāwā, vol. 1, p. 47.
117 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 14, pp. 31-2.
118 See as well: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," pp. 55-7.
119 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 425.
120 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 247.
121 *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 449-450. See: N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 67.
122 *DT*, vol. 1, p. 377.
123 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 383, *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 7, p. 528, vol. 10, p. 474. Also see: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 55.
124 *DT*, vol. 4, p. 207.
125 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 234 – here he is approvingly quotating from Ibn Rushd.
126 *Majmūʾ al-*Fatāwā, vol. 15, p. 240.
127 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 245; also *ibid*. vol. 14, p. 296; N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 134.
128 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 20, p. 121.

desire to preach the truth to others.[129] It is for this reason that certain practices that dictate personal hygiene are mentioned in ḥadīth texts as being part and parcel of the *fiṭra*.[130]

Ibn Taymiyya writes, "Souls are naturally disposed (*majbūla*) to love justice and its supporters, and to hate injustice and its supporters; this love, which is in the *fiṭra*, is what is meant for [justice] to be good."[131]

A key issue regarding Ibn Taymiyya's theory of the *fiṭra* is its relationship to and interaction with the human intellect (*ʿaql*). Did Ibn Taymiyya view the *fiṭra* as being a part of the intellect, or as another type of rationality that works in tandem with the intellect, or as a supra-rational human faculty independent of the *ʿaql*? The answer to this question is not a simple one, for quotations can be found that support all three of these scenarios.[132]

It is obvious, from what has preceded that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fiṭra* as a primary source of knowledge regarding the Existence of God, and of morality.[133] Hence, clearly, the *fiṭra* has a key epistemological role. But, in contrast to the human mind, which does not provide any necessary knowledge, the *fiṭra* bestows necessary knowledge.[134]

Ibn Taymiyya writes that the claim some people make that that a child is born without any knowledge, like a *tabula rasa*, is a manifestly false claim.[135] The knowledge supplied by the *fiṭra* is firmly ingrained in the character and imbedded in the soul (*thubūt fi al-jibilla*, *maghrūra fi-l-nufūs*); whoever attempts to rid himself of that knowledge will not be able to completely eliminate it from himself.[136] This knowledge cannot help but be known to all people, for in fact "…they are compelled towards it, and they cannot possibly repel it from themselves."[137]

God has implanted knowledge in the heart of every person, knowledge that co-exists with a pure, uncorrupted *fiṭra*.[138] The knowledge that is ingrained in the *fiṭra* is so self-evident, Ibn Taymiyya writes, that sometimes when one attempts to prove or define it, this further complicates or obfuscates the matter.[139]

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129 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 76.

130 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 21, p. 306. The ten matters mentioned in Prophetic traditions as being part of the *fiṭra* are: trimming the mustache, allowing the beard to grow, brushing the teeth, washing the mouth, blowing the nose with water, trimming the nails, washing in between the finger joints, plucking the underarm hair, shaving the pubic hair, and circumcision.

131 *Al-Radd ʿalā al-manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 423; taken from Ovamir, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought*, p. 224.

132 W. Hallaq posits some of these same scenarios, and is himself somewhat ambivalent with regards to this issue. He claims (p. 54) that Ibn Taymiyya's "…position may even be construed as contradictory", and then later (p. 66), "But [Ibn Taymiyya's] concept of *fiṭra* is highly problematic, lending itself to two possible interpretations. On the one hand, *fiṭra* represents a knowledge of God inborn in men upon birth, and on the other, it represents a medium for knowing the existence of God through the *necessary* sense perception of the Signs [of God]." He then claims that the first response would be circular, wherease the second would make the *fiṭra* an empirical source of reasoning. See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," pp. 66-7.

Nurcholish Madjid, in his *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, (pp. 85-7), argues that the two terms (i.e., *fiṭra* and *ʿaql*) operate in a synomous meaning for Ibn Taymiyya; however, he does not cite any quotations that demonstrate this.

Jon Hoover, in his *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (pp. 39-44), realizes that these two terms are 'closely linked' but claims that '…it is difficult to pinpoint the exact relationship.' He states that at times Ibn Taymiyya uses the *fiṭra* as synonymous with *ʿaql*, but also uses either to be the origin of the other. He surmises that both of these two terms are functionally equivalent sources for attaining true knowledge of God's existence. While my own conclusions are somewhat similar to those of Hoover, I do believe that certain important nuances have not been fully flushed out in Hoover's brief look at the *fiṭra*. Most significantly, he does not comment on the important notion of the *ʿaql* sometimes correcting, and sometimes being corrected by the *fiṭra*, and vice-versa. This clearly shows that the two entities are separate, albeit related.

Ovamir Anjum also has a brief discussion on the role of *fiṭra* and its relationship to *ʿaql*, in his *Political Law and Community in Islamic Thought*, pp. 220-7. I believe his views mirror much of what I have written, although of course the context of his dicussion is more relevant to political theory and ethical truths.

I hope that in this section, it is demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyya's arguments, while potentially problematic, can actually be reconciled if it is understood that the *fiṭra* is a human faculty that is both an intuitive source of knowledge and a rational faculty.

133 Also see: B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 26.

134 He writes that the Qurʾān (Q. 16:78), does indicate that a child is born without having any knowledge. See: *DT*, vol. 8, p. 460.

135 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwa*, 4, p. 243.

136 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 105.

137 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 276. Hallaq writes, "The knowledge embodied in the *fiṭra* simple exists there, and its ultimate source is no other than God." See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 55.

138 *DT*, vol. 5, p. 312.

139 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 319.

However, not all knowledge derived from the *fiṭra* possesses the same level of certainty, for certain facts are more apparent than others.[140]

The knowledge of the *fiṭra* is an affirmed and necessary knowledge, whereas the knowledge of the mind is negated (in a newborn at least), and is an acquired knowledge. Therefore, it appears that for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fiṭra* itself cannot acquire more knowledge.

It is not just factual knowledge that the *fiṭra* endows on humans. At times, Ibn Taymiyya appears to use the term to be synonymous with what may be termed 'common-sense'[141] for example, that 'one is half of two'.[142] He states that many facts that are supported by correct rational analogies are already known from the pure, uncorrupted *fiṭra*.[143] In fact, correct analogies are a part of the *fiṭra* itself.[144] Furthermore, many of the premises of logic (*manṭiq*) are know from the *fiṭra* without the need of understanding complex syllogisms or sophisticated terminologies.[145]

Ibn Taymiyya writes the *fiṭra* is only one of two ways that God has blessed mankind, for by the *fiṭra* alone mankind would worship and love God, as long as the *fiṭra* is not corrupted. The second source of God's blessings on mankind includes the external sources of guidance, such as the intellect, and the prophets, and the Books that God revealed.[146] This is particularly interesting in that Ibn Taymiyya seems to place the *fiṭra* in a category of its own, and then equates the intellect, and the Prophets, and Divine Books, as being in the same category of supra-*fiṭra* knowledge. He also explicitly describes the *fiṭra* as being 'the Divine Law', the '*salafī* way' and 'rational, indubitable proofs.'[147] Elsewhere, he describes it with adjectives such as 'rationally sound', and 'readily available' (*al-fiṭriyya al-ʿaqliyya al-sharʿiyya al-qarība al-ṣaḥīḥa*).[148]

On another occasion, he seems to suggest that man's intellect is itself a part of the *fiṭra*.[149] This clearly indicates a partial or even complete overlap between *ʿaql* and *fiṭra*.

True intellect, Ibn Taymiyya writes, is supported by the *fiṭra*, and the *fiṭra* bestows knowledge that the intellect knows to be sound.[150] Hence, the best proofs are proofs that are both *fiṭra* and *ʿaql* based. That is why God sends Prophets with rational proofs; in order to guide the *fiṭra* back to its pure state.[151] Valid evidences need to be both rational and *fiṭra*-based ('*ʿaqliyya fiṭriyya*').[152]

Yet, there can at times be a conflict between the *fiṭra* and the *ʿaql*, and when this is the case, it is the *fiṭra* that acts as an internal mechanism to check the validity of the intellect. He writes: "So correct rational thought is that which can be understood by pure and proper *fiṭra*s – those that have not had their capacity to understand corrupted."[153] The rationalists themselves always use premises that other rationalists contradict, yet the followers of the truth rely on rational premises that people of sound *fiṭra* know to be true ('*fiṭar al-ʿuqalāʾ al-salīmī-l-fiṭra*').[154]

Thus, for Ibn Taymiyya, there is an inherent relationship between the intellect and the *fiṭra*, for a corruption of one necessitates a corruption of the other, and the purity of one implies the purity of the other. However, the corruption of the *fiṭra* is more difficult and occurs after passing through greater impediments; it is

140 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 18.
141 As in *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6,p. 571 and vol. 9, pp. 143-4,
142 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 221.
143 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 140.
144 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 29, 124.
145 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 25.
146 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 8, p. 205.
147 *DT*, vol. 4, p. 163. See also *DT*, vol. 5, p. 61, where he equates the *fiṭra* with 'rationality', 'the Texts' and 'what has been narrated (i.e., from the *salaf*)'.
148 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 314.
149 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 38 – the phrase is *ʿuqūl banī Adam allatī faṭarahum Allahu ʿalayhā*.
150 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 103.
151 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 242.
152 *DT*, vol. 4, p. 279. He also uses a similar phrase in *DT*, vol. 6, p. 14 (see footnote).
153 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.
154 *DT*, vol. 4, p. 287.

for this reason that many people of intellect will discover, through their *fiṭra*, that their rational positions were invalid.[155]

The locus of the *fiṭra* appears to be the heart, not intellect, for Ibn Taymiyya seems to ascribe it to the heart when he writes, "And the heart, by its very *fiṭra*, is aware of that."[156]

After all of the above-mentioned references, the question still remains: what is one to make of the relationship between the *ʿaql* and the *fiṭra*? It appears that there is some ambiguity in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, but, when one examines these collectively, we can extrapolate a salvageable working relationship.

Perhaps the greatest source of confusion seems to be the desire to classify Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fiṭra* as either being a receptacle for knowledge or for rational thought. This is particularly problematic as Ibn Taymiyya, quite clearly, views it as incorporating both of these elements, and even more. Just as man's faculties operate in tandem with one another (for example, the eyes and ears co-operate together with the intellect to assess, analyze and digest information) so too, the *fiṭra* and the *ʿaql* work together, sometimes analyzing or supplying the same information, and sometimes analyzing or supplying different facts.

Ibn Taymiyya views the *fiṭra* as being an extra-rational source of both knowledge *and* reflection. In other words, not only does the *fiṭra* provide immediate, necessary, and efficacious knowledge (for example, knowledge of the existence of God), it may also be used as a *means of reflection* that is at a higher order of empirical value than that of the human intellect. The *fiṭra* also depends on and feeds off the intellect, for the presence of a sound intellect is necessary in order for the *fiṭra* to digest information. However, when one's logical reasoning and intellectual conclusions appear to be shaky, it is the *fiṭra* that can be resorted to to corroborate and validate the human *ʿaql*.

Interestingly, from Ibn Taymiyya's writings we can also extrapolate a spiritual connection between the *fiṭra* and the *ʿaql*, for a corruption of one will necessarily result in a corruption of the other, and the rectification of one will result in the rectification of the other.

To summarize, it appears that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fiṭra* as an independent faculty that God has blessed man with – one that works in tandem with the *ʿaql* and yet is more deeply embedded in man's psyche, and consequently more difficult to corrupt. The knowledge of the *fiṭra* is necessary (*ḍarūrī*), whereas the knowledge of the *ʿaql* is acquired (*muktasab*). Additionally, the knowledge embedded in the *fiṭra*, while not as detailed as the *ʿaql*, is more immediate than any knowledge the intellect can derive, yet the *ʿaql*'s power of reasoning is superior to that of the *fiṭra*, for the *fiṭra* can only analyze the most immediate and basic facts – those related to God, His Divine Attributes, and the broad bases of morality. True *fiṭra* supports correct *ʿaql*, and correct *ʿaql* likewise is affirmed via the *fiṭra*.

An extremely fascinating component of the *fiṭra* that Ibn Taymiyya mentions time and again is that of the nourishment and corruption of the *fiṭra*. Once again, this notion reconciles perfectly with Ibn Taymiyya's overall theory of the *fiṭra*. For Ibn Taymiyya, the nourishment of the *fiṭra* is achieved by believing in, submitting to, and obeying the prophetic message, and its corruption occurs by rejecting, disobeying, or not acting upon the prophetic message.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fiṭra* is in need of sustenance in order to flourish, and its sustenance must be from the same genus as its own composition. Hence, the *fiṭra* needs to know and act upon the *Sharīʿa* in order to become perfect.[157] In another place, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that the *fiṭra* is "…strengthened

155 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 281. Hallaq seems to miss this point entirely. He claims that, for Ibn Taymiyya, a rational proof is not as certain as *fiṭra* proofs, but Ibn Taymiyya only allows it since "…any attempt at reaching knowledge about God's existence is certaintly better than none." See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 57.

156 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 10.

157 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā* vol. 10, p. 146.

by the reality of faith and the light of the Qurʾān".[158] Consciousness of God (*taqwā*) also protects the *fiṭra*.[159] And the more the *fiṭra* grows and flourishes, the more it will benefit in terms of what it can bestow upon its owner.[160]

Just as it can grow, the *fiṭra* can also be overridden and silenced via false arguments, or following one's customs, or blindly following those in authority – as an example, Ibn Taymiyya writes, a Christian will subdue (*yaqhur*) his own *fiṭra* when he believes that Jesus the son of Mary is divine.[161]

The *fiṭra* may also be corrupted by a lack of knowledge and implementation of the sayings of the Prophet, and by deceitful speech.[162] Ibn Taymiyya claims that when an innocent neophyte begins to question the scholars of *kalām* regarding something that his *fiṭra* does not correspond with, he will be mocked and told that his intelligence is not up to par for such matters. Feeling intimidated, such a student will force himself to accept a position that his own *fiṭra* is uncomfortable with, until his religion, intelligence and *fiṭra* are all corrupted.[163]

The *fiṭra* can be corrupted, or eliminated in totality, or be present in some limited form and yet not benefit from evidences shown to it, just as a blind man may have eyes which do not see,[164] or a person with weak eyes cannot see properly.[165] In fact, Ibn Taymiyya writes, "…a corrupted *fiṭra* might not be able to recognize the truth, or presume falsehood to be the truth."[166] Worse, claims Ibn Taymiyya: a complete corruption of the *fiṭra* leads one to be Satanic in nature.[167]

Yet, even if the *fiṭra* of some segments of mankind can be corrupted, the *fiṭra* of the masses cannot all unite in denying anything that is known by necessity. It is true, concedes Ibn Taymiyya, that it is possible for large groups to consider falsehood to be valid if they all agree or are taught to agree with something that is contrary to the truth.[168] But even if one group of mankind has had their *fiṭra* corrupted, another group will be found whose *fiṭra* is pure – all of mankind, Ibn Taymiyya assures us, cannot corrupt the *fiṭra* simultaneously.[169]

Ibn Taymiyya informs us that even a corrupt *fiṭra* can still be of benefit. The *fiṭra* is so powerful that many leaders of false beliefs realize that their beliefs are incorrect because of the overriding nature of the *fiṭra* to correct such beliefs.[170] Ibn Taymiyya claims that even those who outwardly denied God's existence – such as Pharaoh – knew from their *fiṭra* that God existed.[171]

If the *fiṭra* of an individual has been corrupted, not all hope is lost. For Ibn Taymiyya, a corrupted *fiṭra* can be rectified and brought back to its pure state if the heart is cleansed of those factors that corrupted it.[172] The primary method of purifying the *fiṭra*, Ibn Taymiyya says, is to expose it to the Qurʾān, for the Qurʾān has in it the cure for all diseases of the heart and soul.[173] When the *fiṭra* is corrupted, it is in need of correct evidences.[174]

Another way to remedy a corrupted *fiṭra* is through examining rational proofs and using sound reason. The uncorrupted mind can be used to correct a corrupted *fiṭra*. It is for this reason that the evidences that God

158 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā,* vol. 10, p. 474.
159 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā,* vol. 15, p. 438.
160 *DT*, vol. 8, p.383.
161 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 272.
162 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā,* vol. 4, p. 141.
163 See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 295-6.
164 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā,* vol. 16, p. 344.
165 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.
166 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.
167 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 21.
168 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 271.
169 *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.
170 *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 376-7.
171 *DT*, vol. 8, p. 39.
172 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā* vol. 10, p. 135. Note that W. Hallaq appears to have overlooked Ibn Taymiyya's quotes where he explicitly says that a corrupted *fiṭra* can be nourished back to the truth; Hallaq writes, incorrectly, that Ibn Taymiyya claims, "…once a *fiṭra* becomes corrupt it has no way of regaining its original, sound condition." See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 57.
173 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.
174 *Majmūʾ al-Fatāwā*, vol 6, p. 73.

uses are not just faith-based, they are also rational, for such evidences can guide the *fiṭra* back to its original disposition.[175]

To summarize then, Ibn Taymiyya views the *fiṭra* as being perfected and nourished via belief in the message of the prophets and acceptance of Divine Revelation; by piety and God-consciousness; and by correct rational thought. And it is corrupted by doubts; the following of one's desires; and by the evil influences of a corrupt society or upbringing.

It is pertinent to note that, for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fiṭra*, the *ʿaql* and the Qurʾān appear to work in tandem, all guiding the person to the truth, and correcting one or both of the others if they are corrupt.[176]

Now that various facets related to the *fiṭra* have been discussed, we can cautiously attempt to extrapolate Ibn Taymiyya's overall view of the epistemological framework of the *fiṭra*.

Ibn Taymiyya makes the case for the *fiṭra* being a faculty that validates external truths, including *rational* truths and *textual* truths. He gives the paradigm of the *fiṭra* in its acknowledgment of the truth as that of eyesight and the Sun: every healthy eye would be able to see the Sun as long as the eye is not covered up. False beliefs (*viz.*, a corruption of the *fiṭra*) are like veils that cover one's eyes and block the truth from reaching it.[177] In another analogy, the *fiṭra* is the eyesight that needs to be aided by the light of the Qurʾān in order to view the truth as it should appear. Ignorance is darkness, hence in a state of ignorance the *fiṭra* might not be able to see the truth. In a third analogy, a corrupted *fiṭra* is likened to a sick body that finds something sweet to be bitter, or a weak eye that might see one object as being two. In each of these examples, the role of the *fiṭra* is to verify what is clearly true – be it the brightness of the Sun or the taste of a delicacy. The *fiṭra* is compared to the faculty of eyesight or taste – a receptacle for analyzing types of information, processing that information, and then supplying the person with a meaningful and correct assessment regarding this information.

For Ibn Taymiyya, part of the information that the *fiṭra* must identify is the truthfulness of a prophet and the validity of a Divine Message: merely by being exposed to either of these matters, a pure *fiṭra* can assess and recognize this claim to be genuine or false. Additionally, every single rational proof must, eventually, be validated by knowledge residing in the *fiṭra* – a knowledge that God has intrinsically placed in the hearts of men. In fact, every *derived* (*muktasab*) knowledge must eventually be validated by *inherent* (*ḍarūrī*) knowledge.[178]

Therefore, the *fiṭra* is essential in deciding which group's position is correct, in light of the fact that each group claims to be using an understanding of a Divine Text, or rational arguments, to derive the truth, and yet each group refutes the other groups positing claims that are contradicted by them. Since no one group can claim authoritative intellectual prowess over the other, there is no alternative but to resort to the pure, undistorted *fiṭra* – the *fiṭra* that has not been corrupted by false beliefs or desires.[179] That is because the people of true *fiṭra* can never say anything that contradicts clear rationality, and therefore they can be used as a criterion to resolve the theological disputes between the groups.[180]

The obvious question that arises here is: who will be the criterion to decide what is the unadulterated *fiṭra*? For Ibn Taymiyya, true Muslims, meaning the *Ahl al-Sunna*, are the ones who maintain the *fiṭra* in its purest form.[181] In fact, any correct beliefs found in those who have turned away from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth is merely due to the fact that they have followed their true *fiṭra* in those beliefs.[182]

175 See: *DT*, vol. 4, p. 279, vol. 7, p. 38, vol. 8, p. 103, and *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 242.
176 This triad will be elaborated upon in the Conclusion of this dissertation.
177 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 247.
178 *DT*, vol. 3, p. 309.
179 *DT*, vol. 1, p. 168.
180 *DT*, vol. 6, p. 145, and *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.
181 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 12, p. 462.
182 *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 13, p. 167.

In discussing the relationship between the *fiṭra*, the intellect, and the Sacred Texts, it is quite clear as we piece together Ibn Taymiyya's thought that the *fiṭra* is an independent faculty that, epistemologically at least, is a subset of an intersection of both correct *ʿaql* and the Divine *Sharīʿa* – meaning, everything in the *fiṭra* may be derived from correct reasoning, and from the message of the Prophets, and the *fiṭra* yields nothing more than what a pure intellect and God's Revelation would contain. Yet, most importantly, the reverse relationship is really what is at stake for Ibn Taymiyya: it is the *fiṭra* that validates the message of a true prophet, and it is the *fiṭra* that verifies what constitutes correct rational inquiry. And the perfect harmony of the *fiṭra*, *ʿaql* and *Sharīʿa* may only occur, not just within the religion of Islam, but more precisely within the beliefs of true Orthodoxy (i.e., *Ahl al-Sunna*). Any other beliefs, whether they be those of the *mutakallimūn* or *falāsifa*, or theologies of other faiths, would simply not produce a harmonious relationship between these three concepts. Since the *fiṭra* is divinely and internally ingrained in each individual, ultimately, it is *its* job to recognize a true prophet from a false one, and to validate true rational thought from irrational thought.

It is fitting to conclude this section with one of the final quotes in the *Darʾ* about the concept of the *fiṭra*. Ibn Taymiyya writes, "…perfection is only achieved by perfecting the *fiṭra*, which itself is perfected by the revealed Texts. For the prophets were all sent to affirm the *fiṭra* and perfect it, not to change the *fiṭra* or distort it."

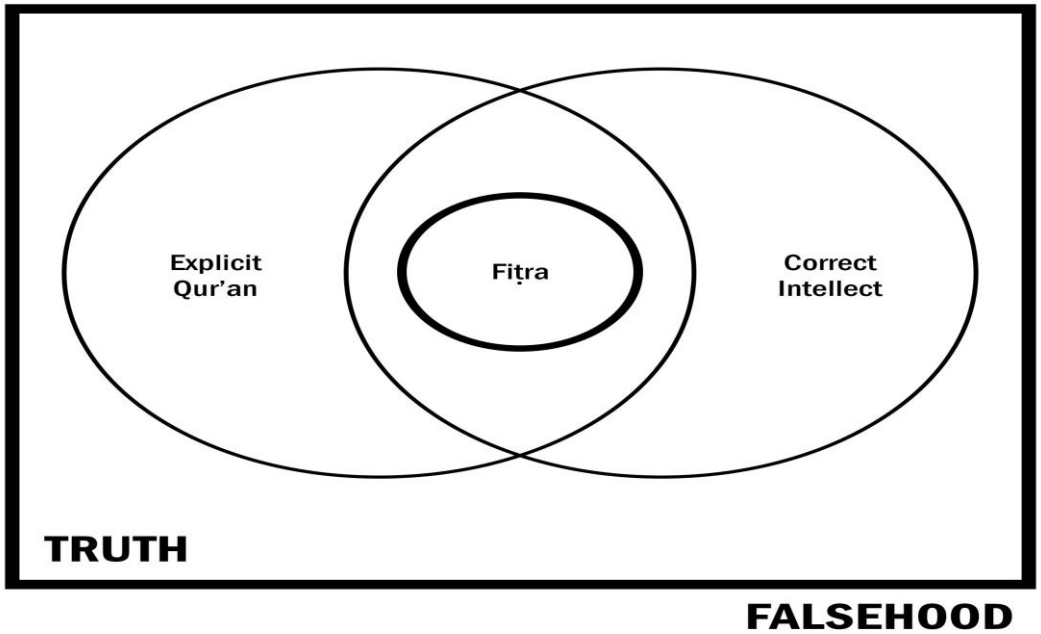

Diagram: The Taymiyyan Ideal

Ibn Taymiyya posited the *fiṭra* as a pivotal, anchoring force that situates both explicit Scripture and sound intellect. Everything that an uncorrupted *fiṭra* affirms is affirmed *both* by the Qurʾān *and* sound intellect. Examples of this include: the existence of God; His primary Attributes, such as Omniscience and Power; His transcendent nature above the creation; human morality; and other matters. And the text of the Qurʾān, when exposed to the pure *fiṭra*, will appropriate it in such a way as to confirm and validate it, until eventually the *fiṭra* is consumed by it. After all, argued Ibn Taymiyya, the Qurʾān was revealed to nourish and foster the *fiṭra*. The combination of Qurʾān-cum-*fiṭra* would then be able to situate what is sound and correct intellect.

Correct intellect, of course, was always within the realm of truth for Ibn Taymiyya (along with the clear meanings derived from the Qurʾān and authentic ḥadīth). The Qurʾān informs of matters that the intellect cannot derive (such as the detailed pleasures and punishments of Heaven and Hell); likewise correct intellect also informs of matters that are not present in the Qurʾān (such as the details of the physical sciences). But in no circumstance will the two be in actual conflict with one another, and the information yielded by both shall remain within the realm of truth.

3. Conclusion

From the above, we can to extract:

3.1 Atheism is primarily but not exclusively a spiritual problem, not an intellectual one.

In order to justify atheism, and given the current climate of the hegemonic scientific narrative, atheists typically invoke, and might even believe, that their rejection of God's existence is due to rational-based arguments. However, from an Islamic paradigm, **atheism is primarily a *spiritual* problem, not an *intellectual* one.**

At core, a person who denies the existence of God has a corrupted spiritual *fiṭra*. That is why intellectual arguments alone with rarely solve this problem. It is, therefore, a mistake to concentrate on intellectual arguments for the existence of God while ignoring other factors. This is not to say that one should not engage in responding to some misconceptions in an intelligent and rational manner. However, to presume that mere argumentations and solid reasoning will bring about most atheists is to ignore what is really at stake, which is a corrupted spiritual core within such a person.

If the *fiṭra* is still intact to a certain level (and of course everything is contingent on *qadr*), it is possible to 'resuscitate' the original *fiṭra* and hence guide a person to Islam. Sometimes the *fiṭra* has been corrupted to the point of no return, and nothing can be done (except if *qadr* intervenes). But what is important for us to know is that it is practically impossible for anyone of us to know the actual state of another's *fiṭra*, hence from our side we must never fully give up on a person.

3.2 The fiṭra is corrupted and fueled by cultural factors, sensual desires and pseudo-rational arguments.

The *fiṭra* is typically corrupted via society, family and the *'zeitgiest'* of the time. This corruption is then fueled and aided by both sensual desires (*shahawāt*) and pseudo-rational arguments (*shubuhāt*). Hence, a person's *shahawāt* and *shubuhāt* combined effectively cloud the sound core of *fiṭra* that one is born with (and *kufr* is done when that core *fiṭra* is 'covered up').

While both desires and pseudo-arguments play a role in the corruption of the *fiṭra*, it is very difficult to ascertain which of these two is more effective in a particular person. Typically, both will interplay with one another in a manner that becomes almost impossible to discern the one from the other. ***In fact, typically even an atheist will not be able to separate them apart in the recesses of his/her own heart.***

A true spiritual leader (*murabbī*) wishing to reach out to an atheist needs to empathize with both of these two causes. Responding to the appeal of 'desires' is, of course, radically different than how one responds to pseudo-intellectual arguments. And it is possible that in some people the *shahawat* are more pronounced (this is typically manifested in a level of arrogance and mockery), whereas in others the *shubuhat* are more pronounced (this is typically manifested in a genuine desire to engage with specific arguments and the willingness to hear responses to them).

3.3 The fiṭra is revived and resuscitated by all factors that are 'Islamic'.

If there is a core of uncorrupted *fiṭra* left in someone, and if it is willed that this person eventually be guided (back) to Islam, there is no simple, fool-proof technique to use other than continual appeal to that inner uncorrupted core, through any and all acts that will spark, or trigger, a positive reaction in his or her *fiṭra.* Hence, hearing a Quranic recitation, or seeing someone in *sajda*, or witnessing a tragedy and rediscovering the meaning

of faith, or being in the company of the rightoues, or any of a million factors, might cause one's heart to (re)discover Islam.

It is for this reason that no two conversion stories are exactly the same: every single convert tells us of an incident or episode that 'triggered' his/her fiṭra, but it wasn't that specific incident that really caused the conversion: it was the triggering of the fiṭra.

Therefore, there is no easy way to 'solve' the issue of apostacy because:

- the corruption of the *fiṭra* is sometimes complete and sometimes not, and we can never know which case it is.
- the revival of the *fiṭra* of an uncorrupted person is not a science in which a set method is followed; rather it is more of an art in which any aspect of pure religion can revive a corrupted *fiṭra*.

Hence, the best method for the family, friends and scholars who interact with such people is to continue to be upon the pure teachings of Islam in all aspects of life and demonstrate the impact of those aspects, while attempting to engage in the pseudo-rational arguments presented and continuously underscoring the limitations of the mind and of the scientific paradigm.

3.4 Many of the Western proofs for the Existence of God are directly linked with fiṭra.

The most effective and obvious proofs for the existence of God proposed by Western theologiansand philosophers all stem from the notion of *fiṭra*, including the rudimentary version of the cosmological proof (not the elaborate *kalam* model); the teleological; the arguments from morality; consciousness; transcendence; and beauty. However, none of the mainstream founders of Western thought proposed an equivalent of the *fiṭra*: that belief in God is inherently innate, despite the fact that more and more modern psychologists and scientists are positing the notion of an innate 'religion instinct'.[183]

Post-script: While this paper is about the notion of *fiṭra*, and not the arguments employed by atheists, it is important to note that the term 'pseudo-rational' is not intended to imply that some of the arguments posited by atheists are superficial. On the contrary, some of them are extremely compelling (e.g., some aspects of evolution appear to clash with religious texts), and others are beyond the realm of human thought (e.g., rationalizing theodicy). Even though the pseudo-rational arguments offered by atheists cannot be valid, some of them are extremely complex and not easily dismissed. Attempts to refute these arguments from within their own paradigms should only be done by individuals who have read enough to be able to make a solid case; superficial attempts by untrained clergy only serves to reinforce the negative stereotypes that this niche has of our respected *ʿulama*.

To be explicit: ***no scholar should ever attempt to refute issues that they haven't studied in detail,*** *such as the Theory of Evolution, as in all likelihood this will make matters worse.* Rather, they should speak with humility, remind the one they are speaking with of other factors that prove the notion of *fiṭra* (e.g., issues of morality, beauty, transcendence, etc.) and for their specific *shubuhāt*, refer such a person to those who have studied such matters.

All praise is due to Allah alone, and to Him belongs glory from pre-time

183 Perhaps one of the more exhaustive such researches was done by two academics at Oxford University, who spent over three years and almost three million dollars on an exhaustive survey involving children in twenty countries. Their research concluded that children across all cultures instinctively believe in factors such as a Higher Power and the existence of souls and even an afterlife. See: "Humans 'predisposed' to believe in gods and the afterlife," *Science Daily* (Jul 2011).

to post-time, and may salat and salām be send down
on the best our Prophet (SAW)
and his Companions and
Followers and
Family,
Amīn
.