

Mysticism in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought: Abdolkarim and Orhan Pamuk

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"You know, I've had enough of big ideas."1 [1]

Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk's comment captures a promising though vulnerable sentiment one finds among intelligentsia in the Muslim world. Pamuk's novel, *Snow* (published in English in 2004), documents how "big ideas" convulse his Turkish homeland, where Islamists and secularists indulge in ideological fantasies that leave little to no room for a moderate and rationally informed political existence.2 [2] The main character, Ka, is a mystical poet whose meditations serve as experiments in personal existence amidst ideological rubble. He strives to transcend Islamists and secularists, and to serve as a bridge between Turkey and the West. Ka strives for personal nonideological existence in a globalized world.

Mentioned by *Time* magazine as one of the top 100 most influential people in the world, Abdolkarim Soroush is an Iranian philosopher inspired by the Sufi writings of Rumi, who experiments with mysticism as a way to transcend Iranian Islamism and Western secularism.3 [3] Whereas Ka's mysticism is apophatic (to use a term derived from Christianity), Soroush's mysticism is noetic in that it takes the form of a life of reason reaching out to the divine in a manner not unlike Augustine's account of the soul that stretches toward God. Soroush engages in a type of Socratic questioning that takes "dialogue" as its central form of existence, in which flashes of

1 [1] Orhan Pamuk, interviewed by Jörg Lau, "The Turkish Trauma," *Die Zeit*, 14 April, 2005. Translated and reposted at: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/115.html> (accessed: July 13, 2005).

2 [2] Orhan Pamuk, *Snow: A Novel*, trans., Maureen Freely, (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

3 [3] *Time*, April 18, 2005 , 88. The bulk of my analysis derives from Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans., Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2000).

noetic insight appear among the interstices of the spoken word. Faith takes the form of reason reaching out; the activity of reason, not necessarily its conclusions, is the work of faith. Dialogue is thus communal and provides the existential basis for a religious community to take democratic form.

Soroush is more optimistic of the possibility of democracy in a (reformed) Shi'ite Islamic society than is Ka.⁴ [4] Both have comparable views on the nature of ideology as a secondary reality, to use Voegelin's term. Yet, while both share mysticism as an attempt to move past those secondary realities, Soroush's noetic mysticism is more successful. Even so, while it issues in a "dialogic" view of society that would sustain democracy, Soroush's Sufi mysticism, like that of Ka, is individualistic as he fails to provide what might be called a phenomenology of friendship that can fulfil the traditional Islamic demand for communal religious existence.⁵ [5]

IDEOLOGY AS SECONDARY REALITY

Both Pamuk and Soroush treat ideology, not simply as opinion, but as a libidinous refusal to perceive reality. In *Snow*, ideology takes the form of dreamworlds, nihilism, and theatrics, whereas Soroush refers to ideology as "those ideas that have causes but no reasons" (94). It is a "hatred of reason" (93).

Snow tells the story of Ka, a Turk living in Germany who has returned home and spends a few days in Kars, a small town near the Armenian frontier. A snowstorm has closed off the town from the outside world. He tells the locals he is writing a story about Kars for a German newspaper,

4 [4] In the *Die Zeit* interview, Pamuk vigorously distinguishes the pessimistic conclusions about Islam and democracy drawn in the novel from his own: "It is an appalling distortion to apply my realism to my political convictions. I see the future of Turkey in Europe as a prosperous, tolerant, democratic country among others. My novel is about a specific period in time. In the ten years which have passed since that period, the country has changed a lot. If you lay aside for one moment the reactions to my comments about our past, it's clear that we are living in a different Turkey today." This paper focuses on Pamuk's poetic presentation in *Snow*, with references to Pamuk's own views, drawn from interviews, as the argument unfolds.

5 [5] Robert Sokolowski offers a phenomenology of friendship in the Western Aristotelian context ("Phenomenology of Friendship," *Review of Metaphysics*, 55 (March 2002): 451-70). See also Jules Toner, *Love and Friendship*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003).

which enables him to interact with a host of the town's characters, including Blue, the Islamist, Kadife, his girlfriend who defies the secularist school authorities by insisting on wearing a headscarf (though she had initially regarded it as a stunt), her sister, İpek, to whom he swears his love, and Sunay Zaim, a Kamalist vaudeville artist who stages a play-within-a-play coup that constitutes the centerpiece of the novel's presentation of secondary realities.

Snow is itself an ambivalent symbol of purgation and mysterious cosmic order, but also of intellectual oblivion that represents the secondary reality in which Islamic society is convulsed:

As [Ka] watched the snow fall outside his window, as slowly and silently as the snow in a dream, the traveler fell into a long-desired, long-awaited reverie; cleansed by memories of innocence and childhood, he succumbed to optimism and dared to believe himself at home in the world. Soon afterward, he felt something else that he had not known for quite a long time and fell asleep in his seat (4).

And so begins the story. Ka succumbs to sleep in order to enter Kars , which, separated from the world because of the snowstorm, constitutes a microcosm of Turkey and the Islamic world.

Ka confronts the dreamworld of Kars immediately upon arriving and meets Serdar Bey, who runs the local newspaper. Bey has already written an article about that evening's performance by Sunay Zaim, whose variety show will also include a reading by Ka of his poem, "Snow":

"I don't have a poem called, ❖Snow,' and I'm not going to the theater this evening. Your newspaper will look like it's made a mistake."

"Don't be so sure. There are those who despise us for writing the news before it happens. They fear us not because we are journalists but because we can predict the future; you should see how amazed they are when things do happen only because we've written them. And quite a few things do happen only because we've written them up first. This is what modern journalism is about. I know you won't want to stand in the way of our being modern ❖ you don't want to break our hearts ❖ so that is why I am sure you will write a poem called ❖Snow' and then come to the theater to read it" (29).

For Bey, and possibly for Ka, being modern entails being swept up by forces whose end-points are predetermined. In the West, we have seen this idea expressed by ideological and totalitarian movements where leaders portray themselves as prophets who then go about ensuring their prophecies come true. For example, Aum Shakiro "prophesized" the Tokyo subway attacks before

he went ahead and attacked them, and Adolph Hitler "prophesized" the greed of Jewish bankers would lead to their extermination while he was exterminating the Jews.⁶ [6]

Feeding the dreamworld is the tendency of Muslims to display characteristics of the mass man or manqué (Michael Oakeshott's term). Blue tells Ka: "To be a true Westerner, a person must first become an *individual*, and then they go on to say that in Turkey, there are no individuals!" (324). While Blue, the Islamist leader, equates "individual" with "Western" (and thus rejects it), one also sees their inability to be an individual in their lack of sustaining individual personalities. This can be seen in Ka's conversation with two schoolboys, Fazil and Necip, who worry about whether Westernization leads them unknowingly to atheism. Necip tells Ka a story about a school director (a reference to the school director of Kars whom an Islamist assassinates) who learns he has the "disease" of atheism from a dervish: "'It seems you've lost your faith in God,' he said. 'What's worse, you don't even know it, and as if that weren't bad enough, you're even proud of not knowing it!'" (81). A sign of the air of secondary reality in this sentiment is that one cannot be proud of something one does not know.

The boys ask Ka whether he is an atheist:

"I don't know," said Ka.

"Then tell me this: Do you or don't you believe that God Almighty created the universe and everything in it, even the snow that is swirling down from the sky?"

"The snow reminds me of God," said Ka.

"Yes, but do you believe that God created snow?" Mesut insisted.

There was a silence. Ka watched the black dog run through the door to the platform to frolic in the snow under the dim halo of neon light.

"You're not giving me an answer," said Mesut. "If a person knows and loves God, he never doubts God's existence. It seems to me that you're not giving me an answer because you're too timid to admit that you're an atheist. But we knew this already. That's

⁶ [6] Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions, Or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 14, 64-5; Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2001), 47.

why I wanted to ask you a question on my friend Fazil's behalf. Do you suffer the same terrible pangs as the poor atheist in the story? Do you want to kill yourself?" (83).

The boys' questioning is drawn from a mixture of common sense and ideological paranoia, as well as anxiety about their own faith. Their assumption that atheism implies the negation of their own existence has its parallels in Western "mainstream" theologies including Augustine and Anselm. Even so, belief for them must lack any of the frailty and even doubt one finds in those Western thinkers, or even in Ka. Belief must be absolutely certain; anything else entails a desire for suicide. It is therefore unsurprising the boys fear becoming atheists unknowingly. They possess the lust for certainty characteristic of mass man, because they lack a sense of themselves that would enable them to live with doubt and to acknowledge their human frailty.

Many of the characters, most notably Ka, possess disordered erotic longings, characterized by a desperate and servile obsession for beloveds that lead the characters to disregard the consequences of their actions: "İpek still knew that Ka was madly in love and already bound to her like a hapless five-year-old who can't bear to be apart from his mother. She also knew that he wanted to take her to Germany not merely to share his happy home in Frankfurt; his far greater hope was that, when they were far away from all these eyes in Kars, he would know for sure that he possessed her absolutely" (330). Treating one's beloved as a helpless child treats his mother is consistent with desiring her absolutely. Again: "During his last four years, which he dedicated to remorse and regret, Ka would admit to himself that those given to verbal abuse are often obsessed by a need to know how much their lovers loved them ♦ it had been that way throughout his life. Even as he taunted her in his broken voice that she wanted Blue, that she loved him more, his concern was to see not so much how İpek answered him as how much patience she would expend for his sake" (362). The narrator describes Ka back in Germany, broken and alone, and obsessed with a pornographic actress who resembles İpek, and with the servile manner she pleasures men (260).

Ultimately, *Snow's* characters, primarily Ka, live in what I term a "compressed metaxy." If metaxy refers to tensional existence between poles of mortality/immortality, happiness/unhappiness, good/evil, etc., then Ka experiences these poles with a sense of immediacy, as if compressed together:

Ka had always shied away from happiness for fear of the pain that might follow, so we already know that his most intense emotions came not when he was happy but when he was beset by the certainty that this happiness would soon be lost to him♦. Love equaled pain♦. Heaven and hell were in the same place. In those same streets he had played soccer, gathered mulberries, and collected those player trading cards you got with chewing gum; it was precisely because the dogs turned the scene of these childish joys into a living hell that he felt the joys so keenly (340-1).

Ka experiences reality as imperfect, not with the virtues of patience and hope, but with an inordinate hope for perfection that sits side-by-side with an inordinate fear of, and perhaps hope for, destruction. Ka finds happiness impossible because he expects pain immediately to follow. This explains why he cut short the happiest moment of his life, when he made love to İpek (262).

Nor do his sentiments involve simply his own personal existence. They are associated with his perception of the world's fate: "It was not enough to be convinced that their own fortunes were still on course; they had to believe all the misery around them had been extinguished to keep a shadow from falling over their own happiness" (341). "To live in indecision, to waver between defeat and a new life, offered as much pleasure as pain. The ease with which they could hold each other and cry this way made Ka love her all the more, but even in the bitter contentment of this tearful embrace a part of him was already calculating his next move and remained alert to the sounds from the street" (361). Ka is the most "modern" character in the book, as evidenced by his highly individualistic religiosity (described below). He views his life and the world as sheer contingency or flux, which is summarized by his constant expectation of pain following pleasure, and unhappiness following happiness (though not the reverse). This betrays a fundamental distrust not only in himself and others, but also in the world. His sentiment compares with St. Augustine's observation that one lives a life of despair who thinks history moves in cycles, where one expects happiness always to give way to unhappiness, and friends to become enemies.⁷ [7] Personal and social existence is impossible.

The staged coup serves as the play within this play. There are actually two plays, though we shall examine only the first. The first is the coup itself, and the second one, staged two days later, is play of Kadife, the leader of the head-scarf girls, killing Sunay Zaim, who portrays the

7 [7] *City of God*, XII.14

secularist. The military stages a coup in the first play. What gives the play, and the audience, the character of a secondary reality is that the military actually gets onto stage and proceeds to shoot audience members, who were not merely looking on in disbelief. Rather, they are incapable of believing that they are getting shot:

A retired civil servant in the front row stood up to applaud. A few others sitting nearby joined in. There was scattered applause from the back, from people presumably in the habit of clapping at anything ♦ or perhaps they were scared. The rest of the hall was silent as ice. Like someone waking up following a long bender, a few even seemed relaxed and allowed themselves weak smiles. It was if they'd decided that the dead bodies before their eyes belonged to the dream world of the stage; a number of those who had ducked for cover now had their heads in the air but then covered again at the sound of Sunay's voice (160-1).

The "dream world" of the stage and of the audience imitates the dream world of society. People who fail to experience themselves as individuals fail to perceive the reality in which they find themselves. Later, Ka tells Sunay Zaim: "I know that you staged this coup not just for the sake of politics but also as a thing of beauty and in the name of art" (333). Sunay Zaim simply perfects the technique of creating the secondary reality that others in society accept. No one knows or cares for the difference between reality and imagination, which is a distinction Ka the poet ultimately fails to confront.

Like Austrian novelist Heimito von Doderer, Pamuk associates ideology with disordered eros. For his part, Soroush focuses his attention on ideology as intellectual corruption, though he does not rule out erotic disorder. He characterizes ideology as a "hatred of reason" and "those ideas that have causes but no reasons" (93-94):

In this sense ideology is the veil of reason; it is the enemy of rationality and clarity. It contradicts objectivity and forces one to see the world through a single narrow aperture even if the result is a distorted view of the world. Idealism and dogmatism often accompany an ideology, but its core is the quality that conceals its falseness by placing it above rational discourse. One can only dote on an ideology or be infatuated by it; one can never rationally evaluate it. No reasons can be properly adduced for a false idea. If we try to find rational grounds or reasons for ideologies, they too must be flawed. The only thing to do at this juncture is to look for the causes and the origins of the idea in question. Here we can trace the interests and advantages of various groups in so far as they constitute the causes of certain ideas. This points to the ideological nature of ideas or, in Marxist parlance, to their "class origins." With this definition the fight against ideology cannot be a rational one because ideology is by definition antirational. To fight an ideology, then,

becomes an actual and concrete struggle. Because ideology has no rational grounds, any effort to eliminate its causes must be extrarational and ideational (94-95).

This passage is at once combative and restrained. It is combative because Soroush describes ideology as a perversion of reason, which is necessarily a corruption of the human person himself. To be an ideologue, a "hater of reason," means to hate oneself. The logical consequence is not dissimilar to that which Necip and Fazil fear is the consequence of atheism. It is restrained because Soroush does not specifically identify the Iranian examples of said "hatred of reason," although it is fairly clear from this and other parts of his writings that he regards the revolutionaries in this light.⁸ [8] Indeed, the conflation of religion with political rule is the main target of his pen.

KA'S MYSTICISM

Snow is the central mystical symbol for Ka. It represents the apeirontic mystery of existence and nonexistence. Its crystalline structure represents cosmic order; the thick blanket it lays onto Kars represents both the cleansing that retrieves one's innocence as well as oblivion. Snow is an ambivalent symbol of order amidst ideological disorder that does not entirely save Ka. The novel begins with Ka traveling to Kars in a snowstorm whose silence intimates the inner peace for which he yearned and would fail to obtain. This is indicated by the fact that it led him to sleep and to the dreamworld that represented both his hopes and the drama that would unfold in Kars : "cleansed by memories of innocence and childhood, he succumbed to optimism and dared to believe himself at home in this world" (4). While the snowflake will be significant for its structure, Ka indicates that the silence of snow is more important: "What brings me close to God is the silence of the snow" (60).

8 [8] It is noteworthy that, in the recent Iranian election, he supported Mehdi Karrubi, a soft spoken, unassuming cleric who was the Speaker of the reformist dominated Sixth Parliament in last Iranian election: "since [Karrubi] has no enemies and no friends, he will be situated fittingly to negotiate with all factions productively." (Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, "What's the Matter with Iran ? How the Reformists Lost the Presidency," *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, June 2005 (<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=1412>) (accessed July 16, 2005). One smells here the type of ironic praise that Alexis de Tocqueville once bestowed to Louis Napoleon: "a genius for whom circumstances had pushed his mediocrity to such a height" (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848*, eds., J. P. Mayer and A. P. Kerr, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 225).

Ka becomes a medium for his poems while in Kars . Like a mystical dervish, he simply receives them from a mysterious divine source. He does not entirely understand them but he understands they reflect a pattern of events in his life. He indicates that his experience of God is more Western than Islamic: "As Ka knew from the beginning, in this [Islamic] part of the world faith in God was not something achieved by thinking sublime thoughts and stretching one's creative powers to their outer limits; nor was it something one could do alone; above all it meant joining a mosque, becoming part of a community" (60-1). Explaining Western (and specifically European) sensibilities to an Islamist, Ka states: "'The idea of a solitary westernized individual whose faith in God is private is very threatening to you. An atheist who belongs to a community is far easier for you to trust than a solitary man who believes in God. For you, a solitary man is far more wretched and sinful than a nonbeliever" (61). In an interview, Pamuk explains that "The hero of the book does have a genuine longing for religious experience. But his concept of God is very Western. He is interested in the individual experience, not in the communal experienced envisaged by Islam."⁹ [9] One should correct Pamuk because Ka's solipsistic mysticism resembles more the modern Western experience of God. It is closer to William James's sense of religious experience, the moment of the "cusp," as Charles Taylor describes it, "about what it's like to stand in that open space and feel the winds pulling you now here, now there."¹⁰ [10] His mysticism is not medieval in the sense of a *fides quaerens intellectum*, which at least in the Augustinian sense turns the soul toward the ordinate love of neighbor (Alypius is near Augustine in the garden, and plays a crucial role in the drama of Augustine's conversion¹¹ [11]). Even so, Muslims view religion as communal, ritual, and as law. As Sunay tells Ka, "even if you did believe in God, it would make no sense to believe alone❖. It's only by eating what they eat, living where they live, laughing at the same jokes, and getting angry whenever they do that you can believe in their God. If you're living an utterly different life, you can't be worshiping the same God they are. God is fair enough to know it's not a question of reason or logic but how you live your life" (204).

⁹ [9] Lau, "The Turkish Trauma."

¹⁰ [10] Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2002), 59.

¹¹ [11] For details, see John von Heyking, "The Luminous Path of Friendship: Augustine's Account of Friendship and Political Order," in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, eds., John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko, unpublished manuscript.

Blue, the Islamist, makes the same point: "In a place like this, if you worship God as a European, you're bound to be a laughingstock. Then you cannot even believe you believe. You don't belong to this country; you're not even a Turk anymore. First try to be like everyone else. Then try to believe in God" (327). As Necip's fears show, one cannot believe one believes whether or not one belongs to a community. *Snow* shows individualistic and communal forms of belief untenable.¹² [12]

So Ka turns inward in his Sufi-modernist manner and receives his poems from the apeirontic depths: "He believed himself to be but the medium, the amanuensis" (377). But the amanuensis also engages in anamnesis because the poems, even though he is not their author, reflect the patterns of his life. Ka explains the anamnestic nature of the snowflake:

One a six-pronged snowflake crystallizes, it takes between eight and ten minutes for it to fall through the sky, lose its original shape, and vanish; when, with further inquiry, he discovered that the form of each snowflake is determined by the temperature, the direction and strength of the wind, the altitude of the cloud, and any number of other mysterious forces, Ka decided that snowflakes have much in common with people. It was a snowflake that inspired "I, Ka," the poem he wrote sitting in the Kars public library, and later, when he was to arrange all nineteen titles for his new collection, *Snow*, he would assign "I, Ka" to the center point of that same snowflake (375-6).

The snowflake is a symbol of order and disorder, of genesis and of destruction. Its crystalline structure indicates a cosmic intelligence, but one that appears to humans at least as random, determined as it is by the contingencies of temperature and the direction and strength of the wind. Ka sees humans as hopeful icons of order in an otherwise chaotic expanse. His modern sentiments are not unlike those of Alexis de Tocqueville: "man comes from nothing, traverses time, and is going to disappear forever into the bosom of God. One sees him for only a moment wandering, lost, between the limits of two abysses."¹³ [13]

¹² [12] However, the novel equates communal faith with legalism, with ritual as something to be followed blindly. One requires a more robust understanding of mimesis to get by this impasse found in this novel.

¹³ [13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press , 2000), DA 2.1.17, 462.

Ka's nineteen poems are mapped onto the snowflake, which has three axes: memory, imagination, and reason (Ka said he was inspired by Bacon's tree of knowledge) (261, 376). The snowflake, while an expression of cosmic order, also reflects the "compressed metaxy" that Ka experiences. The reason axis contains poems of order and happiness on one point, but the other point contains poems of suffering. The memory axis contains poems referring to childhood memories and relating to some of the events of his visit to Kars, including Necip's anxious fears of atheism and the night of the coup. The imagination axis contains a poem on love adjacent to one on jealousy, and one on happiness adjacent to suicide. These poems came to him "as if someone were whispering the poems into his ears" but he did not hear them when he returned to Frankfurt (257). Ka, the exile, could only find a semblance of happiness in Kars, which itself is the dreamworld fraught with ideological deformations. The snowflake is an ambiguous symbol of a tenuous cosmic order that, ultimately, Ka fails to grasp. Indeed, the deformation resides deep inside Ka's soul. After reflecting on how the poems reflect actual events in Kars, the narrator and Ka's friend, Orhan (an autobiographical reference?), tries to retrace Ka's final thoughts when he betrayed Blue, the Islamist, to the police:

I lay down on the bed and imagined Ka's thoughts as he struggled to look Z Demirkol in the eye❖. What sorry I felt to imagine my friend pointing out the building in the distance. Or was it something worse? Could it be that the writer clerk was secretly delighted at the fall of the sublime poet? The thought induced such self-loathing I forced myself to think of about something else (419).

Just as Necip was horrified at the self-destruction brought on by an atheism he could not control, so too is Orhan horrified at the thought that Ka's "compressed metaxy" compelled him to destroy himself, to reject willfully the happiness that could have enjoyed.

The psychodrama of Kars, replayed in Ka's soul, displays the dead end of secularism and Islamism. *Snow* provides a bleak picture of the spiritual state of the Islamic world, with no apparent way out from the dead ends of secularism and Islamism. Human contact is made impossible by the ideological dreams of both, but so too does Ka's "western" mysticism and the ritualistic customs of the Muslims result in a dead end.

As noted above, Pamuk has stated that the novel's bleak outlook does not reflect his own views. The openness and tolerance he foresees seems rooted in the promise of openness of the

Justice and Development Party's "Muslimhood model," which, as Elizabeth H. Prodromou describes, "assumes that religious freedom and, particularly the possibility for Muslim ideas and actors to engage in public life, are not only compatible with, but necessary for, Turkish democratization and integration into the EU."¹⁴ [14] The "Muslimhood model" is an attempt to cut between Kemalist militant secularism and Islamism, whose success Prodromou reports is imperiled by various factors including the JDP's core constituencies.

Snow suggests that the Islamic world would do better if it avoided the cosmic questions in the form of world-transforming ideologies, in favor of common sense. Its characters suffer because of immoderation. Ka because of his unrealistic demand for perfect happiness and his deformed erotic attachments to İpek, Sunay Zaim for his artistic revolution, and Blue for his Islamism, suffer because they lack moderation. Ka finds peace in his observation of the worldly and ever day joy of falling snow. The novel suggests that the Muslim world would have a better future if people tended more to the every day and to common sense. Pamuk argues as such: "You know, I've had enough of big ideas. I've been over-exposed to them in my over-politicised country. Literature is my reaction to this, an attempt to turn the game around, and invest it with a certain humour, a certain distance. I want to tell the reader: Don't take everything so dammed seriously. Isn't life beautiful? Pay attention to life's details. The most important thing in life is happiness, and the possibility to survive in this intolerant society we have created."¹⁵ [15] In his earlier book, *My Name is Red*, he strove to capture the essence of life in its minor details, including manuscript illuminations and the texture of the city.¹⁶ [16] For Pamuk, happiness resides in the magical

14 [14] Elizabeth H. Prodromou, " Turkey Between Secularism and Fundamentalism?: The Muslim Model' and the Greek Orthodox Minority," *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 3(1) Spring 2005, 11.

15 [15] Lau, "The Turkish Trauma."

16 [16] *My Name is Red*, (New York : Vintage, 2002). In a 2003 BBC interview, he explains: "City life, urban life, living in big cities, in fact, is living in a galaxy of unimportant, random, stupid, absurd images. But your look gives a strange, mysterious meaning to these little details of streets, asphalt or cobblestone roads, advertisements, letters, all the little details of bus stops, or chimneys, windows. All these things constitute a texture of a city, and each city in that fashion is very different." (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3131585.stm>)."

interstices of the every day, which invites a political pragmatism not found among the characters of *Snow* (though it could move too far the opposite way toward quietism).

SOROUSH'S NOETIC MYSTICISM

While *Snow* dismisses mysticism as Western, Abdolkarim Soroush embraces it as the savior for the Islamic world. Soroush is the pen name for Husayn Haj Farajullah Dabbagh.¹⁷ [17] It means "divine muse" (157), which suggests Soroush understands himself as a dervish medium in terms similar to Ka. The fundamental, and determining, difference between the two is that Soroush's mysticism is noetic, resembling in many ways the noetic mysticism of Plato and Augustine. His noetic mysticism makes him better equipped to transcend the ideological deformations of modernity and the Islamic world. However, like Ka, his mysticism is ultimately solitary, making it insufficiently robust to accomplish its task.

Soroush's mysticism provides the basis for his "Hermeneutical Expansion and Contraction" theory of the Shari'ah, which can be summarized by his view that religion is permanent while religious knowledge varies in time and place. Religion is mystical and seemingly ineffable while religious knowledge gets expressed in whatever philosophical terminology and insights are available at a given time. The bulk of Soroush's writings detail the interaction of religious knowledge with other forms of knowledge, including political philosophy. He argues that religious knowledge depends on these other forms of knowledge, going so far as to argue that religious knowledge must incorporate notions of human rights and democracy, not to mention the latest insights of biology, physics, and other physical sciences.

What he means by religion is more ambiguous because it is unclear how religious knowledge is about religion when it is informed by lower sciences. In order to avoid the paradox of having a serenely ineffable and unknowable religion become irrelevant to life on account of its incommunicability, Soroush provides what may be called a "dialogic" model of the interaction of

¹⁷ [17] Laura Secor, "The Democrat: Iran 's leading reformist intellectual tries to reconcile religious duties and human rights," *Boston Globe*, March 14, 2004
(http://www.drSORoush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20040314-1.html)

religion and religious knowledge, which is anchored in ineffable mystical insight not unlike that described by Plato in his *Seventh Letter* or Augustine in the *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*.

Like Western Protestants as well as political philosophers including John Locke, Soroush criticizes ritualism as getting in the way of true religious experience. His theory of expansion and contraction, where contraction signifies clearing away "useless" rituals that hinder truth, is based on the esoteric tradition of seeing three stages of religion: *shari'ah* (rituals and laws), *tariqah* (the truth path), and *haqiqah* (the inner dimension). Earlier revivalists and sages "did not countenance the eclipse of truth of religion behind a parade of rituals, nor did they appreciate a religion restricted to the strictures of appearance" (27). By this esoteric standard, religion is more pure, or contracted, in the form of *haqiqah*. Soroush appeals to the Sufi mystic Rumi as his authority on mystical knowledge, though his characterization of *haqiqah* as the "inner dimension" is intelligible to Westerners steeped in the traditions of modern religious experience, as represented by the likes of Locke, Tocqueville, and William James. And so, he writes: "We have communal actions and rituals, but not communal faiths. Expressions of faith are public but the essence of faith is mysterious and private" (140). He quotes Rumi: "Faith, too, is hostile to partnership for as Rumi avers: ❖Hail love, the splendid destroyer of partnerships" (141). Just as there is no coerced faith and love, there is no collective faith and love.

The theory of expansion and contraction of religious interpretation moves on three levels: *kalam* (Islamic theology), *usul* (applied logic in religious jurisprudence), and *irfan* (esoteric knowledge) (34). *Irfan* is both ineffable knowledge as well as the basis for his hermeneutic and dialogic theory. It provides a mystical viewpoint beyond individual religions, as he indicates by citing Rumi: "The difference among Moslems, Zoroastrians, and Jews/Emanate, O learned one, from their various points of views" (35). It consists not in axiomatic forms of knowledge, but rather in the opening of the soul in the sense of Augustine's *intentio animi*: "For the believers, religion quickens the blaze of the sublime quest, delivers from inner attachments, grants ascent above earthly concerns, opens the heart's aperture toward the sun of truth, and induces a sense of utter wonder in the face of mystery of existence, so that one may hear the call of *Ho-val-Haq* (God is the Truth) from every particle of the universe" (36-7). One might compare his description of ascent with one of Augustine's famous ascents in the *Confessions*, as well as his description of

how Creation calls out that it was created.¹⁸ [18] Or quoting Rumi again: "Renditions of tongue reveal the core/But silent love reveals more" (88).

Unlike Ka, Soroush must be considered a noetic mystic because of the activity of reason that defines the human person (reason informed by love). Soroush emphasizes the activity of reason that seeks over the product of reason (what it knows): "We can have two visions of reason: reason as destination and reason as path. The first sees reason as the source and repository of truths. The second sees it as a critical, dynamic, yet forbearing force that meticulously *seeks* truth by negotiating tortuous paths of trial and error❖. Here it is not enough to attain truth; the manner of its attainment is equally important❖. Our mission as rational human beings is to search actively for the truth. This view attaches more value to earning a modest living in a small trade than to finding a treasure in the wilderness" (89-90). This "modest living" is conducted by inquiring into the empirical materials that surround one at any given time. In other words, *irfan* depends, not only on *kalam* (theology) and *usul* (jurisprudence), but the entirety of religious knowledge depend on other areas of human knowledge, including history and the sciences. Lower levels of knowledge give "content" to higher levels, including the highest, *irfan*, which itself has no content in the sense of containing truth in prepositional form. Soroush's understanding is thus closer to the noetic mysticism of Plato and the divided line, or Augustine who follows Plato, than to the apophatic mysticism of Ka.

Irfan informs, and is informed by, the lower levels of knowledge in the manner that an Aristotelian would see *habitus* informing virtuous action (128). *Habitus* constitutes the manner of acting, not the contents of acting. Thus, Soroush accords greater weight to habits of practical judgment than to formulating rules of behavior (105-21). Like Aristotle, Soroush thinks that before they follow rules and reasons, humans act via mimesis, after exemplars of virtue: "Humanity takes pride in the few who have reached those lofty peaks. Indeed we love humanity for the sake of these few exemplars" (93).

18 [18] "I asked the whole frame of the universe about my God and it answered me: ❖I am not He, but He made me": (Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, (Indianapolis : Hackett, 1993), X.6, p. 177.

The *habitus* of *irfan* informs democracy, and constitutes the substance of religious democratic government. Like Tocqueville's analysis of the United States, Soroush distinguishes the secular institutions of democracy from its civic culture, which needs to be religious and which he identifies with intellectual dynamism: "Religious society is based upon a free and invisible faith and dynamic and varied understanding" (142). Moreover, he expresses skepticism toward liberal Muslims who attempt to defend democracy with Qur'anic concepts like consultation (*shura*), consensus of the faithful (*ijma'*), and oath of loyalty to a ruler (*bei'at*): "Rather, the discourse on religious government should commence with a discussion of human rights, justice, and restriction of power (all extrareligious issues)" (132). This is in keeping with his theory of expansion and contraction, and his move toward natural justice, where religious knowledge begins with contemporary symbols of order and disorder. Democracy in Islam cannot derive from the Qur'an; democracy must be a habit that springs from its own sources.

Religion must be maintained as a civilizational habit, and this religiosity must be in accord with habits of practical reasoning:

In order to remain religious, they, of course, need to establish religion as the guide and arbiter of their problems and conflicts. But, in order to remain democratic, they need dynamically to absorb an adjudicative understanding of religion, in accordance with the dictates of collective "reason." Securing the Creator's approval entails religious awareness that is leavened by a more authentic and humane understanding of religiosity and that endeavors to guide the people in accordance with these ideals. In thus averting a radically relativistic version of liberalism, rational and informed religiosity can thrive in conjunction with a democracy sheltered by common sense, thereby fulfilling one of the prerequisites of a democratic religious government (128).

Democratic government presupposes habits of thought that include the exercise of practical judgment, which in its collective and political form is called "common sense":

Preconditions for democratizing religious government is historicizing and energizing the religious understanding by underscoring the role of reason in it. By reason, I do not mean a form of isolated individual reason, but a collective reason arising from the kind of public participation and human experience that are available only through democratic methods. For democratic governments, "common sense" is the arbiter of society's antagonisms and difficulties; religious governments assign this arbitration to religion, while dictatorships leave it in the hand of one powerful individual" (127).

Soroush describes "common sense" in its most noetically differentiated form ♦ it is the habit of practical reason by the man whose soul is open to reality as symbolized by *irfan*.¹⁹ [19] Society is not saved by ideologies or "great ideas" but by the hard-won civilizational habits of intellectual and moral virtue.

Soroush remains aware of the Western liberal crisis of moral relativism and technological consciousness (seen in its reduction of man to "pure potential," as in the case of Karl Marx (66-7)). Even so, he points out to his Muslim audience that democratic habits in fact make Western democracies more godly than their own: "The free societies are closer to the prophets than the totalitarian ones" (103). Part of the reason for this is that Western wealth provides for leisure and thus, higher pursuits. Soroush knows how much Westerners abuse, which is why he observes that Westerners may have external (political) freedom, they have largely abandoned internal freedom of the soul (103-4). Even so, his point about wealth is directed against the romantic view of poverty in his own society (and that of Sufi). Just as wealth induces greed, no less does poverty induce greed and envy (46-7). Besides, echoing Aristotle, wealth enables one to practice magnificence and generosity. Soroush may have too much confidence in man's power to resist the worst of modernity. However, he views the problems facing Muslims as worse, and attempts to prepare Muslims with the appropriate religious, political, intellectual, and moral habits to engage with modernity.

Soroush's noetic mysticism goes to considerable lengths in bringing Islam into constructive engagement with modernity. As Fred Dallmayr notes, "Soroush's text makes a contribution to a major conundrum that has beleaguered Islam as well as other religions throughout the course of their historical development: the dilemma of the relation of reason and faith."²⁰ [20] There are

19 [19] "[Common sense] is the habit of judgment and conduct of a man formed by ratio; one could say it is the habit of an Aristotelian *spoudaios* without the luminosity of the knowledge concerning the ratio as the source of his rational judgment and conduct. Common sense is a civilizational habit that presupposes noetic experience, without the man of this habit himself possessing differentiated knowledge of noesis" (Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6, trans., M. J. Hanak, ed., David Walsh, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 411.

20 [20] Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices*, (New York : Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 183.

reasons to be skeptical that he will have great success, however. His reliance of Sufism over and against the Qur'anic text, while *philosophically* defensible as a way of promoting the exercise of practical reason among Muslims, falls short of providing a *public* defense of practical reason that would have to derive at least in part on Qur'anic sources. He faces the same possible fate that L. Carl Brown observes of medieval philosophers like Alfarabi and Averroes: their esoteric philosophy produced brilliant ideas but had little public impact.²¹ [21] The historicity of religious knowledge that *irfan* discovers butts up against the widespread belief that the Qur'an is the infallible, uncreated word of God, and that Muhammad was not at all influenced by the Bible stories he heard from Nestorian Christians he heard during his life as a merchant.²² [22]

On a related point, the centrality of esoteric knowledge, while in principle open to everyone willing to work hard enough to attain it, is difficult to square with his defense of democracy. This is especially so since he characterizes democracy, even religious democracy, in terms not unlike John Stuart Mill's debating club view of democracy. Religious democracy, like Mill's view of democracy, needs widespread habits of intellectual curiosity and, indeed, philosophizing. Like Mill, Soroush overlooks some of the inherent tensions between the life of philosophy and that of politics. However, perhaps Soroush can be forgiven on this point because his immediate concern is simply to promote the exercise of practical (and theoretical) wisdom in Muslim societies.

Finally, Soroush's understanding of *haqiqah* is in tension with his demand for democracy to be sustained by its "common sense" because it is unclear how common objects of love, to borrow Augustine's phrase, are to be shared when the ascent of the soul is one of increasing interiorization. Soroush fails to provide the reader with what may be called a phenomenology of friendship capable of explaining the acts of loving and sharing. One might think he has the model of the Sufi fraternities in mind, though he does not make explicit use of them. He is therefore in danger of falling into the same trap that Ka falls into. This is hardly conducive to habits of democratic self-government. Pamuk, for his part, dismisses Sufism as a withdrawal into the self that one performs

21 [21] L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics*, (New York : Columbia University Press, 2000), 57.

22 [22] Salman Rushdie, "The Right Time for an Islamic Reformation," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005 , B07 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/05/AR2005080501483.html>). On debates concerning the historicity of the Qur'an, see Cooper, *New Political Religions*, 185-98.

in response to imperialism.²³ [23] This critique is perhaps too harsh because Soroush's Sufism is a reconstructed one and he explicitly rejects certain basic tenets, including its political quietism. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to compare Soroush's individualistic mystical knowledge to someone like a John Locke, whose Socinian theology made him latitudinarian when it came to the institutional arrangement of the church. In the *Letter on Toleration*, Locke cites Matthew's Gospel when he defines a church as the meeting of any two in Christ's name. Locke did not give actual arrangements much further thought. So too with Soroush.

CONCLUSION

Pamuk and Soroush experiment with different forms of mysticism as ways of transcending the dogmatomachy of the Islamic world. In Pamuk's novel *Snow*, Ka plays the role of a dervish, the medium of poems he himself does not write. These poems point to a cosmic order that is intimated in the structure of a snowflake that promises Ka redemption from the "compressed metaxy," consisting of disordered erotic attachments and ultimately an inordinate and impossible desire for perfect happiness. However, perhaps Ka is too passive because, ultimately the disorder is too deep in his soul and prevents him from making the necessary choices to obtain a happy life.

In contrast, Soroush experiments more successfully with noetic mysticism that enables him to engage more directly and effectively with the dogmatomachy of his time. He issues a more direct challenge to Muslims, and one perhaps for which it is unready, as evidenced by Soroush's exile to many visiting professorships in Western universities.²⁴ [24] His call for Muslims to "philosophize!", while noble, is perhaps too rash in overlooking the deep tensions in the Islamic world between piety and thought, and between thought and politics more generally. He might pay greater attention to the noetic sources within Qur'anic orthodoxy as a more effective way of

²³ [23] "The reaction to this traumatic loss of empire was to retreat into oneself. Faced with the challenge of Western thinking, people tend to focus on themselves and chant like a Sufi: we are different, we will always be different and we are proud to be different" (Quoted in Lau, "The Turkish Trauma.").

²⁴ [24] In the Sunni context, one laments the silencing of liberal scholar Sayyid Mahmud al-Qimany in Egypt, which followed Al Azhar's banning of his books (David Warren, "Marching," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 6, 2005 (<http://www.davidwarrenonline.com/index.php?artID=496>)).

reforming the minds of his fellow Muslims, as St. Thomas Aquinas magnified the noetic sources of his own tradition when he wrote his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Even so, one might justly accuse any philosopher who publicizes his views of being rash.

Ultimately, the achievement of both Pamuk and Soroush is to defend common sense. Both are skeptical of "big ideas" in the form of world-transforming ideologies. As novelist, Pamuk seeks happiness in the interstices of life's moments and details. As a thinker who might be prone to "big ideas," Soroush emphasizes the priority of the activity of thinking over its conclusions. The attention of both to life's interstices make them intellectual and moral models for Muslims and for Westerners alike.
