

A Polemical Critique of Philosophical Heresies: The *Maqāmi‘ al-Ḥadīd* of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān

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Abstract

This article examines Maqāmi‘ al-Ḥadīd, a little-studied treatise by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān (d. 1921), one of the most influential Sunni scholars of colonial India, as a polemical critique of philosophical doctrines deemed heretical by Islamic orthodoxy. Through a detailed analysis of Khān’s refutation of eight propositions drawn from the Aristotelian-Avicennian philosophical tradition, the study highlights Khān’s broader antagonism towards philosophy as a discipline he saw as corrosive to Islamic belief and religious certainty. By situating Maqāmi‘ al-Ḥadīd within the wider context of Khān’s writings and the colonial educational reforms of nineteenth-century British India, the article suggests how his rejection of philosophy may be part of a larger intellectual and pedagogical resistance to a broader colonial modernity. Khān’s critique reflects deep anxieties about epistemological authority, the integrity of Islamic knowledge, and the threat of secular rationalism to Muslim identity and religious life. In challenging recent portrayals of Khān as exhibiting a significant affinity for philosophy, this article argues instead that his polemics against philosophy were a conscious act of intellectual and cultural preservation in an era of profound transformation.

Keywords

India, colonialism, heresy, philosophy, rational sciences.

Introduction

Aḥmad Riḍā Khān (d. 1921) is one of the most renowned scholars of India. He was a jurist, theologian, reformer, poet of the highest calibre, and considered a doyen of the Sunni-Indian milieu of the nineteenth and early twentieth century with one of the largest doctrinal followings within South Asia and the South Asian Muslim diaspora.¹ Khān’s

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¹ On Aḥmad Riḍā Khān’s life and thought in Anglo-American studies, see Usha Sanyal’s seminal and nuanced study (now revised and expanded) in *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), as well as her general overview of his life, thought and approach (*maslak*) in *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi: In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 51-110. On a more recent but unfortunately less academically rigorous study, refer to Anil Maheshwari and Richa Singh, *Syncretic Islam: The Life and Times of Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021). In this book, the suggestion that Khān’s account of Sufism is somehow “syncretic”—one of the main theses of this book—

magnum opus is the *Fatāwā Riḍawīyyah*, an encyclopaedic collection of treatises on many topics, but most prominently a collation of a vast catalogue of legal responsa on questions about matters of belief, personal law, and newly emerging issues.² In this article, I explore Khān's theological critique of certain philosophical doctrines held by Muslim philosophers inherited from the Hellenic period in classical antiquity and rigorously defended by its Muslim proponents throughout the medieval period and up to and including the time of Khān himself. What drew the ire of Khān is that some senior Sunni theologians of India appeared to prefer philosophical doctrines over theological ones and even elevated philosophy and philosophers above that of the Islamic religious disciplines like Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*), *ḥadīth*, and knowledge of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and religious scholars ('*ulamā'*) and jurists (*fuqahā'*) respectively. In this article, I probe a hitherto overlooked work of Khān called *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, a refutation of what Sunni orthodox creed deems heretical philosophical doctrines. A major conclusion of

is highly contestable, given not only Khān's doctrines and ideas but his project of carving out an exclusivist Sunni communal identity based on a high Muhammadology and reimagining of normative Islamic living. On this latter point, especially within intra-Ḥanafī competing sectarian visions in colonial North India, see SherAli Tareen's excellent study *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020). On his revivalist thought in comparison with that of the Deobandi school, see Fuad S. Naeem, "Sufism and Revivalism in South Asia: Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanvī of Deoband and Mawlānā Aḥmad Razā Khān of Bareilly and Their Paradigms of Islamic Revivalism," *The Muslim World* 99 (2009): 435-51. The most comprehensive account of Khān's thoughts, ideas, and overall contribution to the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Indian-Islamic context is the twenty-volume encyclopaedia *Jahān-i Imām Aḥmad Rīzā Khān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥanīf Khān (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers, 2019), which contains numerous articles by Khān's affiliates, as well as various academics, admirers, and scholars.

² As for *Fatāwā Riḍawīyyah*—the full Arabic title of which is *al-'Aṭāyā al-Nabawīyyah fī 'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍawīyyah* (The Prophetic Gifts in the Legal Edicts of Riḍā)—it is still both understudied by Western academics and under-represented in formal studies by Khān's followers in the various Barelvi diaspora, and this has meant any proper academic assessment of his contribution to the development of Islamic legal and theological thought within the subcontinent is yet to be made. On a list of all the works contained in *Fatāwā Riḍawīyyah*, as well as a brief overview of its significance, refer to Muḥammad Asad Qādirī 'Aṭṭārī, *Talkhīṣ-i Fatāwā-i Rīzawīyah* (Lahore: Akbar Publishers, 2010), 36-93 and 106-22, respectively. A note to make on *Fatāwā Riḍawīyyah* is that there is a hefty tome in which Khān's *fatāwā*, among other collections, are studied by Arun Shourie in his book *The World of Fatwas or the Shariah in Action* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2012). The book is highly simplistic, condescending, and anti-Islamic in its tone, adopting a thematic catalogue and entirely descriptive account of *fatāwā* in general. To spare the reader the ad nauseam nature of the book, the last two pages on lessons to be learnt are perhaps the only academic highlights.

this article is that, like many other traditional scholars of his time, Khān was strongly antithetical to philosophy, viewing it as a fundamentally pernicious discipline that was religiously destabilizing. This finding not only directly challenges the claims of those who have suggested that Khān exhibited a significant affinity for Islamic philosophy, but it also highlights a deeper point: Khān's rejection of philosophy must be understood as part of and situated within a wider resistance to the educational trajectory under a broader colonial modernity emerging under British rule. In this light, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, along with the wider corpus of his writings, can be seen as offering valuable glimpses into the ways both Muslim scholars (like himself) and the wider laity were grappling with, interpreting, and responding to the intellectual and cultural transformations taking place in the late nineteenth-century colonial context.

The structure of the article is as follows: In section one, I first give a structural and thematic outline of the specific text under analysis, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*. In section two, following on from the introduction and contextualization of *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* as a text, I explicate the heretical philosophical doctrines Khān examines, and then in section three, I analyse Khān's refutation of these heretical doctrines, drawing on some of his other writings to present a fuller treatment of the issue. In section four, the final section, I conclude with a discussion on what I take to be contestations embedded within *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* over ideas like authority, epistemology, and pedagogy and their various normative modalities.

1. The Structure and Aim of *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*

Khān's text *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd 'alā Khadd al-Mantiq al-Jadīd* (Iron Bludgeons on the Cheek of the New Discourse) was written in the month of Rajab 1304 AH, corresponding to March 1887, and was printed as treatise number 3 in the twenty-seventh volume of *Fatāwā Riḍawiyyah*, published in the month of Rajab 1404 AH, corresponding to Monday, April 1984, by the Riza Foundation, Jāmi'ah Nizāmiyyah Riḍawiyyah in Lahore, pages 105-194.³ According to one of the eminent disciples (*murīd*) of Khān, Zafar al-Dīn al-Bihārī (d. 1963), the text was classified under works of rational theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), defined as that discipline "through which a person becomes capable of proving true religious beliefs using rational arguments, and through which doubts and uncertainties are dispelled," and not perhaps expectedly under the refutation works

³ Some sources mention the Gregorian date as 1885. 'Aṭṭārī, *Talkhīṣ-i Fatāwā-i Riḍaviyyah*, 85. An Arabic translation of *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* was published in a collection of Khān's other philosophically thematic treatise on whether it is possible for God to lie under the title *al-Falsafah wa 'l-Islām*, trans. Muḥammad Jalāl Riḍā and Ghulām Muḥammad Butt (Cairo: Dār al-Bayān li 'l-Nashr wa 'l-Tawzī', 2002), 53-117.

(*tardīd*, *radd*). Al-Bihārī's classification of Khān's works is mainly guided by consideration of subject (*fann*) rather than chronology or aims.⁴ However, more contemporary scholars, like the senior Bareilvi scholar Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mubīn Nu'mānī, categorize *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* under "*falsafah*," being described vaguely as "a refutation of the new philosophy."⁵

Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd is a refutation penned against a logico-philosophical work written in Arabic, boldly titled *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd* (The New Discourse).⁶ It was written by a major erudite Sunni scholar of India,

⁴ Zafar al-Dīn al-Bihārī, *Ḥayāt-i A'lā Ḥaẓrat* (Lahore: Maktabah-i Nūriyyah, 2003), 54. He explains his classification more on pp. 6–9.

⁵ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mubīn Nu'mānī, *al-Muṣannafāt al-Riḍawiyyah*, 2nd ed. (Malegaon: Nuri Mission, 2013), 44. Interestingly, the reception of Khān's text *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* within specifically the Bareilvi intellectual ecosystem and more generally within affinity theological orientations, like the Khairabadi school has yet to be studied. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this reception, but my cursory perusal of the mainstay works of both schools reveals no engagement with it. This absence of engagement may be due to several overlapping factors. First, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* was primarily a polemical intervention rather than a pedagogical or widely circulated study text and thus did not penetrate the formal scholastic curriculum sustained by the Khairabadi school and other inheritors of it like the Bandialvi circles. Second, while Khān's critique targeted specific metaphysical claims of the philosophers, he did not reject *manṭiq* or the rational sciences (*'ulūm 'aqliyyah*) tout court; this may have allowed later Sunni scholastics to revere him without feeling compelled to revisit or reconcile his anti-philosophy rhetoric with their own rationalist heritage. Finally, perhaps the deep veneration of both the Khairabadi lineage and Khān within the same Sunni ecosystem discouraged direct scrutiny of potential tensions between their intellectual orientations.

⁶ Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Sanbhalī, *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd li Nāṭiq wa Alannā lahu 'l-Ḥadīd* (The New Discourse for the Eloquent One for Whom We Softened Iron) (n.p.: Maṭba'-i Anvār-i Muḥammadi, 1295/1878). On al-Sanbhalī's chosen title specifically, Khān has a scathingly extensive discussion. For the important details, see Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd 'alā Khadd Manṭiq al-Jadīd*, in *al-Aṭāyā al-Nabawiyyah fī 'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍawiyyah* (Lahore: Riza Foundation, 2004), 27:162–83. The gist of it is as follows: First, he views the phrase "*al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd*" (The New Discourse) as hyperbolic and self-aggrandizing in nature, which he sees as exaggerating the book's contribution to the field of Arabic logic and philosophy that diminishes the contribution of earlier masters. Second, the description "*Nāṭiq*" (the Eloquent One) in whichever way it is glossed (whether referring to God, the author himself, or the reader) all fail. If applied to the author specifically, it implies a level of unparalleled intellectual supremacy inconsistent with the humility expected in Islamic scholarship. Third, the direct incorporation of Qur'ānic language in the title—"wa Alannā lahu 'l-Ḥadīd" (We softened iron for him) [Qur'ān 34:10]—associates the author with a divine favour granted to Prophet David (peace be on him). Even if it is denied as applying to the author and taken in a figurative way, Khān still considers it an inappropriate and sacrilegious use of sacred terminology. Finally, he perceives the title as overstepping ethical and theological boundaries by elevating speculative reasoning to a status that conflicts with

Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Sanbhalī (d. 1305/1887).⁷ However, Khān never mentions his interlocutor by name, only referring to him cryptically as “Zayd the pseudo-philosopher” (*zayd mutafalsifah*) throughout, even though the two knew of each other.⁸ This may be for several reasons. One possible reason could be to maintain parity with the questioner Navāb Maulavī Sulṭān Aḥmad Khān, who, in his question to Khān, introduces al-Sanbhalī with this very description. It may be that Khān maintains this out of consistency with the questioner.⁹ Another reason may be that, due to al-Sanbhalī hailing from a pious and scholarly family and being himself a highly esteemed Sunni figure of Delhi who was

the primacy of divine and Prophetic knowledge. For Khān, such a title not only misleads readers but also undermines the humility and reverence expected in Islamic scholarship, and he concludes his discussion stating, “There is no acceptable interpretation of this title that would free the author from the sin of using it.” Khān, *Maqāmi‘ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:174. Therefore, even this critique of the title of al-Sanbhalī’s text is implicitly symptomatic of a broader trend of the late nineteenth century, which involves overly glorifying human reasoning at the expense of divine and Prophetic knowledge.

⁷ By his own admission, al-Sanbhalī is identified as a Ḥanafī in law, Māturīdī in theology, and Qādirī in spiritual affiliation. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Sanbhalī, *al-Qawl al-Wasīṭ fī Ja‘l al-Mu‘allaf wa ‘l-Basīṭ* (The Moderate Discourse on the Creation of Composite and Simple Substances) (Kanpur: Maṭba‘-i Nizāmī, 1879), 276. On al-Sanbhalī, refer to al-Sharīf ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, *al-I‘lām bi Man fī Ta‘rīkh al-Hind min al-A‘lām al-Musammā bi Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir wa Bahjat al-Masāmi‘ wa ‘l-Nawāzīr* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999), 8:1354-55; its verbatim inclusion in Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mar‘ashlī, *Nathr al-Jawāhir al-Durar fī ‘Ulamā‘ al-Qarn al-Rābi‘ ‘Ashar* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 2006), 1:1128-29; and Maulavī Raḥmān ‘Alī, *Tadhkirah-i ‘Ulamā‘-i Hind*, trans. Muḥammad Ayyūb Qādirī (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1961), 101-2n2. However, al-Sanbhalī is not given a biographical entry in the original Persian *Tadhkirah-i ‘Ulamā‘-i Hind*.

⁸ Henceforth, in the article, I will depart from following Khān in referring to his interlocutor as “so and so the pseudo-philosopher” and instead will mention al-Sanbhalī by name. The fact that Khān and al-Sanbhalī had correspondence is established in an incident recounted by al-Bihārī regarding a scheduled debate between Khān and a “*tafḍīlī*,” a person who prefers Prophet Muḥammad’s cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) over his two senior companions and confidants Abū Bakr (d. 13/634) and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644). Al-Sanbhalī was also appointed to be among the debaters. Even though he was severely ill, Khān accepted the debate and insisted on doing it despite the doctor advising to the contrary. Khān sent thirty questions to al-Sanbhalī for the *tafḍīlī* interlocutor to answer, and upon receiving them, al-Sanbhalī “with utmost honesty, stated that no one holding the *tafḍīlī* belief could provide answers to these questions and, boarding the carriage, returned. The details of this incident have already been published in *Fath-i Khaibar*.” See Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Sharaf Qādirī, *Yād-i A‘lā Ḥazrat* (Lahore: Maktabah-i Qādiriyyah, 1994), 35. The original and full account can be found in the original Persian version of Maulavī Raḥmān ‘Alī’s *Tadhkira-i ‘Ulamā‘-i Hind* (Lucknow: Maṭba‘-i Munshī Naval Kishōr, 1914), 17-18, 101.

⁹ Khān, *Maqāmi‘ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:186.

recognized by the scholarly class of his time, naming him outright could have caused unnecessary controversy or division within the Sunni-Indian community, particularly among followers who respected al-Sanbhalī's scholarly and spiritual lineage. Khān may have sought to address the perceived errors in al-Sanbhalī's ideas without turning the issue into a factional dispute.¹⁰ A third reason may be out of a polemical strategy. By shifting the focus from the person to the ideas of the person, Khān can take a highly critical stance towards a senior figure without reducing his critique to a personal dispute. In classical Islamic scholarship, it was common to use generic names like "Zayd" or "Amr" when critiquing ideas or debating concepts. This practice allows the critique to focus on the ideas rather than becoming a personal attack on the individual.¹¹ However, the likely reason may be, as a way of depreciation, that it belittles al-Sanbhalī for the views he was espousing or cryptically endorsing.

Structurally, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* divides into three parts. The first part is the question, which contains a list of eight heretical philosophical propositions that the questioner, Navāb Maulavī Sulṭān Aḥmad Khān of

¹⁰ Khān was no stranger to sectarian disputes. His later life would come to be identified with one of the most prolonged and fractious polemics involving the senior scholars of Deoband that was continued by the intellectual followers and successors of each side. On the origins of what is referred to as the Deobandi-Barelvi conflict and the academic representations around it, refer to Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, "For the Love of the Prophet: Deobandi-Barelvi Polemics and the Ulama in Pakistan" (PhD diss., Faculty of Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, 2018). For examples of Khān's polemics against some of the senior figures (*akābir*) of Deoband, refer to Tareen, *Defending Muhammad*, 281-83 and 310-15. On overviews of both groups, refer to Thomas J. Kugler, "Barelwīs," in *Encyclopaedia of Indian Religions: Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism*, ed. Zayn R. Kassam, Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, and Jehan Bagli (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018), 116-20 and Brannon Ingram, "Deoband School," in *Encyclopaedia of Indian Religions: Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism*, ed. Zayn R. Kassam, Yudit Kornberg Greenberg and Jehan Bagli (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018), 208-13.

¹¹ This is not to say that Khān was not provocative in his denouncement of al-Sanbhalī's statements. The entire treatise is replete with harsh condemnations and a tone of strong contempt. In one place, after stating how some Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī jurists permit using pages from a logic book to clean oneself after urinating and defecating (as long as the pages do not have God's name etched on them), he warns the questioner against giving *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd* (and related works) any further publicity:

Regarding this destructive and ruinous book, I do not say what some scholars of the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools have said about certain logical books that pages from them, which are devoid of the names of God and His Messenger, can be used for cleaning oneself. . . . Yes, I will certainly say this much: Refrain from printing it any further; burn the remaining volumes as soon as possible; and strive to the best of your ability to suppress its propagation and erase its mentions. Such falsehood and denial deserve nothing less. (Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:185-86)

Bareilly, seeks further clarity on.¹² All but one of the propositions stated by the questioner and then addressed by Khān appear to impinge on divine unicity (*tawhīd*) and aseity (*qayyūmiyyah*).¹³ Hence, the concern is about fundamental Muslim doctrine. The second part consists of Khān's detailed responses to each of the propositions. I will examine this in section three below, so leave off mentioning anything here. The third and final part of *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* contains three general admonitions that reveal Khān's attitudes towards the Islamic intellectual disciplines, philosophy, and the religious priorities that ought to occupy a believer. Each of the admonitions will now be briefly explained because, as I will comment below in section four, these admonitions, along with other responsa in *Fatāwā Riḍawiyyah*, implicitly carry a commentary on the broader religious and intellectual tensions, as well as the perceived spiritual and intellectual malaise within the Indian Muslim community of the nineteenth century.

In the first admonition, Khān directly appeals to al-Sanbhalī's sense of reason and fear of divine sanction, calling him to abandon his arrogance and embrace repentance. He addresses the ego-driven resistance to acknowledging one's errors, particularly in matters of disbelief. The admonition revolves around the following points:

1. Rejection of ego and arrogance: Khān identifies arrogance (*anāniyat*) as the root of al-Sanbhalī's refusal to repent. He argues that the fear of losing status or reputation leads to self-destruction.
2. Call to humility and repentance: Khān urges him to abandon his attachment to erroneous beliefs, as returning to the truth is a mark of true knowledge, not a deficiency.
3. Critique of intellectual pride: He warns against the false perception that turning to the truth would undermine one's philosophical stature. Instead, it would elevate the philosopher in the eyes of both God and others as a just and truth-seeking individual.
4. Warnings against persisting in error: The admonition highlights the dangers of persisting in minor or major sins, particularly disbelief, and emphasizes the severity of God's punishment.

¹² Sulṭān Aḥmad Khān clearly had familiarity with *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd*, having access to the text, and for the selection of quotes and their page references that he cites in his question.

¹³ In *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, there is also a reference to a passage from *al-Qawl al-Wasīṭ fī Ja' l al-Mu'allaf wa 'l-Basīṭ*, a short philosophical text written in 1296/1879 by al-Sanbhalī, discussing efficient causality, existence, and related issues in metaphysics. See Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:186-87.

5. Encouragement to reflect: Al-Sanbhalī is advised to reflect in solitude, free from the influence of prejudice, on whether clinging to disbelief is truly worth enduring the consequences of God's wrath.
6. Prayer for guidance: Khān's admonition concludes with a heartfelt prayer for God to guide al-Sanbhalī, accept his repentance, and grant steadfastness in faith to all.¹⁴

In the second admonition, Khān warns against the dangers of intellectual vices like prejudice and blind fanaticism, which ought to be replaced by allegiance to Islam:

If, God forbid, the vein of prejudice begins to surge, remember this much: in matters of the beliefs of Islam and the *sunnah*, the sayings of so-and-so from India or someone else from Sindh hold no authority over us. Islamic rulings are not specific to one person over another. All honour belongs to God. The *sharī'ah* is a proof upon everyone—who could be a proof over the *sharī'ah*? Whoever engages in such actions will bear the consequences of their misdeeds, regardless of who they are. We align with individuals only so long as they remain steadfast in the true religion. If, God forbid, they deviate from it, we pray for their influence to stay far away from us: "May their shadow be far removed from us." We accept the words of anyone that we find to be in accordance with Islam and the *sunnah*—not because they said it, but because it aligns with the Straight Path (*ṣirāt-i mustaqīm*). And if we find their words to contradict the truth, whether they are Zayd, 'Amr, Khālīd, or Bakr, we will discard their opinions like a stone against a wall and cling firmly to the blessed stirrup of the Messenger of God. May God never separate us from his guidance in this world or the hereafter—Amen, O God, Amen! "Muḥammad the Arab, the honour of both worlds; Whoever is not dust at his door, let dust be on their head."¹⁵

This second admonition sets out the criterion of a believer: loyalty to Islam and the Prophet's (peace be on him) *sunnah* must surpass all personal allegiances. Truth is judged by its alignment with the religion of Islam, not by the stature of the individual who speaks it or by the ideas and views that they produce.

In the third and final admonition, Khān critiques excessive indulgence in philosophy, warning students against prioritizing speculative disciplines over the essential sciences of the religion, like Qur'ānic exegesis, *ḥadīth*, and particularly *fiqh*. He highlights what he sees as the futility and endless contradictions of philosophical pursuits, which neither yield certainty nor address the critical questions of the hereafter, such as correct beliefs and proper deeds. He acerbically comments on this perceived danger of philosophy:

¹⁴ Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:186-87.

¹⁵ Ibid., 27:188.

O dear students! If you are learning for the sake of the afterlife, by God, philosophy is harmful for the hereafter. As for worldly benefit, even that is better served by something simpler, like passing the middle school exams to secure a ten-rupee job. O dear ones! By God, be just! The Chosen One described knowledge as the inheritance of prophets and scholars as their heirs. Look carefully: Is this the knowledge in which you are entirely engrossed, or is it the one you neglect with such carelessness and disdain? Reflect sincerely on what is better: becoming an heir to the Prophet or chasing after the scraps of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī? As the poet says: “Consider the difference—it is as vast as the heavens and the earth.” O dear students! Satan whispers into the ears of this group, convincing them that only these philosophical sciences are worth devoting their lives to. Their profound depths and subtle intricacies make them invaluable; once mastered, religious sciences will pale in comparison. But by God, this is utterly false. You have never truly tasted the sweetness of the divine sciences (*‘ulūm-i rabbānīyah*). Otherwise, you would know that these are the real sciences, possessing such depth, complexity, beauty, and delicacy that philosophy cannot match even a fraction of them. But what can be done when “People are enemies of what they do not know.” Fine, perhaps you disagree. But what great precision and excellent research have these philosophers achieved? Thousands of years have passed, yet no conclusion has been reached. People claim that new opinions refine knowledge, but in this field, it’s the opposite: “Their dreams became disordered due to the abundance of interpretations.” Look at the predecessors and their successors—each one, with great pomp and eloquence, presents their ideas as if the truth never existed outside their grasp. Then comes another, dismissing the prior as foolish, proclaiming their own as superior. This endless cycle of chaos will not end until the Day of Judgment.¹⁶

Khān further contrasts the vanity of saying “I say” in philosophical discourse with the sacredness of “God says” and “the Prophet says,” emphasizing the superiority of divine knowledge. While allowing the study of logic, mathematics, and other practical aspects of philosophy in moderation, he insists that religious sciences must remain the primary focus. He warns that the arrogance bred by philosophy can rust the heart, making it resistant to divine truth, and criticizes those who mock religious scholars as poor substitutes for intellectuals and philosophers. Khān concludes his admonition with a sincere prayer for guidance and steadfastness on the path of true knowledge rooted in the Qur’ān and *sunnah*.¹⁷ More on this will be discussed in section four.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27:189.

¹⁷ Ibid.

2. The Heretical Propositions

Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd is a methodical and well-structured text. Following it is straightforward. Each philosophical proposition is addressed by Khān in sequence, first to last. The editor and annotator of *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* conveniently summarizes Khān's declarations of each of the eight propositions.¹⁸ I have reproduced it in full translation below:

The first statement: Besides Allah Almighty, the world has ten creators.¹⁹

Response: This is a doctrine of disbelief.

The second statement: The matter of bodies is eternal.²⁰

Response: This is a doctrine of disbelief.

The third statement: The corporeal form and the specific form (*ṣūrat-i jismiyyah-o nau'iyah*) are eternal.

Response: This is disbelief.

The fourth statement: The ten intellects and souls are eternal.

Response: This is disbelief.

The fifth statement: Some things inherently have more merit for being created. If Allah does not create them, then He would be considered stingy, and it would necessitate preferring the lesser over the greater.²¹

Response: This statement is heretical, misguided, and leads to disbelief.

The sixth statement: As evidence, he stated that these ten intellects are free from every defect and imperfection, and it is impossible for any particle in the entire universe to ever escape their knowledge.²²

Response: Adhering to this is disbelief.

The seventh statement: Origination and change—nothing was ever non-existent, nor will anything ever become non-existent. Rather, what we say “did not exist before” was merely hidden, and what we say “is no longer present” has simply become concealed. In reality, everything has always existed and will continue to exist forever.²³

Response: This is disbelief and entails many forms of disbelief.

The eighth statement: My book is the pinnacle of research, angelic in its impact, and even capable of creating angels.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid., 27:105-6n.

¹⁹ Al-Sanbhalī, *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd*, 250-51 and *al-Qawl al-Wasīṭ*, 261.

²⁰ Al-Sanbhalī, *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd*, 255-56.

²¹ Ibid., 349.

²² Ibid., 206-7.

²³ Ibid., 15.

²⁴ This proposition will not be discussed in this article as it is not of immediate philosophical relevance. For Khān's scathing response to it, see Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:162-74.

Response: This statement is a grave sin of the highest order and, according to many narrations, amounts to disbelief. And God Almighty knows best.²⁵

The first proposition receives the most extensive treatment as it directly relates to divine aseity, sovereignty, and creative exclusivity, which are compromised by a belief in an emanative scheme of intellects that also create.²⁶ This is followed by propositions two, three, and four, all grouped as they relate to the single question of eternal entities besides God.²⁷ The fifth proposition delves into the philosophical doctrine of necessitarianism that entails a negation of a choice model for divine action.²⁸ The sixth proposition assesses the claim that the ten emanative intellects (*al-ʿuqūl al-ʿasharah*) are perfect and omniscient. It is the shortest treatment in the entire text.²⁹ The seventh proposition addresses questions around eternalism (*al-dahriyyah*) and its proper interpretation and theological implications.³⁰ The final proposition is dealt with in various places of the treatise as well as under the eighth proposition itself, and will not be discussed here because Khān sees little philosophical merit in doing so, in that it relates more to his interlocutor's spiritual condition and ego.³¹

3. Khān's Responses to al-Sanbhalī

In this section, I discuss Khān's criticisms of seven of the eight propositions. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to cover the entire ambit of Khān's refutation. Hence, some will be treated with more detail than others, guided by where I think the interesting theological and philosophical points of consideration are. In addition, where necessary, I will reference other works of Khān on the related issues as they are discussed. This will allow for appreciating, albeit in a broad way, Khān's arguments and methodology.

On the first proposition, Khān gives his most extensive response. According to al-Sanbhalī, the grounded position (*taḥqīq*) among the philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ*) regarding cosmology is that God is the effective cause (*ʿillah mu'aththirah*) who essentially brings into existence all existent things (*al-mawjūdāt*), and the horizontal descending series of ten intellects (*al-ʿuqūl al-ʿasharah*) that emanate from God are the intermediaries (*wasāʾit*) or conditions (*shurūṭ*) of God's management of

²⁵ Ibid., 27:105-6.

²⁶ Ibid., 27:113-31.

²⁷ Ibid., 27:131-37.

²⁸ Ibid., 27:137-44.

²⁹ Ibid., 27:144-46.

³⁰ Ibid., 27:147-61.

³¹ Ibid.

the cosmos. This means that God's activity emanates to the material world through the instrumentality of these ten intellects, culminating in the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*), the primary agent through which God effuses His specific temporal gifts and graces.³² For Khān, two matters are directly undermined by this philosophical account. The first is God's "*tadbīr*," the complete order throughout creation, His meticulous planning behind the functioning of the physical cosmos, and the providential unfolding of the history of the world until the Day of Resurrection. The second is God's "*khalq*," His absolute power of executing an act of creating something from nothing without exception. For Khān, to suggest in any way that God, Exalted and Blessed, is disconnected from the management and control of any matter, or to assert that something other than God is the creator of substances, or to say that another thing completes God's act of creation, is outright and absolute unbelief. These issues are among the most evident and fundamental necessities of religion, and they are distinguished even within this category due to their exceptional clarity. They are so self-evident that they require no further elaboration or explanation.³³

The reason for the entailment of unbelief is that it amounts to polytheism (*shirk*).³⁴ God's unicity (*tawhīd*) cannot accommodate any conceptual notion of the universe and its workings being explained by reference to entities in addition to Him.³⁵ The ten intellects would assume this creative role, albeit in a subordinate way, leading to the positing of multiple creators (*ta'addud-i khāliq*). To believe in multiple creators is to commit unbelief.³⁶ This is why Khān is also dismissive of any suggestion by al-Sanbhalī to circumvent direct connotations of creative activity attributed to the ten intellects by construing their creative power as entirely derived or metaphorical. Al-Sanbhalī mentions the example of the moon obtaining its light from the sun. Just as the moon does not generate light from its own nature but reflects the light of the sun, similarly, it is God who possesses intrinsic or essential

³² Al-Sanbhalī, *al-Mantiq al-Jadīd*, 251 and *al-Qawl al-Wasīṭ*, 2. See M. S. Saeed Shaikh, *A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1970), 75, s.v. "*al-'uqūl al-ashara*."

³³ Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:113.

³⁴ On *shirk*, see Mustansir Mir, "Polytheism and Atheism," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 4:158-62.

³⁵ On models of divine unicity, refer to Khalil Andani, "Divine Unicity (*Tawhīd*)," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al., August 29, 2024, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/DivineUnicity>.

³⁶ Khān, *Maqām' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:120.

creatorship (*khāliqiyat-i dhātiyah*), whereas the ten intellects have a derived creatorship or power (*khāliqiyat-i mustafādah* or *qudrat-i mustafādah*).³⁷ Khān explains why this is still theologically unacceptable:

Zayd's statement explicitly asserts that the ten intellects lack inherent creatorship but are, in reality, considered creators of the world, akin to the moon's borrowed illumination from the sun. According to this view, their creative capacity is derived from God Most High, similar to how the moon derives its light from the sun. However, when measured against the Qur'ān and the beliefs of its followers, this notion is unequivocally false, God forbid. There is no creator in his essence besides God. Never has He granted the role of creating the world to any other entity, whether through inherent or derived power. Creation is solely God's prerogative. God states in the Qur'ān: "Exalted is He above what they associate with Him."³⁸

This establishes that attributing such creative roles to intermediaries, even metaphorically, contradicts the Qur'ānic assertion of God's absolute uniqueness and sovereignty. It is a stark deviation from foundational Islamic theology, where the Creator remains unpartnered and unparalleled in His abilities.

Khān presents two lines of attack against the first proposition to uphold the doctrine of divine unicity. The first is the Islamic medieval argument from God's administration of the cosmos (*dalīl al-tadbīr*), and the second is the citation of Qur'ānic verses.³⁹ On the *dalīl al-tadbīr*, Khān explains at length how various natural and biological phenomena have been intricately and exquisitely put together, that harmoniously function in ways that no one can know how they occur, let alone be the cause behind them. Therefore, all the intricate interconnectedness of the various complex parts of any object, however great or small, that produces harmony and beneficial outcomes is a result of the governance of a single, all-powerful, all-knowing Creator who does everything out of wisdom (*ḥikmat*). On the Qur'ānic verses, Khān cites examples such as "This is God's creation, so show Me what those other than Him have created. Rather, the wrongdoers are in clear misguidance"⁴⁰; "And if you were to ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They would surely say, 'Allah'"⁴¹; "Is there any creator other than God?"⁴² and "O people! A parable is presented, so listen to it carefully: Indeed, those

³⁷ Al-Sanbhalī, *al-Qawl al-Wasīṭ*, 261-62.

³⁸ Qur'ān 16:18; Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:124.

³⁹ On the *dalīl al-tadbīr*, see Mehmet Ozalp, *God in Islamic Theology: Tawhid in Classical Islamic Theology and Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (London: Lexington Books, 2023), 164-67.

⁴⁰ Qur'ān 31:11.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31:25.

⁴² Ibid., 35:3.

whom you invoke besides God can never create [even] a fly, even if they all come together for it.”⁴³ All these verses are unequivocal in stating God’s sole creative prerogative and sovereignty over creation.

Khān deals with the second, third, and fourth propositions straightforwardly. He comments:

The second, third, and fourth statements reflect the same erroneous beliefs: asserting the temporal eternality of concepts such as *hayūlā* (prime matter), corporeal form, specific form, the ten intellects, and certain souls. These claims are, unequivocally, acts of disbelief. The Imams of this religion have categorically stated, “Whoever attributes eternality (*azaliyyah*) to anything other than God becomes a disbeliever by the unanimous consensus of the Muslims (*ijmāʿ-i muslimīn*).”⁴⁴

Nothing besides God can be eternal. This is categorically unbelief. Whatever is temporal cannot be eternal because a temporal object lacks existence and then gains existence at a particular point in time. Thus, it undergoes change or “originations” (*ḥawādith*) in the terminology of the theologians. Khān explains his answer, citing the Almoravid judge of Ceuta al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā al-Yaḥṣūbī (d. 544/1149):

Whoever affirms the divinity (*ulūhiyyah*) and oneness (*waḥdāniyyah*) of God Almighty but believes in the eternality (*qidam*) of anything other than [Him] (i.e., other than God’s essence and attributes, such as the belief of the philosophers that the universe or the intellects are eternal), has fallen into unbelief. Similarly, if someone believes that anyone besides God is the creator of the universe (as the philosophers claim with their doctrine that “only one can emanate from one”), such beliefs constitute clear unbelief (and the adherent to such doctrines is considered a disbeliever, like the metaphysicians from the philosophers and the naturalists).⁴⁵

Elevating something temporal to being eternal is, in effect, to assert that it has a property that only God’s essence or attribute has, and this is impossible. The notion of something being eternal entails that it cannot be temporal. In addition to this entailment, Khān lists several quotes from well-known Sunni theological manuals and their authoritative commentaries to support his point without the need to make any lengthy metaphysical elaboration because of their clear-cut nature.⁴⁶

Khān describes the fifth proposition as a “bizarre concoction of multiple misguidances and numerous absurdities” that has “clear roots

⁴³ Ibid., 22:73.

⁴⁴ Khān, *Maqāmiʾ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27:131-32.

⁴⁶ For these theological quotes, see *ibid.*, 27:132-37.

in philosophy and Mu'tazilah thought."⁴⁷ He discusses al-Sanbhalī's statement in four related points, but I will focus only on the central philosophical claim, explained as follows: The idea that some things inherently have more merit or value implies that God, as an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good being, would, by His nature, bring about the greater and more meritorious option. If God refrains from creating something inherently better or more beneficial, it raises the question of whether such a decision reflects a lack of generosity (*jūd*)—referred to as "stinginess" (*bukhl*). The philosophers, particularly in the tradition of Islamic Neoplatonism, emphasize that God is the most generous being and that His actions are necessarily tied to the principle of goodness. They argue that God's perfection entails that He acts to create and distribute good maximally, as withholding good would contradict His nature. Like the philosophers, the Mu'tazilah developed the doctrine of "the optimum" (*al-aṣḥā*), which holds that God always chooses the optimum (best) course of action. According to this view, God is merciful, wise, and just, so He necessarily acts in the way that brings about the best or the least harm for His creation, a welfare model of divine action. For example, God would only create a world that is the most beneficial overall, balancing justice and mercy, not because He needs it, but because His creatures need it.⁴⁸ The Mu'tazilah used this doctrine of the optimum to explain phenomena such as suffering and evil, arguing that such occurrences are necessary to achieve a greater good.⁴⁹

Khān's response to proposition five follows that of the *kalām* theologians before him in rejecting both the necessitarian model held by the philosophers and the welfare model of divine action espoused by the Mu'tazilah in favour of a choice model. I reproduce Khān's rebuttal below:

Thirdly, the statement of the follower and the leader that "there is no stinginess on the part of the Creator, and this necessitates emanation" is entirely contradictory to the principles of the Ahl al-Sunnah. The Ahl al-Sunnah believe that the Creator, Blessed and Exalted, is Generous (*jawād*), Gracious (*karīm*), and the Most Generous of the generous (*akram al-*

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27:137, 144.

⁴⁸ This is a highly simplified summary for the purposes of the article. For details, refer to Robert Brunschvig, "Mutazilisme et Optimum," *Studia Islamica* 39 (1974): 5-23.

⁴⁹ On two recent overviews on evil and suffering in Islamic thought, refer to Timothy Winter, "Evil and Suffering," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al., August 29, 2024, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/EvilandSuffering> and Nasrin Rouzati, "The Concept of Evil in Islam," in *The Concept of Evil in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Georges Tamer and Catherina Rachik (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2024), 101-52. For a thoroughly philosophical assessment of this topic from within the Islamic intellectual tradition, refer to Safaruk Zaman Chowdhury, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2021).

akramīn). Glorified is His Majesty, and Sanctified is His Decree. However, despite this, they do not believe that anything is obligatory upon Him. Before creating the universe, He was already generous, and even if He had never created the universe, He would still be generous. Neither would His abstaining from creation imply any deficiency in Him, nor would it detract from His perfect and complete attributes. The creation or annihilation of anything is not binding upon Him. God, the Exalted, has said, “Your Lord does whatever He wills”⁵⁰; “God does what He wishes”⁵¹; “He decrees as He wills”⁵²; and “He is not questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned.”⁵³ This is clear and evident to anyone whose insight God has illuminated. God, the Exalted, has said, “Whomever God does not grant light, there will be no light for him.”⁵⁴ This supposed “necessity of emanation” also arises from the same accursed philosophy that considers the All-Powerful, Wiling Agent (*qādir mukhtār*) to be a compelled agent (*fā’il mūjib*) and views the creation of the universe as a cause of His perfection. “Exalted is God far above what the wrongdoers say, a great exaltation!”⁵⁵

Fourthly, the philosophical follower added yet another move to the chessboard and a new melody to the lute, asserting, “If something less deserving is actualized while something more deserving is not, this would necessitate the preference of the lesser over the greater.” Glory be to God! There is no concept of “more deserving” (*aḥaqq*) or “less deserving” there, nor can your weak intellects pass judgment over the All-Powerful, Praiseworthy One. The decree of “He does whatever He wills”⁵⁶ is beyond your reasoning. For us, there is no criterion for preference other than His will, and even if some other criteria were to exist, it would not pose any objection against Him. God, the Exalted, has said, “sovereignty belongs to none but God,”⁵⁷ “God decrees, and there is no one to reverse His decree,”⁵⁸ and “Your Lord creates whatever He wills and chooses; they have no choice in the matter. Exalted is Allah and far above the partners they associate with Him”⁵⁹. . . . Let me make it even clearer: The core belief of Ahl al-Sunnah is that all possibilities (*maqḍūrāt*) are equal before the Exalted Sovereign. Nothing inherently possesses any merit or entitlement such that one could be deemed “preferred” (*rājiḥ*) and the other “less preferred” (*marjūḥ*). . . . The only criterion of preference is the will (*irādah*)

⁵⁰ Qur’ān 11:107.

⁵¹ Ibid., 22:18.

⁵² Ibid., 5:1.

⁵³ Ibid., 21:23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 24:40.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17:43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85:16.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12:40.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3:41.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28:68.

of the Mighty and Glorious Creator. Whatever His will determines to create, that alone gains preference. . . . Hypothetically, even if there were any external criterion of preference (*murajjih*), it would not bind the Sovereign Lord, glorious is His Majesty. He has the freedom to never actualize the preferred and instead grant existence to the less preferred. There can never be any objection to this.⁶⁰

Quoting theological works that reject any obligation or duties on God, Khān comments,

Look closely at this passage; it also refutes the philosopher's accusation of stinginess (*bukhl*). And God's argument is supreme. All these points that the scholars have explained are individually established through the verses I recited. Even if nothing else were presented, the single verse "Indeed, God is powerful over all things"⁶¹ (Q. 2:20) would suffice. Because even the so-called less preferred (*marjūh*) is a thing (*shay'*), and every *thing* is within His power. The essence of divine power is the capacity to both act and refrain, meaning God can either do something or not do it, with no harm or deficiency arising from either possibility. . . . So how can there be any accusation of preferring the less preferred? What kind of audacity is it to levy such claims against the All-Powerful, Willing Agent? Then I say briefly: We ask Zayd: What do you mean by "the necessity of preferring the less preferred"? Do you claim it implies an intrinsic impossibility (*istiḥālāh dhātiyyah*)? If so, this is evidently false because such a concept applies only to our finite, perishable, and deficient power, not to the eternal, perfect, and complete divine power. Or do you claim it entails a flaw in God? This would mean equating the Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy One with His creation and turning away from hundreds of Qur'ānic texts. Our actions are either good or bad, but whatever God does is inherently good. If we commit a deed, we are subject to objection; if He does the same deed, there can be no objection. . . . If God were to cast a believing servant into Hell (and may we seek refuge in His gracious countenance), then ask that believer, "How did your Lord's decision seem to you?" By God! The believer will respond, "Very good, extremely excellent, utterly just, and perfect. But your mercy and well-being are more expansive for me."⁶²

Khān upholds God as a willing agent (*fā'il mukhtār*) and powerful agent (*qādir mukhtār*) who exercises His will and power to either choose or not when it comes to an act without any external imposition on that will or impediment to the power to execute the act. He establishes this characterization of God from Qur'ānic verses and appeals to authoritative theological scholars without the need for lengthy theological elaboration. For Khān, the denial of or curtailing God's sovereignty and agency entailed by the philosophers' necessitarian

⁶⁰ Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:137-41.

⁶¹ Qur'ān 2:20.

⁶² Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:141-44.

doctrine and the Mu'tazilah's doctrine of the optimum is to effectively undermine God's divinity (*ulūhiyyah*).⁶³

Khān rejects proposition six in a swift and straightforward discussion, giving his basic reason, which is that ascribing any created object with exclusively divine qualities is unbelief. He says,

The sixth statement asserts that "the ten intellects are free and purified from all defects and flaws, and their knowledge is complete and all-encompassing, to the extent that not even the smallest particle of the universe can remain hidden from them." This claim attributes a quality that is exclusively the attribute of the Knower of the unseen and the seen, referring to God Almighty. . . . To ascribe such a quality to anyone other than God is unequivocally an act of disbelief (*kufr*), for all honour and majesty belong to God. A Muslim should reflect upon the impossibility of such a claim and recognize the magnitude of its blasphemy, as well as how it directly contravenes explicit Qur'ānic verses.⁶⁴

Some of these "explicit" Qur'ānic verses that unequivocally establish God's omniscience include: "Not even the measure of a particle in the earth or sky escapes your Lord, nor anything lesser or greater: it is all written in a clear record"⁶⁵; "no one knows your Lord's forces except Him"⁶⁶; "knowledge of the Final Hour belongs solely to Him"⁶⁷; "they say, 'If what you say is true, when will this promise⁶⁸ be fulfilled?' Say, 'God alone has knowledge of this: my only duty is to give clear warning'"⁶⁹; "but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills"⁷⁰; and "they said, 'May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise.'"⁷¹ In addition to this textual evidence, Khān also denounces al-Sanbhalī's reference to the ten intellects being angels (*malā'ikah*):

⁶³ Khān, *al-Kalimah al-Mulhamah fī 'l-Ḥikmah al-Muḥkamah li Wihā' al-Falsafah al-Mash'amah*, in *al-'Aṭāyā al-Nabawīyyah fī 'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍāwīyyah* (Lahore: Riza Foundation, 2004), 27:386; Muḥammad Sa'd Allāh, *'Aqīdah-i Tauḥīd main Maulānā Aḥmad Riḍā Khān kī Khidmāt* (Lahore: Dār al-Ikhlāṣ, 2009), 43-45.

⁶⁴ Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:144.

⁶⁵ Qur'ān 10:61.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74:31.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 41:47.

⁶⁸ That is, "the punishment on the Day of Resurrection." Sayyid Muḥammad Na'im al-Dīn al-Murādābādī, *Khazā'in al-'Irfān* on the margins of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān's vernacular Urdu translation of the Qur'ān called *Kanz al-ʾImān* (Karachi: Maktabat al-Madīnah, 2011), 1043.

⁶⁹ Qur'ān 67:25-26.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2:255.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2:232; Khān, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd*, 27:144-45.

Glory be to God! The philosophers claim that the ten intellects refer to angels. This claim is fundamentally false—because the characteristics they ascribe to these ten intellects bear no actual resemblance to the attributes of angels—and there is no greater liar than one whom the Qur’ān has declared a liar. In truth, these are merely baseless fabrications of their deluded imaginations, with no foundational reality: “these are nothing but names you have invented yourselves, you and your forefathers. God has sent no authority for them.”⁷² However, if we hypothetically accept their claim, we could argue that just as the polytheists of Arabia exaggerated and distorted the status of angels by describing them as female, so too did the disbelievers of Greece take their exaggeration to an extreme by declaring that these beings transcend all created attributes. . . . Thus, the ruling on the issue is clear. The only point of contention here lies in Zayd’s use of the phrase “according to them” (*indahum*), which explicitly indicates that he is quoting or narrating their perspective. I respond: Regardless of the fact that the statement “It is impossible for the First Intellect, for example, to be unaware of particularities of existents. . . .” is itself blatant disbelief and that it is not framed as a quote, rather it is mentioned as a consequence of the absolute transcendence [of the ten intellects]—as indicated by the phrasing and context of the statement—I wonder how this would support him, because he presented the ability of the immaterial entities to know material particulars in their specific forms as his personal, verified belief and used the aforementioned claim as evidence to support this notion. Thus, it is clear that this was not a mere act of quoting or narrating but rather an act of reliance and defence, portraying acceptance of the claim. This is an obvious indicator of approval, as any rational person—let alone an intelligent scholar—can discern. Moreover, we have already established that explicitly narrating such claims, even with the intent of quoting, is impermissible unless it is accompanied by clear rejection and refutation.⁷³

Within the medieval emanationist cosmology favoured by Muslim peripatetic philosophers, the ten intellects came to be identified with angels in an attempt at synthesizing Greek philosophy and Qur’ānic angelology. However, as Khān points out in the above passage, there are clear conflicts with the Qur’ān. The point here is not to digress into an account of the ontology of angels within Islamic theology but just to highlight how Khān evaluates these attempts by Muslim philosophers to construe the ten intellects as angels, not as a matter of a failure in hermeneutics but as an actual doctrinal fabrication.⁷⁴ Khān also

⁷² Qur’ān 53:23.

⁷³ Khān, *Maqāmi’ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:145–46.

⁷⁴ On an overview of angels in Islamic emanationist cosmologies, see Stephen Burge, “Angels (*Malā’ika*),” in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al., sec. 4.3, August 29, 2024, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/Angels>.

compares the excessive glorification of the ten intellects by Greek philosophers to the Arab pagans' extremes in misconstruing angels. While the pagans feminized angels, the philosophers exalted the ten intellects to quasi-divine status, attributing to them properties that belong to God alone. As the above passage also indicates, Khān is highly sceptical of al-Sanbhalī's motives and approach. While al-Sanbhalī appears to frame his discussion as mere quotation or historical reporting (*hikāyah*), Khān argues that his words indicate more than neutral reporting. Instead, he accuses him of using these doctrines as evidence to support his own positions, making them part of his reasoning. For example, Khān points out that al-Sanbhalī accepts certain philosophical premises (e.g., that the First Intellect must know all particulars of the world), which Khān considers outright heresy. According to Khān, al-Sanbhalī's reliance on these ideas shows approval rather than mere academic interest. Hence, he accuses al-Sanbhalī of cloaking his personal approval of these ideas in the guise of neutral discussion. This accusation becomes especially pointed when Khān notes that al-Sanbhalī does not accompany his references to these doctrines with explicit repudiation or refutation, which Khān considers a minimum requirement for avoiding the appearance of endorsement. Thus, for Khān, merely quoting such ideas without rejection is impermissible in Islam unless accompanied by clear disapproval and denunciation.

On proposition seven, Khān refutes the doctrine of eternalism (*al-dahriyyah*).⁷⁵ His rebuttal to the seventh proposition is indeed a complex philosophical critique addressing issues of time, existence, and the reality of temporal entities. Al-Sanbhalī states that the philosophers argue that temporal entities (*zamāniyyāt*)—things that exist within time—never truly go out of existence. Instead, their states of non-existence (*'adam*) are merely phases of concealment (*khafā*). They propose that these entities are part of a “container of reality” (*wi'ā' al-dahr*) and maintain a kind of eternal existence in objective reality (*nafs al-amr*).⁷⁶ Thus, nothing ever

⁷⁵ On the *dahriyyah*, refer to the discussion and references in Hinrich Biesterfeldt, “Reflection: ‘Eternalists’ and ‘Materialists’ in Islam: A Note on the *Dahriyya*,” in *Eternity: A History*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 117–23.

⁷⁶ Khān critiques this idea of a container of reality (*wi'ā' al-dahr*), where all temporal events (past, present, future) coexist eternally in some form, as a baseless, fabricated idea. He emphasizes that the eternity of entities, as posited by the philosophers, contradicts the real nature of temporal existence and annihilation. Entities are not eternal; they come into existence, persist for a time, and then truly cease to exist. The notion of perpetual existence for entities—regardless of their apparent annihilation—clashes with both reason and Islamic theology, which affirms the temporal and

truly ceases to exist—it merely becomes veiled.⁷⁷ Khān, however, objects to this view, drawing out the absurd implications as he sees it with several examples. One example is the case of a disbeliever becoming a Muslim; their disbelief (*kufr*) does not persist in some hidden form—it is annihilated in reality (*nafs al-amr*). Similarly, when a Muslim is removed from Hell, their state of chastisement is not merely hidden—it is truly abolished. Yet still, temporal events like the flood of Noah are not concealed when they are not manifest but truly expire. He rejects the notion that states like disbelief, Hellfire chastisement, or temporal events continue to exist in a concealed or veiled way. Thus, when something ceases to exist in time, it truly ceases to exist.⁷⁸

On an epistemological point, philosophers also equate knowledge of something (e.g., our knowing about the flood of Noah or the Day of Judgment) with its existence in reality. Khān refutes this. For him, knowledge (*ilm*) is not the same as reality (*wāqīʿ*). For example, the flood of Noah no longer exists, yet we know about it. The Day of Judgment has not yet occurred, yet we have knowledge of it. These things are not real in the present—they are either past or future. Equating knowledge with existence leads to absurdities, as it blurs the distinction between what exists and what is merely known. On this, Khān distinguishes divine knowledge and the existence of temporal entities. God’s knowledge encompasses everything—past, present, and future—but this does not mean that everything exists eternally. For example, God knew of creation before it existed and knows of annihilation after it ceases, but these states do not imply eternal existence for created entities. The eternal nature of God’s knowledge does not entail the eternal existence of the known entities themselves.⁷⁹

Khān here is opposing a view similar to eternalism in modern philosophy of time, which holds that the past, present, and future all exist equally in some objective sense.⁸⁰ He instead supports a form of presentism, where entities exist only in their temporal moments and truly cease to exist when annihilated.⁸¹ Khān defends the Islamic

contingent reality of creation (*ḥudūth*) and its annihilation (*fanāʾ*). See Khān, *Maqāmiʿ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:154.

⁷⁷ Al-Sanbhalī, *al-Manṭiq al-Jadīd*, 255–56.

⁷⁸ Khān, *Maqāmiʿ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:149–51.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27:151–54.

⁸⁰ On eternalism, see David Ingram, “Presentism and Eternalism,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Time*, ed. Nina Emery (London: Routledge, 2026), 197–208.

⁸¹ On presentism, see Thomas Crisp, “Presentism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 211–45.

theological principle that created entities are contingent and finite. They come into existence, persist, and then cease to exist entirely. The metaphysical container of reality is dismissed as an unnecessary and illogical metaphysical construct that complicates rather than clarifies the nature of existence.

4. Tensions and Contestations

This closing section will examine how the status of philosophy and Khān's attitude towards it in *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* and his wider views registered in his various *fatāwā* reveals an underlying clash between, on the one hand, the inherited and maintained pre-modern form of epistemology and pedagogy that defines the traditional and conservative mode of Muslim education and, on the other, the increasingly prevalent rationalist and modernizing (meaning secularizing) structure of education that was permeating at the time. The perceived superiority of philosophy and the rational sciences as a discipline over that of religious ones, like *fiqh* (Islamic law), Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Prophetic sayings (*ḥadīths*) and practices (*sunan*), appears embedded in not only a historical pattern of patronage of the former category of sciences over the latter beginning from the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) through to Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) but a more recent framework of colonial epistemological control under the British.⁸² It is this immediate colonial context that Khān's reaction to philosophy can arguably be situated.⁸³

Firstly, on the status of philosophy, Khān's overall stance towards it—and the broader rational sciences (*'ulūm 'aqliyyah*)—was markedly hostile.⁸⁴ He vehemently criticized traditional Islamic philosophy, particularly its Aristotelian-Avicennian legacy, which had historically been incorporated into the curricula of *madrasahs*. He declared its study, in more than one place within his *fatāwā*, to be generally unlawful. Compared to earlier Muslim educational traditions, such as that of Firangi Mahal, Khān significantly warned against studying philosophy

⁸² Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers: Madrasas and Islamic Education in India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), 42-54.

⁸³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to chart the various ways Muslim religious scholars (*'ulamā'*), movements, and newly emerging Muslim institutions negotiated colonial modernity under the British in India. On this see Qamar Hasan, *Muslims in India: Attitudes, Adjustments and Reactions* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987); N. Hanif, *Islam and Modernity* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1997); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulema in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Aijaz Ahmad, *Indian Muslims Against British Rule* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2014).

⁸⁴ Jalāl al-Dīn Qādirī, *Imām Aḥmad Riḥā kā Nazāriyah-i Ta'līm* (Lahore: Markazī Majlis-i Riḥā, 1984), 71-77.

and, to a lesser degree, the rational sciences as part of a person's Islamic educational curriculum. In an alarmist tone, he comments that "the harm of philosophy and the misguidance of its proponents is brighter than the sun and more evident than yesterday. Therefore, only someone with a diseased heart and weak faith would doubt its prohibition—we seek refuge in God to protect us from such a state."⁸⁵ He even likens it to "lethal poison and consuming fire" (*zahr-i muhlik-o nār-i muhriq*) and should only be taught under strict conditions, minimizing its harm and impact by a strong Sunni teacher, firm in his faith and disinterested in philosophical speculation.⁸⁶

Khān interestingly reasons from *ḥadīth* texts to explicitly prohibit studying philosophy. He uses the example of the Prophet Muḥammad forbidding the reading and studying of the Torah as a parallel to his argument against studying philosophy. His reasoning takes the following structure: He first cites the narration in which 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) brought a copy of the Torah to the Prophet, who became visibly angry. The Prophet warned that even if Moses were alive, he would have no choice but to follow the Prophet. This *ḥadīth* establishes the principle that, despite the Torah being divine revelation in origin, it had subsequently undergone distortions and was not to be studied separately from the Qur'ān. Given this, Khān then analogizes: if the Torah, a divine scripture, is forbidden to be read independently due to the risk of confusion, then Greek philosophy, which is entirely the product of human speculation, is even more dangerous. Khān argues that philosophy is filled with heresies, distortions, and outright falsehoods, making its study even more condemnable than studying the Torah. In addition, just as the Torah had truth mixed with distortions, leading people astray, Khān asserts that philosophy is even worse—it is rooted in disbelief and outright denial of Islamic doctrines (e.g., denying resurrection, belief in multiple eternal entities like the ten intellects, etc.).⁸⁷ The Prophet emphasized that Islam is complete and self-sufficient, and believers should not seek knowledge outside divine revelation for understanding theological matters. Khān concludes that the study of philosophy represents an unwarranted intellectual curiosity that undermines reliance on revelation, just as the Prophet rebuked 'Umar for seeking knowledge from the Torah when the Qur'ān was sufficient.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, *al-Huqūq li Ṭarḥ al-'Uqūq*, in *al-'Aṭāyā al-Nabawiyyah fī 'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍawiyyah* (Lahore: Riza Foundation, 2004), 24:441, issue no. 166.

⁸⁶ Khān, *'Ilm-o Ta'līm*, in *al-'Aṭāyā al-Nabawiyyah fī 'l-Fatāwā al-Riḍawiyyah* (Lahore: Riza Foundation, 2004), 23:635, issue no. 299.

⁸⁷ For a list of heretical philosophical doctrines, see *ibid.*, 23:634.

⁸⁸ Khān, *al-Huqūq li Ṭarḥ al-'Uqūq*, 24:437–41.

In one place, Khān is cautious not to appear to endorse a blanket prohibition of the rational sciences noting that “the idea of declaring the teaching and learning of the rational sciences entirely impermissible, to the extent of prohibiting even the study of important religious books like *Tawḍīḥ* and *Talwīḥ*, which include some accurate and beneficial rational discussions, reflects extreme ignorance and a severe lack of understanding.”⁸⁹ Elsewhere, he states, “Dear ones! I am not saying that Islamic logic, mathematics, geometry, and other permissible parts of philosophy should not be studied. Study them, but only as much as necessary.”⁹⁰ However, Khān did praise logic (*manṭiq*), commenting that “it is undoubtedly beneficial, useful and in many cases necessary . . . sufficing for understanding theology, legal theory, sharpening the mind and training the intellect.”⁹¹

Several interrelated reasons explain Khān’s rejection of philosophy. Foremost was his commitment to preserving Muslim religious certainty and belief. He feared that reliance on speculative rationality, inseparable from a discipline like philosophy, would erode certainty (*yaqīn*) or firm belief and sow seeds of doubt regarding the fundamental tenets of Islam. Accordingly, he placed greater emphasis on revelation and transmitted knowledge, particularly in a context where Islam itself appeared under siege.⁹² Again, in a strong language and a scripturally reasoned way, Khān warns that indulging in speculative philosophy can spiritually corrode the heart, likening its effect to the Qur’ānic concept of “rust” (*rān*). He argues that such corruption prevents the heart from receiving divine knowledge, which is pure light that only shines in a polished, humble heart:

The Prophet said, “When a servant sins, a black dot appears on his heart. If he repents, seeks forgiveness, and turns back [to God], the heart is polished

⁸⁹ Khān, *‘Ilm-o Ta’līm*, 23:634. Also see Muḥammad ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Riḏavī, “Imām Aḥmad Riḏā aur ‘Aṣrī Ta’līm,” in *Jahān-i Imām Aḥmad Riḏā Khān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥanīf Khān (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers, 2019), 2:482.

⁹⁰ Khān, *Maqāmi’ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:192. Also see Riḏavī, “Imām Aḥmad Riḏā aur ‘Aṣrī Ta’līm,” 2:482.

⁹¹ See Khān, *‘Ilm-o Ta’līm*, 23:636, which also includes his standard list of works on logic within the Dars-i Nizāmī curriculum. On Khān’s views about logic, see Muḥammad Ishāq Qādirī, “Imām Aḥmad Riḏā Khān kī Manṭiqiyānah aur Falsafiyānah Fikr-o Nazar,” in *Jahān-i Imām Aḥmad Riḏā Khān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥanīf Khān (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers, 2019), 15:261–65.

⁹² See the letter written to Khān by a Ḥamīd al-Ḥasan in 1918, complaining about the domination of philosophy, science and chemistry disrupting traditional religious epistemology, Aḥmad Riḏā Khān, *Qawārī’ al-Qaḥḥār ‘alā ‘l-Mujassimah al-Fujjār*, in *al-‘Aṭyā al-Nabawiyyah fī ‘l-Fatāwā al-Riḏawiyyah* (Lahore: Riza Foundation, 2004), 29:267–68, issue no. 108.

clean. But if he returns to the sin, the blackness increases until it covers the entire heart. This is the “rust” (*rān*) that God, Most High, refers to in the verse: “No! Rather, the rust has covered their hearts due to what they used to earn.”⁹³ Be careful—do not let this adorned, deceptive philosophy (*falsafah-i muzakhrifah*) cast rust over your hearts such that there remains no space for the true, sincere, divine sciences. You say, “By acquiring this [philosophy], the other sciences will follow on their own.” Far from it! Once this has taken root in the heart, those sciences will never even cast their shadow, because they are pure light, and light only shines in a clean mirror. Dear ones! This very rust is the reason why those absorbed in philosophy look down upon the religious sciences, mock the scholars of religion, and consider them ignorant. They believe that the title of “scholar” belongs solely to them. But had the mirror of their hearts been polished, they would have realized that these scholars are the inheritors and deputies of the Prophet. They carry and possess that noble wealth for which God revealed books and for which prophets spent their lives teaching. They are the pillars of Islam, the foundations of Paradise, the beloveds of God, and the soul of guidance. As for mocking them—if its bitter consequence is not tasted today, it soon will be. As God says, “And those who did wrong will soon know what return they will be turned back to.”⁹⁴ Dear ones! The self-conceited soul, drunk with the freedom of saying “I say. . .” has become arrogant—and has forgotten the true delight of “The Messenger of Allah said. . . ,” which brings joy to the heart and light to the eyes.⁹⁵

Khān thus criticizes those who immerse themselves in philosophy for developing arrogance, mocking the Islamic sciences and their scholars, whom he regards as the true heirs of the Prophet and the pillars of Islam. He cautions that the pleasures of self-derived speech (“I say”) have made such individuals forget the reverent beauty of Prophetic knowledge (“The Messenger of God said”), and he warns of divine consequences for those who scorn the religious tradition.

Another reason for his rejection of philosophy is that not only is it morally corrosive, but it is also apparently socially destabilizing. Khān was sent a question by a person expressing consternation at how an elderly and pious teacher of traditional Islamic knowledge (a Sayyid by lineage) in a village within the Hazara district was uprooted by a young student (a Gurjar by lineage) who had emboldened himself by learning philosophy and now sought to replace his teacher as the imam of the mosque. Notwithstanding the class dynamics at play here, Khān replied that such arrogance and self-aggrandizement are utterly deplorable and can only take root if a person thinks human-constructed knowledge is

⁹³ Qur’ān 83:14.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 26:227.

⁹⁵ Khān, *Maqāmi’ al-Ḥadīd*, 27:191–92.

superior to revealed knowledge. He then rules that if philosophy has no religious significance whatsoever due to its un-Islamic origins and its religious harm, it follows that it is not a factor by which a person is entitled to lead the prayer or assume the role of an imam for the community. Moreover, anyone who thinks that mastery of philosophy or the rational sciences is a degree of merit worthy of community religious leadership is entirely mistaken and may even be heretically privileging something irreligious for a religious objective.⁹⁶

This elevation of reason over revelation in the form of a perceived superiority of philosophy over Islamic sciences reveals a broader shift that had taken place at the time. The British colonial administration in India had introduced new secular educational models that valorized rationalism, the empirical sciences, and secular knowledge, all of which challenged the epistemological foundations and social authority of traditional Islamic scholarship. In response, it seems that Khān's anathematization of philosophy was part of a broader strategic defence of Islam; he perceived philosophy as foreign anyway, but also contaminated by Western, secularizing ideas that could weaken Islamic identity, pedagogy, and communal cohesion. Furthermore, he seems to have associated philosophical speculation with a broader crisis of religious authority, wherein unchecked rationalism could challenge the central role of the *'ulamā'* as custodians of Islamic knowledge and tradition. This intellectual vanguardism must be understood within the broader imperial and colonial context of nineteenth-century British India. Colonial education policies systematically marginalized traditional Islamic institutions, establishing government colleges and universities that championed secular rationality and empirical science over religious sciences—one such institution being the Mohammaden Anglo-Oriental College (MAO), becoming Aligarh University in 1920.⁹⁷ In doing so, the British restructured the economy of knowledge, creating a crisis of legitimacy for Muslim scholars; they were forced to confront the pressing question of whether to embrace modern secular knowledge or to protect the Islamic tradition. The emergence of Deoband as a conservative scholarly movement was, in part, an attempt to preserve Islamic knowledge and the social authority of the *'ulamā'* against the epistemic domination of the colonial state. Their curricular reforms, such as modifying the Dars-i Niẓāmī to de-emphasize philosophy while retaining essential logical tools, were part of a deliberate resistance to

⁹⁶ Khān, *al-Ḥuqūq li Ṭarḥ al-'Uqūq*, 24:435-38, issue no. 166.

⁹⁷ Mohammed Wajihuddin, *Aligarh Muslim University: The Making of the Modern Indian Muslim* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2021).

Westernization. Rather than fostering free-ranging speculative inquiry, Deoband's pedagogy focused on defending orthodoxy, cultivating religious piety, and training scholars to maintain Islam's intellectual and moral integrity in a colonial environment increasingly hostile to traditional religious authority.⁹⁸ Although Deoband was, to Khān, a heretical and unorthodox institution, both their reactions and his had remarkable overlap.

A third and final reason for Khān's rejection of philosophy is the relationship between learning philosophy and employment opportunities under the British. Colonial institutions valued subjects like logic, philosophy, English literature, and Western sciences, and mastery of these disciplines became a gateway to social mobility and employment within the colonial administration. Success in competitive examinations, such as the Imperial/Indian Civil Service (ICS) exams, often depended on proficiency in these areas. As a result, Muslims who pursued such studies could access prestigious and lucrative positions within the colonial bureaucracy, judiciary, and educational systems, while those committed to traditional Islamic scholarship found themselves increasingly excluded. For Khān, like many traditionalist and conservative scholars in his time, this presented not merely a material or professional dilemma but a profound spiritual and moral threat. The British colonial employment structure appeared as corrupting: it enticed Muslims away from their Islamic identity and towards complicity with the colonial order. Consequently, rejection of philosophy and the rational sciences was thus not purely an epistemological decision but a deeply political and moral one. It was a conscious act of resistance to the colonial economy of knowledge, an effort to preserve Islamic learning as an end in itself, grounded in divine revelation, rather than allowing it to become a means for worldly gain in service of an imperial system. In one *fatwā*, we get a glimpse of Khān's explicit denunciation of the Mohammeden Anglo-Oriental College (Aligarh University) fulfilling this colonial agenda. He writes,

For years, the Aligarh College has been established with such goals, and its results are evident—it has rendered Muslims semi-Christian (*nīm 'īṣā'ī*). Most of its graduates mock Islam and its beliefs, ridicule the imams and scholars, exhibit selfishness, egotism, worldliness, and neglect of religion, so much so that they are repulsed by the beard and other Islamic symbols. If these are the signs at the halfway point, then the fruits of full completion are all too clear. Judge the spring by the state of its garden.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Brannon D. Ingram, "'Modern' Madrasa: Deoband and Colonial Secularity," *Historical Social Research* 44 (2019): 206–25.

⁹⁹ Khān, *'Ilm-o Ta'līm*, 23:686.

Khān's response reflects the very tensions and anxieties outlined above. He condemns the Aligarh curriculum for marginalizing Islamic theology, exalting Western sciences that contradict core Islamic beliefs, and fostering an environment where students mock religious symbols and authorities. He warned that Muslim students trained at such institutions were becoming "semi-Christians"—detached from their heritage, dismissive of Islamic practices like the beard, and more receptive to secular and even anti-Islamic viewpoints. He thus portrays Aligarh not only as a site of religious dilution but as a mechanism for social engineering, producing a Westernized Muslim elite loyal to colonial interests rather than the global Muslim *ummah*.

Conclusion

Khān's *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* emerges as more than a refutation of philosophical heresies; it is a deliberate act of intellectual and cultural resistance against a shifting epistemological order under colonial modernity. Khān's critique of philosophy is neither incidental nor superficial; it is rooted in a theological imperative to safeguard divine sovereignty, Prophetic authority, and the integrity of Islamic knowledge. His polemics reflect profound anxieties over the elevation of reason above revelation, the marginalization of traditional religious sciences, and the broader social consequences of aligning Muslim intellect with colonial structures of power. By condemning philosophy as corrosive, speculative, and spiritually ruinous, Khān reasserts a model of religious education grounded in scholarly authority, certainty (*yaqīn*), revelation, and allegiance to the Prophetic legacy. Far from exhibiting affinity with philosophy, *Maqāmi' al-Ḥadīd* reveals Khān's vision of preserving Islam's epistemic independence and moral clarity at a time when both were under siege. It stands as a critical intervention in the contest over authority, tradition, and the soul of Islamic pedagogy in the modern age.

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