Islamism, death, and justice:
A comparative history of political thought

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Abstract: In this article, we suggest that one important if neglected way through which we can make sense of political theories is by understanding their philosophical position on death. Comparative political theory analysis has been made for this purpose, and the history of political thought is read backwards. Focus has been made on Islamism to interpret its position on death and, through this, to see how Islamism approaches political institutions and critiques a modern justice tradition. The utility of such comparative history of political thought is that it shows how death and justice interconnect in political thought.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī; comparative political theory; death; justice; Islamism

Contemporary philosophical debates on euthanasia, warfare, eugenics that explore killing and dying do not feel the need to spell out their philosophical account of death. They explore what causes death and agree on its badness. This is one such sign in contemporary philosophical debates of the idea that it is possible to talk about mortality without elaborating death. We argue against this trend to contribute to a conceptual discussion. We suggest that it is not possible to bracket off the idea of death at all and make it entirely irrelevant in the context of debates on justice. Instead it is possible to read an account of death even in those accounts of justice that do not mention it. A utility of such a conceptual discussion is that it allows us to appreciate the role that death plays and has played in designing political institutions.

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We turn to comparative political theory to make our point. It 'introduces non-Western perspectives into familiar debates about the problems of living together, thus ensuring that "political theory" is about human and not merely Western dilemmas' (Euben, 1999, p. 9). The methodological utility of this as regards our discussion lies in the fact that it allows us to provide a contrast to an account that might otherwise appear obvious to readers primarily trained in modern political thought. The discussion contributes to history of political thought as it provides a comparative analysis, and contributes to comparative political theory as it reads histories of the interrelation of death and justice in philosophical and political contexts.

The broader argument of this article is as follows. We first focus on a specific influential account in the tradition of modern justice, and read it backwards to comment on its assumptions about the nature and badness of death. We suggest that it analytically separates life and death, finds death bad because it deprives the dying person of the resources that make its life and living meaningful, and holds a particular account of death's experience. Consequently, this modern justice account assumes that life alone can provide the telos of a political society and bracketing off death does not affect the quality of justice. We then focus on an Islamist political tradition to see what its account of death is, before we see what this institutionally means. We suggest that these Islamists give a political reading to an Islamic account of death, wherein death discloses what it means to live and is that which holds life and afterlife together. Consequently, this Islamist account assumes that wellbeing in both this world (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*ākhira*) should be a focus of a political society and argues that bracketing death off politically affects justice.

The article is divided into five sections. First it begins by reading Rawls's principles of justice and locates an account of death in it. We come across assumptions in Rawls, and turn to Locke and Hobbes to find resources in them that justify what Rawls takes for granted. We see how this tradition reveals presumptions about the nature and value of death. The next two sections turn to Islamic theories and Islamism. Second reads a medieval Islamic thinker, al-Ghazālī, who systematizes an Islamic account of death, and third analyzes how contemporary Islamists provide a political reading to such an account. Fourth sees how the prima facie consensus of Islamism and modern justice on the importance of rights, rule of law, and democracy can be viewed as a critical engagement. Last concludes by noting the importance that death should be accorded in the context of comparative histories of political thought.

We now briefly specify which thinkers and theories we focus on in this article, and lay out our reasons for the selection. We select those debates in the tradition of modern justice that have sought to design and evaluate political institutions.

We contrast this tradition with Islamism that has aimed to restructure political institutions. This requires three clarifications. 1) The terms are capacious. It remains unclear whether modern justice tradition has a specific political theory, and whether one should not instead consider it a broad church that incorporates a rich array of arguments and trends. We address this point by reading history of political thought backwards. By going backwards, we take a specific direction, and exclude romantic and counter-Enlightenment thinkers; and by not going forward, we do not focus on postmodern thinkers as well. We do this because we believe this direction allows us to make some sense of those philosophical debates that have been of crucial institutional importance. Moreover, as modern political institutions have spread geographically, non-Western thinkers have responded by seeing what it meant for them to live in such contexts. 2) We study 'theo-democratic' Islamism articulated in the South Asian context. The thought of these Islamists has influenced Egyptian and Iranian Islamism, as it argues how political institutions should be restructured. The overall institutional focus of both political theories therefore makes a comparative analysis of their political thought possible. 3) Some modern political theorists we read do not explicitly touch death, with the exception of Hobbes. Alternatively, Islamists that we read do not isolate death. Similarly, both do not directly engage with each other's thought. Yet, we suggest that it is possible to reconstruct their engagement, and we invoke 'interpretive license' to do that.

A caveat before we proceed further. Though our account may 'assume distinction ... between units or entities' (March, 2009, p. 537), or, worse, might reify 'the boundary between [them]' (Idris, 2016, p. 1), we suggest that this analysis constructs 'ideal normative types' – a construction which is helpful in comparative contexts. Any analytical specification is open to the charge of essentialization – yet, in both ordinary and comparative contexts, it is unavoidable. Complete analytical open-endedness is an impossibility; a solely 'genealogical' account is a partiality.

§1: Death and justice

With the caveat that a tradition is more than any of its proponents, we read history of political thought backwards, both while reading modern justice tradition and Islamism. This methodology allows analysts to locate theoretical continuity in a tradition and 'to articulate [some of that tradition's] convictions ... so that these may become available to rational scrutiny' (MacIntyre, 1984, S. 3). We begin by looking at Rawls's principles of justice, which is one influential recent attempt to articulate moral intuitions in the modern justice tradition, and then proceed backwards as

we come across some assumptions in Rawls, and look for their justifications in the history of political thought.

Rawls's principles of justice are famously those which rational agents derive behind a 'veil of ignorance' in which they 'do not know the[ir] particular circumstances' (Rawls, 1999, p. 118), e.g. class or status, talents, aims, temperament, cultures (Rawls, 1999, p. 52). Commentaries on Rawls's principles of justice overlook the role of mortality in the derivation of these principles. On the one hand, the derivation assumes mortality. All agents have an interest in their lives in view of its finitude; they know that their lives pass through a cycle of birth and end; they know that they would live limited lives because of which they can never in fact choose everything that they can possibly choose; they know that they have one life to live and within it they make calculations. The derivation would be ineffective if the agents possess the following knowledge; the infinite nature of their lives, the potential for optimum living in every moment, the belief in eventual achievement of any goal, and the prospect of experiencing life repeatedly. Yet, mortality is not brought into explicit focus as regards derivation because of two reasons. 1) Agents are 'rational long-term plan[ners]' (Rawls, 1999, p. 111). They cannot measure the opportunity-costs of their decisions, even if they also come to know the exact time-frame of their decisions and of their lives. 2) Death is not crucial in 'specifying basic rights and duties and determining the appropriate distributive shares' (Rawls, 1999, p. 6). Both points require elaboration.

1a) Humans are uncertain about their death. I 'make some provision for even the most distant future and for our death, but it becomes relatively less specific for later periods' (Rawls, 1999, p. 360). We make opportunity-cost calculations, as if things would go on as usual. Political institutions provide us with a context within which we can decide, despite death's ever-looming presence. 1b) Humans are self-interested, though not selfish. If I am to devise principles of justice that apply to everyone (myself included) and know that I would die at the age of 45, I can without any contradiction universalize the maxim: 'Each has equal rights till they reach the age of 45'. But 'the restrictions on particular information' (Rawls, 1999, p. 121) in the case of death are two-dimensional. Death remains objectively unknown. When I sigh 'My mother's death killed me, Sam!', I speak metaphorically. We cannot know what it was for our mother to die, unless we die ourselves – even then, we die our own deaths, and not hers. This presumption is that one cannot understand what it is to die before dying and one cannot die after one has died. Death is a sort of experiential 'guillotine': it is rationally unknown before its occurrence; it is rationally unknowable afterwards.

2) Political institutions give importance to individuals 'as rational beings with their own ends and capability' (Rawls, 1999, p. 11) in a social context 'typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interests' (Rawls, 1999, p. 4). Political institutions distribute 'primary social goods … like rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth' (Rawls, 1999, p. 79). Things like charm, love, wit, familial happiness are 'higher-order sentiments that do not include principles of right to adjudicate conflicts [among them]' (Rawls, 1999, p. 167). Death is at double remove. Death is in the same league as charm and wit, as regards distribution of primary social goods. Yet, death is different, as in a normal social context it is not clear to us that A is closer to death as compared to our observation that A is witty. Political institutions distribute primary social goods – and death, as it 'deprives us of [the goods that make our life valuable]' (Nagel, 1979, p. 1), is not of much help in designing political institutions. In other words, political institutions deal with primary social goods, regardless of individuals' peculiar philosophical view of death. That is, they deliver primary social goods by default, with much left to the choice of individuals concerning their use or the exercise of such an option. The constraints in view of delivering primary social goods to everyone might affect A's individual philosophy of death. But this is considered justifiable to the extent that it does not single out A or A's philosophy in particular.

So, politics provides individuals with a context within which they can make choices, with rights that allow them to make and act on their choices, and with institutions that serve that context and guarantee rights. Political institutions rule out dealing with: a) issues that touch one's self-interest but do not raise social cooperation problems; b) social cooperation not based on the self-interest of the agents. Political institutions can never know whether they can 'really' delay Mary's death from Point A to a more distant Point B by providing Mary with legal protections and basic social services. Any idea of Mary's possible death before her actual death is a bad guess. More, though the uncertainty surrounding the question of death would enable social cooperation, death itself is not an object of social cooperation: those who are marching towards their own deaths seek social cooperation to secure their lives. In order to briefly see in what sense the thinkers on which Rawls draw on in fact justify these assumptions, and whether there is some kind of continuity to this line of political thought, we turn to an early modern thinker: Locke.

It is while imagining a pre-political life that Locke develops an argument that justifies the points which Rawls assumes. For him, a pre-political world is 'a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature' (Locke, 2003a, S. 102).

Problems emerge when an individual confronts another. 'In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity' (Locke, 2003a, p. 103). Social cooperation and self-interest can go together: it is in the self-interest of an individual to cooperate as this allows civil society to protect its life, liberty, and property; and, it is in the collective interest of everyone to cooperate, as this rectifies problems related to the interpretation and application of the moral law that mandates protection of life, liberty, and property (Locke, 2003a, pp. 162, 165, 170, 195). But death is not intersubjective. It terminates our liberty, as its onset ends our capacity to do what we want to do with our life and limb; it terminates our property claims, as its onset ends our being as property-makers and property-owners. Unlike material resources, death is neither excludable nor dividable: A does not die on B's behalf, nor can A be said to be more or less dead. Thus, politics, and justice, is about the tangible. Death is out of the picture as regards the understanding of individuals' legal personality. A dead person is not a rights-holder, though 'it', as a corpse, continues to possess moral rights as regards burial and non-desecration of corpse. It is to Locke's lasting legacy that much of the modern debates on justice internalizes both points: death-as-an-event ends social meaning and is not intersubjective; death-as-an-experience cannot be a direct focus of political institutions. However, Locke takes an assumption for granted: an analytical separation of life and death, because of which life alone could be politically addressed. This finds its justification in one of the interlocutors he was engaging with: 'Mr. Hobbes' (Locke, 2003c, p. 14).

Hobbes's formulation of life as the telos of politics has been influential. Life's 'vital motion' (Hobbes, 1998, p. 269) is internal to an agent: the sovereign cannot stop the time I am living but can only end it. This shows my status as a free being. 'Fearing death' (Hobbes, 1998, p. 86), agents enter a political context to ensure that their lives are protected, as 'those that are dearest to a man are his own life and limbs' (Hobbes, 1998, p. 226). Such a telos is not something that one has to achieve through politics, 'for there is no utmost aim nor greatest good as is spoken in the books of old moral philosophers' (Hobbes, 1998, p. 65). Unlike Aristotelian metaphysics and politics, wherein moral perfection requires cultivating contexts, such a telos is already here (c.f. Skinner 1996, 316-326). Hobbes acknowledges the possibility of a clash between this telos and freedom guiding it. 'No man is supposed, at the making of commonwealth, to have abandoned the defense of his life' (Hobbes, 1998, pp. 198, 200). Two examples. If I am sentenced to capital punishment because I committed a murder, it is only natural that I would seek to avoid my capture or frame someone else for it. I exercised my freedom to deny someone else their life, but I have not given away my freedom to protect my own life. Similarly, if I am

terminally ill, I can choose to kill myself because my life is unbearable. Yet, it would be odd to take consequences of such an ethical stance far (a point later taken up by Kant in his rejection of the suicide maxim: 'From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when its longer duration threatens more troubles than it promises agreeableness' (Kant, 1996, p. 74). It is important to note that such a teleological view outlines the shape of and limits to freedom in the light of which responses are developed as to what an agent should do with its life. The way the question reveals itself as a problem signifies that there is some continuity to its position on the question of life – and of death.

In sum, when we look at select modern political thinkers whose thoughts on justice have been institutionally important – that is, those who have explored justice within the context of certain institutions or whose thought has become a point of reference for the way political institutions philosophically justify themselves – we can discern an account of death. This account allows life to be considered as the telos of a political society and to create political institutions in a certain way.

§2: Ethics for mortals

The above philosophical account of death, though complex, seems fairly obvious, and so do most of the points made in the course of elaborating justice within this tradition of political thought. We now see how a different account of death has been articulated. We look at Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a twelfth century Muslim theologian and philosopher, whose views sought to clarify orthodox philosophical positions in Islam with much influence. We outline an interpretation of his views on death. It helps making Al-Ghazālī's account explicit, as this would aid us in understanding contemporary Islamism in the next section.

Al-Ghazālī's magnum opus *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* is 6500 pages. It discusses food, emotions, anatomy, medicine, afterlife, and so on. It discusses death in light of character traits (*akhlāq*) like moderation, self-cultivation, abstinence, health, salvation, and so on. It is possible to excise his ethical thought because 'at no point [in *The Revival*] does al-Ghazālī reveal the philosophical origins of his ethics' (Griffel, 2020). We follow Frank Griffel (2009) lead on al-Ghazālī's overall thought, and develop an interpretation of death in al-Ghazālī on such lines. Griffel notes how al-Ghazālī's provides a 'cum-possible cosmological view' between occasionalism and secondary causality (Griffel 2009, 2020). Occasionalism, based on the works of the 10th century Arab theologian Abū al-Hasan al-Ash arī (d. 936), held that God creates everything anew at every moment. Secondary causality, based on the works of the Hellenized Muslim philosophers (collectively known as the philosophers (*falāsifa*)),

held the view that causal laws determine effects and God creates by means of them. Griffel believes that al-Ghazālī's occasionalism uses causal language. For al-Ghazālī, God created the universe. Therefore, all the causes and effects that unfold are God's creations. Further, as humans exercise agency in the context of necessity, 'one can say that human lack agency in the sense that they are forced to make a choice (*majbūr 'alā l-ikhtiyār*)' (Griffel, 2009, p. 219).

We suggest we can understand death in Al-Ghazālī's thought analogously. Death has three aspects in *The Revival*: death of heart; death of body; and migration of soul. Death of heart tells us that death stays with us and enables actions. Our consciousness tells us about our death, evidenced by our memory surveying the different moments of our life. As we remember those moments, we cherish them or shudder – but we know that they are not coming back. 'Death had been with me; it follows me' (III: 738). If our life is a collection of moments, then each passing moment is an evidence of my death. 'I may be not as much interested in death, but death is interested in me' (III: 738). Each moment imposes an injunction to live in a way that all moments hang together meaningfully in a story of limited lived moments. God would not hold those lacking such consciousness accountable because those individuals did not have resources to 'anticipate their deaths' (II: 924). Death of heart comes when one indulges in life given the distant possibility of death or abandons oneself to torpor given death's imminence. Further, we live moments in social contexts. When we remember our siblings fighting with us, our first school day, and our wedding, we cherish our childhood, feel our mother's embrace, and recollect our spouse's youth. But that consciousness tells us that that social context is not replicable anymore. Our siblings have all grown up, our mother has died, and our spouse is past the prime age. Our finitude evidenced by the passing moment overlaps with the finitude of others. A passing moment joins us and others, and requires that we perform our duties well. 'My heart dies, if I don't do this' (IV: 215). Sufi mystics would thus want to die in this ordinary life context. 'Performing duties that I owe to my parents, family, children, neighbors ... that is being good ... is a part of my preparation for my death' (II: 845-877). The second Rashidun caliph could thus say: 'I would prefer to die when I am out shopping for my family' (II: 325).

Then, there is death of body. 'By making humans mortal and providing them a consciousness of their own finitude, God prevented human vanity' (II: 166). We might be tempted to seduce a person we are attracted to, but we cannot imagine that the final thing we ever did in our life was to seduce someone. Bodily death 'ends my life on that specific point' (IV: 589). It completes our story, but the endpoint is not a complete story on its own. We need to look at what went on before. Looking at the tradition of the Prophetic sayings (*hadīth*), al-Ghazālī explains that we might die

in a justified war, but the moment of our bodily death is not enough to determine the justness of our entire life. That is, I do not die a noble death, if I owed money, deceived simpletons, was boastful (c.f. Al-Qushayrī 2007, Vol. 1, 201, 230, Vol. 5, 220, 239-240). In other words, death works as a retrospective judgment on our entire life, i.e. from that specific point backwards. It is our bodily death that completes our story and that connects all the passed moments of our life to tell what kind of life we had lived from that point backwards. 'Death is the culmination of lives, and for those who are fighting with their base instincts it is the peak' (III: 294). The finitude of life makes it a quest and the kind of death one faces depends on the life one had lived.

As body dies, the soul goes back to its abode. As soul partakes in the divine matter, it lives on. Yet, afterlife gives substance to one's life. 'The world is a ploughing field for afterlife' (III: 267). Afterlife sees life as meaningful, even if it was a specific life ordinarily lived and not known to the world, as God as All-Knower knows and God as All-Just decides. Pagans knew this problem of the 'banality of lives' but their hubris led them to find immortality in politics, at least for select leaders (c.f. Arendt 1958, 314). Consciousness, death, afterlife go together with past, life, and worldly meanings. God reveals through His Laws the character traits one should acquire to keep one's heart pure. Sufis could thus note that people's 'varying moral excellence reflects their varying belief in death' (I: 306). 'Death is written on your forehead, while the world behind you is being folded' (V: 554). Similarly, God ensures that our past, though passed, is not fixed. If we did not have the relevant character traits when we lived a moment, we can seek forgiveness. One can be a sycophant courtier, an unjust king, and a crafty scholar (State 1). But, one can become an honest courtier, a just king, and an upright scholar (State 2). It is clear that one cannot become something else, after one's bodily death. If our bodily death occurs when we were in State 1, this defines what we had been. If instead it happens when we had changed ourselves from State 1 to State 2, or when we had intended the transition, then this defines us.

Al-Ghazālī acknowledges that 'some people find death bad because they are afraid that they would lose those things that they value in their lives' (III: 1220). His response is that death is a transition, pointing backwards to our life and pointing forwards to our afterlife, and goodness and badness depends on what we make of it within the context of divine rules. Furthermore, he has three responses for those who say they do not know death now. First is occasionalist. '99 deaths surround you, escaping which you reach old age' (V: 551). What has already gone before, which you remember, is but a confirmation of your (and others') finitude. Second is experiential. Sleep is half-death; waking up is half-afterlife. 'If you doubt the experience of death, then do not sleep; for if you know what it is to sleep, it means you have some idea of what the experience of death would be like' (I:1079). Reason

cannot know the nature of afterlife on its own; divinely-revealed Laws revealed to Prophets are posited as a matter of rational necessity. Third is causal. It is God's habit (*sunna*) to govern the world in one way than another. A rotting fruit does not finally rot; it had already been undergoing the process since the seed grew into a fruit. So, your body tells you that one day its 'parts would decompose and mix into the earth they had come from' (IV: 255).

Griffel's recent work on al-Ghazālī can help us appreciate al-Ghazālī's moral account of death. Al-Ghazālī's view of death navigates occasionalism and secondary causality by highlighting three things. 1) Life has a disclosive aspect. Passing moments reveal we are beings dying in the company of others who are themselves dying. Or, death has a disclosive aspect. Passing moments reveal we are beings living or wanting to live meaningfully with other beings who live or want to live meaningfully. 2) Life has a transitionary aspect. God had made lives finite, as finite lives hold meaning. Death of body allows me to look back at my life as a totality, i.e. an unfolding of meaningful events to which one could attribute a single narrative flow. God tests humans through death and lays down His Laws to guide their lives. Or, death has a transitionary aspect. It goes backwards telling you how your life passed and forwards telling you what awaits you in your afterlife. 3) Ethical aspect bridges both. Divinely-revealed Laws specify character traits in their social context. The goodness or badness of life, or that of death, depends on those traits. Death enables actions. To tell A 'you would die' means telling A that 'you should prepare yourself for your death and act like someone who would die'. Remembering death 20 times a day has a crucial ethical importance for al-Ghazālī. To illustrate, consider God as someone who created a game and then specified rules for that; the justness of those rules depends on His act of creation, like there are no just football rules prior to football; so, God's presence is there in both the initial creation and in the subsequent rules; those rules constrict the players but do not produce 'winners'; it is will, belief, and effort as regards the acquisition of character traits which produces 'winners'. Disclosive, ethical, and transitionary aspects give us three takeaway messages: the overlap of life and death; death and its social aspect; death as being related to social meanings and as their endpoint.

§3: Fuller lives through death

Al-Ghazālī's influence can still be felt. Traditional Islamic scholars, i.e. ulema, interpret divinely-revealed Laws to guide ethical behavior of believers towards their salvation. Ulema generally believe that they can attempt to correct political leaders through counsel and public through guidance but should not themselves get involved into

politics. Sufi brotherhoods cultivate character traits in brotherhood members to make them pious, at home with the Sufi tradition, attentive to their deaths. Sufis mostly believe that politics has a corrupting influence, which a Sufi should better stay away from. Islamism, a term used for a school of contemporary thought, looks at the conditions of possibility of ethics. 'In contrast to those Muslims who primarily seek to cultivate a mystical understanding of the divine (which is not devoid of political implications) or who strive to carry on their devotional practices and scholarly pursuits indifferent to their political surroundings, Islamists may be characterized as explicitly and intentionally political and as engaging in multifaceted critiques of all those people, institutions, practices, and orientations that do not meet their standards of this divinely mandated political engagement' (Euben & Zaman, 2009, p. 4). So, an Islamist like Israr Ahmed could argue that orthodox ulema and Sufis are a 'silent majority' who would benefit from an Islamic revolution after it has been successful but cannot be expected to cause one (Ahmed, 1994).

However, it must be noted that 'the single term Islamism masks real differences among Islamist thinkers and activists past and present, as well as significant diversity in the politics they embrace, the strategies they deploy, the contexts in which they operate, and the audiences they address' (Euben, 2015, p. 506). We only present a line within Islamist thought, i.e. the 'theo-democratic Islamism' articulated by South Asian Islamists. This line is slightly different from some of the Shiite versions, for whom the genealogical descent from the Prophet of an Islamic political leader is critically important (Khomeini, 2009, pp. 163-180). We suggest that we can understand the complex relation of 'theo-democratic Islamism' to democracy, rights, and the rule of law by seeing its account of death, and that we can explore this account as a politicized reading of al-Ghazālī. In this sense, this section builds on the foregoing section's discussion.

We begin by looking at Israr Ahmed (d. 2010), a Pakistani public intellectual and the founder of a number of politicized organizations including most notably 'The Islamic Organization' (*Tanzeem-e-Islami*). Ahmed's premise is the effect of politics on consciousness, death, and afterlife, as 'Western modernity has penetrated the world to an extent that a deviation from it is an exception and not the norm … and those countries who oppose it largely do so based on another interpretation of it' (Ahmed, 1982, p. 4). An effect of this has been the focus on the way one lives different moments. The consequent 'mechanist' view (Ahmed, 2002, p. 42) does not acknowledge the temporal flow that connects the moments to see how individuals are slowly dying and heading to their deaths. Politics now plays a part in shaping the social contexts within which one lives moments, to an extent that it was not possible

in the premodern times. For Ahmed, it influences the ethical aspect in three ways. First is direct. If I am a diplomat 'of a superpower which can control countries in different continents', I would be expected 'to formulate policies solely based on my country's interests' without thinking about the moral justifiability of those interests (Ahmed, 2002, p. 42); yet, if my state normally expects that 'there is a justifiable room for some lying, deception, exploitation in pursuit of interests' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 13), it makes me live moments in a way that affects my life lived as a whole, the death I will face, and my afterlife. Now, al-Ghazālī did identify the direct influence of politics on death and afterlife. However, Ahmed identifies the pervasiveness of its direct influence, given modern state's administrative structure. This brings Ahmed to his second point: its indirect influence. Life is a motion picture. The motion narrates a story. The passing of each frame produces motion. So, if death and life overlap, then any systematic attempt to regulate life has consequences for death and afterlife. If an economic context incentivizes usury (*riba*) and betting (*satta*), it gets difficult to comply with divinely-revealed Laws that forbid both. 'If your business is spread well and wide, but later you start avoiding usury and betting, the extent of your business would start to shrink' (Ahmed, 1987, p. 156). Whereas al-Ghazālī could believe that a Sufi attitude of avoiding political power centers is a sound one, and himself famously opted for it, Ahmed believes that such an attitude ignores that there is systematicity to modern life. 'Dust in air forces everyone to inhale it' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 21). This takes Ahmed to his third point: its graduality. Madrasas and Sufi lodges (*khanqah*) help one know the Law and acquire divinely-sanctioned traits. Ahmed agrees with al-Ghazālī that such religious institutions help individuals know what God wants them to do and to do it. However, he disagrees that they are sufficient or that their evolution is impervious to politics. If there is a 'moral anarchy' (Euben & Zaman, 2009, p. 5), politics needs to consider it systematically. 'If you find a decline in people's moral values [despite an increase in madrasas, missionaries, khanqahs], when you compare today's society to the last 10 years, you cannot not know that something is systematically wrong' (Ahmed, 1987, p. 155).

This helps Ahmed articulate a distinctive political phenomenology. The specific configuration of the death discloses the specific shape of politics to the believer. Believers just need to see how politics nudges them and the social characters it asks them to idealize to see where politics stands. If it is not conducive for their afterlife, something is wrong in it. Not academic treatises or scholarly debates, but a phenomenological analysis suffices. Further, death's transitionary aspect guides political reform. An explicitly political attitude to political power is in view of salvation of the people subjected to that political power. All aspects of death are politicized 'given social changes and societal evolution' (Ahmed, 1987, p. 154). Ahmed's thought

emphasizes three points: ethics of death/ afterlife and their political aspects; political correspondence of life and death; death/ afterlife as a perspective to evaluate and transform politics.

In line with the findings of comparative political theory literature, we can note that Ahmed's view of modern state is critical yet reformist, and works as a 'perspective on and attempt to redefine what it must mean to live in the modern world' (Euben, 1999, pp. 11, 21). Ahmed believes that modern state with 'its coercive power, imposes a specific political and economic system' (Ahmed, 1994, p. 90). Yet, instead of arguing for its dismantlement, he believes that modern state can be restructured in the light of 'the scriptural foundations of the Muslim community' (Euben & Zaman, 2009, p. 4). Restructuring it as an Islamist state lends systematicity to the ethical aspect making salvation possible. So, 'given social changes and evolution, it is necessary to reflect on the creation of an Islamic state which does not simply replicate the Rashidun caliphate but keeps its guiding principles firmly in sight' (Ahmed, 1987, p. 154). Though Ahmed explains how a restructured Islamist state as a 'theo-democracy' would make salvation easier, his philosophical points heavily draw on an earlier thinker, i.e. Maududi.

Abul Ala Maududi (d. 1979), an Indian/ Pakistani Islamist, mentored young Ahmed. Maududi's thought and the political party he founded, 'The Islamic Party' (*Jamaat-e-Islami*), have received much attention from comparative political theorists (e.g. Iqtidar 2011, 2016). The scholarship has explored how Maududi gives death and afterlife their political meaning. We suggest that this also helps us understand his arguments for designing political institutions to 'create a just community on earth' (Euben, 2002, p. 9).

Three points stand out, as we locate his thought in the context of Islamist tradition. First: his views on the rule of Law (with a capital 'L'). God specified character traits in their social context that humans need to live a meaningful life and secure eternal salvation, but He left it to humans to actualize His Laws. Actualizing His Laws entails free-will in its collective and individual dimensions. God has specified His Laws in their economic, political, and legal contexts, and so on. It is a matter of collective free-will to 'implement the Islamic system of life without cherry-picking' (Maududi, 1966). An individual cannot do A, if A is connected to such collective contexts. If A cannot be done given such reasons, a society is engaged in a 'collective heresy' (*ijtimai ilhad*). Institutionalizing divinely-revealed Laws ensures that these Laws do not exist as a matter of political ruler's discretion. Developing economic, political, and legal institutions that actualize divinely-revealed Laws is in the light of divine wisdom and eternal salvation. More, it enables individual free-will, i.e. to

be individually pious or otherwise, as 'there is no causality that guides moral lives, unlike the one which guides the natural world where a mango seed would only produce a mango' (Maududi, nd, pp. 33-34). Maududi's thought makes room for the eventuality that one might want to quit public life to remain a better believer, e.g. a path al-Ghazālī opted for. Yet, like Ahmed, he doubts whether such an individual path can address a collective problem. He argues that Western modernity, with its institutionalization and non-theistic outlook, poses 'a complex problem, whose solution therefore cannot be found in the thought of medieval Muslim thinkers' (Maududi, 1967, p. 522).

Second is his formulation of a 'theo-democracy'. Maududi considers caliphate a political label, but not a structure of political organization. That structure is democracy qualified by divinely-revealed Laws. God made everyone finite (though not equally finite) and give everyone resources (though not equal resources) to secure their eternal salvation. On the other hand, everyone is equally subjected to divinely-revealed Laws which neither majority nor political leadership should abrogate. Within the limits of divinely-revealed Laws, democratic decision-making enables salvation, as it is the practical manifestation of the fact that all Muslims equally partake in Islam as 'ideology'. Alternatively, if despotism gains ground, it would lead to a decline in religious imagination of the people (c.f. Ahmed 1994, 7) and 'God would hold the despot responsible for having an unjust government that prevented people from following their will … and that forced them to develop dysfunctional personalities (Maududi, 1967, p. 635).

Third is his 'grounded' understanding of rights. Human mortality exhibits itself in passing moments; salvation depends on how one lives those moments and how they hang together. Mortality causes an Islamist state to guarantee individual rights, as those rights tell rights-holder 'that there is a way open to them as regards development of their capacities and power without something else getting in way' (Maududi, 1967, pp. 153, 412). In contrast to the classical Islamic scholarship that only knows 'Rights of Men' and 'Rights of God', Maududi could this find individual rights as emerging from the concerns related to mortality and salvation. Rights require that state laws guarantee individuals a context that realize the divinely-revealed Laws they believe in, that they speak to state's laws in terms of divinely-revealed Laws to tell why the former violates their individual rights, and that state's laws can determine the scope of their rights with reference to divinely-revealed Laws (Maududi, 1967, pp. 415-417). Maududi's theo-democratic Islamist state gives us three takeaway messages: political institutions oriented to both life and afterlife; salvation as a democratic idea, and democracy as enabling salvation; rights as grounded protections.

§4: Politics for mortals

It appears that modern debates on justice and Islamists converge on the importance of rule of law, democracy, and rights. Interpretive differences aside, one may find an 'overlapping consensus' (Rawls, 1993, p. 134). Such a consensus is one that is 'acceptable on moral grounds to the adherents of C1 … C2, and so on. The grounds of course would not be the same in each case (Waldron, 2004, p. 95). One can argue that different premises limit consensuses that it might generally be in name only, that a consensus might mask social power and whitewash historical injustices. Political theory scholarship has however already explored these points. We instead see how the consensus might also be read as a critical engagement. Comparative history of political thought can thus turn tables by 'making room for reciprocal questioning and critique' (Dallmayr, 1997, p. 423). We look at three things: the idea of agency; the question of pluralism; and, the nature of social justice.

Islamists affirm the importance of individual rights because 'humans have a remarkable capacity to inflict systematic injustices on their specie members' (Maududi, 1967, p. 573). Yet, they believe that individual rights need to remain rooted in the social context and doubt whether there could be any interpretation of rights from a vantage point not rooted in a specific history of political thought. If politics does not draw on the ideas of subjects that they use to live by, then it would coerce them into that which would be at the cost of the meaningfulness of their lives and deaths. For Islamists, this is especially crucial now, given modern state's institutionalized centralization of power (See Maududi 1967, 378-390; Ahmed 1994, 90).[1]

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1   Maududi criticized English colonialism in India differently. It bothered him as a system – 'Western imperialism replaced Islamic law with Western ones' (Maududi 1967, 520) – not that that an outsider had controlled India. English colonial state had 'different ideological foundations' (Maududi 1967, 72) because of which political structures created for over centuries in India were destroyed. The Mughals were not perfect but 'they did not cancel or abrogate the Islamic sources of constitution' (Maududi 1967, 528). The colonial British Indian state had an effect of 'influencing the beliefs of 90% of population, and its influence increased with time on the remaining 10%' (Maududi 1967, 73). For him, the wrong lies in the fact that colonialism neither respected our dead nor our deaths. This means that Islamists like Maududi who now want to revive those social and political structure face an uphill historical task, as 'the effects of a system can never be undone with a single stroke – it even took the Prophet 10 years to do away with Modern Dark Ages' (Maududi 1967, 113). More, given the educational system, 'our ulema often do not know much about political and constitutional matters, and our modern educated youth does not know Islamic law … not does it generally care about it' (Maududi 1967, 314, 521). Despite being anticolonial, Maududi's thought is a conditional criticism of colonialism: if the colonizers had converted to Islam, they would have belonged to (Maududi 1967, 148, 554), what Maududi calls as, Hezbollah, i.e. 'the Party of God' (Maududi 1967, 50); if they had constructed structures in line with Islam as ideology, their state structure would not have ideological problems (Maududi 1967, 99-104). The poet Muhammad Iqbal could note in his poem 'Counter-complaint' by looking at the Golden Horde's expansionism: 'It is plain from the tales of Tatar blitzes/ the Kaaba found its defenders from temples'.

This entails structural pluralism that is a modus vivendi of different histories of political thought all the way down. 'Individuals should not follow the law they do not believe in, and should not be exempted from those laws that they believe in' (Maududi, 1967, p. 70). In other words, the public order appears as the sum of plural social values; it is not for public order to stand in an equidistant manner from those values (Maududi, 1958, pp. 10-11). Otherwise, 'demands for justice would be seen as insincere, where presentation of right moral points is seen not for the sake of justice but as an expression of interests' (Maududi, 1958, p. 11). A reason for this is that there is no 'neutrality' about death that might support its institutional bracketing off, as then institutions would stand behind a specific history of political thought without being able to defend it. Therefore, for Islamists, it should not be binding on A to follow rules, if there are general rules that similarly apply to everyone, which nevertheless inhibit the social structures that make A's death meaningful or affect A's salvation. To the extent that those general rules 'signify a way of life, it is impossible for a person to practice another way of life' (Maududi, 1967, p. 65). In other words, if general rules prevent A from living according their religious, cultural, and personal beliefs, then A should not be bound by those rules. It is 'naïve to call it camaraderie' (Maududi, 1967, p. 70), if A is unable 'to follow his own religious, cultural, and personal law' (Maududi, 1967, p. 376). B will not go into the grave of A, nor does it make sense to put both of them into the same grave. Theo-democratic Islamists hope that such an Islamist state is well-suited to identify domains that politics should make room for, given the moral reasons touching agents' mortality (Maududi, 1967, pp. 122-135). Though there is an important qualification: both Maududi and Ahmed are quite clear that non-Muslims would not hold political power nor qualify for political offices in a theo-democratic Islamist state, as that state upholds the 'ideology' of Islam, considers the Muslim community (*umma*) akin to the members of a 'political party', and cannot give political room to those who do not share this ideology in the same way as communists do not want capitalists as general secretaries of the Communist Party and capitalists do not want Trotskyites as presidents.

A critique on the same lines is applied to social justice. Islamists consider it obvious that one cannot give charity without accumulating some material resources, but believe that this 'accumulation of resources needs to make sense with reference to moral framework that determines political evolution and management' (Maududi, 1967, pp. 47, 51). In other words, social justice need not focus on disparate moments, where each is qualitatively the same as the other. Doing this prevents social justice from seeing how economic progress, national interests, health and safety enabled political subjects live passing moments meaningfully, and the way social justice

should guarantee these concerns in view of subjects' finitude (Ahmed, 2002, p. 42). Without an 'allocative' side, distributive justice falters because what makes human lives meaningful is that those lives, as any other story, have an end to it.[2] Humans seek politics because they are not born of their own accord nor necessarily die of their own will (Maududi 1949, Vol. 2, 504, Vol. 4, 39-41, Vol. 5, 95-100). If one does not factor in one's own fragility or that of one's social context, then death shocks and is considered a scandal that politics can either hide or publicly honor. If social justice is to do justice to our nature as finite beings, Islamists hope that it would provide people with resources to live their lives meaningfully, meet their deaths naturally, and seek eternal salvation. 'The separation between life and afterlife, world and afterworld are examples of Modern Dark Ages (*jadeed jahiliyyat*), which remains unable to establish human civilization on firmer foundations, as it does not consider human life in its entirety' (Maududi, 1967, pp. 38-39) & (Ahmed, 2010, p. 21).

In brief, Islamists are concerned by the bracketing off of death at an institutional level, as they argue that this affects the quality of justice. They broaden the view of 'quality of justice' to include the ethical motivation of believers in view of the unfolding of their lives, the fragility of individual human lives and their social contexts, and the overall legal contexts of a divinely-revealed Law in ensuring both worldly justice and salvation. The challenge this perspective poses to some of the influential versions in the tradition of modern justice is twofold: it questions whether domains can be analytically differentiated at the phenomenological level; it denies that bracketing off death has no effects on the quality of justice.

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2   We can here identify some limits to opportunity-cost calculations. The idea of opportunity-cost calculations is only applicable to future courses of action via the present, as an agent chooses Course A over Course B, with the idea that this would give it more utility. But once an agent has chosen Course A, and lived the moment, the calculation is no longer valid. One can speculate later, but this is no calculation. So, opportunity-cost calculations do not apply to an agent's already-taken past decisions. This is not in itself a problem, unless one can see that it is past itself that allows an agent to make opportunity-cost calculations. So, second, when an agent calculates opportunity-costs for Course A, and chooses it over Course B, it tells us something about that agent. Both in themselves emerge historically and evolve. There is an accumulation of moments that influences the way an agent now defines itself and that extends that self-definition. It is the past of an agent that connects its one choice to another, and that defines its own continuity as an agent. This is in contrast to the view that focuses on separate and unrelated moment of detached beings who only make future calculations, without that future drawing on an agent's past, altering its present, or without that amounting to another episode in a single, meaningful story. This also necessitates factoring in both the agent's and the fragility of its social world into every such calculation.

§5: Death and justice

We began by discerning an account of death in modern debates on justice. We focused on Rawls and, rather than going forwards, we read his account backwards, to show that there is some continuity to that attitude towards death that we find in Rawls, and that there are points which Rawls takes for granted as regards death and whose justifications we can find in the thinkers that Rawls draws on, such as Locke and Hobbes. We then saw how Islamists like Ahmed and Maududi draw on an Islamic account of death, one of whose most influential articulation has been by al-Ghazālī. With the help of comparative histories of political thought, we saw how Islamists reinterpret such an account in the light of contemporary conditions to critically evaluate some of the premises used to evaluate modern political institutions. Thus, on the one hand, we saw how modern justice relates itself to death, and on the other hand we saw how Islamists' account of death relates itself to the question of justice. The institutional focus of both, in addition, provided the point which allowed the article to make both political theories enter into a dialogue.

Broadly speaking, the conceptual discussion in this article has yielded two related results. 1) It showed that one way to make sense of political theories, or specific strands within them, is by understanding their philosophical position on death. Thus, the question of justice cannot be dissociated from the question of death, as the idea that death is not relevant for politics itself relies on an understanding of both death and of politics. 2) Religiously-oriented political theories, with their focus on death and afterlife, can contribute to the debates on justice. Avoiding religious accounts, on account of scholarly concerns related to justice, ignores the fact that religion provides one of the important resources with which a number of people view their lives and deaths. It is a remarkable story of present political theory scholarship that its insistence on democracy would have simultaneously entailed a skepticism towards the demos. In other words, one might philosophically question, if religion (any religion) advances justice. Yet, it would be hasty, if we are to believe that such a question should precede analysis of those contributions.

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