

Bernard George Weiss, *Language in Orthodox Muslim Thought: A Study of “Waq’ Al-Lughah” and Its Development*, Princeton University, 1966, 157 pages, OCLC Number: 54742627, Doctoral Thesis.

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Linguistic studies have a long history in the Islamic tradition. A wide scope and detailed scientific and intellectual knowledge including many sub-disciplines has developed in the meantime. The concepts of *wording* and *meaning* constitute the building blocks of language and the relation between these two concepts lies at the foundation of these disciplines. When we consider disciplines at the forefront of classical and the educational curriculum, including lexicography, grammar, and rhetoric, it can be seen that the main issue which determines the concerned relation is the *denotation of meaning by wording*. Accordingly, we can conclude that academic studies in modern times center around these related disciplines, with *verbal denotation* understood as the central problematic.

Another issue regarding wording and denotation is the question of the constitution of the concerned relation of denotation. Denotation is not a quality of wording. Rather, it occurs when a subject assigns wording to a certain meaning. Classical thinking makes such assignment with the term *waq’*. *Waq’iyya* literature that begins with *al-Risālat al-waq’iyya*, compiled by the famous theologian ‘Adud al-Dīn al-Ījī, discusses the main categories and problems associated with this relationship. This literature, considered an independent science resulting in the production of many texts, is one of the dimensions of the language-centric thought with a strong philosophical aspect in the Islamic tradition. Moreover, *waq’* connects closely with meaning and interpretation-centric disciplines including linguistics, logic, and Islamic jurisprudence. However, despite this historical and theoretical importance, in modern times—putting aside certain attempts, a majority of which are merely textual publishing—it is very hard to state that enough studies of significant depth have been conducted regarding the concept of *waq’* and the issues discussed in literature. In this respect, the review of the concept of *waq’ al-lughah* and its development in Islamic thinking prepared as a doctoral thesis by Bernard G. Weiss at Princeton University in 1966 is an important text.

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The study comprises four sections. In the introduction, the author interprets the concept of *waq̄' al-lughā* as *the givenness of language*, indicating this as one of the main principles of Islamic thought (p. 1). While referring to givenness, the author refers to the way in which the relationship between wording and meaning, excluding the identity of the subject, has been initially assigned and constructed. Humans are born into a pre-defined language environment in the process of history. The author, departing from the fact that divine speech (revelation) should reach people in a natural language (Arabic), indicates that its givenness leads to the assumption that language is also a fixed order on semantic terms. This is because language provides data required for understanding divine speech and jurisprudence that is based on it. Moreover, divine speech can only be maintained in a stable order until the end of time, as the sole opportunity for the right path for humanity (pp. 2–3). The Islamic thought's intellectual basis indicates that the order of life, based on jurisprudence, depends on the fact that language is given and provides a stable order. The author compares this intellectual basis to other divine religions and modern thinking of law. He states that this basis is not present in any of them, as is the case in the Islamic tradition (pp. 3–5). The relationship between *waq̄'* and the concept of *sunna* without a religious meaning, established by the author at the end of introduction, is interesting. Accordingly, both concepts are *given*, where this means pre-defined and with mean bases/principles exemplary for all further actions/conditions (pp. 5–7).

It can be observed that the basic idea that *language is given*, asserted in the introduction, determines all three sections of the study. The first section explains the emergence and initial development of the concerned idea, the second section reviews it at an advanced level under the heading of *linguistic premises* in the procedure of jurisprudence, and the third and final section discusses the final form achieved in the science of *waq̄'* as an independent discipline (p. 7).

The first section of the study discusses the origin of language in the Islamic tradition. Three theses are proposed, each concerned with demonstrating the foundation on which the givenness nature of the wording–meaning relationship is built. According to the first thesis, language is a product of nature (the naturalist thesis). According to the second thesis, language is the result of human convention (the conventionalist thesis); according to the third, language is a result of divine instruction (the theological thesis) (pp. 8–9).

The naturalist thesis looks for the givenness and stable nature of the wording–meaning relationship via natural contact between sound and meaning. Therefore, a language with roots firmly anchored in nature would be protected from all kinds of modifications and impairments. This theory, however, has not managed to survive. The author believes that it results from the fact that the naturalist thesis associates

durability and certainty, one contrary to general acknowledgement in Islamic thinking, not with the will of God but with nature (pp. 17–18).

The main controversy about the origin of language in Islamic tradition, on the other hand, occurred between the theological and the conventionalist thesis. The famous Mu'tazilite theologian of the era, Abū Hāshim Jubbāi, objected to the theological thesis and adopted the conventionalist language thesis. According to the conventionalist thesis, language depends on convention resulting from the joint efforts of people, not on divine instruction. When the conventionalist thesis became the distinguishing character of Mu'tazilite kalam in a very short time, al-Ash'arī (who had previously abandoned Mu'tazilite kalam) adopted the perception of a language based on divine instruction commonly accepted in parallel to traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), defending the theological thesis (pp. 20–22).

Weiss establishes a relation between the theological–conventionalist contradiction and the theological discussion on whether the Quran is created. Mu'tazilite theologians emphasized the created/mundane nature of the language/speech to suggest that the Quran is also created. The author does not suggest that the theory of the created Quran necessarily gives rise to the conventionalist thesis. This is because, as a created (posterior) being, language may have been created entirely by God, without human intervention. Mu'tazilite thinkers adopt the conventionalist language theory because of the assertion that language has a divine origin in the traditionist community and has become a natural extension of the uncreated Quran perspective—one never to be accepted by the Mu'tazilite sect (pp. 23–24).

On the other hand, Sunni theologians establish a relationship between language/speaking and the attribution of wisdom to the Supreme Being, whilst asserting that the Quran is not created. Therefore, teaching names to Adam is synonymous with giving wisdom. The traditionist perspective regarding the origin of language is not concerned with the origin of language, which occurs with its first appearance on the stage of creatures. Rather, it describes the delivery of language to Adam from a superior level, more clearly commanding the divine declaration to Adam. The term *apprehension* that has become the name of the *theological* thesis implies, by lexical meaning, delivery of language to humanity, not its occurrence. The conventionalist thesis adopted by the Mu'tazilite communities is a reaction to the metaphysical and ethereal character of language adopted by traditionists. Therefore, language is not a metaphysical reality donated to mankind, but is instead a human creation. The discussion of the theological versus the conventionalist thesis has been about the nature and character of language rather than about how it occupied its first place in history (pp. 23–26)

After outlining justifications asserted by various parties, Weiss indicates that this discussion ended with al-Bāqillānī (one of the Ash'arite theologians) explaining that no theory about the origin of language can be proved on the final analysis and that it is therefore necessary to put an end to it. The reason is discussions on the nature of speech and distinguishing between literal and sensual speech. The general principle in traditionist thinking that the Quran is not created has been completely detached from the nature of daily language. By asserting that the *divine speech is archaic*, traditionist thinkers indicate that Quran is characterized as a divine statement, not one made in daily language. As this quality is present in the self and as *al-kalām al-nafsī*, pronouncing the meanings prepared in the self, is realized through wordings, the word which is the expression of the concerned quality is named *al-kalām al-lafẓī*. After protecting the metaphysical and the eternal nature of the divine word, the issue of the origin of language is not about whether language is a transcendental/metaphysical reality granted to humanity, but rather about how language as a created phenomenon came into existence. (pp. 31–34)

The second section of the study concerns how the established/constituted nature of language is reviewed in jurisprudence. Accordingly, the term *wad'ī* means provision of linguistic data to be considered by scholars while interpreting texts in principle of jurisprudence works (p. 42).

The author states that jurisprudence is based on three principles: theological, linguistic, and jurisprudential (pp. 54–59). Jurisprudential principles are about definitions, with no basis apart from jurisprudence. Theological and linguistic principles are about the givenness of God and language. Qualifications of God should certainly be known and considered while interpreting the text, because it concerns God's addressing. On the other hand, as divine statement has reached people in a natural language, it is also necessary to consider the nature and qualifications of language (p. 59).

In the second section, the author also describes how the idea that language is given is developed under the heading *linguistic premises*. The most important point here is the acknowledgement that language can only be known through transmission. On these pages, Weiss describes how Ibn al-Anbārī applied the hadith criticism to linguistics, shift of Āmidī's problem of narration of language to jurisprudence (*uṣūl*) with the main lines, suspicions of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in this regard and other related details (pp. 61–72).

After showing that it is determined that language is given, legal theorists discuss issues directly associated with textual interpretation. When the meanings of specific statements in language are insufficient for determining the meaning of the text, the legal theorist needs to go beyond this data and reach certain qualifications

such as homonymy and synonymy. The effort invested by legal theorists within linguistic premises is for demonstrating general semantic qualifications of language. These are included in the nature of language for their imposition (pp. 72–74).

Following these general explanations based on the assertion that language is given, the author discusses *metaphor*, *religious terms*, *generality-homonymy-synonymy*, and similar phenomena as general qualifications of language reviewed within this scope (pp. 75–88).

The third section of the study is concerned with the science of *wadʿ* as an independent discipline. Weiss states that this science includes the final statement of the thinking that language is given. Accordingly, a review with components only connected with text interpretation in the principles of jurisprudence literature (metaphor, generality, synonymy, and so on) is expanded to include all elements in language when it comes to the science of *wadʿ*. The reason for this is as follows. In the science of *wadʿ*, all meaningful elements in language, whether a word, a form, or structural elements in the form of a suffix, are considered to be a name with a certain meaning. Therefore, language is indeed constituted by a *naming* process (pp. 90–91).

Weiss states that ‘Adud al-Dīn al-Ījī is the first person who detached the concept of *wadʿ* from the question, how the text should be interpreted and discussed within its own scope. As a result, *wadʿ* became an independent field of study. However, the author states that it only became an independent science through systematic texts with a broad scope written in the eighteenth century and later (pp. 92–93).

There are two important factors connected with the content in literature. Accordingly, while studying the relationship between meaningful components in language and that between meanings of these components, the categories of *wadʿ* were taken as a basis; in the end, the concerned categories were applied to all components used in language (p. 93).

Weiss identifies three categories of the *wadʿ* phenomenon. The first is the difference in terms of *particularity –generality*. There are three sub-headings depending on particularity or generality of *wadʿ* and *mawzūʿ lah*. The second is the *isolative-subsumptive* (*shakhṣī-nawʿī*) categories which provide the difference between essences and appearances of wordings during *wadʿ* and the third is the *direct* and *indirect* (*tahqīqī-taʿwīlī*) *wadʿ* categories which provide the difference between reality and metaphor and depend on whether they require presumption while indicating the meanings of wordings (pp. 93–95).

The main purpose of al-Ījī is to demonstrate that wording types such as personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns (*al-ism al-mawṣūl*), and letters which are considered to have general meanings by previous thinkers (*mu-*

taqaddimūn) have general *waḍ'* patterns but have specific and not general meanings. Weiss draws attention to the concept of *ma'rifah*. Accordingly, all wording types discussed by al-Ījī are under the heading of marife in language. Marife is a quality of wording which refers to something known by both the speaker and the listener. Starting from this, the author asserts similarity between *ma'rifah* and *juz'ī*. Therefore, the entity indicated by marife words should be specific rather than general. This accords well with the aforementioned purpose of al-Ījī (pp. 95–98).

The author explains that previous scholars considered meanings of marife wordings, such as pronouns and demonstrative pronouns, as not specific but general, with the principle that *the meaning of wording is the meaning envisaged by the founder of language*. Therefore, the founder of language should not have predicted possible meanings of marife words, such as the pronoun “it” (*huwa*), in many future discourses and should not have envisaged each of these specific meanings, because the formation of language precedes discourse. In this case, the founder of language should have determined a general meaning applicable to all specific conditions. Therefore, meaning should be general. Previous scholars explained the fact that pronouns indicate not a general but a specific individual in every discourse, with a condition postulated again by the founder of language. In this case, the meanings in question are general and their references in certain discourses are specific.

However, according to al-Ījī, when the meanings are generally accepted, this does not prove that the wordings are marife, or, in other words, that their character of *indicating a known thing* is given. The condition postulated by the founder of language is not sufficient for this. Therefore, al-Ījī, while explaining *waḍ'* for the concerned wording types, suggested that they were assigned to a specific, not a general, meaning. For this reason, apart from the first two *waḍ'* categories where both *waḍ'* and *mawzū' lah* are particular and general, to explain the marife wording addressed here, a third category was developed in which *waḍ'* is general but *mawḍū' lah* is particular. Accordingly, wordings, such as pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and relative pronouns, were not considered a counterpart of general concepts projected by the founder of language. In contrast, they were imposed at once as a counterpart of many specific conditions envisaged through this general projection (pp. 98–105).

Weiss explains the issue of particularity of letter by describing three differences between the circumstances of direct and indirect thought about meanings by referring to the mirror metaphor manifested in the *epistle of letters* by Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī and briefly discussing *isolative-subsumptive* and *direct-indirect* distinctions of *waḍ'* (pp. 110–118). The section ends by applying the concerned categories of *waḍ'* to all meaningful components in language. Here common points between the texts are addressed and conflicting issues between the authors are discussed (pp. 118–139).

The work of Weiss is generally successful. The most important reason for this is that he, rather than reading the texts as wordings and listing the issues, attempts to delve into the intellectual background which allows him to describe the historical processes in a cause and effect relation. Considering the text in general, it can be seen that the author bases the issue of *waqʿ al-lughā* on the fact that language is given and tries to interpret data within this conceptual abstraction. How accurate these interpretations are, is a separate question. For example, while he is accurate in proclaiming that divine speech (thus, jurisprudence) is a data required to be understood, absolutizing this condition, stating that there is no way to identify the intention of Supreme Being apart from the language of divine speech after the Prophet's death (p. 140) is a highly problematic assertion.

The author's questioning of the intellectual foundations of the science of *waqʿ* and addressing discussions under the *linguistic premises* heading in the origin of language and the principle of jurisprudence are significant achievements. However, the issue of *waqʿ* is, above all, a problem about language. However, the author almost never refers to linguistic sources and does not follow traces of the issue of *waqʿ* in the linguistic tradition. Another point to be addressed here concerns studies of logic which gained momentum especially with al-Fārābī. The concept of denotation was discussed by logicians at the absolute level and the concept of *waqʿ* was considered as a principle of denotation. Weiss does not refer to logicians at all, either. But what is more important is the question, why the issue of *waqʿ* began with the famous theologian al-Ījī, and, in the upcoming period, almost all authors who wrote comments and annotations on this text are scholars who come to the forefront in rational science. The question of why *waqʿ* was developed by al-Ījī and followers with the same tendencies but not by others or at a previous time has turned into an independent discussion which takes the nature of language into account. Can this situation have a special meaning? On the other hand, it can be concluded that, despite referring to *waqʿ* works compiled in the eighteenth century and later, the work has certain gaps in terms of defining the scientific scope of the issue of *waqʿ*. This is because the author did not cover comments and annotations which constitute the classical texts of *waqʿ* literature at a sufficient level.