ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Sceptical Muslim

Imran Aijaz

Department of Language, Culture, and the Arts, The University of Michigan-Dearborn, 4901 Evergreen Rd, Dearborn, MI 48128, USA
Email: iaijaz@umich.edu

Abstract

Many Muslims take the position that religious doubts constitute a serious problem for anyone who regards himself or herself as a Muslim, arguing that such a predicament may even result in apostasy. According to this position, the main problem with a Muslim who harbours religious doubts, a 'Sceptical Muslim', is that he or she is culpable for failing to respond appropriately to epistemic certainty about fundamental Islamic doctrine, primarily the existence of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad. I shall argue that, contrary to what many Muslims have asserted, the position of the 'Sceptical Muslim' is a viable one in an Islamic context.

Introduction

In this article, I will discuss whether the stance of the 'Sceptical Muslim' is acceptable from an Islamic perspective. More specifically, I will offer a defence of this stance against a standard Islamic objection based on the claim that epistemic certainty about Islamic doctrine is a prerequisite for a Muslim's faith and religious commitment. After offering a brief account of what I take a Sceptical Muslim to be, I will introduce this objection and show that it can be construed in several different ways. On one dominant interpretation of it, the idea of a Sceptical Muslim is held to be objectionable because it entails a culpable refusal to acknowledge Islamic matters that are rooted in epistemic certainty. I shall argue that, given the dialectical context that a Sceptical Muslim finds himself or herself in, this objection cannot be sustained. I will conclude my discussion by noting how, in addition to possessing several positive qualities often associated with meritorious and non-sceptical faith, the Sceptical Muslim may also have faith, even as he or she harbours religious doubts.

The Sceptical Muslim: some preliminaries

In *Islam: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation*, I introduced the concept of the 'Sceptical Muslim' as a person who (1) identifies as a Muslim but (2) doubts the existence of God and/or the Prophethood of Muhammad (Aijaz (2018), 117). The main idea behind condition (2) is that the Sceptical Muslim doubts propositions that are *religiously significant*

in the Islamic tradition. Among these propositions, the two that rank highest for Muslims are surely 'There is no god but God' and 'Muhammad is the messenger of God'. Indeed, the conjunction of these two propositions is enshrined in the Islamic testimony of faith known as the *Shahada*: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God'. According to Islamic orthodoxy, one enters the fold of Islam by sincerely reciting the *Shahada*. Although the propositions contained in the *Shahada* are the most religiously significant ones for Muslims, they are certainly not the only ones that carry such significance. Most Muslims also maintain the religious significance of the propositions 'The Qur'an is the inerrant Word of God' and 'Muhammad was sinless', to cite some other examples. In formulating my conception of the Sceptical Muslim, I selected two paradigmatic examples of religiously significant propositions in Islam. This conception can easily accommodate alternative religiously significant propositions as substitutes in condition (2) since the basic idea of the Sceptical Muslim will remain intact. In what follows, I will continue to use the propositions 'God exists' and 'Muhammad is God's Prophet' in discussing the Sceptical Muslim, understanding, of course, that there are other religiously significant propositions such a Muslim may doubt. To turn now to another point about (1) and (2), I take these to be *necessary* conditions to be a Sceptical Muslim; deciding on what the sufficient *conditions* are is not essential, given my aims in this article. Still, the following discussion will explore what some of these conditions may be.

Let me now clarify the reference to doubt as it appears in condition (2) of the Sceptical Muslim profile. By 'doubt', I mean a kind of propositional attitude. More specifically, I take doubting a proposition *p* to entail that one *neither* believes that *p* nor disbelieves that *p*. The fact that doubt in this sense does not entail disbelief is important to note, given the ambiguity in ordinary English expressions of the form '*S* doubts that *p*'. This locution could mean (a) *S* believes that not-*p* (e.g. when the statement 'Buzz doubts conspiracy theories about the moon landings' is taken to mean that 'Buzz believes that conspiracy theories about the moon landings are false'); alternatively, the locution could mean (b) *S* is in doubt about whether *p* (e.g. one way to take the statement 'Spencer doubts whether Plato's account of Socrates' life is historically accurate' is to take it to mean something like 'Spencer doesn't think that Plato's account of Socrates' life is historically accurate, but he doesn't think that it is historically inaccurate either'). It is this second way of understanding what it means to doubt that *p* which I am using to characterize the Sceptical Muslim.[1]

I understand 'belief' to be another sort of propositional attitude that is distinct from doubt. One way to understand the difference between these two propositional attitudes is to observe how doubting that *p* lacks the phenomenology characteristic of believing that *p*, such as 'a disposition to feel it true that *p*' (Cohen (1989), 368). Since the locus of doubts in my conception of the Sceptical Muslim is a religious one, let us call the doubts that such a person has 'religious doubts'. In having religious doubts about the existence of God and/or the Prophethood of Muhammad, then, the Sceptical Muslim does not believe (i.e. lacks the belief) that these propositions are true.[2] The causes that can bring about these religious doubts vary. In a helpful and illuminating survey of American Muslims struggling with religious doubts, the Yaqeen Institute of Islamic Research documents three broad causes for these doubts: (1) moral and social concerns, (2) philosophical and scientific concerns, and (3) personal trauma (Chouhoud (2016)). As an example of philosophical concern, the survey mentions how, for some Muslims, the perceived absence of 'proof' for God's existence gave rise to religious doubt that extended to all other aspects of their religious commitment:

Not infrequently, our respondents were asked by their community members to explain how it is possible to prove with certainty that God exists and that Islam is

true. When 'proof' was not forthcoming, this became a source of doubt that affected all parts of the questioners' faith. In their minds, if there is no satisfying proof that God even exists, then how can there be proof of anything else in Islam, like the personal religious obligation to pray five times a day, to abstain from alcohol, etc.? (Chouhoud (2016))

In a subsequent complementary survey of American Muslims dealing with religious doubts, the Yaqeen Institute lists some ways in which these Muslims responded to them (Chouhoud, (2018)). Most of the Muslims surveyed sought guidance from Islamic sources (e.g. praying, reading the Qur'an, etc.). A notable number of them did, however, say that they were likely to explore their doubt by consulting non-Islamic sources and also that they did not feel irrevocably bound to their Islamic commitment (*ibid*.).

Here, one may wonder how it is possible for a Muslim who is in doubt about religiously significant propositions in Islam to sustain some sort of religious commitment. After all, if the Sceptical Muslim as a result of his or her doubts does not *believe* that God exists, for instance, what else could motivate such a person to maintain a degree of commitment to God in an Islamic context? In his essay 'The Will to Believe', William James offers a useful framework in which we can explore this question. Discussing the relationship between belief and action, alongside the idea of 'live' and 'dead' hypotheses, he says this:

> Let us give the name of *hypothesis* to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of *live* and *dead* wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature, – it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. *The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all.* (James (1896); emphasis mine)

In applying what James says in this passage to the concept of the Sceptical Muslim, here is what we can say. For such a Muslim, Islam is *to some degree* a 'live hypothesis'; it still appears to him or her as a 'real possibility', as James puts it. It is not, however, *maximally* live, which, as James explains, would mean a willingness to act irrevocably that is predicated on belief. In having *some* willingness to act, however, the Sceptical Muslim will have a believing tendency towards the truth of the relevant religious propositions. By 'believing tendency', I take James to mean an *inclination* towards a doxastic state. This inclination may manifest itself in the form of non-doxastic propositional attitudes such as *acceptance* or *hope* (see Alston (1996) and Pojman (2003) for an exploration of these as viable attitudes in the context of religious faith).

Why might the Sceptical Muslim be favourably inclined towards those religiously significant propositions in Islam that he or she doubts? James offers an explanation in what he calls our 'willing nature':

> When I say 'willing nature,' I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from, – I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact we find ourselves believing,

we hardly know how or why . . . Evidently, then, our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions. *There are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief* . . . (James (1896); emphasis mine)

A Sceptical Muslim may have a favourable 'willing nature' towards Islam because of his or her religious upbringing, the experience of living in a Muslim country, etc. This willing nature may result in some form of religious commitment despite the presence of religious doubts. Consider, as an example of how this may happen, a Sceptical Muslim who provides this account:

> I have doubts about God's existence. To me, there don't seem to be any good arguments for the existence of God. Certainly, there don't seem to be any good arguments for God's existence if by 'God' we mean God as conceived of in Islam. I think there might be some evidence for the existence of a 'higher power' but I'm not even sure about that. Despite this, I find myself unable to leave Islam (at least for now). I continue to do things like pray to God, read the Qur'an, etc. There's something that's keeping me in my community. My heart hopes that Islam is right. Also, as someone who was raised Muslim, I feel comfortable being part of the Islamic community and want to remain there (everyone in my family is Muslim). It's just that I have these doubts about God's existence, and I want to believe what is *true*. I can't simply believe that something is true because I was taught to believe that it is true. Why even the Qur'an condemns thinking that something should be believed simply because it was taught by one's forefathers (e.g. 2:170). God Himself criticizes those who do not use their reason (e.g. 8:22). I've followed the advice of my Muslim family and friends who have encouraged me to study the Qur'an and to read works by Muslim scholars who have argued for the truth of Islam. I've done this and I still have doubts about God. I remain committed to seeking the truth about religious matters, however, even if it means seeking it outside of my religion.

Although devised, this sort of account is one that we can easily find today among people who identify as Muslims, especially in the modern secular climate present in Anglo-American culture.

Is the stance of the Sceptical Muslim a reasonable and acceptable one from an Islamic perspective? Many Muslims answer 'no'. In an attempt to justify this answer, they appeal to a fairly common view on religious doubt, faith, and commitment that one finds within the Muslim community. In the next section, I will present and examine this view, both with an aim to defend the stance of the Sceptical Muslim as well as to investigate some matters on the nature of faith and commitment in Islam.

A traditional Islamic perspective on religious doubt, faith, and Islamic commitment

For many Muslims, the primary reason the stance of the Sceptical Muslim is problematic from an Islamic perspective is that it is seen as incongruous, if not downright incompatible, with faith and commitment. To better understand and articulate this objection, let us consider, as a starting point for discussion, this *fatwa* (legal opinion on Islamic law) by the committee of Muslim scholars who work for Islamweb.net, a popular Islamic website:

> Doubting the principles of faith and the principles of Islam takes the person out of the fold of Islam. A person who doubts is not a believer, as being firm upon belief is

a condition for the validity of belief. A person who doubts, neither confesses to the truth nor is he sure about it. Allaah says (which means): {Only those are the believers who have believed in Allaah and His Messenger, and afterward doubt not. . .} [Quran 49:15] . . .

Therefore, not doubting is a condition for the validity of belief in Allaah and His Prophet . . . because the person who doubts is a hypocrite. Allaah says (which means): {Only those would ask permission of you who do not believe in Allaah and the Last Day and whose hearts have doubted, and they, in their doubt, are hesitating.} [Quran 9:45].

The Prophet . . . said: 'I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allaah and I bear witness that I am the Messenger of Allaah, no one meets his Lord with this testimony not doubting in it except that he will be admitted to Paradise.' [Muslim]

In this narration, the Prophet . . . conditioned entering Paradise on uttering these testimonies with a content heart and without being in doubt. So if the condition is not fulfilled, the person will not enter Paradise. However, one should differentiate between being content with this doubt as this takes the person out of the fold of Islam, and between the whispers of the devil which a person is not content with and which he tries to repel from his heart, as this is not disbelief [this does not take the person out of the fold of Islam]. The fact that a person hates these whispers and tries to repel them from his heart proves his correct belief.

Finally, it should be noted that the person who is content with this doubt, we seek the Refuge of Allaah from that, is not like the person who has these whispers and is not content with them. (Islamweb (2005))

There are several things here that need to be unpacked and clarified to understand what exactly the *fatwa* amounts to.

 Let's start with the analysis of religious doubt offered by the *fatwa* committee (henceforth referred to as the FC). In the initial reference to religious doubt in the *fatwa*, the FC doesn't explain whether it is referring to a temporary episode of doubt or doubt that persists over a long period (and will perhaps remain unresolved). Suppose that Ali, a devoted believing Muslim and a freshman at university, takes an Introduction to Philosophy class and reads about the Problem of Evil for the first time. Perhaps he reads J. L. Mackie's classic presentation of the problem in which Mackie tries to show that theistic belief is 'positively irrational' (Mackie (1955), 200). Let's imagine that in considering Mackie's argument Ali can't find any fault with it. All of Mackie's points seem correct and the reasoning behind them seems airtight. Ali also agrees with Mackie's discussion of various 'fallacious solutions' to The Problem of Evil and is convinced that none of the usual theistic replies succeed (*ibid*., 202–212). So impactful is Mackie's argument on Ali that he starts doubting God's existence. Suppose further that because of this, Ali's religious commitment is affected at a practical level. After praying to God for guidance in light of his doubts, and perhaps feeling that his prayers went unanswered, he starts missing some of the mandatory Islamic prayers, doesn't read the Qur'an as much as he used to, etc. Let's finish the thought experiment in this way. Ali's doubts about God's existence continue for a few weeks until his philosophy instructor – in the interests of maintaining balance in class discussions about God's existence – later introduces students to the enterprise of theodicy. The instructor recommends John Hick's book on the subject in which Hick defends his

Irenaean 'soul-making' theodicy (Hick (2010)). Ali borrows Hick's book from his university library, reads it carefully, re-reads it for a thorough critical examination, and finally comes to think that Hick's theodicy constitutes an adequate response to Mackie. Being satisfied that Mackie's argument does not show theistic belief to be 'positively irrational' or any such thing, Ali finds his belief that God exists, a belief that had been displaced by religious doubt for a few weeks, has returned. Now, is it the case that Ali was not a Muslim during the period in which he doubted God's existence? In considering this question at a more general level, the FC offers two possibilities on which to base an answer to it: being 'content' with religious doubts or else making an effort to repel these doubts ('whispers of the devil'). The latter possibility, the FC maintains, does not take a person outside the fold of Islam; on the contrary, it 'proves his correct belief'. Let me address this second possibility first, before turning to the first one.

As I noted earlier, doubting that *p* entails that one does not believe that *p* (or disbelieve that *p*), so Ali's religious doubt about God's existence entails that he doesn't believe that God exists (or that God does not exist). What, then, might the FC have in mind in suggesting that one can be in a state where he correctly believes, say, that God exists *while also* having doubts about God's existence? Perhaps the idea here is that believing that *p* is compatible with *hyperbolic* (e.g. Cartesian) doubts about *p*. Thus, even if I believe (and believe with confidence) that there is an external world, for example, it is still possible for me to doubt its reality from the perspective of what Bernard Williams calls 'the project of Pure Enquiry' (Williams (2005), 46). To this possibility, one can add some religious colouring, as the FC does. It might be the case that such hyperbolic doubts are also, at least in a religious context, 'whispers of the devil'; they are, that is, attempts by Satan (or perhaps one of his minions) to misguide the believer in some way. For the purposes of my discussion, there is no need to evaluate the FC's judgments about the causes (Satanic or otherwise) or appropriateness of hyperbolic doubts about religious matters. The kind of religious doubt that I am considering is what Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan call 'belief-canceling doubt'; this is doubt that is sufficient to cancel belief (Howard-Snyder and McKaughan (2021), 71, 74). It is this kind of doubt that is operative in my example of Ali, who doubts God's existence and (temporarily) lacks the belief that God exists after consideration of The Problem of Evil.[3]

What about the first possibility, according to which being 'content' with religious doubts takes one out of the fold of Islam, as the FC holds? Since the FC doesn't offer any explanation of what it means by being 'content', let's consider one way of understanding this claim. In the *Pensées*, Pascal discusses the topic of the immortality of the soul, noting that our perspective on it will have great consequences for all our actions. We have, he says, a duty to enlighten ourselves about this topic. Reflecting on the different sorts of people who do not believe that the soul is immortal, Pascal identifies two kinds of doubters. He sympathizes with those sorts of doubters 'who sincerely bewail their doubt, who regard it as the greatest of misfortunes, and who, sparing no effort to escape it, make of this inquiry their principal and most serious occupations' (Pascal (1958), 194). By contrast, there is another sort of doubter:

> [T]he doubter who does not seek is altogether completely unhappy and completely wrong. And if besides this he is easy and content, professes to be so, and indeed boasts of it; if it is this state itself which is the subject of his joy and vanity, I have no words to describe so silly a creature. (*ibid.*; emphasis mine)

Let's call the first kind of religious doubter that Pascal sympathizes with the *conscientious religious doubter* and the second kind that aggravates him the *heedless religious doubter*. If Ali is this second kind of religious doubter, perhaps a case can be made for no longer

considering him Muslim. I say 'perhaps' because it is not clear that Ali's heedlessness in doubt would disqualify him as a Muslim, especially if his practical religious commitment (generally) conformed to Islamic norms. For, one might argue, there are also *heedless religious believers*. Suppose that we have another Muslim – Omar – who believes that all the religiously significant propositions in Islam (e.g. 'God exists', 'Muhammad is God's Prophet', etc.) are true. In his practical religious commitment, however, Omar is a disengaged and lackadaisical fellow, frequently distracted by earthly affairs. He often thinks about his office work while he is performing the daily obligatory prayers, fantasizes obsessively during Ramadan about the various culinary pleasures awaiting him after the breaking of his fasts, gives charity only if he can make a public show of it in front of others, etc. In behaving this way, Omar is arguably a heedless religious believer. Should he be regarded as having left the fold of Islam, given his behaviour? This is a controversial issue in Islamic theology and Muslim theologians have different opinions about such a matter. Be that as it may, here is the key point. If an Islamic assessment of Omar as a heedless religious *believer* can still regard him as a Muslim, why can't a similar assessment of Ali as a heedless religious *doubter* (supposing his doubt is indeed heedless) also regard him as a Muslim? No doubt, both Ali and Omar would still be culpable for their heedlessness. But why regard the heedlessness of one as sufficient to constitute apostasy but not the heedlessness of the other?

For the sake of argument, I am willing to concede that a case can be made for thinking heedless religious doubters are not Muslims (perhaps this case can also be constructed in such a way that allows heedless religious believers still to be regarded as Muslims). In my example of Ali who struggled with religious doubt, however, I portrayed him as a conscientious religious doubter. Thus, correct or not, whatever criticisms the FC may have about heedless religious doubters are simply irrelevant to considerations about whether conscientious religious doubters like Ali should still be counted as Muslims. To consider conscientious religious doubt a bit further, might not Ali's doubts be similar to Abraham's, a prophet who is venerated in the Qur'an? In the sixth *surah* (chapter) of the Islamic Scripture, there is an interesting account of Abraham's intellectual journey towards monotheism that seems to include periods of religious doubt:

> Abraham said to his father Azar, 'Do you take idols for gods? I see that you and your people are in evident error.' Thus We showed Abraham the empire of the heavens and the earth, that he might be one of those with certainty. When the night fell over him, he saw a planet. He said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I do not love those that set.' Then, when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I will be one of the erring people.' Then, when he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my lord, this is bigger.' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, I am innocent of your idolatry. I have directed my attention towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth – a monotheist – and I am not of the idolaters.' (6:74–79)[4]

This passage has invited a lot of discussion in Qur'anic exegesis. For now, I want to focus on Abraham's religious doubts about who or what exactly God is. Following his rejection of idol worship, Abraham beholds the heavens and wonders whether any of the celestial bodies might be God. On several occasions, he identifies God with a celestial body, presumably also *believing* that God is, say, the moon and therefore *not believing* that *God* (i.e. God as He truly is) exists. Eventually, Abraham concludes that God must be the One who created everything ('the heavens and the earth'), so God cannot be a planet, the moon, the sun, or any other celestial body. In reading this passage, one has the impression that Abraham had religious doubts of the conscientious kind that eventually

reached a resolution in monotheism. Now to the interesting question: was Abraham a Muslim during his period of religious doubt? I am not aware of any Muslim thinker who has charged Abraham with heedless religious doubt or apostasy, even of the transient sort. Perhaps this is because the Qur'an explicitly recognizes Abraham as a Muslim, noting that 'he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists' (3:67). It seems that what we have in this story of Abraham is an example of a conscientious religious doubter who was nevertheless a Muslim. What is particularly worth considering is what it was that allowed Abraham to retain his status as a Muslim despite having religious doubt. Some Muslims have answered that it is Abraham's unbroken status as a *hanif*, a term that the Qur'an uses in 3:67 in describing him. Although there isn't an exact definition of this term that is agreed upon in the Muslim community, many Islamic interpretations take it to mean 'one who is inclined towards truth' (Engineer (2008)).[5]

In response to my use of Abraham, the FC might argue as follows. Conscientious religious doubt of the kind demonstrated by Abraham is tolerable because it was temporary. There was a brief period in Abraham's life when he had religious doubts, but these doubts were resolved, and Abraham died believing that God exists. Had Abraham's religious doubts been unresolved, the argument may continue, things would have been different. But how would they have been different in a way that is relevant to considering whether Abraham is a Muslim? Surely, the traits in virtue of which Abraham is still a Muslim during temporary conscientious doubt (e.g. being reflective, sincerely seeking the truth, etc.) can continue to exist in cases where such doubt is prolonged and even unresolved? The FC may grant this point and shift gears, insisting that it takes us away from the real concern about religious doubts: *belief*. In a Pascalian spirit, it might argue that adopting the propositional attitude of belief towards religiously significant propositions in Islam is very important. One reason for this that the FC cites is that 'belief' is necessary for salvation. This appears to be its position in claiming that having religious doubt means that a person is not a 'believer'. The FC cites, for instance, a *hadith* (a report of a saying or action attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) in which the Prophet Muhammad states that a person who meets God without harbouring any doubts about the *Shahada* will enter Paradise.[6]

What is it, then, about 'belief' that makes it inextricably connected to being a Muslim, as the FC maintains? In a brief but critical line in the *fatwa*, the FC states that 'A person who doubts is not a believer, as being firm upon belief is a condition for the validity of belief.' Unfortunately, there are several important concepts and distinctions (all of which are recognized in the Islamic tradition) that are muddled in this remark. These need to be separated and clarified before we try to understand what exactly the FC is stating. There is, first, the distinction between the *Muslim* and the *mumin* that one finds in both the Qur'an and the *hadith*. A Muslim is one who outwardly conforms to Islamic practice through rituals like prayer, fasting, etc. A *mumin*, on the other hand, is the person who possesses *iman* (faith). We see this distinction in Qur'an 49:14:

> The Bedouin say, 'We have attained to faith' (*tu'minoo*) Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: 'You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, "We have [outwardly] surrendered" (*aslamna*) – for [true] faith (*al-imanu*) has not yet entered your hearts. But if you [truly] pay heed unto God and His Apostle, He will not let the least of your deeds go to waste: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' (italics are my insertions of Arabic terms as they appear in this Qur'anic passage)

In this passage, God instructs the Prophet to inform the Bedouin that, despite their claim to have attained *iman*, they have merely submitted to Islam in a practical sense (*aslamna*). The distinction between the Muslim and the *mumin* also appears in the famous 'Hadith of

Gabriel', where Islam and *iman* are referred to separately (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 1). In this *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad explains that Islam involves *practically committing oneself* to the 'five pillars' of the religion, which include things like prayer, fasting, etc. But *iman*, he says, is to have *faith* in God's existence, His Revelation, His prophets, etc. And what exactly is *iman*? I'll answer that shortly. For now, notice how the Muslim-*mumin* distinction lends itself to a refutation of the FC's claim that a person who doubts is not a 'believer' if by 'believer' one simply means 'Muslim'. A person may identify as a Muslim based on some form of practical commitment to Islam (e.g. praying to God), despite not being a *mumin* (i.e. not having faith). Even if it turns out that having religious doubts is incompatible with having *iman*, it seems that it is *not* incompatible with being a *Muslim*. To be Muslim, all one needs to do is have an outwardly conforming commitment to Islam, which is possible despite having religious doubts.

Is religious doubt incompatible with having *iman*? To answer this question, we need to know what *iman* is. The word is derived from the verb *amana*, which roughly means 'to be secure in' or 'to put trust in' something. In a religious (Islamic) context, *iman* is an act that involves *trusting in* God – His Word, Commandments, etc. (see Izutsu (1965) for an extended analysis of *iman*). Throughout Islamic history, discussions of *iman* often identified its key feature as *tasdiq* or *assent* to the message of Islam. More specifically, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains, *tasdiq* 'is the inner appropriation and outward implementation of truth. It is the process of making or finding true in human life, in one's own personal spirit and overt behaviour, what God – or Reality – intends for man' (Smith (1981), 151). Does *tasdiq* require an *explicit* understanding, recognition of, and assent to God's existence or Muhammad's Prophethood? Perhaps not. For instance, one might, by adopting a Platonic understanding of Islam (which has prestigious precedent in medieval thinkers like Ibn Sina), think that responding to any good in the world is to respond to God Himself. After all, as the Qur'an tells us, *all* good comes from God (4:79). One might also apply a Platonic interpretation to Qur'anic verses describing how 'God only wants to remove from you all that might be loathsome . . . and to purify you to utmost purity' and how He 'bestows His blessings upon you, with His angels [echoing Him], so that He might take you out of the depths of darkness into the light' (Q. 33:33, 43). Reading these verses in a Platonic sense allows one to appreciate the strong resonance they have with the allegory of the cave (*Republic* 514a–520a). Perhaps the conscientious religious doubter who is sincerely seeking knowledge, motivated by his or her doubts, is on a journey towards 'Divine Light', much like Plato's prisoner in the cave who ascends to its exit (interestingly, the Platonic allegory involves a reference to the effect of education on the mind). While discussing Plato's famous allegory, it would be remiss of me not to mention the Prophet Muhammad's journey towards a deeper understanding of religious truth that began in a cave at Mount Hira. A striking feature of the traditional Islamic account that describes this is how, following his first encounter with the angel Gabriel, Muhammad himself had religious doubts about the nature of the experience (Lings (2006), 44–45).

In considering *iman*, it seems that the philosophical distinction between belief-*that* and belief-*in* may apply. Believing *that* God exists, for instance, simply means that one has a doxastic attitude towards the proposition 'God exists'. To believe *in* God, however, is to trust in God, to respond appropriately to Him, etc. A simple example will make the use of this distinction clear in an Islamic context. In Qur'an 2:34, we read about Satan's rejection of God: 'And behold, We [God] said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam" and they bowed down. Not so Iblis (Satan): he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith.' In this Qur'anic verse, God explains that Satan – who clearly believed *that* God exists (since he *knew* that God was speaking to him) – did not believe *in* God. Because of his haughtiness, Satan refused to submit to God's Will and is therefore described by God as one who rejects faith (i.e. he did not have *iman*).

With the Muslim-*mumin* and belief-that/in distinctions in hand, let us return to the argument of the FC that 'A person who doubts is not a believer, as being firm upon belief is a condition for the validity of belief.' To conclude that a person who doubts is not a 'believer', the FC appeals to a single premise that states 'being firm upon belief' is a condition for the belief's 'validity' (by 'validity', I take the FC to mean 'genuineness' or something like that). Let's analyse this in some detail. In considering whether a 'belief' is genuine, one might be referring to a belief-that or a belief-in. Reference to a 'condition' for 'belief' can be construed as a reference to either a *necessary* or *sufficient* condition. Finally, one can understand 'being firm upon belief' as related to either belief-that or belief-in. In the case of belief-that, I will construe 'being firm upon belief' to mean *psychological* certainty, 'when the subject who has [the belief] is supremely convinced of its truth' (Reed (2022)). In the case of belief-in, I will interpret being 'firm upon belief' to mean firm *practical commitment*, leaving it open what exactly this entails at the level of practice. Given all this, here are some ways in which we can understand the FC's claim (I will use the proposition 'God exists' in formulating these claims; one can also formulate them concerning the proposition 'Muhammad is God's Prophet'):

(A) *S* believes-*that* God exists if *S* is psychologically certain (i.e. believes with certainty) that God exists.
(B) *S* believes-*that* God exists only if *S* is psychologically certain (i.e. believes with certainty) that God exists.
(C) *S* believes-*in* God's existence if *S* is psychologically certain (i.e. believes with certainty) that God exists.
(D) *S* believes-*in* God's existence only if *S* is psychologically certain (i.e. believes with certainty) that God exists.
(E) *S* believes-*in* God's existence if *S* is firmly practically committed to acting on God's existence.
(F) *S* believes-*in* God's existence only if *S* is firmly practically committed to acting on God's existence.

I'll start with (A) and (B) on the list, both of which refer to belief-that. There is no trouble with (A), clearly. If a person believes with psychological certainty that God exists, he or she believes that God exists. What about (B)? With many of our ordinary beliefs-that, such as believing that there is a plane in the sky, believing that I visited a particular restaurant several times in the past, believing that Elvis Presley is dead, etc., it seems strange to say that these beliefs do not count as beliefs *unless* held with psychological certainty. Surely, many people can and do believe that, for instance, Elvis Presley is dead without being supremely convinced that this is true. For example, some might think that despite their significant confidence in believing Elvis is no longer with us, there is a remote possibility he faked his death to avoid the Mafia and go into hiding. In reply to this point, it might be argued that *some* beliefs-that are nevertheless held with psychological certainty and that, without the accompanying certainty, there is a real question about whether these beliefs would exist at all. Examples might be my belief that $1 + 1 = 2$ or my belief that the whole apple is larger than any particular slice that I remove from it. These examples involve belief in *analytic* propositions, however, and it isn't clear that 'God exists' is an instance of such propositions.[7] But even if it was, notice a serious implication of taking (B) to be true. Wouldn't it follow that a large number of Muslims, perhaps even the majority, do not *really* believe that God exists as this belief is unaccompanied with psychological certainty for them? This might be reason enough for the FC to reject (B).

Let's now consider the formulations involving beliefs-in. Is (C) correct? No. According to (C), believing with certainty that God exists is enough to believe in God. But this is false,

as shown by the example of Satan. For although Satan believes with certainty that God exists, he does not believe in God. As noted earlier, the Qur'an explicitly states that Satan is a rejector of faith. It is interesting to note that, although Satan believes with certainty that God exists, this belief alone fails to override his rejection of faith because of the negative traits he exercises towards God and God's Truth. These traits include, to name a few, being haughty (Q. 2:34), an enemy of humanity (Q. 2:168), a tempter and deceiver (Q. 7:20–22), a betrayer (Q. 14:22), and a dedicated misleader (Q. 38:82). Believing with certainty that God exists is clearly not a sufficient condition for believing in God. Is it nevertheless necessary, as (D) states? As I noted in my remarks regarding (B), there are many Muslims who do not believe with *certainty* that God exists. This includes Muslims who are fairly confident in their beliefs-that about God, but their confidence does not result in psychological certainty. If (D) is correct, then it follows that these Muslims do not *really* believe in God. Appealing to (D) in an attempt to argue for the incompatibility between religious doubt and faith would mean that, in addition to Muslims who have religious doubts about God's existence, Muslims who believe that God exists without psychological certainty also do not believe in God. Again, for this reason alone, the FC may want to refrain from using (D) in formulating an objection to religious doubt.

Turning now to the other two senses of beliefs-in, let's look at (E). This seems false in light of the Muslim-*mumin* distinction. A person who is firmly committed to Islamic practice as a Muslim is not necessarily a *mumin*, one who believes in God (i.e. has *iman*). What this shows is that the *mere* adherence to Islamic practice is insufficient to distinguish between the Muslim who has faith in God and the Muslim who has religious doubts about God's existence. Still, might not firm practical commitment to acting on God's existence nevertheless be necessary for *iman*, as (F) states? Here, there are some complications. What precisely does a 'firm practical commitment' to acting on God's existence consist of? Does it perhaps involve *consistently engaging in all the required rituals of Islam*, such as prayer, fasting, etc.? If so, (F) will imply that many Muslims, who do regard themselves as believing in God and as being firmly committed to acting on God's existence, do not *really* believe in God if they are not consistently engaged in all the required rituals of Islam. As with (B) and (D), the worry with (F) is that it may be too restrictive, excluding from the domain of *iman* not just Muslims with religious doubts who may not have a firm practical commitment to acting on God's existence but many other Muslims as well. But why think that a Muslim who has religious doubts about the existence of God can't in some sense have *iman* involving firm practical commitment to acting on God's existence? A Muslim who doubts that God exists may nonetheless be moved to such a commitment because Islam remains a 'live hypothesis' for him or her, as I noted earlier. Such a Muslim may have a favourable 'willing nature' towards Islam that motivates and animates a pragmatic commitment to the faith of the sort described by Richard Swinburne:

> The person of Pragmatist faith . . . prays for his brethren, not necessarily because he believes that there is a God who hears his prayers, but because there is a chance that there is a God who will hear those prayers and help his brethren. He worships not necessarily because he believes that there is a God who deserves worship, but because it is very important to express gratitude if there is a God to whom to be grateful, and there is some chance that there is. (Swinburne (2005), 148)

To be clear, I am not saying that all or even most Muslims with religious doubt will firmly commit to religious practice in this manner. But, as long as it is possible, (F) won't pose an in-principle problem for Muslims who have religious doubts.[8]

So, there are several different ways of understanding and criticizing the FC's position that 'A person who doubts is not a believer, as being firm upon belief is a condition for the validity of belief.' I will now offer an elaboration of this position using the distinctions that appear in (A)–(F) above, drawing mainly from (B), (D), and (F). I suspect that the FC has something like the following view in mind in objecting to religious doubt in an Islamic context:

> God's existence is evident to everyone. Everyone *knows* with certainty that God exists (i.e. everyone has *epistemic* certainty that God exists). Because of this, everyone believes *that* God exists with *psychological* certainty (the psychological certainty is a product of epistemic certainty). Only those who respond appropriately to this knowledge of God can be said to believe *in* God (i.e. have *iman*). Those who claim that they do not have any kind of certain knowledge or belief that God exists (including Muslims who claim to have religious doubts about God's existence) are perversely denying in their hearts what they know very well is true. As a result of their sinfulness, these people are deluded into thinking that God's existence is open to any kind of serious doubt. What is clear is that they do *not* believe in God. They are, as a matter of fact, in an epistemic position similar to Satan's, who knew the reality about God but refused to act appropriately with this knowledge. Similarly, anyone who learns about Muhammad will come to know with certainty that he is a genuine prophet of God. A person who learns about Muhammad but claims that he or she does not have any certain knowledge about Muhammad's Prophethood is perversely denying the certitude they possess regarding this fact. In sum, the two core tenets of Islam – God's existence and Muhammad's Prophethood – constitute instances of certain knowledge for all who give them due attention and reflection. Given that God has made His existence and the truthfulness of His Prophet evident to all, *iman* requires that we firmly commit ourselves to Islamic practice.

This sort of view is, in Islamic literature, at the heart of most if not all objections to religious doubts. Claiming that one has religious doubts about God's existence or Muhammad's Prophethood is either due to culpable denial or a result of some sort of sinfulness that smothers the recognition in one's mind of the impeccable epistemic credentials of these tenets of Islam. Regarding God's existence, for instance, Ayatullah Abdul Husayn Dastaghaib says this:

> The . . . excuse of one who does not know Allah and is unaware of Him, is not acceptable . . . Allah is not hidden from any sensible person . . . [W]hatever is present in the universe are all proofs of His Absolute Knowledge, Wisdom, Power and Command. Hence there is a Being, infinitely knowledgeable and Wise, Omniscient, Mighty, Omnipotent, and Powerful . . . *People, who doubt, are in fact those who do not want to recognize the truth itself*. If they were really seekers of truth, they would have looked at the creatures of the world and sought a lesson from it. If they had looked at the marvel of the wisdom and amazing power of the Creator of the Universe with proper attention, they would never have doubted. (Dastaghaib; emphasis mine)

And, on the topic of knowing whether Muhammad is truly God's Prophet, Shaykh 'Abdul Rahman 'Abdul Khaliq offers these remarks:

> My brothers and sisters everywhere! You should know that the Messenger, Muhammad the son of 'Abdullah (may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him) is Allah's Messenger in reality and truth. The evidences that show his veracity are

abundant. *None but an infidel, who out of arrogance alone, could deny these signs.* ('Abdul Khaliq; emphasis mine)

Many similar pronouncements on knowledge of God and Muhammad's Prophethood can easily be found in Islamic writings.[9] The central idea behind these pronouncements is that *iman* involves a positive response to epistemic certainty regarding fundamental Islamic doctrine. In the opinion of one of the 'founding fathers' of Sunni Orthodoxy, Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari, 'authentic religious assent is fundamentally a cognitive judgement which [is] founded in knowledge and must be held with indefectible certitude' (Frank (1989), 37). I will call this view, which says that the cognitive component of Islamic faith comes from universal epistemic certainty regarding God's existence and (for those who are appropriately informed about him) Muhammad's Prophethood, the Epistemic Certainty of Islam (ECI) Thesis.

Now, if the ECI Thesis is true, then there does seem to be something problematic in stating that one (Muslim or not) has religious doubts about Islam. Since everyone knows (and therefore believes) that God exists, why claim that one has doubts about this? Wouldn't that be like saying one has doubts about the reality of sunshine? If one *did* say this and wanted to be taken seriously, we would think that such a person is jesting, being vexatious, or is perhaps, unfortunately, suffering from some sort of cognitive impairment. Given that we all have certain knowledge of God's existence and Muhammad's Prophethood, as the ECI Thesis states, the right thing to do is to believe in Islam (i.e. have *iman*) and to do so with firm practical commitment. Failing to do this can happen only if one is culpably refusing to appropriate knowledge of Islamic truth in one's life. The Qur'an has a term for this, *kufr*, an antonym for *iman* that Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains as follows:

> *Kufr* (so-called 'infidelity'), the heinous sin, the incomprehensibly stupid and perverse obduracy, is not unbelief but 'refusal'. It is almost a spitting in God's face when He speaks out of His infinite authority and vast compassion. It is man's dramatic negative response to this spectacular divine initiative. (Smith (1981), 123)

The person guilty of *kufr*, the *kafir* (usually translated as 'infidel') is 'that cantankerous ingrate who rejects' God's Truth (*ibid.*, 126). By contrast, the *mu'min* is 'that blessed one who, by divine grace, recognizes the situation as it is and commits himself to acting accordingly' (*ibid.*). *Iman*, as incorporated into the ECI Thesis, goes hand in hand with epistemic certainty, as does *kufr*. Someone who claims to have religious doubts about God's existence and/or Muhammad's Prophethood is culpable. There is no such thing as conscientious religious doubt, or, at the very least, claims about conscientious religious doubt are deeply suspect. Finally, by an extension of the preceding point, one who wavers in practical commitment to Islam claiming that he or she has religious doubts is blameworthy for this as well.

Is the ECI Thesis true? Muslims who affirm it typically try to defend the thesis by proffering, in the context of Islamic *apologetics*, what they hold to be good arguments for the existence of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad. Occasionally, a non-evidential epistemic basis is cited as well: our innate disposition (*fitrah*) towards Islam that was engineered by God Himself. As a result of this disposition, it is sometimes claimed that arguments for God's existence and Muhammad's Prophethood, while welcome, are not *required* for Islamic belief to constitute knowledge (e.g. Tzortzis (2019), 84–95). Be that as it may, Muslim apologists who attempt to defend the ECI Thesis do so by and large by resorting to arguments. I cannot evaluate here the usual arguments given to defend the ECI Thesis, so will refer the reader elsewhere to where I have done so (Aijaz

(2014)). For now, let me offer a few observations regarding Islamic apologetics and the ECI Thesis.

Despite their occasional proclamations that the arguments usually found in Islamic apologetics ought to convince any sincere rational person, Muslim apologists frequently admit that the methodological framework these arguments arise in is *fides quaerens intellectum*; that is, apologetic arguments stem from an antecedent commitment to the truth of Islam. Thus, Hatem al-Haj, in his discussion of the principles and guidelines of Islamic apologetics, understands the enterprise to be 'a rational *explication* of the faith [that] can often facilitate the path to certainty and conviction for many' (Al-Haj (2020); emphasis mine). In these remarks, al-Haj also gestures towards another important function of apologetic arguments. These arguments are utilized by individuals interested in *defending* the religion, often with the goals of making it rationally appealing to non-Muslims and strengthening the faith commitment of Muslims (indeed, as the reader may be aware, the word 'apologetics' is derived from the Greek word *apologia*, which roughly means 'defence'). Given these features of Islamic apologetics, there is a real question about whether its norms of inquiry and justification are appropriate for or even relevant to those who have religious doubts about Islam. The religious doubter, as I have understood him or her throughout my discussion thus far, is someone interested in pursuing, much like the philosopher of religion, a 'second-order activity focused on the fundamental issues of a given religion' (Stewart (1980), 6). A 'second-order' investigation into the epistemic credentials of Islamic doctrine will be open to evidence that *supports or goes against* the truth and reasonableness of, say, God's existence and/or Muhammad's Prophethood. This, however, is not the case with Islamic apologetics, which has an asymmetrical emphasis on support only. Perhaps the best contemporary illustration of this limiting feature of Islamic apologetics can be found in the so-called 'scientific miracles' argument, according to which we can be certain that the Qur'an is a genuine revelation from God because it contains many passages that are confirmed by the findings of modern science. In reading some of the apologetic works where this argument is found, one initially gets the impression that the apologist using it is allowing the contents of the Qur'an to be *verified* by modern science (e.g. Ibrahim (1997)). But this doesn't seem to be the case, as is made clear when the same apologist will change his or her tune upon being confronted with Qur'anic passages that appear inconsistent with modern scientific findings. When this happens, the usual response is that the contents of the Qur'an are not subject to evaluation using modern scientific criteria. Commenting on this tendency of apologists to vacillate when using this particular argument, Shabbir Akhtar makes an astute observation and raises an important question:

> If the Koranic claims tally with scientific views, it is cause for celebration in the religious camp; if not, it is declared either that the beliefs currently prevalent in the scientific community are, conveniently enough for Muslims, erroneous or else that secular scientific truths are irrelevant to judgements about the truth of revealed claims . . . For to accept a consistent application of the criterion is, as the religionists themselves vaguely sense in some moods, in effect to impose a very exacting demand upon revelation. Is the Koran's authority, then, dependent upon its being able to achieve conformity with current scientific scholarship? (as quoted in Rippin (2012), 246)

Let's think about this problem as it relates to claims about the truth of the ECI Thesis within the parameters of Islamic apologetics. I propose reflecting on it using the following analogy. Suppose that Fatima is charged with a serious crime and the matter has now reached court. Suppose further that, instead of following norms and procedures that

are currently part of our criminal justice system, the prosecuting side (who have made no secret of the fact that they are *absolutely convinced* Fatima did it) is given free rein to decide what they would like the norms and procedures to be before presenting their case at trial. Moreover, they are given the right to change these norms and procedures at any time and under any circumstances once the trial is underway (e.g. if they are presented with evidence that seems to go against their position). No such privileges are granted to the defence, who must abide by the norms and procedures decided upon by the prosecution. In this scenario, how seriously would the prosecution's case for thinking that Fatima is absolutely guilty be taken by the defence, jury members, or anyone else who had doubts about it? Of course, this is a laughable example, but the problem that it illustrates is a real one. In the dialectical context involving someone who seriously questions the truth of the ECI Thesis, such as one who has religious doubts about God's existence and/or Muhammad's Prophethood, the norms of inquiry and justification for considering its truth cannot legitimately be determined by consulting the preferences of Muslim apologists only.

For those who are not already convinced that the ECI Thesis is true, what dialectical context *would* be proper in which to engage with arguments relevant to a consideration of its truth, if not the one provided by Islamic apologetics? I submit that a suitable context is provided by philosophy of religion, which has norms for inquiry and justification that are *significantly better* (although not perfect, of course) than those of apologetics. To point out one significant difference, philosophers of religion admit as relevant and appropriate evidence that *confirms or disconfirms* the truth of religious claims. This suggests that they are not endorsing an approach that is biased in favour of religion, at least not as biased as the apologists' method of permitting only positive evidence to count in a consideration of religious truth. In the main, philosophers of religion who endorse 'evidentialism', according to which (roughly) religious belief is rational to hold only if there is sufficient evidence for it, operate within what John Bishop calls our 'rational empiricist evidential practice' (Bishop (2007), 67). Discussing some of the norms that this practice involves, Bishop mentions one that is salient for the present discussion. Under this practice, he says,

> judgements of evidential support for theistic beliefs are to be made taking into account all the evidence that 'we' have available that could conceivably be relevant to their truth: attending only to a restricted part of 'our' total evidence will not be warranted. 'We' here grandly signifies the widest possible community of inquiry – no less than the entire human race over its full history to date. *Reflective theists who accept this evidential practice, then, do their limited and fallible best to judge evidential support for theism on behalf of that all-encompassing community of inquiry.* (*ibid.*; emphasis mine)

As far as I am aware, no contemporary Muslim philosopher of religion has tried to defend the ECI Thesis from a genuine 'second-order' perspective of Islam that operates within our rational empiricist evidential practice. Such attempts have been made, however, by some contemporary Christian philosophers of religion, who assert that epistemic certainty or something very close to it is defensible in relation to Christian belief. Richard Swinburne, for example, has argued that the public evidence makes it extremely likely (approximately 97% probable) that God became incarnate in Jesus who rose from the dead (Swinburne (2003), 214). As many modern philosophers of religion are aware, Swinburne's arguments are highly controversial. One issue with them concerns whether the various probability assignments that are critical for his arguments to succeed are truly objective or are merely 'describing Swinburne's own subjective probabilities or

degrees of belief' (Otte (2003)). Similar concerns have been raised about arguments offered by other Christian philosophers who have attempted to defend epistemic certainty or high probability concerning Christian belief. Using the Christian religion as an analogue for Islam, which is appropriate if only in virtue of the shared commitment to theism and the historical circumstances surrounding prophetic activity and revelation, one can say that the prospects for defending the ECI Thesis via our rational empiricist evidential practice do not look good.[10]

Considering all this, I don't think that one can justifiably use the ECI Thesis as a basis for formulating objections to religious doubts in an Islamic context. No doubt, there are other sorts of objections that one might deploy in an effort to show why religious doubts are incongruous or incompatible with Islamic faith and commitment. But whatever these objections may be, they do not appear in the *fatwa* from the FC that I have examined in my discussion. As far as this *fatwa* is concerned, as I trust I have shown, it does not contain anything that constitutes a viable objection to religious doubts, and, *ipso facto*, the stance of the Sceptical Muslim.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown both *how* it is possible for a Sceptical Muslim to sustain some sort of religious commitment and *why* he or she may wish to do so. In raising concerns about the appropriateness of religious doubts that such a Muslim may have, I noted that one must take care to distinguish between *conscientious* and *heedless* religious doubt. While some Sceptical Muslims may be heedless in their religious doubt, there is no reason to suppose that all are. Indeed, the existence of Sceptical Muslims who have conscientious religious doubts can be confirmed by interacting with individuals in the Muslim community. Furthermore, a Sceptical Muslim can have many positive things in common with his or her believing co-religionists, such as an inclination to truth, a habit of incorporating the good in this world into one's life and responding judiciously to it, a desire to educate oneself and seek knowledge, and a firm practical religious commitment of some sort.

By way of closing remarks, I will briefly discuss a hermeneutical matter. As I've noted, a common objection to the stance of the Sceptical Muslim is that it lacks *iman*, since this requires trust and assent to *certain knowledge* of God's existence, Muhammad's Prophethood, etc. I have argued in reply that the attempt to defend this objection through something like the ECI Thesis will be problematic if the Sceptical Muslim is reflecting on Islamic truth from a 'second-order' perspective. To consider the matter a bit further, it may be that, from the Qur'anic perspective, the understanding of *iman* as *consequent* to religious knowledge is improper. Perhaps, as Yedullah Kazmi has argued, it is the other way around with *iman* being *antecedent* to possible religious knowledge:

> References to just [a] few [Qur'anic] verses will be sufficient to make the point. For example, in *Surah al An'am*: 'Behold! In these things. There are Signs for people who believe' (6:99). Then in *Surah Yunus*: 'But neither Signs nor Warners profit those who believe not' (10:101). And then again in *al-Ankabut*: 'Verily in that is a Sign for those who believe' (29:24). What these verses abundantly make clear is that without faith in Allah the signs of Allah cannot be understood. Indeed, without faith in Allah the signs would not be signs of Allah at all. In other words, faith in Allah is the necessary condition for us to understand the signs as His signs. (Kazmi (1999), 506)

If Kazmi is correct, then *iman* may well be amenable to Hick's contention that 'religious faith, in its most basic sense, [is] the interpretative element within [a] distinctively

religious way of experiencing life' (Hick (1985), 17–18). While *compatible* with religious knowledge, such an understanding of *iman* does not *require* it. One may be motivated to see the world in 'the Islamic way' while having religious doubts about God's existence, Muhammad's Prophethood, etc. If the cognitive component of *iman* can be satisfied in this manner, then, alongside the other positive qualities I've discussed that the Sceptical Muslim may display, he or she may also have Islamic faith.[11]

Notes

1. I am grateful to John Bishop and to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.

2. Daniel Howard-Snyder draws some useful distinctions between (a) having doubts about whether *p*, (b) being in doubt about whether *p*, and (c) doubting that *p*. Here is how Howard-Snyder distinguishes between these three notions:

> For one to *have doubts* about whether p – note the 's' – is for one to have what appear to one to be grounds to believe not-p and, as a result, for one to be at least somewhat inclined to disbelieve p. For one to be *in* doubt about whether p is for one neither to believe nor disbelieve p as a result of one's grounds for p seeming to be roughly on a par with one's grounds for not-p. One can have doubts without being in doubt, and one can be in doubt without having doubts. Having doubts and being in doubt are not to be identified with doubting that. If one *doubts* that something is so, one is at least strongly inclined to disbelieve it; having doubts and being in doubt lack that implication. (Howard-Snyder (2013), 359)

To apply Howard-Snyder's taxonomy to my discussion, we can say that the Sceptical Muslim is *in* doubt because of *having* doubts. I understand and grant the point that *having* doubts does not automatically mean one is *in* doubt. In my consideration of the Sceptical Muslim, however, I will proceed on the assumption that he or she is in doubt because of having doubts. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to Howard-Snyder's helpful taxonomy.

3. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for informing me about Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan's use of this phrase and for suggesting another possible interpretation of the FC's claim that one can believe *and* doubt that *p*. It might be that, despite not having any *hyperbolic* doubt that *p*, one has some degree of (reasonable) doubt that *p* even as one believes that *p*. For instance, one might believe that it will rain this afternoon while also having some doubt about this. While I think that this sort of scenario is certainly possible, it is not relevant to my consideration of *belief-cancelling* doubt.

4. The Qur'anic story here is similar to this account of the young Abraham that one finds in the Midrash:

> When Abraham was three years old, he . . . wondered in his heart: Who created heaven and earth and me? All that day he prayed to the sun. In the evening, the sun set in the west and the moon rose in the east. Upon seeing the moon and the stars around it, he said: This one must have created heaven and earth and me – these stars must be the moon's princes and courtiers. So all night long he stood in prayer to the moon. In the morning, the moon sank in the west and the sun rose in the east. Then he said: There is no might in either of these. There must be a high Ruler over them, to this One I will pray and prostrate myself. (Meszler)

This account strongly suggests that the young Abraham temporarily did not believe that God (i.e. God as He truly is) exists.

5. I will briefly mention here, but not explore, another theological argument in support of the idea that one can be a Muslim without having explicit beliefs about the existence of God or the Prophethood of Muhammad. This argument relies on a certain interpretation of 'Muslim' different from the conventional understanding that rests

on having specific beliefs about Islamic doctrine. The interpretation that I have in mind holds that anyone – indeed, *anything* – who submits to the Will of God is 'Muslim'. In the Qur'an, we read that 'the stars and trees prostrate' to God (55:6). Obviously, stars and trees do not have mental states or beliefs, but they can nevertheless be said to submit to God. How so? Al-Kindi, the 'Philosopher of the Arabs', offers this explanation focusing on the Arabic word for 'prostrate':

> In Arabic, one uses [the verb] *sagada* ('to prostrate oneself') to designate the action of placing the forehead onto the earth in prayer, and pressing the palms of the hands and the knees to the earth. But one also uses [the verb] *sagada* in [this] language to mean 'to obey', which has nothing to do with the forehead, palms or knees, and in general does not involve the prostration (*sugud*) during prayer. Thus, 'to prostrate' here means 'to obey (*at-ta'a*)'. (Adamson and Pormann (2015), 175)

On this understanding, as long as something is (fully) conforming to God's Will (with or without explicit beliefs about Islamic doctrine), it can be said to obey or submit to God (i.e. be 'Muslim'). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for providing comments that prompted me to make a note of this argument.

6. As Zain Ali has noted in correspondence, this *hadith* only mentions what will happen to those who meet God without harbouring any doubts. It is silent about God's plan for those who are doubters. That is, the *hadith* appears to be stating a *sufficient* but not *necessary* condition for entering Paradise. In its interpretation of this *hadith*, the FC mistakenly takes a sufficient condition to be necessary, claiming that the Prophet 'conditioned entering Paradise on uttering these testimonies [contained in the *Shahada*] with a content heart and without being in doubt. So if the condition is not fulfilled, the person will not enter Paradise.' On the FC's (mis)interpretation of this *hadith*, one would be left with the awkward implication that infants and some cognitively disabled people, among others, would not enter Paradise as they have no comprehension of the *Shahada* at all; surely, *some* comprehension of the *Shahada* is required to utter it with a content heart and without being in doubt. To make a final connected point here, there are other *hadith* references that suggest even very weak faith will be accepted by God in the afterlife. For example: 'I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, 'On the Day of Resurrection I will intercede and say, "O my Lord! Admit into Paradise (even) those who have faith equal to a mustard seed in their hearts"' (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 97, Hadith 134).

7. Defenders of The Ontological Argument may disagree, but an assessment of this argument is beyond the scope of the present article. For now, I will simply note that Anselm's famous argument was rejected by many theists, such as Aquinas: '[G]ranted that everyone understands that by this word "God" is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow he understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally' (*Summa Theologica*, 1.2.1). Putting aside the proposition 'God exists', it is hard to see how the historically contingent propositions of Islamic doctrine, such as 'Muhammad is God's Prophet', 'The Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad in seventh-century Arabia', etc., could be classified as analytic propositions. I am grateful to Daniel Yeakel for helpful conversations on this point.

8. A Muslim with religious doubts may exhibit *resilience* in practical commitment to God's existence, perhaps in part because Islam is a sufficiently 'live hypothesis' for him or her, and not due to believing with psychological certainty that God exists. For a detailed exploration of faith and resilience, see Howard-Snyder and McKaughan (2022). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the idea of resilience as one possible interpretation of 'firmness' in religious commitment and for drawing my attention to Howard-Snyder and McKaughan's discussion of the topic.

9. For example, Encik Md. Asham bin Ahmad explains how Islamic faith rests on epistemic certainty: 'When we Muslims talk about faith or belief, we mean that which is reflected by the term iman, namely "true belief", belief which is sanctioned by knowledge and certainty. Islam is a conscious and willing submission, [*sic*] therefore, it can not [*sic*] be founded upon doubt, since doubt is antithetical to knowledge' (Ahmad (2006)). In his *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*, Mirza Tahir Ahmad contends that the epistemic certainty of Islamic doctrine can indeed be demonstrated:

> Can it be proved with certainty that the Holy Quran is true in its claim that God reveals some aspects of the unseen to those whom He chooses? Can it be shown to the sceptic that the faith in the unseen is not merely an illusion or wishful thinking, but is founded on reality and can be rationally demonstrated? Answers to these questions have to be fully supported by factual and scientific evidence. This exactly is the purpose of this treatise and the reader will find ample proof of the validity of revelation as a dependable means of the transfer of knowledge in the following chapters. (Ahmad (1998))

10. As an anonymous reviewer observed, the ECI Thesis seems like a really high bar to set for acceptable epistemic credentials about religious (Islamic) matters. As the reviewer noted, even the most promising arguments

of natural theology (e.g. of the kind defended by Swinburne) tend to be probabilistic and fall short of claiming to provide certainty.

11. In defending the position of the Sceptical Muslim and the possibility of non-doxastic faith, I hope it is clear that I am not *discounting* belief in thinking about Islamic faith. Rather, I have been exploring ways in which Islamic faith can be expanded to *accommodate* the stance of the Sceptical Muslim.

References

'Abdul Khaliq. '*Abdul Rahman 'Twelve Proofs that Muhammad is a True Prophet*'. Available at www.saaid.net/islam/8.htm.

Adamson P and Pormann PE (2015) *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindi.* Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Ahmad E (2006) *Faith without Certainty?* Available at https://www.ikim.gov.my/index.php/2006/12/12/faith-without-certainty/.

Ahmad MT (1998) *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth.* Available at https://www.alislam.org/library/books/revelation/part_4_section_3.html.

Aijaz I (2014) Traditional Islamic exclusivism: a critique. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, 185–209.

Aijaz I (2018) *Islam: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation.* New York: Routledge.

Al-Haj H (2020) In defense of faith: principles and guidelines for Islamic apologetics. *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.* Available at https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/in-defense-of-faith-principles-and-guidelines-for-islamic-apologetics.

Alston WP (1996) Belief, acceptance, and religious faith. In Jordan J and Howard-Snyder D (eds), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today.* London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 3–27.

Aquinas T. *Summa Theologica.* Available at https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q2_A1.html.

Bishop J (2007) *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chouhoud Y (2016) Modern pathways to doubt in Islam. *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.* Available at https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/youssef-chouhoud/modern-pathways-to-doubt-in-islam/.

Chouhoud Y (2018) What causes Muslims to doubt Islam? A quantitative analysis. *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.* Available at https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/what-causes-muslims-to-doubt-islam-a-quantitative-analysis.

Cohen LJ (1989) Belief and acceptance. *Mind* 98, 391.

Dastaghaib AAH. *Immaculate Conscience.* Available at https://www.al-islam.org/qalbe-saleem-immaculate-conscience-sayyid-abdul-husayn-dastghaib-shirazi/fourth-disease-doubt.

Engineer AA (2008) *Qur'an and Isma'ili Ta'wil.* Available at https://www.dawoodi-bohras.com/news/120/64/Quran-and-Ismaili-tawil/d,pdb_detail_article/.

Frank RM (1989) Knowledge and taqlîd: the foundations of religious belief in classical Ash'arism. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, 37–62.

Hick J (1985) *Problems of Religious Pluralism.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hick J (2010) *Evil and the God of Love.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Howard-Snyder D (2013) Propositional faith: what it is and what it is not. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50, 357–372.

Howard-Snyder D and McKaughan DJ (2021) The fellowship of the ninth hour: Christian reflections on the nature and value of faith. In Arcadi JM and Turner JT Jr (eds), *The T&T Clark Handbok of Analytic Theology.* London: Bloomsbury, pp. 69–82.

Howard-Snyder D and McKaughan DJ (2022) Faith and resilience. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 91, 205–241. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-021-09820-z.

Ibrahim IA (1997) *A Brief Guide to Understanding Islam.* Houston: Darussalam.

Islamweb.net (2005) *Doubts in Islam.* Available at https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/90226/doubts-in-islam.

Izutsu T (1965) *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology.* Yokohama: Yurindo Publishing.

James W (1896) *The Will to Believe.* Available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm.

Kazmi Y (1999) Faith and knowledge in Islam: an essay in philosophy of religion. *Islamic Studies* 38, 503–534.

Lings M (2006) *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 5th edn. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.

Mackie JL (1955) Evil and omnipotence. *Mind*, New Series, 64, 200–212.

Meszler J. *Abraham Origin Stories.* Available at https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/273690.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

Otte R (2003) Review of *The Resurrection of God Incarnate. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.* Available at https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/the-resurrection-of-god-incarnate/.

Pascal B (1958) *Pensées*. New York: E. P. Dutton. Available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm.

Plato, *Republic*. Available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm.

Pojman L (2003) Faith, doubt and belief, or does faith entail belief? In Gale RM and Pruss AR (eds), *The Existence of God*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 535–549.

Reed B (2022) Certainty. In Zalta EN (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/certainty.

Rippin A (2012) *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 4th edn. London: Routledge.

Sahih Al-Bukhari. '*Oneness, Uniqueness of Allah (Tawheed)*' *(Book 97)*. Available at https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7509.

Sahih Muslim. '*The Book of Faith*' *(Book 1)*. Available at https://sunnah.com/muslim/1.

Smith WC (1981) *On Understanding Islam*. The Hague: Mouton.

Stewart D (1980) *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Swinburne R (2003) *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swinburne R (2005) *Faith and Reason*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tzortzis H (2019) *The Divine Reality: God, Islam and The Mirage of Atheism*. n.p.: Lion Rock Publishing.

Williams B (2005) *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. Abingdon: Routledge.