
Mysticism in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought: Orhan Pamuk and Abdolkarim Soroush¹

John von Heyking

University of Lethbridge

“You know, I’ve had enough of big ideas.”²

Whether due to Western-style schemes of “development,” Marxism, nationalism, secularism, or Islamism, the Islamic world has suffered its share of ideological activism. What these ideologies share is a “big idea,” or ideology, that purports to transform the Islamic world into a modern post-industrial economy, Marxist utopia, collection of nations, liberal democracy, and caliphate, respectively. Today, Muslims find themselves torn between some version of secularism that wishes to remove “irrational” Islam from public life, and an Islamism that wishes to direct the totalizing political control of Islam into all facets of public and private life. Things are more complicated in Iran, where one finds an unpopular clerical establishment confronted by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s millenarian faith in the return of the Twelfth Imam. In Turkey, a Turkish prosecutor, with the support of Islamists and secular nationalists, charged its top novelist, Orhan Pamuk, who later would win the

*Islamic world
torn between
conflicting
ideologies.*

JOHN VON HEYKING is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Lethbridge in Canada.

¹ Previous drafts of this article were delivered to the Eric Voegelin Society at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, and at the University of Wisconsin Political Philosophy Colloquium. I thank Richard Avramenko and H. Lee Cheek for their comments.

² Orhan Pamuk, interviewed by Jörg Lau, “The Turkish Trauma,” *Die Zeit*, 14 April 2005. Translated and reposted at: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/115.html> (accessed: July 25, 2006).

Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006, with defaming the Turkish nation for comments he made about Turkey's historic mistreatment of Kurds and Armenians; the charges were subsequently dropped.³

Ideology as
"secondary
reality"
entails
extreme
willfulness.

One does not need to be an "orientalist" suffering post-colonialist Schadenfreude to recognize an eerie sense of unreality in these phenomena. The West has had no shortage of ideological "big ideas" that owe more to the imagination than to political philosophy. Political philosopher Eric Voegelin calls such ideologies "secondary realities" which involve a refusal to perceive things as they are. They are not simply subjectively held opinions, distorted by the "prejudices" we all bring to our understanding of the world. "Prejudice," after all, is nothing more than pre-judged data, that is, opinion. Ideology understood as "secondary reality" differs in kind because it involves a desire to rearrange the world according to one's will. Such willfulness, taken to its extreme, resembles more the conspiracy theorist who sees things when there is nothing to see, or the erotically obsessed who thinks his beloved reciprocates his love when she does not, than the prejudiced "orientalist" who more modestly brings along his cultural baggage to understand inadequately a foreign culture. The ideologue resembles more Plato's tyrant, whose imagination has destroyed his intellect, than the prisoner of the cave. An example from the Muslim world is Sayyid Qutb's distortion of Islam, where its traditional praxis gets transformed into the esoteric knowledge of a revolutionary vanguard, or when the statement, "there is no coercion in Islam," presupposes the revolutionary vanguard has already eliminated a field of action in which it might be possible to choose to become a Muslim. Ideology, understood as secondary reality, is about intellectual trickery, and, as such, it makes rational discourse with ideological activists extraordinarily difficult.⁴

³ Paul Hughes, "Iran Gripped by President's Devotion to 12th Imam," *National Post* (Toronto), November 18, 2005, A13; John von Heyking, "Ahmadinejad's Doomsday Dreams," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 19, 2005, A17; Orhan Pamuk, "On Trial," *The New Yorker*, December 19, 2005 (http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/articles/051219ta_talk_pamuk); Stephen Kinzer, "In Turkey, the Novelist as Lightning Rod," *New York Times*, October 23, 2005; "Turkish Court Dismisses Case Against Author," *Globe and Mail*, January 23, 2006, A15.

⁴ For details, see Eric Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," *Published Essays, 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 315-75; see also his "On Debate and Existence," in the same volume, 36-51. On Qutb's

Western attention is usually drawn toward Islamists and less often to the efforts among Muslims to theorize more authentically about their own existence. Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk and Iranian philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush analyze the ideological movements of their societies in terms comparable to Voegelin's, and experiment with mysticism, not as an escape from the ideological furnace, but as a means of recapturing a more authentic experience of reality characterized by existential openness.

Pamuk's impatience regarding "big ideas," seen in the epigraph of this essay, captures a promising though vulnerable sentiment one finds among intelligentsia in the Muslim world. Pamuk's novel, *Snow* (published in English in 2004), documents how "big ideas" convulse his Turkish homeland, where Islamists and secularists indulge in ideological fantasies that leave little to no room for a moderate and rationally informed political existence.⁵ The main character, Ka, is a mystical poet whose meditations serve as experiments in personal existence amidst ideological rubble. He strives to transcend Islamists and secularists, and to serve as a bridge between Turkey and the West. Ka strives for personal nonideological existence in a globalized world.

Mentioned by *Time* magazine as one of the top 100 most influential people in the world, Soroush refigures the Sufi writings of the poet Rumi to experiment with mysticism as a way of transcending Iranian Islamism and Western secularism.⁶ Whereas Ka's mysticism is apophatic (to use a term derived from Christianity), Soroush's mysticism is noetic in that it takes the form of a life of reason reaching out to the divine in a manner not unlike Augustine's account of the soul that stretches toward God. Soroush engages in a type of Socratic questioning that takes "dialogue" as its central form of existence, in which flashes of noetic

The main character of Pamuk's Snow, Ka, strives for personal non-ideological existence.

In Soroush's mysticism, faith takes the form of reason reaching out.

views of Islam as a movement to be led by an ideological vanguard, see *Milestones*, trans. unknown (Cedar Rapids, IA: Mother Mosque Foundation, n.d.), 12, 27, 47, 59, 101. See Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 75.

⁵ Orhan Pamuk, *Snow: A Novel*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

⁶ *Time*, April 18, 2005, 88. The bulk of my analysis derives from Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Additional writings and interviews can be found on his personal website: <http://www.dr.soroush.com/>.

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

Soroush's Sufi mysticism, like Ka's, fails to accommodate communal religious experience.

Soroush is more optimistic of the possibility of democracy in a (reformed) Shiite Islamic society than is Ka.⁷ Both have comparable views on the nature of ideology as a secondary reality. Both experiment with mysticism to regain commonsense experience of the world, distorted neither by Islamist ideological fantasies, nor by a groundless secularism and relativism. This article demonstrates that the association of mysticism with common sense is not as oxymoronic as it sounds. While both share mysticism as an attempt to move past those secondary realities, Soroush's noetic mysticism is more successful. Even so, while it issues in a "dialogic" view of society that would sustain democracy, Soroush's Sufi mysticism, like that of Ka, is individualistic as he fails to provide what might be called a phenomenology of friendship that can fulfill the traditional Islamic demand for communal religious existence.⁸

Ideology as Secondary Reality

Ideology a libidinous refusal to perceive reality.

Both Pamuk and Soroush treat ideology, not simply as opinion, but as a libidinous refusal to perceive reality. In *Snow*, ideology takes the form of dream worlds, nihilism, and theatrics, whereas Soroush refers to ideology as "those ideas that have causes but no reasons" (94). Like Plato who speaks of misology (*Republic* 411d), ideology for Soroush is a "hatred of reason" (93).

⁷ In the *Die Zeit* interview, Pamuk vigorously distinguishes the pessimistic conclusions about Islam and democracy drawn in the novel from his own more optimistic view: "It is an appalling distortion to apply my realism to my political convictions. I see the future of Turkey in Europe as a prosperous, tolerant, democratic country among others. My novel is about a specific period in time. In the ten years which have passed since that period, the country has changed a lot. If you lay aside for one moment the reactions to my comments about our past, it's clear that we are living in a different Turkey today." This paper focuses on Pamuk's poetic presentation in *Snow*, with references to Pamuk's own views, drawn from interviews, as the argument unfolds.

⁸ Robert Sokolowski offers a phenomenology of friendship in the Western Aristotelian context ("Phenomenology of Friendship," *Review of Metaphysics*, 55 (March 2002): 451-70). See also Jules Toner, *Love and Friendship*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003).

Snow tells the story of Ka, a Turk living in Germany who has returned home and spends a few days in Kars, a small town near the Armenian frontier. A snowstorm has closed off the town from the outside world. He tells the locals he is writing a story about Kars for a German newspaper, which enables him to interact with a host of the town's characters, including Blue, the Islamist leader, Kadife, his girlfriend who defies the secularist school authorities by insisting on wearing a headscarf (though she had initially regarded it as a stunt), her sister, Ýpek, to whom Ka swears his love, and Sunay Zaim, a Kamalist vaudeville artist who stages a play-within-a-play coup that constitutes the centerpiece of the novel's presentation of secondary realities.

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

Snow a symbol of secondary reality.

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

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

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

Ka confronts a dream world.

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

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

For Bey, and possibly for Ka, being modern entails being swept up by forces whose end-points are predetermined by the forces of history and by ruling powers. In the West, we have seen this idea expressed by ideological and totalitarian movements where leaders portray themselves as prophets who go about ensuring their prophecies come true. For example, Aum Shakiro “prophesized” the Tokyo subway attacks before he attacked them, and Adolph Hitler “prophesized” the greed of Jewish bankers would lead to their extermination while he was exterminating the Jews.⁹

*Inability
to sustain
personal
agency
characteristic
of mass man.*

Feeding the dream world is the tendency of the inhabitants of Kars to display characteristics of the mass man or manqué (Michael Oakeshott’s term). Blue tells Ka: “To be a true Westerner, a person must first become an *individual*, and then they go on to say that in Turkey, there are no individuals!” (324). While Blue, the Islamist leader, equates “individual” with “Western” (and thus rejects it), one also sees in Kars’s residents the inability to sustain individual personalities and agency. This can be seen in Ka’s conversation with two schoolboys, Fazil and Necip, who worry that Westernization leads them unknowingly to atheism. Necip tells Ka a story about a school director (an allusion to the school director of Kars whom an Islamist assassinates) who learns from a dervish that he has the “disease” of atheism: “‘It seems you’ve lost your faith in God,’ he said. ‘What’s worse, you don’t even know it, and as if that weren’t bad enough, you’re even proud of not knowing it!’” (81). The author is dealing with secondary reality, or imaginative oblivion, because one can hardly be proud of something one does not know. The boys’ anxiety over *unknowingly* becoming atheists expresses an absence of freewill and personal agency characteristic of mass man. They lack personal agency, and an awareness of this lack, because they fear being powerless to prevent themselves from becoming atheists.

The boys ask Ka whether he is an atheist:

“I don’t know,” said Ka.

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

“The snow reminds me of God,” said Ka.

⁹ Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions, Or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 14, 64-65; Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2001), 47.

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

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

“You’re not giving me an answer,” said Mesut. “If a person knows and loves God, he never doubts God’s existence. It seems to me that you’re not giving me an answer because you’re too timid to admit that you’re an atheist. But we knew this already. That’s why I wanted to ask you a question on my friend Fazıl’s behalf. Do you suffer the same terrible pangs as the poor atheist in the story? Do you want to kill yourself?” (83).

The boys’ questioning is drawn from a mixture of common sense and ideological paranoia, as well as anxiety about their own faith. Their assumption that atheism implies the negation of their own existence has its parallels in Western “mainstream” theologies including Augustine and Anselm. One might also compare the boys to the Nikolai Stavrogin character in Dostoevsky’s *Possessed*, for whom atheists are necessarily suicidal.¹⁰ Even so, they think religious faith must lack any of the frailty and even doubt one finds in those Western thinkers, or even in Ka. Belief must be absolutely certain; anything else entails a desire for suicide.¹¹ It is therefore unsurprising the boys fear unknowingly becoming atheists. Bizarrely, the desire to know God with certainty, and the fear of unknowingly slipping into atheism, that is, nonbeing, go together in this dream world. They possess the lust for certainty characteristic of mass man because they lack personal agency that would enable them to live with doubt and to acknowledge their human frailty.

Lust for certainty reflects inability to acknowledge human frailty.

¹⁰ Pamuk acknowledged his debt to Dostoevsky in his November 2005 acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (“In Kars and Frankfurt,” trans. Maureen Freely, <http://www.nrc.nl/redactie/Doc/pamuk.doc>) (accessed: July 24, 2006). See also Richard Avramenko, “Bedeviled by Boredom: A Voegelinian Reading of Dostoevsky’s *Possessed*,” *Humanitas*, XVII(1-2) 2004: 108-38.

¹¹ Alexis de Tocqueville explains mass man’s desire for existential certainty: “When there is no authority in religion or in politics, men are soon frightened by the limitless independence with which they are faced. They are worried and worn out by the constant restlessness of everything. With everything on the move in the realm of the mind, they want the material order at least to be firm and stable, and as they cannot accept their ancient beliefs again, they hand themselves over to a master.” *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.2.5.

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

Ultimately, *Snow’s* characters, especially Ka, live in a fluctuating cosmos in which the polar extremities of existence—perfect happiness and utter misery, bliss and despair, life and death, immortality and mortality, love and hate, and good and evil—coexist in their immediacy, as if compressed together:

Ka had always shied away from happiness for fear of the pain that might follow, so we already know that his most intense emotions came not when he was happy but when he was beset by the certainty that this happiness would soon be lost to him. . . . Love equaled pain. . . . Heaven and hell were in the same place. In those same streets he had played soccer, gathered mulberries, and collected those player trading cards you got with chewing gum; it was precisely because the dogs turned the scene of these childish joys into a living hell that he felt the joys so keenly (340-41).

Ka experiences reality as a flux of extremes, not with the virtues of patience and hope, but with an inordinate hope for perfection that sits side-by-side with an inordinate fear of, and perhaps even hope for, destruction. Ka finds happiness impossible because he expects pain immediately to follow. This explains why he cut short

Reality experienced without patience and hope as a flux of extremes.

the happiest moment of his life, when he finally made love to Ýpek (262).

Nor do Ka's sentiments involve simply his own personal existence. They are associated with his perception of the world's fate: "It was not enough to be convinced that their own fortunes were still on course; they had to believe all the misery around them had been extinguished to keep a shadow from falling over their own happiness" (341). "To live in indecision, to waver between defeat and a new life, offered as much pleasure as pain. The ease with which they could hold each other and cry this way made Ka love her all the more, but even in the bitter contentment of this tearful embrace a part of him was already calculating his next move and remained alert to the sounds from the street" (361). Ka is the most "modern" character in the book, as evidenced by his highly individualistic religiosity (described below). He views his life and the world as sheer contingency or flux, which is summarized by his constant expectation of pain following pleasure, and of unhappiness following happiness (though not the reverse). This betrays a fundamental distrust not only in himself and others, but also in the world. His sentiment compares with St. Augustine's observation that one lives a life of despair who thinks history moves in cycles, where one expects happiness always to give way to unhappiness, and friends to become enemies.¹² Personal and social existence is impossible.

Ka displays fundamental distrust in himself and the world.

The staged coup serves as the play within this play. The staged coup is precipitated by a performance of a Kemalist play, "My Father or My Scarf," by Sunay Zaim's wife, Funda Eser, who was also known for her career of "gratuitous belly dancing" (146). The short play was popular among westernizing officials in the 1930s who wished to liberate women from the head scarf. Eser portrays a woman deliberating whether to remove the veil. In its conclusion, she burns the veil on stage which provokes the audience into spasms of screaming and violence:

But now, no one could hear anything above the booing and cat-calls and angry whistles from the religious high school boys. Despite the guilty, fearful silence at the front of the auditorium, few could hear what Funda Eser was saying: that when the angry girl tore the scarf off her head, she was not just making a statement about people or about national dress, she was talking about our

¹² *City of God*, XII.14.

souls, because the scarf, the fez, the turban, and the headdress were symbols of the reactionary darkness of our souls, from which we should liberate ourselves and run to join the modern nations of the West. This provoked a taunt from the back rows that the entire auditorium heard very clearly.

“So why not take everything off and run to Europe stark naked?” (151-52).

Eser’s play reveals the irreconcilable divide between the secularists and the Islamists. The secularists promise freedom but one that is meaningless, as the catcall concerning running “stark naked” expresses. The Islamists promise community based on an identity, but without freedom. The dark and noisy theater signifies that the two sides can only “communicate” in terms of screams and provocative images. There is no possibility for reasonable persuasion.

Violence is at the bottom of such a society, and so it is only natural that the military uses the chaos in the theater as an opportunity to stage a coup. What gives the play, and the audience, the character of a secondary reality is that the military actually gets onto stage and proceeds to shoot audience members, who are not merely looking on in disbelief. Rather, they are incapable of believing that they are getting shot:

A retired civil servant in the front row stood up to applaud. A few others sitting nearby joined in. There was scattered applause from the back, from people presumably in the habit of clapping at anything—or perhaps they were scared. The rest of the hall was silent as ice. Like someone waking up following a long bender, a few even seemed relaxed and allowed themselves weak smiles. It was if they’d decided that the dead bodies before their eyes belonged to the dream world of the stage; a number of those who had ducked for cover now had their heads in the air but then cowered again at the sound of Sunay’s voice (160-61).

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

Pamuk associates ideology with disordered erotic desire. For his part, Soroush devotes most of his attention to criticizing competing philosophical and religious interpretations of religion and politics on the basis of reason. Even so, his analysis of ideology as intellectual corruption and libidinous desire compares with Pamuk's critique, although Soroush's critique of ideology takes up less space in his writings. He characterizes ideology as a "hatred of reason" and "those ideas that have causes but no reasons" (93-94):

For Soroush, ideology comprises "ideas that have causes but no reasons."

In this sense ideology is the veil of reason; it is the enemy of rationality and clarity. It contradicts objectivity and forces one to see the world through a single narrow aperture even if the result is a distorted view of the world. Idealism and dogmatism often accompany an ideology, but its core is the quality that conceals its falseness by placing it above rational discourse. One can only dote on an ideology or be infatuated by it; one can never rationally evaluate it. No reasons can be properly adduced for a false idea. If we try to find rational grounds or reasons for ideologies, they too must be flawed. The only thing to do at this juncture is to look for the causes and the origins of the idea in question. Here we can trace the interests and advantages of various groups in so far as they constitute the causes of certain ideas. This points to the ideological nature of ideas or, in Marxist parlance, to their "class origins." With this definition the fight against ideology cannot be a rational one because ideology is by definition antirational. To fight an ideology, then, becomes an actual and concrete struggle. Because ideology has no rational grounds, any effort to eliminate its causes must be extrarational and ideational (94-95).

This passage is at once combative and restrained. It is combative because Soroush describes ideology as a perversion of reason, which is necessarily a corruption of the human person himself. For this reason he treats ideology in terms of al-Ghazzali's theory of obliviousness (*ghafalat*) according to which one perversely justifies an action knowing full well its injustice (42-43). To be an ideologue, a "hater of reason," means to hate oneself. The logical consequence is not dissimilar to that which Necip and Fazil fear is the consequence of atheism. This passage is also restrained because Soroush does not specifically identify the Iranian examples of said "hatred of reason," although it is fairly clear from this and other parts of his writings that he regards the revolutionaries in this light.¹³ Indeed, the mutual cor-

¹³ It is noteworthy that, in the Iranian presidential election, he supported Mehdi Karrubi, a soft spoken, unassuming cleric who was the Speaker of the reformist dominated Sixth Parliament: "since [Karrubi] has no enemies and no

ruption of religion and politics under Iran's clerical regime is the main target of his pen.

Ka's Mysticism

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

Ka becomes a medium for his poems while in Kars. Like a mystical dervish, he simply receives them from a mysterious divine source. He does not entirely understand them but he understands they reflect a pattern of events in his life. He indicates that his experience of God is more Western than Islamic: "As Ka knew from the beginning, in this [Islamic] part of the world faith in God was not something achieved by thinking sublime thoughts and stretching one's creative powers to their outer limits; nor was it something one could do alone; above all it meant joining a mosque, becoming part of a community" (60-61). Explaining Western (and specifically European) sensibilities to an Islamist, Ka states: "The

friends, he will be situated fittingly to negotiate with all factions productively." Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, "What's the Matter with Iran? How the Reformists Lost the Presidency," *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, June 2005 (<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=1412> (accessed July 26, 2006)). One smells here the type of ironic praise that Alexis de Tocqueville once bestowed on Louis Napoleon: "a genius for whom circumstances had pushed his mediocrity to such a height." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848*, ed. J. P. Mayer and A. P. Kerr (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 225.

idea of a solitary westernized individual whose faith in God is private is very threatening to you. An atheist who belongs to a community is far easier for you to trust than a solitary man who believes in God. For you, a solitary man is far more wretched and sinful than a nonbeliever” (61). In an interview, Pamuk explains that “The hero of the book does have a genuine longing for religious experience. But his concept of God is very Western. He is interested in the individual experience, not in the communal experience envisaged by Islam.”¹⁴ One should correct Pamuk because Ka’s solipsistic mysticism resembles more the modern than the traditional Western experience of God. It is closer to William James’s sense of religious experience, the moment of the “cusp,” as Charles Taylor describes it, “about what it’s like to stand in that open space and feel the winds pulling you now here, now there.”¹⁵ His mysticism is not medieval in the sense of a *fides quaerens intellectum*, which at least in the Augustinian sense turns the soul toward the ordinate love of neighbor (Alypius is near Augustine in the garden, and plays a crucial role in the drama of Augustine’s conversion¹⁶). Even so, Muslims view religion as communal, as ritual, and as law. As Sunay tells Ka, “even if you did believe in God, it would make no sense to believe alone. . . . It’s only by eating what they eat, living where they live, laughing at the same jokes, and getting angry whenever they do that you can believe in their God. If you’re living an utterly different life, you can’t be worshipping the same God they are. God is fair enough to know it’s not a question of reason or logic but how you live your life” (204). Blue, the Islamist, makes the same point: “In a place like this, if you worship God as a European, you’re bound to be a laughingstock. Then you cannot even believe you believe. You don’t belong to this country; you’re not even a Turk anymore. First try to be like everyone else. Then try to believe in God” (327). As Necip’s fears show, belief is impossible, whether or not one be-

Ka’s solipsistic mysticism akin to modern Western religious individualism.

¹⁴ Quoted in Lau, “The Turkish Trauma.”

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 59.

¹⁶ For details, see John von Heyking, “The Luminous Path of Friendship: Augustine’s Account of Friendship and Political Order,” in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, eds., John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko, unpublished manuscript. For its political implications, see John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

longs to a community. *Snow* portrays individualistic and communal forms of belief as untenable.¹⁷

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

Once a six-pronged snowflake crystallizes, it takes between eight and ten minutes for it to fall through the sky, lose its original shape, and vanish; when, with further inquiry, he discovered that the form of each snowflake is determined by the temperature, the direction and strength of the wind, the altitude of the cloud, and any number of other mysterious forces, Ka decided that snowflakes have much in common with people. It was a snowflake that inspired "I, Ka," the poem he wrote sitting in the Kars public library, and later, when he was to arrange all nineteen titles for his new collection, *Snow*, he would assign "I, Ka" to the center point of that same snowflake (375-76).

The snowflake is a symbol of order and disorder, of genesis and of destruction. Its crystalline structure indicates a cosmic intelligence, but one that appears to humans at least as random, determined as it is by the contingencies of temperature and the direction and strength of the wind. Ka sees humans as hopeful icons of order in an otherwise chaotic expanse. His modern sentiments are not unlike those of Alexis de Tocqueville: "man comes from nothing, traverses time, and is going to disappear forever into the bosom of God. One sees him for only a moment wandering, lost, between the limits of two abysses."¹⁸

Ka's nineteen poems are mapped onto the snowflake, which has three axes: memory, imagination, and reason (Ka said he was inspired by Bacon's tree of knowledge) (261, 376). The snowflake, while an expression of cosmic order, also reflects the fluctuating extremities of existence that Ka experiences. The reason axis contains poems of order and happiness on one point, but the other point contains poems of suffering. The memory axis contains poems referring to childhood memories and relating to some of the

¹⁷ The novel equates communal faith with legalism, with ritual as something to be followed blindly. One requires a more robust understanding of the figurative nature of ritual to get by this impasse found in this novel.

¹⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2.1.17.

events of his visit to Kars, including Necip's anxious fears of atheism and the night of the coup. The imagination axis contains a poem on love adjacent to one on jealousy, and a poem on happiness adjacent to a poem on suicide. These poems came to him "as if someone were whispering the poems into his ears" but he did not hear them when he returned to Frankfurt (257). Ka, the exile, could find a semblance of happiness only in Kars, which itself is the dream world fraught with ideological deformations. The snowflake is an ambiguous symbol of a tenuous cosmic order that, ultimately, Ka fails to grasp. Indeed, the deformation resides deep inside Ka's soul. After reflecting on the manner in which the poems reflect actual events in Kars, the narrator and Ka's friend, Orhan (an autobiographical reference?), tries to retrace Ka's final thoughts when he betrayed Blue, the Islamist, to the police:

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

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

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

As noted above, Pamuk has stated that the novel's bleak outlook does not reflect his own views. The openness and tolerance he foresees seems rooted in the promise of openness of the Justice and Development Party's "Muslimhood model," which, as Elizabeth H. Prodromou describes, "assumes that religious freedom and, particularly the possibility for Muslim ideas and actors to engage in public life, are not only compatible with, but necessary for,

Turkish democratization and integration into the EU.”¹⁹ The “Muslimhood model” is an attempt to cut between Kemalist militant secularism and Islamism, whose success Prodromou reports is imperiled by various factors including the JDP’s core constituencies.

Pamuk views Muslim world as “over-politicised.”

Snow suggests that the Islamic world would do better if it avoided the cosmic questions in the form of world-transforming ideologies in favor of common sense. Its characters suffer because of immoderation. The lack of moderation among the characters of *Snow* causes their suffering: Ka because of his unrealistic demand for perfect happiness and his deformed erotic attachments to Ýpek, Sunay Zaim for his artistic revolution, and Blue for his Islamism. Ka finds peace in his observation of the worldly and everyday joy of falling snow. The novel suggests that the Muslim world would have a better future if people tended more to the everyday and to common sense. Pamuk argues as such: “You know, I’ve had enough of big ideas. I’ve been over-exposed to them in my over-politicised country. Literature is my reaction to this, an attempt to turn the game around, and invest it with a certain humour, a certain distance. I want to tell the reader: Don’t take everything so damned seriously. Isn’t life beautiful? Pay attention to life’s details. The most important thing in life is happiness, and the possibility to survive in this intolerant society we have created.”²⁰ In his earlier book *My Name is Red* he strove to capture the essence of life in its minor details, including manuscript illuminations and the texture of the city.²¹

For Pamuk the novelist, happiness resides in contemplating “life’s hidden geometry,” those interstices of reality that individuals experience in their particularity. It is for this reason he regards reading novels as an inherently philosophical exercise:

¹⁹ Elizabeth H. Prodromou, “Turkey Between Secularism and Fundamentalism?: The ‘Muslim Model’ and the Greek Orthodox Minority,” *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 3(1) Spring 2005, 11.

²⁰ Lau, “The Turkish Trauma.”

²¹ *My Name is Red* (New York: Vintage, 2002). In a 2003 BBC interview, he explains: “City life, urban life, living in big cities, in fact, is living in a galaxy of unimportant, random, stupid, absurd images. But your look gives a strange, mysterious meaning to these little details of streets, asphalt or cobblestone roads, advertisements, letters, all the little details of bus stops, or chimneys, windows. All these things constitute a texture of a city, and each city in that fashion is very different” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3131585.stm>) (accessed: July 24, 2006).

For it is by reading novels, stories and myths that we come to understand the ideas that govern the world in which we live; it is fiction that gives us access to the truths kept veiled and hidden by our families, our schools, and our society; it is the art of the novel that allows us to ask who we really are. . . . We know that the thing we have been reading is both the product of the author's imagination and of this world into which he has taken us. Novels are neither wholly imaginary nor wholly real. To read a novel is to confront both its author's imagination and the real world whose surface we have been scratching with such fretful curiosity.²²

Self-knowledge depends on one's ability to practice sympathy, to put oneself in someone else's place. Reading a novel enables one imaginatively to experience, vicariously and in reality, the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of others through their particular and specific actions. Self-knowledge is gained by interacting with the concrete experiences of others. His approach resembles the view of others who, following Alexis de Tocqueville, regard literature as the particularly democratic mode of public philosophy.²³

Self-knowledge gained by interacting with the concrete experiences of others.

If being an author literally means being an *auctoritas*, the term the Romans used to refer to founders of cities, then Pamuk regards himself as the founder of a new mode and order through the medium of the novel:

Sometimes, I try to conjure up, one by one, a multitude of readers hidden away in corners and nestled in their armchairs with their novels; I try also to imagine the geography of their everyday lives. Then, before my eyes, thousands, tens of thousands of readers will take shape, stretching far and wide across the streets of the city, and as they read, they dream the author's dreams, and imagine his heroes into being, and see his world. . . . As I imagine all these readers using their imaginations to put themselves in someone else's place, as I conjure up their worlds, street by street, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, all across the city, a moment arrives when I realise that I am really thinking of a society, a group of people, an entire nation—say what you will—imagining itself into being. Modern societies, tribes, and nations do their deepest thinking about themselves through reading novels; through reading novels, they are able to argue about who they are; so even if we have picked up a novel hoping only to divert ourselves, and

²² Pamuk, "In Kars and Frankfurt," no pagination.

²³ See Patrick J. Deenen and Joseph Romance, "Introduction: The Art of Democratic Literature," in *Democracy's Literature: Politics and Fiction in America*, eds., Patrick J. Deenen and Joseph Romance, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 1-7.

relax, and escape the boredom of everyday life, we begin, without realising, to conjure up the collectivity, the nation, the society to which we belong.²⁴

There is no reason to stop with the nation, as Pamuk does, as the political unit envisaged by the author's founding. The sentimental bonds of democracy, as Tocqueville foresaw, could imaginatively encompass the human species. Even so, Pamuk envisages a political unit based on the sympathy of individuals toward others, as exercised through the reading and contemplation of novels. It is necessarily democracy, modeled after Europe and the European Union, just as the novel is, for Pamuk, Europe's greatest artistic achievement.

Pamuk sees the novel as the means to promote personal agency and knowledge.

While Pamuk states that he and Ka have "more than a little in common," they follow different paths. Ka's mysticism ultimately aggravates the threats that the psychology of mass man places on his selfhood. Pamuk sees the art of the novel, which explores "life's hidden geometry," as the means to promote personal agency and self-knowledge for modern democracy. The snowflake of the novelist is superior to the snowflake of the amanuensis.

Soroush's Noetic Mysticism

Soroush's mysticism is noetic, resembling Plato's and Augustine's.

While *Snow* dismisses mysticism as Western, Abdolkarim Soroush embraces it as the salve for the Islamic world. Soroush is the pen name for Husayn Haj Farajullah Dabbagh.²⁵ In Farsi, the name means "divine muse" (157), which suggests Soroush understands himself as a dervish medium in terms similar to Ka. The fundamental, and determining, difference between the two is that Soroush's mysticism is noetic, resembling in many ways the noetic mysticism of Plato and Augustine. His noetic mysticism makes him better equipped to transcend the ideological deformations of modernity and the Islamic world. However, like Ka, his mysticism is ultimately solitary, making it insufficiently robust to accomplish its task.

Soroush's mysticism provides the basis for his "Hermeneutical Expansion and Contraction" theory of the Shari'ah, which can be

²⁴ Pamuk, "In Kars and Frankfurt," no pagination.

²⁵ Laura Secor, "The Democrat: Iran's leading reformist intellectual tries to reconcile religious duties and human rights," *Boston Globe*, March 14, 2004 (http://www.drSoroush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20040314-1.html) (accessed: July 24, 2006).

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

His understanding of religion is more difficult to understand because it is unclear how religious knowledge is about religion when it is informed by lower sciences. In order to avoid the paradox of having a serenely ineffable and unknowable religion become irrelevant to life on account of its incommunicability, Soroush provides what may be called a "dialogic" model of the interaction of religion and religious knowledge, which is anchored in ineffable mystical insight not unlike that described by Plato in his *Seventh Letter* or Augustine in the *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*.

Like Western Protestants as well as political philosophers including John Locke, Soroush criticizes ritualism as getting in the way of true religious experience. His theory of expansion and contraction, where contraction signifies clearing away "useless" rituals that hinder truth, is based on the esoteric tradition of seeing three stages of religion: *Shari'ah* (rituals and laws), *tariqah* (the truth path), and *haqiqah* (the inner dimension). Earlier revivalists and sages "did not countenance the eclipse of truth of religion behind a parade of rituals, nor did they appreciate a religion restricted to the strictures of appearance" (27). By this esoteric standard, religion is more pure, or contracted, in the form of *haqiqah*. Soroush appeals to the Sufi mystic Rumi as his authority on mystical knowledge, though his characterization of *haqiqah* as the "inner dimension" is intelligible to Westerners steeped in the traditions of modern religious experience, as represented by the likes of Locke, Tocqueville, and William James. And so, he writes: "We have communal actions and rituals, but not communal faiths. Expressions of faith are public but the essence of faith is mysterious and private" (140). He quotes Rumi: "Faith, too, is hostile to partnership for as Rumi avers: 'Hail love, the splendid destroyer of

Soroush sees ritualism as interfering with true religious experience.

Knowledge
(irfan) results
from an
opening of the
soul to truth.

partnerships” (141). Just as there is no coerced faith and love, there appears to be no collective faith and love.

The theory of expansion and contraction of religious interpretation moves on three levels: *kalam* (Islamic theology), *usul* (applied logic in religious jurisprudence), and *irfan* (esoteric knowledge) (34). *Irfan* is both ineffable knowledge as well as the basis for his hermeneutic and dialogic theory. It provides a mystical viewpoint beyond individual religions, as he indicates by citing Rumi: “The difference among Moslems, Zoroastrians, and Jews/Emanate, O learned one, from their various points of views” (35). It consists not in axiomatic forms of knowledge, but rather in the opening of the soul in the sense of Augustine’s *intentio animi*: “For the believers, religion quickens the blaze of the sublime quest, delivers from inner attachments, grants ascent above earthly concerns, opens the heart’s aperture toward the sun of truth, and induces a sense of utter wonder in the face of mystery of existence, so that one may hear the call of *Ho-val-Haq* (God is the Truth) from every particle of the universe” (36-7). One might compare his description of ascent with one of Augustine’s famous ascents in the *Confessions*, as well as his description of how Creation calls out that it was created.²⁶ Or quoting Rumi again: “Renditions of tongue reveal the core/But silent love reveals more” (88).

Unlike Ka, Soroush must be considered a noetic mystic because of the activity of reason that defines the human person (reason informed by love). Soroush emphasizes the activity of reason that seeks over the product of reason (what it knows): “We can have two visions of reason: reason as destination and reason as path. The first sees reason as the source and repository of truths. The second sees it as a critical, dynamic, yet forbearing force that meticulously *seeks* truth by negotiating tortuous paths of trial and error. . . . Here it is not enough to attain truth; the manner of its attainment is equally important. . . . Our mission as rational human beings is to search actively for the truth. This view attaches more value to earning a modest living in a small trade than to finding a treasure in the wilderness” (89-90). This “modest living” is conducted by inquiring into the empirical materials that surround one at any given time. In other words, *irfan* depends on *kalam* (theol-

²⁶ “I asked the whole frame of the universe about my God and it answered me: ‘I am not He, but He made me’” (Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), X.6, p. 177.

ogy) and *usul* (jurisprudence), but also the entirety of religious knowledge depends on other areas of human knowledge, including history and the sciences. Lower levels of knowledge give “content” to higher levels, including the highest, *irfan*, which itself has no content in the sense of containing truth in propositional form. Soroush’s understanding is thus closer to the noetic mysticism of Plato and the divided line, or Augustine who follows Plato, than to the apophatic mysticism of Ka.

Irfan informs, and is informed by, the lower levels of knowledge in the manner that an Aristotelian would see *habitus* informing virtuous action (128). *Habitus* constitutes the manner of acting, not the contents of acting. Thus, Soroush accords greater weight to habits of practical judgment than to formulating rules of behavior (105-121). Like Aristotle, Soroush thinks that before humans follow rules and reasons, they act via mimesis, after exemplars of virtue: “Humanity takes pride in the few who have reached those lofty peaks. Indeed we love humanity for the sake of these few exemplars” (93).

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

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

In order to remain religious, they, of course, need to establish religion as the guide and arbiter of their problems and conflicts. But, in order to remain democratic, they need dynamically to ab-

sorb an adjudicative understanding of religion, in accordance with the dictates of collective “reason.” Securing the Creator’s approval entails religious awareness that is leavened by a more authentic and humane understanding of religiosity and that endeavors to guide the people in accordance with these ideals. In thus averting a radically relativistic version of liberalism, rational and informed religiosity can thrive in conjunction with a democracy sheltered by common sense, thereby fulfilling one of the prerequisites of a democratic religious government (128).

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

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

Society is not saved by ideologies but by shared habits of intellectual and moral virtue.

Soroush describes “common sense” in noetically differentiated form—it is the habit of practical reason by the man whose soul is open to reality as symbolized by *irfan*.²⁷ Society is not saved by ideologies or “great ideas” but by the hard-won civilizational habits of intellectual and moral virtue.

Soroush is not uncritical of the West. He remains aware of the Western liberal crisis of moral relativism and technological consciousness (seen in its reduction of man to “pure potential,” as in the case of Karl Marx [66-7]). Even so, he points out to his Muslim audience that democratic habits in fact make Western democracies more godly than their own: “The free societies are closer to the prophets than the totalitarian ones” (103). Part of the reason for this is that Western wealth provides for leisure and thus,

²⁷ “[Common sense] is the habit of judgment and conduct of a man formed by ratio; one could say it is the habit of an Aristotelian *spoudaios* without the luminosity of the knowledge concerning the ratio as the source of his rational judgment and conduct. Common sense is a civilizational habit that presupposes noetic experience, without the man of this habit himself possessing differentiated knowledge of noesis.” Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6, trans. M. J. Hanak, ed. David Walsh (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 411.

higher pursuits. Soroush knows how much Westerners abuse leisure, which is why he observes that Westerners may have external (political) freedom, but they have largely abandoned internal freedom of the soul (103-04). His praise of wealth is directed against the romantic view of poverty in his own society (and that of Sufi). Just as wealth induces greed, no less does poverty induce greed and envy (46-47). Besides, echoing Aristotle, wealth enables one to practice magnificence and generosity. Soroush may have too much confidence in man's power to resist the worst of modernity. However, he views the problems facing Muslims as more pressing, and attempts to prepare Muslims with the appropriate religious, political, intellectual, and moral habits to engage with modernity.

Soroush's noetic mysticism goes to considerable lengths to bring Islam into constructive engagement with modernity. As Fred Dallmayr notes, "Soroush's text makes a contribution to a major conundrum that has beleaguered Islam as well as other religions throughout the course of their historical development: the dilemma of the relation of reason and faith."²⁸ There are reasons to be skeptical that he will have great success, however. His reliance on Sufism over and against the Qur'anic text, while *philosophically* defensible as a way of promoting the exercise of practical reason among Muslims, falls short of providing a *public* defense of practical reason that would have to derive at least in part from Qur'anic sources. He faces the same possible fate that L. Carl Brown observes of medieval philosophers like Alfarabi and Averroes: their esoteric philosophy produced brilliant ideas but had little public impact.²⁹ The historicity of religious knowledge that *irfan* discovers conflicts with the widespread belief that the Qur'an is the infallible, uncreated word of God, and that Muhammad was not at all influenced by the Bible stories he heard from Nestorian Christians during his life as a merchant.³⁰

²⁸ Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 183.

²⁹ L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 57.

³⁰ Salman Rushdie, "The Right Time for an Islamic Reformation," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005, B07 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/05/AR2005080501483.html>) (accessed: July 24, 2006). On debates concerning the historicity of the Qur'an and their political significance, see Cooper, *New Political Religions*, 185-98.

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

Finally, Soroush's understanding of *haqiqah* is in tension with his demand for democracy to be sustained by its "common sense" because it is unclear how common objects of love, to borrow Augustine's phrase, are to be shared when the ascent of the soul is one of increasing interiorization. Soroush fails to provide the reader with what may be called a phenomenology of friendship capable of explaining the acts of loving and sharing. One might think he has the model of the Sufi fraternities in mind, though he does not make explicit use of them. He is therefore in danger of falling into the same trap into which Ka falls. This is hardly conducive to habits of democratic self-government. Pamuk, for his part, dismisses Sufism as a withdrawal into the self characteristic of quietist imperial subjects.³¹ This critique is perhaps too harsh because Soroush's Sufism is a reconstructed one and he explicitly rejects certain basic tenets, including its political quietism. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to compare Soroush's individualistic mystical knowledge with that of someone like a John Locke, whose Socinian theology made him latitudinarian when it came to the institutional arrangement of the church. In the *Letter on Toleration*, Locke cites Matthew's Gospel when he defines a church as the meeting of any two in Christ's name. Locke did not give actual arrangements much further thought. So too with Soroush.

³¹ "The reaction to this traumatic loss of empire was to retreat into oneself. Faced with the challenge of Western thinking, people tend to focus on themselves and chant like a Sufi: we are different, we will always be different and we are proud to be different" (Quoted in Lau, "The Turkish Trauma.").

Conclusion

Pamuk and Soroush experiment with different forms of mysticism as ways of transcending the ideological swamp afflicting many parts of the Islamic world. In Pamuk's novel *Snow*, Ka plays the role of a dervish, the medium of poems he himself does not write. These poems point to a cosmic order that is intimated in the structure of a snowflake that promises Ka redemption from life's fluctuating extremes: extremes consisting of disordered erotic attachments and ultimately an inordinate and impossible desire for perfect happiness. But perhaps Ka is too passive because ultimately the disorder is too deep in his soul, and it prevents him from making the necessary choices to obtain a happy life. By contrast, Pamuk the *auctoritas* sees the novel as the appropriate manner to contemplate and create selfhood and community in the modern world because the novel enables individuals to develop their personalities through sympathetic engagements with specific characters and this activity forms a suitable basis for community.

Soroush experiments more successfully with noetic mysticism that enables him to engage more directly and effectively with the ideologies of his time. He issues a more direct challenge to Muslims, and one perhaps for which they are unprepared, as evidenced by Soroush's exile to many visiting professorships in Western universities.³² His call for Muslims to philosophize, while noble, is perhaps too rash because it overlooks the deep tensions in the Islamic world between piety and thought, and between thought and politics more generally. He might pay greater attention to the noetic sources within Qur'anic orthodoxy as a more effective way of reforming the minds of his fellow Muslims, as St. Thomas Aquinas magnified the noetic sources of his own tradition when he wrote his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Even so, one might justly accuse any philosopher who publicizes his views of being rash.

Ultimately, the achievement of both Pamuk and Soroush is to defend common sense. Both are skeptical of "big ideas" in the form of world-transforming ideologies. As a novelist, Pamuk seeks

³² In the Sunni context, one laments the silencing of liberal scholar Sayyid Mahmud al-Qimany in Egypt, which followed Al Azhar's banning of his books (David Warren, "Marching," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 6, 2005 (<http://www.davidwarrenonline.com/index.php?artID=496>) (accessed: July 24, 2006).

happiness in the interstices of life's moments and details. As a thinker who might be prone to "big ideas," Soroush emphasizes the priority of the activity of thinking over its conclusions. The attention of both to "life's hidden geometry" makes them intellectual and moral models for Muslims and for Westerners alike.