University of
St Andrews

St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology

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First published: 10 February 2025

https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/Iblis

Citation

Bodman, Whitney. 2025. 'Iblīs', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/Iblis Accessed: 3 May 2025

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ISSN 2753-3492

Iblīs

Whitney Bodman

Iblīs is the name of a spiritual being reported within a single narrative told in varying forms in seven sūras of the Qur'an. He then develops in subsequent tradition into the dedicated adversary of humanity. The foundational story is that, having created Adam, God commands the angels to bow down to him. All comply except Iblīs, who tries to justify his refusal in various ways, but is nevertheless ejected from heaven. His essential flaw is arrogant pride. Iblīs is generally regarded in the Islamic tradition as the proto-Shayṭān (Satan), meaning that, after disobeying God in heaven, he becomes Shayṭān on earth, the manifest enemy of humanity. He will have the power to tempt to disobedience, but not to coerce. Satan does not rule the earth as in some Christian theologies.

The hotly debated question of whether Iblīs is an angel or a jinn is rooted in ambiguities in the Qur'anic story and bears on the nature of angels – whether they are capable of disobedience or change. If they can change, or are of diverse sorts, how does this affect the reliability of revelation? This, in turn, bears on the larger theological issue of theodicy, the origin of evil. The Muslim scholastics, various schools of thought that explored the issue of theodicy, relegated Iblīs to a minor role, being concerned about the responsibility (or not) of God for the presence of evil in the world.

In some Sufi traditions, Iblīs is the teacher of morality, the appraiser of spiritual purity. He can be the passionate lover of God, the ultimate monotheist, the guardian of the Presence of God, and a tragic figure. Sometimes he wishes to redeem himself. Generally, in popular literature, he is used to illustrate various clever and deceitful ways to lead believers astray. In some modern literature, he becomes a means to explore critiques of society, its materialism, patriarchy, abuse of religion, or the tensions between religion and reason.

Keywords: Iblīs, Angels, Jinn, Demons, qiyās, Evil, Devil, Satan/Shayṭān, Qur'ān, Divine love, Temptation, Theodicy

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1 Etymology

The derivation of the name Iblīs is uncertain. Most Muslim commentators, such as the eleventh-century scholar al-Rāghīb al-Isfahānī (d. 502/1108; all dates are given first in the Hijri calendar, then in the Gregorian), resist the possibility of foreign words in the Qur'an, citing the Qur'anic verse, 'If we made it a foreign Qur'an, they would have said, "why are its verses not divided between those foreign and those Arabic?"' (Q. 41:44). They suggest that *Iblīs* is a variant form derived from the consonantal root *b-l-s*, meaning, in this case, 'to be cut off' or 'to be despondent' (Jeffery, Böwering and McAuliffe 2007: 47–48). This can be weakly supported by verses in the Qur'an that note that the guilty will be despondent when Judgment Day arrives (Q. 30:12; 6:44; 23:77). This would, however, be an unusual grammatical construction.

Most Western scholars derive the name from the Greek *diabolos*, used in the New Testament, correlating to the Hebrew Bible *ha-śāṭān*. This may have come into Arabic through the Syriac *dīblūs* or *diyābūlūs* (Reynolds 2004; Jeffery, Böwering and McAuliffe 2007: 48). The name is found eleven times in the Qur'an, always as a proper name. All but one occurrence (Q. 26:95) relate to the story of the creation of Adam and subsequent eviction of Iblīs from heaven.

2 Pre-Islamic sources

The name 'Iblīs' is not found in pre-Islamic texts. The theme of the devil being cast down from heaven is briefly mentioned in Luke 10:18: 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning'. Isaiah 14:11 refers to the Daystar, Son of Dawn, falling from heaven, but it is not clear whether this refers to an angel or devil. Ezekiel 28:12–19 could also refer to a fallen angel. Some early Christian interpreters, such as Origen, took this as a reference to the angel of the city of Tyre. Coming closer to the Iblīs story is 2 Enoch 29:4, which describes an angel being cast out of heaven as punishment for inflated ambition and pride. The story is further advanced in several apocryphal texts, the Jewish *Life of Adam and Eve*, the fourth- or fifth-century Christian *Gospel of Bartholomew*, the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, *3 Baruch*, and the Armenian *Penitence of Adam* (Minov 2015; Bodman 2011: 72–83). In these, one finds many of the details of the Qur'anic story prefigured – the pride of Satan, the comparison of composition of fire and dirt, the order of creation, and the command to worship Adam. In all these cases, Satan is an angel, not a jinn or other non-angelic specie.

3 Iblīs and Shayṭān

The relationship between Iblīs and Shayṭān can be approached in a number of ways. According to one reading, Iblīs is a name attached to a particular spiritual being, while

al-Shayṭān is a title. Outside of the Qur'an the two words, however, are used virtually interchangeably. Iblīs is a Qur'anic character who disobeys God and is sent down from heaven to earth, where he becomes Shayṭān. The Garden story of Adam's disobedience is told as a Shayṭān story in the Qur'an, though elsewhere in Islamic literature it is often told as an Iblīs story. English translations often use Satan where the text says Iblīs.

4 Sūrat al-Baqara

The Iblīs story appears first in Sūrat al-Baqara in the canonical ordering of the Qur'an, and in consequence it is this telling that receives most of the commentarial attention. The story in verses 2:30–36 is a four-part account of the creation of humanity, beginning with an announcement from God to the angels of an intention to create humanity. The angels, with apparent knowledge of what will come to pass, announce their dismay at this decision. This scenario is followed by a challenge to name the creatures of the world. Third comes the refusal of Iblīs to bow down to Adam, which is followed by the story of Adam and his wife (unnamed, but in tradition Ḥawwāʾ) who also disobey God and are cast out of the Garden.

Here is the wording of the passage:

> 30. When your Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a deputy on earth', they said: 'Will You place there one who will spread corruption and shed blood while we glorify You with praise and sanctify You?' He said: 'I know what you do not.'
> 31. And He taught Adam the names of all things; and then presented them to the angels and said: 'Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.'
> 32. They said: 'Glory to You. We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Truly you are the Knowing, the Wise.'
> 33. He said: 'O Adam! Tell them their names.' When he had told them, God said: 'Did I not tell you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and on earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?'
> 34. And when We said to the angels: 'Bow down to Adam,' they bowed down, except Iblīs. He refused and was arrogant. He became an unbeliever.
> 35. We said: 'O Adam! you and your wife may live in the Garden; and eat whatever you wish from it; but do not approach this tree or you will become one of the wrongdoers.'
> 36. Then Shayṭān make them slip from the (Garden) and lose the situation in which they had been. We said: 'Go down, all of you, and you will be enemies of each other. Earth will be your dwelling-place and your source of livelihood - for a time.' [All translations from the Qur'an are mine]

4.1 The objection of the angels

One issue is particular to this version of the Iblīs story in the Qur'an: the angels in verse 30 are bold enough to raise an objection to God based on foreknowledge of what will unfold on earth. They apparently know that humanity will commit all manner of corruption thereon. God does not answer their objection, but rather asserts divine prerogative. The objection of angels to the creation of Adam is found in Jewish tradition as well (Ginzberg

1968: 52–54; Reynolds 2010: 47). There some of the angels raising objection meet with fatal consequences.

The story of the names establishes the superiority of Adam to the angels, at least in some respects. God teaches the names (of what?) to Adam, but not to the angels, and then demonstrates that Adam has this knowledge, and the angels do not. The superiority of Adam is based on this knowledge. Christian narratives, by contrast, present Adam as superior because he is made in the image of God. (The idea that Adam was made in the image of God is found in a hadith, but proves controversial, Reynolds 2010: 44–54). Although two of the Iblīs stories in the Qur'an include the idea that God breathed his spirit into Adam, these are earlier renderings of the story (Sūrat Sād 38:71–85 and Sūrat al-Ḥijr 15:26–44). That element is not included in Medinan revelations (Dye 2023: 128).

This sets up the third element of the story, the command to the angels to prostrate to Adam, which they all do, except Iblīs. The implication here is that Iblīs is an angel since the command was given explicitly to the angels. This command follows naturally from the demonstration of Adam's superiority.

5 Typology of non-human beings

5.1 Angels

There are seventy-seven references to angels in the Qur'an. Belief in angels is, for example, accounted as an essential element of righteousness for the pious in verse 2:177. The Arabic word for angel, *malak* (pl. *malāʾika*), has a root meaning associated with messaging: 'Praise belongs to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Maker of the angels as messengers, with wings – two, three, and four [pair] – He adds to creation as He wills' (Q. 35:1).

This is not, however, the primary role of angels in the Qur'an or in Islam in general. Angels are the basic workforce for the functioning of the cosmos according to God's will. Angels are involved in three major areas of work. As above, they play various roles in the creation narrative. They are also integral to the daily interaction between humans and the divine realms. Two angels, for example, sit on the right and left shoulders of every person to record the good and evil deeds that they perform (Q. 43:80; 50:17–18). Finally, angels are actively involved in the eschatological drama (Burge 2012: 71–87; Webb 2001: 85–92).

The creation story in Sūrat al-Baqara is a small but vitally important element of angelic involvement in the creation story.

5.1.1 Named angels

Two angels are mentioned by name in the Qur'an, Jibrīl (Gabriel) and Mīkāʾīl (Michael; Q. 2:97–98), though Jibrīl is not explicitly identified as an angel. In tradition, Jibrīl is

acknowledged as the angel of the revelatory event described in Qur'anic verses 53:1–18 and 96:1–5; as the visitor to Mary in verse 19:17; and as the mysterious man who visited Muḥammad in the presence of his companions, teaching that the faith is fundamentally composed of *islām* (practice), *imān* (faith), and *iḥsān* (beauty) (Bukhāri, *Kitāb al-imān, Bab suʾāl jibrīl al-nabī*, 37).

Tradition names other angels according to function, such as Isrāfīl, who announces the Day of Judgment (Q. 50:20), Munkar and Nakīr, who question the deceased in the grave, Mālik the guardian of Hell (Q. 43:77) and Ridwān the guardian of Heaven (Q. 39:73), and Azrāʾīl, the angel of death (Q. 6:61). Beyond these are innumerable angels associated with natural phenomena, the celestial bodies, and the service and praise of God, including bearing God's throne (Q. 69:17) (Burge 2012: 31–51).

5.1.2 Can angels disobey God?

In Qur'anic verse 2:30, the angels question God in a manner that may almost be taken as a rebuke about His intention to create humanity. This is not quite disobedience, but it does show some independence of thinking. God's response, 'I know what you do not', asserts superior knowledge but does not answer the angels' concerns. This may mean that God also knows of the human potential for obedience and devotion, similar to, or at least approaching, that professed by the angels.

God then teaches Adam the names, establishing Adam's prominence. Now Adam also knows what the angels do not. God has already indicated that humanity will have the role of *khalīfa*, a word that can mean a deputy or vice-regent, one with delegated authority, or perhaps a successor to previous beings on earth. The first is more common in translations, but the second meaning is more common among Muslim interpreters. The predominant understanding is that humans are successors to angels and jinn, who were created first (Reynolds 2010: 40–43; Al-Ṭabarī 1987: 208–211).

When the angels are instructed to prostrate to Adam, confirming his stature, Iblīs refuses. This is clear disobedience. The explanation is that Iblīs was arrogant. If Iblīs was an angel and not a jinn, as is claimed elsewhere in the Qur'an (Q. 18:50), then clearly some angels are capable of direct disobedience.

5.1.3 Hārūt and Mārūt

The possibility of disobedience is supported by the story of Hārūt and Mārūt in Qur'anic verses 2:102–103. These two angels descended to earth to teach magic and attempt to sow discord between husband and wife. According to a hadith cited by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), the angels wished to prove that they would easily resist the temptations to which men were susceptible. Hārūt and Mārūt were delegated by God to descend to earth under command to resist evil. On earth, they encountered a beautiful

woman and desired her, but she insisted that they worship her idol. They refused twice, but the third time were invited to choose one of three faults: worshiping the idol, killing a person, or drinking wine. They chose drinking wine, which then led to fornication and murder. They were not permitted to return to heaven but came to understand the strength required to resist evil while hidden from God, the human condition (Burge 2012: 94).

5.2 Al-Shayṭān

The passage in Sūrat al-Baqara switches abruptly in verse 36 from Iblīs to Shayṭān in the Garden story. The common understanding is that Iblīs becomes Shayṭān after being ejected from heaven, but this is nowhere clearly stated in the Qur'an. Within the entirety of that text, *al-shayṭān* is used seventy times in the singular, and eighteen times in the plural – *shayāṭīn*. While Iblīs is almost always associated with the story of the creation of Adam, Shayṭān is never used in that context. On the other hand, Iblīs is used twice in the role of an earthly tempter, including in verses 26:95 (which mentions the soldiers of Iblīs) and 34:20.

Shayṭān's role is as tempter, often whispering (the Arabic word is the onomatopoetic *waswas*) to believers, causing them to slip from obedience. He can make people forget the signs of God's activity. To believers he is a clear enemy (Q. 17:53), to unbelievers a friend and companion (Q. 4:76). He causes fear, dissention, defilement, and hatred. He seeks to lure the believers from the straight path by lying, approaching them from every side. He sneaks around (Larsson 2012).

Shayṭān is frequently referred to as the 'stoned Satan', or *Shayṭān al-rajīm* (Q. 3:36; 15:17; 16:98). This refers primarily to the devils – *shayāṭīn* – who were stoned by angels when they approached heaven, as mentioned in Qur'anic verses 67:5, 72:9, and 15:17. An alternative explanation is that *rajīm* means 'cursed' (Reynolds 2010: 54–64). Another story is that Ibrāhīm (Abraham) stoned the devil when he was tempted at al-ʿAqaba, near the valley of Mina, outside of Mecca. There were three temptations: to refuse to sacrifice Ismāʿīl, to allow Hajar to stop him from that sacrifice, and to allow Ismāʿīl to dissuade him. Near the end of the Ḥajj pilgrimage, pilgrims stone three pillars (*jamarāt* – now replaced by walls) in imitation of those temptations and as an opportunity to reflect on the temptations of Shayṭān that they have resisted or failed to resist. Every Qur'anic recitation begins with the words, 'I seek refuge from the stoned Satan'.

Certain verses in the Qur'an are used as apotropaic defences against Shayṭān, in particular the last two sūras (113 and 114), referred to as the *muʿawwidhatayn*, the Two Prayers of Refuge. For example:

> Say, I see refuge with the Lord of humanity, the Ruler of humanity, the God of humanity, from the evil of the one who whispers and withdraws, the one who whispers into the hearts of humanity, from among the jinn and humanity. (Q. 114:1-6)

These verses and others may be worn as an amulet for protection against Shayṭān. There are a multitude of other prayers, incantations, objects (such as evil-eye jewellery or the 'hand of Fāṭima'), and other practices that are common – and controversial – for protection against Shayṭān and evil jinn.

Unlike Christianity, Islam does not associate Shayṭān with hell. The Qur'an speaks extensively about hell as the Fire, with graphic descriptions of heat and torment. Hell is governed by the angel Mālik and is populated by angels and demons (Lange 2015b: 16).

5.3 Demons

Demons are commonly referred to as *shayāṭīn*, 'satans', though in Qur'anic verse 26:95 the army (*jund*) of Iblīs must refer to the same entities. They are jinn, as is Shayṭān himself. The confusion about whether Iblīs is an angel or a jinn spills over into discussions of demons, with a suggestion that they may be a particular form of angel, but this is little accepted. The importance of demons is that they represent the ever-present, constant danger of Iblīs/Shayṭān.

As will be explained below, jinn are as free as humans to be either good or evil. Demons are those jinn who have chosen to be evil, to join the forces of Shayṭān (Nünlist 2021; Dye 2023).

5.4 The jinn

Although the presence of Iblīs among the angels suggests the possibility that he was an angel, Sūrat al-Kahf (18:50) states clearly that he was 'one of the jinn'.

In the Islamic tradition there are three general types of beings: angels, humans, and jinn. Whereas the angels are created by God from light and humans from clay, the jinn are formed from *nār al-samūm*, fiery, scorching wind (Q. 15:27), or *mārijin min nār*, smokeless flame (Q. 55:15) (El-Zein 2009: 32–34). Jinn occupy a domain, a world, between those of the humans and the angels. It is often referred to as the *barzakh*, 'isthmus', or the imaginal world between the material world of humanity and the celestial world of the angels. The three worlds are interrelated and interpenetrating (El-Zein 2009: 8; Sharpe 1992).

Jinn are not normally visible, but there are many stories in which they are seen, or choose to become visible, for some reason or another. They can appear in the guise of animals

and humans. A Prophetic hadith reports that there are three classes of jinn: those who have wings and fly through the air, those who are snakes and dogs, and those who travel over the surface of the earth like human nomads (Lange 2015c: 81). They appear in dreams and visions and are the muse upon which poets draw for inspiration, and seers for information (El-Zein 2009: 121–133; Sharpe 1992). An irrational or outlandish person may be called *majnūn*, from the same root, including someone in a delirium of love. Muḥammad himself was accused of being *majnūn* or a *kāhin* (seer), given his claims of divine inspiration and communication. The Qur'an refutes this directly (Q. 7:184; 52:29; 68:2; 81:22).

The jinn are organized, like humans, into nations and tribes with kings and shaykhs (El-Zein 2009: 15). They procreate and have families, though their lifespan is much longer than that of humans. Many of the legends describing the origin of Iblīs tell of tribes of jinn that inhabited the earth before humans were created.

The jinn are not evil. They are, like humans, created with the ability to be deeply pious or, contrarily, malicious. They are often spoken of together with humans: 'I have only created the jinn and the humans to serve me' (Q. 51:56). The hymnic Sūrat al-Raḥmān speaks of the creative work of God and asks repeatedly, '[t]hen which of the favours of your Lord will you both deny?' The 'you' is in the dual form and is commonly taken as referring to humans and jinn. Hence jinn have the same religious responsibilities as humans do, and will, like humans, be accountable for their lives on the Day of Judgment. Some will end up in Paradise, and some in the Fire. Prophets have come to both humans and jinn to teach them the essentials of belief, the 'signs' (*ayāt*) of God's creative work, and warn them of the consequences of unbelief (Q. 6:130).

In Sūrat al-Jinn, we encounter a group of pious jinn:

> Say: It has been revealed to me that a group of the Jinn listened (to Qur'anic recitation) and said: Indeed, we have heard a marvellous Qur'an that guides to righteousness, so we believe in it and will never ascribe a partner to our Lord. He – exalted be the majesty of our Lord – has taken neither wife nor son, and that the foolish among us used to speak an atrocious lie concerning God. We had supposed that humankind and jinn would never speak a lie concerning God. Indeed, some among the people used to invoke the protection of some of the jinn, such that they increasingly revolted against God. (Q. 72:1–6)

Here a group of jinn, while listening to Qur'anic recitation, affirm their belief in the unity of God. There are other jinn, however, who commit the worst sin, *shirk*, assigning partners to God – polytheism. Furthermore, we see that some people invoke the protection of jinn. This could refer to the idea that jinn populate wilderness areas so that travellers need to

seek protection from them, often by making a pact. Jinn can, however, cause mischief and harm in any aspect of life.

6 The heritage of Iblīs

The disobedience of Iblīs is unique. His was a direct contravention of God's command, followed by his attempt to justify his actions. How did this happen? Abū Jaʾfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in his *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (History of Prophets and Kings), gives several possibilities, each reported from various companions of the Prophet, most notably Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 67/687). According to one, Iblīs was among the most noble of angels, belonging to the most honoured tribe among them. He was a keeper of Paradise. God made him beautiful. He had the authority to rule over the lower heaven as well as the earth. His name in primordial times was Azazel (see Lev 16:10), or Ḥārith (Al-Ṭabarī 1988: 201, 224). Perhaps the earliest narrative of Azazel is in the second-century *Apocalypse of Abraham* chapter 13 (20ff.), where he is a fallen archangel and adversary of God. Azazel is also found in the Ethiopic book of Enoch, chapters 6–11. There he is a teacher of armament-making and cosmetics. Another report adds that his tribe was an angelic tribe of jinn, explaining that the word *jinn* relates to *al-janna*, the word for paradise (Al-Ṭabarī 1988: 249–257). This is one explanation for the presence of Iblīs, a jinn (Q. 18:50), among the angels.

Another tradition adds to this, saying that the jinn were the first to dwell on earth. They caused corruption and shed blood, so God sent Iblīs to them with an army of angels. This army slaughtered the jinn and banished their remnants to islands in the ocean and to the sides of mountains. Iblīs's success in this regard then went to his head, and he became proud of himself, thinking himself superior to others. An alternative view was that Iblīs was on earth as one of the jinn and was captured by the angel army and taken to heaven (Al-Ṭabarī 1988: 249–257; Al-Ṭabarī 1987: 208–227). These stories recall the fallen angel mythology: the Daystar, Son of Dawn, in Isa 14:12; the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 – possibly a watcher angel; Lucifer in Luke 10:18; and various pseudepigraphal accounts such as *The Life of Adam and Eve*, the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, and others (Bodman 1999: 258–269).

If Iblīs is a jinn, then it is theoretically possible that he could also become a believer. The Christian doctrine of apocatastasis, the idea that all, including Satan, would be restored in the apocalypse, was advocated by early scholars such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa but was rejected by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. It is based on an interpretation of 'all things' in Acts 3:19–21, attributed to Origen (Bodman 2011: 20). Generally, Christian views of universal salvation have usually been somewhat qualified. Such a view is not acceptable in Islam, where the destination of the eternal fire

for the unbelievers is well attested to in the Qur'an. The following hadith, though, suggests that the progeny of Iblīs is not consigned to evil:

> The Prophet said to the jinni: 'This is the stride of a jinni, as well as the tone of his voice!' The jinni replied: 'My name is Hāma ibn Lāqqīs ibn Iblīs'. The Prophet said: 'Only two generations separate you from him [Iblīs]'. He replied: 'True'. The Prophet asked: 'How long have you lived?' The jinni replied: 'Almost all of time. I was a small boy when Abel was killed. I believed in Noah and repented at his hands after I stubbornly refused to submit to his call, until he wept and wept. I am indeed a repentant—God keep me from being among the ignorant! I met the prophet Hud and believed in his call. I met Abraham, and I was with him when he was thrown in the fire. I was with Joseph, too, when his brothers hurled him into the well – I preceded him to its bottom. I met the prophet Shuʿayb, and Moses and Jesus the son of Mary, who told me: 'If you meet Muḥammad, tell him Jesus salutes thee!' Now I've delivered his message to you, and I believe in you'. The Prophet said: 'What is your desire, O Hāma?' He said: 'Moses taught me the Torah, Jesus the Gospels, can you teach me the Qur'an?' So the Prophet taught him the Qur'an. (Cited in El-Zein 2009: 65–66)

Might Iblīs also be redeemed (Bodman 1999: 261–263)?

For Iblīs, the situation may be different. After he refused to bow down to Adam and God ejected him from heaven, Iblīs asked for respite (Q. 7:14; 15:36; 17:32; 38:79). It is not clear what Iblīs is asking for here. He gets no respite from his banishment from heaven, and no other punishment is threatened. God grants him respite until the Day of Judgment. At that moment, Iblīs pledges to be an adversary to people on earth. The nature of this oppositional role changes somewhat from story to story.

In Sūrat al-Aʿrāf, verse 16, Iblīs blames God using vocabulary familiar from Sūrat al-Fātiḥa: 'you have sent me astray [see Q. 1:7] so surely, I will sit for them by your straight path [see Q. 1:6]'. He pledges to assault 'them' from every angle to the point that they will cease any gratitude to God for God's mercies. God's response is vehement: 'Get out, disgraced, and expelled. Certainly, whoever among them follows you – I will fill Hell with all of you'.

In Sūrat al-Ḥijr, Iblīs once again blames God for putting him in the wrong. He makes an exception for the servants of God. In Sūrat al-Isrāʾ it is God who tells Iblīs to lead people astray, except that he will have no authority over God's servants. In Sūrat Sād, Iblīs will lead all but God's servants astray, but 'by Thy power', emphasizing that authority for all that Iblīs is doing originates from God.

We may summarize this by concluding that Iblīs is doing his work of temptation according to instruction received from God. He is not an adversary of God, but, like the Satan in

the book of Job, is serving the role of testing the will of humanity, perhaps serving as the prosecutor in the divine court. He is also disallowed from tempting God's servants. This is a bit puzzling since there are numerous stories of Iblīs tempting Sufi saints, companions of the Prophet, and even the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Once Iblīs is granted reprieve, he announces to God that he will be a tempter and an adversary to humanity.

7 The Garden story

Three versions of the Iblīs story are followed by the Garden story, familiar from Genesis 2:15–3:24. They are found in Qur'anic verses 2:35–39, 7:19–23, and 38:117–123. In them, Iblīs is evicted from heaven and arrives first in the Garden – Paradise, *al-janna* – where Adam and his wife have been commanded to dwell (Q. 2:35). Heaven, inhabited by God and the angels, is separate from Paradise. The word *al-janna* describes a garden or an orchard that is usually enclosed. Christian understandings of heaven and paradise tend to elide the two, but in Islam, Paradise is richly described as the destination of the righteous, a place of abundance and pleasure. Its most important characteristics are that rivers run beneath it, hence an abundance of water, and fruit is there for the picking, hence an abundance of food. There are other delights: spouses, fine raiment and jewellery, couches, wine, and more (Q. 2:25; 18:31; 43:70–73; 47:15). In short, all that one could desire (Q. 43:71).

Sūrat al-Baqara, verses 35–36, contains an abbreviated Garden story, with the command of God to Adam and his wife to dwell in the Garden, enjoy its fruits, but refrain from eating from a particular tree. In Genesis, Adam and his wife may eat freely in the Garden, except for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, implying that the Tree of Life is fully available to them. In the Qur'an, it is the Tree of Eternity (Q. 20:120) that is forbidden. This information comes from Shayṭān, not God. Eating from it will cause them to be among the unjust.

In Sūrat Ṭā Hā, God warns them against Shayṭān, who will try to get them out of the Garden: 'Then we said, 'O Adam! Truly this is an enemy to you and to your wife, so do not let him drive you both from of the Garden and cause you suffering' (Q. 20:117). Some traditions say that when Iblīs was ejected from heaven, he went to the snake and entered the Garden hidden in its mouth, through which he spoke to Adam and Hawwāʾ. At that time the snake was like a camel and was beautiful (Al-Ṭabarī 1987: 252–254). Afterwards the snake was made to crawl on its belly, a parallel with Genesis 3:14. Other stories hold that Iblīs entered with the help of a peacock (al-Kisāʿī 1997: 36–42).

Satan whispers (*waswas*) to them to reveal their *sawʾa*, 'shame'. The word has overtones of sorrow, evil, and wrongdoing. In Qur'anic verses 20:118–119, it says that what is in the Garden is sufficient for food, clothing, drink, and shade so that Adam and Hawwāʾ may

not be naked. In verse 7:22, however, when they eat from the tree, their shame becomes evident and they sew together clothing (Reynolds 2010: 64–70).

Shayṭān swears to them that he is a true advisor (Q. 7:21). He informs them that God only forbade the tree lest they become angels, or one of the immortals (Q. 7:20). In verse 20:120, he leads them to the tree, which will in turn lead them to a kingdom that does not decay.

The Qur'anic story differs from the Genesis story in several ways. For example, there is no separate creation of Hawwāʾ mentioned. The story of the creation of Adam is told in several places, the most detailed in Sūrat Ṣād, where Adam is formed with God's two hands (Q. 38:72, 75). In Sūrat al-Ḥajj humanity is created from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then a single clot of clinging material (blood), then an embryo, formed or unformed (Q. 22:6). This description, emphasized also in Sūrat al-ʿAlaq, demonstrates that humanity comes from a single origin, including male and female (Azaiez et al. 2016: 59–67).

Adam and Hawwāʾ are also equally complicit in error. There is no tree of knowledge of good and evil. Rather, Adam and Hawwāʾ are morally responsible from the beginning. There is in Islam no concept of original sin. Adam and Hawwāʾ are no different from any of their descendants in terms of moral capability and culpability. They share with all the rest of humanity certain deficits. They are forgetful, as in the Garden (Q. 20:115). Humanity is also created weak (Q. 4:28), hasty (Q. 17:11), impatient, anxious, and greedy (Q. 70:19–21). These should be considered vulnerabilities for sin, not sins in and of themselves. In the case of the Garden, it is forgetfulness of God's commandment under the influence of Shayṭān that led to the disobedience of Adam and his wife. The whispering of Shayṭān in the Garden is no different from the whispering of Shayṭān on earth throughout time until Judgment Day. Shayṭān, Adam, and his wife will be enemies of each other. This includes their respective progeny (Barlas 2002: 138–139).

Subsequent Muslim interpretation introduces elements of the Biblical story that are not in the Qur'an. The commentator Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 672/1273) comments that Hawwāʾ was created from Adam's rib, before recounting a narrative in which Adam is asked if he loves Hawwāʾ. He answers yes, but Hawwāʾ answers no to the same question, even though she does love him with a love greater than Adam's. The following comment is then made, 'if any woman were to speak the truth about her love for her husband, Hawwāʾ would have spoken the truth'. Al-Qurṭubī cites similar opinions from Ibn Masʾūd (d. 33/653) and Ibn ʿAbbās (al-Qurṭubī 2019: 133).

Al-Ṭabarī cites Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. c. 110/728), who recounts the temptation story almost exactly according to the Biblical account, placing the bulk of responsibility for disobedience on Hawwāʾ: Iblīs enters the Garden in the belly of the serpent and himself picks the fruit, which he brings to Hawwā'. She eats and gives it to Adam, repeating the

exact words used by Iblīs. As in the biblical account, Adam's penalty is the curse of the ground; Eve's is pain in childbirth; and the serpent's is to slither on the ground and be an enemy of humanity. No punishment is described for Iblīs. Hawwā's penalty, though, is not for disobeying God, but rather for misleading Adam (Al-Ṭabarī 1987: 251–252). Other commentators further extend the debilitation of Hawwāʾ, saying, for instance, that she will now bleed as she made the tree bleed, and will be foolish, though she was created wise (Ayoub 1984: 82–89).

Some modern interpretations seek to restore the equality of the Qur'anic account. Asma Barlas points out that the primary issue within the account of human creation is that we are all created from a single blood clot: 'Read, in the Name of your Lord, who created, created humanity from a blood clot' (Q. 95:1–2). Sūrat al-Nisāʾ gives a variation: 'Fear (or be mindful of) your Lord, who created you from a single *nafs*, and from it its mate, and from those a multitude of men and women' (Q. 4:1). *Nafs*, a feminine singular noun, is sometimes translated as 'soul', but here refers to a material person. Barlas argues that from a single person is created two people of like nature, who then generate all of humanity, male and female, with a common nature (Barlas 2002: 133–136). She further argues that Adam should be understood not exclusively as the name of a single male person, but rather as the original ungendered human being formed from the soil, *adama*. 'In the Quran, men and women originate in the same Self, at the same time, and in the same way; that is, they are ontologically, coeval, and coequal' (Barlas 2002: 136).

The eviction from the Garden causes no additional punishment. The ground is not cursed; there is no eruption of thorns and thistles; there is no change in diet; there is no subsequent pain in pregnancy; the husband does not rule over the wife. The earth will be a dwelling place and provision for them. There is no sense that the provision on earth will require punishing labour. It will, rather, be a source of enjoyment (Q. 2:36). Iblīs, however, will be an eternal enemy of both.

In Qur'anic verses 2:37–38, 7:22–23, and 20:122, Adam and his wife are restored to God's good grace. The accounts differ. Sūrat Ṭā Hā reads, '[t]hen his Lord chose him and turned to him and guided [him]'. Sūrat al-ʿArāf elaborates on this: God rebukes them for believing Shayṭān and eating from the tree. Both of them then confess, '[o]ur Lord, we have wronged ourselves (our *nafs*), and if you do not forgive us and are not merciful to us, we will be among the losers'. Sūrat al-Baqara adds a further twist:

> Then Adam received from his Lord words and He turned towards him. Truly he is the Oft-Returning, the Merciful. We said, 'Go down from here, all [of you], and when guidance comes from Me, then whoever follows My guidance will have no fear, nor shall they sorrow'. (Q. 2:37)

In this rendering, God takes the initiative to teach Adam ‘words’. Some interpreters understand this as prayers of repentance, such as the words in Qur’anic verse 7:23. Others believe it might refer to the basics of the Islamic tradition, both practices and beliefs, particularly the pilgrimage. Still others say that they were a confession of faith.

8 *The Satanic Verses*

In Sūrat al-Najm we find these verses:

> Have you seen al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt, the third, the other? For you the male and to Him female? (Q. 53:19–21)

According to tradition, most notably the biographies of the Prophet and the Hadith, after reciting ‘Have you seen al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt, the third, the other?’ Muḥammad was prompted by Satan to insert the verse, ‘These are the high-flying cranes whose intercession is sought’. Some suggest that he was drowsy, or his attention had strayed for a moment. Others say that he did not recite them, but the verses were nevertheless heard. Some say that Shayṭān whispered them into his ear, perhaps mimicking the voice of Jibrīl (Burton 1970: 254). Nevertheless, the non-Muslim Quraysh were pleased to see their own gods thus acknowledged. Muḥammad subsequently either realized his mistake or was corrected by Jibrīl, only to be then reassured by another revelation from Sūrat al-Ḥajj:

> We never sent a messenger or a prophet before you but that, when he recites, Shayṭān inserts [something] into his recitation. But God removes what Shayṭān inserts and God will confirm His verses, for God is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. He will make what Shayṭān inserts a test for those whose hearts are diseased and those whose hearts are hardened. (Q. 22:52–53)

The early Muslim community seems to have accepted this narrative. As the doctrine of the infallibility of prophets became secured over time, however, this story of the effective suggestion of Shayṭān was questioned on several grounds, most importantly that it would introduce uncertainty about the reliability of the text of the revelation (Nasr 2015: 841–844; Ahmed 2017: 1–3, 49–51).

It also became grounds for an extended debate about the issue of abrogation. Does God replace a verse with another verse, leaving the original in the Qur’an, such as in the case of the change in the direction of prayer, confirmed as Jerusalem (the sacred mosque is al-Aqṣā) in the Qur’an (Q. 2:142, 149–150), but subsequently changed to Mecca in a hadith. Or does God remove the verse entirely, as in the above case? There is also evidence that

God removes a verse, but leaves the ruling of the verse intact, such as the suggestion that, while lashing is the punishment for adultery in the Qur'an (Q. 24:2), there used to be a verse prescribing stoning. Though that verse was removed or suppressed by God, the penalty of stoning is the recognized punishment, based on a hadith and the practice of the Prophet (Burton 1970).

Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) refers to this narrative and provoked widespread condemnation from many Muslims. The controversy erupted in India, based on two interviews Rushdie gave to Indian publications, likely as a tool for Muslim politicians (Appignanesi and Maitland 1990). Due to the complexity and allusive nature of the book, it is safe to say that very few of those complaining have ever read it.

The novel is framed by a story of two South Asians traveling to Britain. Most of the substance of the book consists of dream narratives. Several of the narratives, among them the story of the Satanic verses, are drawn from early Islamic tradition, reconstituted to Rushdie's own literary purposes.

9 *Qiyās*

Iblīs argues that he should not prostrate to Adam because 'I am better than him!' (Q. 7:12). His claim is based on two principles. First, he was created before Adam. He is therefore older, and by the tradition of primogeniture, should have priority and respect. The argument is familiar from the biblical stories of the Patriarchs, of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. Birth order matters (Bodman 2011: 84–93). Second, he is made from smoking fire, while Adam is made from clay, or even worse, muck (Q. 15:26, 28, 33). Fire is superior to clay.

On the face of it, these are reasonable arguments. With them Iblīs is using the tool of *qiyās*, analogical reasoning. *Qiyās* means literally measuring or ascertaining the length, weight, or quality of something. Thus, some new situation on which the law is silent may be found to have a common cause, *ʿilla*, with an existing ruling, *hukm*, that is clear from divine revelation – the Qur'an or Sunna (Kamali 1991: 197–199). This involves the use of reason. The challenge is precisely identifying a common factor, a common *ʿilla*, that allows one to derive a novel ruling from an established one. That Iblīs is accused of using *qiyās* is an indication of its controversial status (Awn 1983: 35–36).

In debates throughout Islamic history, the arguments of Iblīs have served those who have rejected *qiyās*. A well-known hadith says, 'The first to use *qiyās* was Iblīs, and would the sun and moon be worshipped if it was not for *qiyās*?' (Ibn Kathīr 2003: 27 [vol. 4]). While his arguments are reasonable, therefore, they misidentify the proper *ʿilla*. Iblīs bases his claim in part on the assertion that fire is better than clay, therefore what is made of fire should not be subservient to something that is made of clay. However, there is no

revelation that establishes fire as superior to clay, therefore his reasoning is not supported. It is quite possible – and many Islamic scholars make the case – to argue that clay is superior to fire. For example:

> Iblīs's argument, however, is self-serving and partial, in both senses of the term. Although fire may be luminous, subtle, and characterized by levity and lightness, it is also associated with fickleness, recklessness, restlessness, and destructiveness – with grandeur, but also haughtiness, qualities consistent with the arrogance (see v. 13) that ultimately leads to Iblīs's perdition.
>
> By contrast, clay or earth is base, heavy, dark, and low lying, but also has the properties of gravity, forbearance, humility, and stability. It is these latter qualities in Adam that lead him to seek and receive God's forgiveness after his disobedience. Clay or earth can also serve as a place of prayer. Moreover, in the Islamic context it is the constituent elements of clay – namely, water and earth – that serve as a means of ritual purification, not fire. (Nasr 2015: 410, edited to remove commentarial notations)

Even an argument that clay is superior is pure speculation. Therefore, there is no common factor, an *ʿilla*, on the basis of which one can establish the relative superiority of fire or clay.

What *is* a firm basis for a ruling is divine revelation – the command of God, which negates all reasoned arguments that produce contrary rulings. The divine revelation here gives no justification, no explanation as to why Iblīs should bow down to Adam. Iblīs attempts an argument independent of divine revelation, i.e. what God directly says.

The argument on the basis of primogeniture is equally flawed; commentators point out that Adam's superiority is indicated by the fact that God taught him the names (Q. 2:31) and created him 'with His two hands' (Q. 38:75).

10 Heresiology

As with any personification of evil, Iblīs can be associated with whomever or whatever one defines as illegitimate. Abū al-Farrāj ibn al-Jawzī (d. 599/1201) is associated with the Ḥanbalī tradition of Islamic law. Among his many works is *Talbīs Iblīs* (The Delusion of the Devil), a popular work that seeks to identify the myriad ways in which Iblīs proliferates deceptions among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. His approach, as Ibn al-Jawzī defines it, is to use reason, God's greatest gift to humanity, to analyse the errors of, among others, Jews and Christians, jurists, preachers, governors, philosophers, scholars, and, above all, Sufis (Ibn al-Jawzī 2011: ix). Throughout, Ibn al-Jawzī uses carefully constructed arguments to precisely identify those elements of a practice that may be in some ways

admirable, but that have been distorted through the conniving of Iblīs. *Talbīs Iblīs* is still widely read and used to support certain interpretations of Islam, and to condemn others.

11 *Kalām*

The Qur'an says that God has power over all things (Q. 67:1). Does God have power over evil? Does God cause evil? Is Shayṭān a servant of God, or does he act independently? The Iblīs story appears to indicate that Iblīs made his own decision to disobey God, and made his own decision, subsequently, to be a tempter of humanity. God allowed this to happen, though He imposed restrictions.

The Qur'an does indicate that God inflicts harm and that such is pre-ordained:

> We inflicted Pharaoh's people with famine and shortage of crops so that they might take heed. No misfortune can happen, either on earth or in yourselves, that was not set down in writing before We brought it into being – that is easy for God. (Q. 10:107)

In the eighth century, contact with Greek philosophy, primarily through interactions with Christians, led to the rise of rationalist schools of Islamic theological and philosophical thinking, called *kalām*. One issue of primary concern was that of theodicy.

The first significant school of systematic thought, known as the Muʿtazila, argued that reason is the primary means to know God. The most important ethical characteristic of God is omnibenevolence. A benevolent God sends prophets and messengers to benefit humanity. A benevolent God is exonerated from all moral evil and injustice. God is capable of doing evil but chooses not to (Jackson 2009: 52). For humanity, choosing the good will result in reward from God, ultimately in an afterlife in Paradise, while choosing evil will result in punishment, expressed in an afterlife spent in Jahannam, the Fire. Humans are obliged to command the right and forbid the wrong, which becomes the basis of social activism (Jackson 2009: 47–51; Chowdhury 2021: 18–19).

Mortals have free will and create their own actions. Humans can discern by means of reason what is good and what is evil. Therefore, they are accountable before God for their actions. Shayṭān seeks to distort reason and discernment. This accountability is the most significant difference between the Muʿtazila and the other schools of thought in Islam (Jackson 2009: 53). All of God's actions are for the positive benefit of humanity, even those which seem harmful.

The Ashʿarīs, a school which emerged in response to the Muʿtazila, rejected the idea that God is bound by values or principles, such as a commitment to the human good. This would violate God's unlimited prerogative and autonomous power. Rather, God is the

cause of all that happens, including those things that human beings perceive as evil. Only will or intention can be attributed to humans, but the will's connection to the act is still an action of God. Evil has no independent reality, so God cannot cause evil. God's motives in causing whatever God causes are inscrutable.

A third major school is the Māturīdīs. They share the affirmation of God's omnipotence, but while also foregrounding God's wisdom. God can cause evil, which separates the Māturīdīs from the Ashʿarīs and the Muʿtazila. But since God acts according to wisdom, every instance which may be humanly understood as evil or as causing suffering actually occurs according to some wise purpose.

Finally, a Traditionalist perspective developed in opposition to all rationalist schools. Although commonly associated with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), he is in no sense its founder. For those subscribing to this perspective, the various rationalist programs are all innovations unsanctioned by the authoritative textual sources of Islam – the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet. Once these sources are established, there is no need – in fact, it is wrong – to venture into speculation. While rationalists would assess hadith using reason, dismissing some and interpreting others metaphorically or allegorically, the Traditionalists would claim to evaluate them solely on the basis of authenticity. The Qur'an is clear about the reward and punishment for the deeds of mortals. It is also clear that God has ultimate control of all things, including disaster, suffering, and evil. 'Traditionalists, therefore, accept both the obligation to believe, and the inability to completely know – belief in a sense constituting for them its own, independent epistemology' (Jackson 2009: 130).

In all of these schools, Iblīs, or Shayṭān, is not the cause of evil. Evil comes from God, or in the case of the Muʿtazila, from human choice. Shayṭān is a tempter, leaving to the human being the responsibility of either succumbing to temptation or resisting. Shayṭān is wily, but ultimately has no power. He is the whisperer, not the commander.

12 Sufism

In the Islamic mystical tradition, Iblīs plays a variety of roles. These are largely based on the idea that Iblīs is not primarily an external phenomenon, but a part of one's soul.

The Hadith collection of Muslim reports a story from Ibn Masʿūd:

> The messenger of God – may God bless him and grant him peace – said, 'there is no one among you who does not have a jinn as his companion placed in charge of him'. They said, 'and you, too, O messenger of God?' He said, 'even me, except that God came to my assistance against him and he (the jinn) has become Muslim. Now he only urges me to good.' (*Saḥīḥ Muslim* 52, *Kitāb al-fitan wa al-ashrāṭ al-sāʿa*, Bab 16, 2814)

12.1 Al-Khannās

Another well-known story stresses that Iblīs is incorporated within the very being of humanity. The Sufi Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār (d. c. 601/1221), in his *Taẕkirat al-awliyā* (Remembrance of the Saints), tells this story, here summarized:

Iblīs came to Hawwāʾ when Adam was away and asked her to take care of his son, al-Khannās, for a while. She agreed, but when Adam returned and found out that this was the child of Iblīs, he was furious. He killed the child, chopped him into pieces, and hung the pieces from the tree. When Iblīs returned, he gathered the parts, joined them back together, and they went off.

When Iblīs returned a second time, Hawwāʾ was reluctant to take the child but was finally convinced to do so. Again, Adam returned and was furious. This time he killed the child, burned the body, and threw the ashes half into the sea and half to the wind. Again, Iblīs returned, and once again resurrected his son.

The same scenario played out yet a third time. This time, when Adam returned, he killed al-Khannās, fried him, and divided the flesh between the two of them to eat. When Iblīs returned, he said, ‘This was exactly my intention in order that I might have access to men’s interior! Since his breast is now my abode, my goal is achieved’ (Awn 1983: 63).

A well-known hadith says that Satan flows in man’s very bloodstream (Al-Ghazālī 2010: 92). The ‘field of battle’ is the heart or *nafs*, the lower soul. Some say that the *nafs* is the domain of Iblīs, the source of all the passions that lead to trouble. Others say that it is the contested zone where Iblīs and God – represented by angels – struggle for the loyalty of the believer.

The *nafs* interacts with the world, *dunyā*, where temptations abound. Iblīs is therefore active both externally and internally, in the *dunyā* and in the *nafs*. Iblīs promises, ‘I will lie in wait for them on Your straight path, then I will assault them from ahead and behind, from their right side and their left’ (Q. 7:16–17).

12.2 Iblīs and Muʿāwiya

Stories of Iblīs’s deceptions abound. There is no place where Muslims are more vulnerable than when they are at prayer (Larsson 2012: 56–58). The well-known story of Iblīs and Muʿāwiya in the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) illustrates a number of points.

According to that account, the Umayyad Caliph Muʿāwiya was asleep in his palace and the doors were locked. Iblīs appeared to him and said, ‘The time for prayer is come to an end; you must run quickly to the mosque’. Muʿāwiya rejected the idea that Iblīs would ever encourage him to piety. Iblīs responded by telling his story.

> At first, I was an angel: I traversed the way of obedience to God with all my soul […] I have been a lover at His court […] Many is the time I have received kindness from him and walked in the Rose-garden of His approval […] during the short while since he drove me from his presence, my eye has remained fixed upon His beauteous face […].

Muʿāwiya responded, pointing out that Iblīs has waylaid hundreds of thousands like him. God has made him the master of all thieves. ‘You are the sea of cunning, and all the creatures are but a drop […] Who shall escape from your cunning, O adversary? We are drowned in the flood, except them that are protected by God’.

Iblīs replied,

> I am the touchstone for the false coin and the true. God has made me the test of lion and cur, God has made me the test of genuine coin and counterfeit […] To the good I act as guide, the dry branches I rip off […] How should I make the good man bad? I am not God. I am only a prompter, I am not their creator […] wherever I see a fruitful sapling, I foster it diligently like a nurse. Wherever I see a sour and dry tree, I cut it down, in order that the musk may be delivered separately from the dung.

Muʿāwiya again rejected Iblīs’s second argument. He said, ‘I cannot prevail in argument with Iblīs, for he leads everyone, noble and base alike, into temptation’. He then challenged Iblīs to tell the truth.

Iblīs made a third argument. ‘You curse Iblīs, guiltless though he is. How do you not see that the deception proceeds from yourself? […] Your love of sensual things makes you blind and deaf; your black fleshly soul is the culprit: do not quarrel with others’.

Muʿāwiya again challenged Iblīs to speak truthfully. Finally, Iblīs confessed that if Muʿāwiya had missed the prayer, his anguish would be a far stronger expression of piety than fulfilling the obligation to pray (Rūmī 1926: 356–365, edited).

Iblīs often targets acts of piety, distracting people in their prayers. Sometimes he openly declares his identity, as here to Muʿāwiya. In many stories he appears disguised as an old man.

12.3 Iblīs and Muʿāwiya – the arguments

Iblīs’s first argument describes at length his great love for God. Prior to being commanded to bow down to Adam, he was the most dedicated of angels. Despite his rejection from heaven, his deep and passionate love for God remains. He admits that his refusal to bow

down to Adam arose from envy, but his envy was rooted in his love for God. He still hopes for God's mercy.

This is a passionate argument that reflects the Sufi commitment to a deep love of God. It is clear from the context, the language, and the extent of Iblīs's explanation that Rūmī is quite sympathetic to this disposition. In contrast, Muʿāwiya's response is rather flat.

The second argument of Iblīs is that he fulfils a role assigned to him by God. He separates the wheat from the chaff, true piety from false. God 'has made me an informer, a truth-teller'. He is not the cause of bad behaviour. Rather he encourages good behaviour and exposes the bad.

Muʿāwiya rejects this argument and complains to God about Iblīs's protestations. 'I cannot prevail in an argument with Iblīs'. To this, Iblīs responds with contempt: Muʿāwiya is ignorant and would not recognize truth because his desire for the 'sheep's fat tail' – worldly delights – has blinded him. The lure of the world, the *dunyā*, is a constant peril and a tool of Iblīs.

The solution to this is the renunciation of passions while focusing on God alone and seeking refuge in Him. The formula, 'I seek refuge with God from the stoned Satan', is a particularly effective mantra. According to the companion Anas, the Messenger of God said, 'Satan places his snout on the heart of the son of Adam; if he remembers God, the Exalted, Satan slinks away, but if he forgets God, the Exalted, Satan gobbles up his heart' (Al-Ghazālī 2010: 82).

At the end, Iblīs confesses that his aim was to prevent Muʿāwiya from missing the prayer and experiencing the anguish of being separated from God, which would lead to a deeper presence with Him. This ending preserves the notion that Iblīs is never to be trusted and is always seeking to draw people away from God. This expected revelation pales in comparison to the powerful messages contained in Iblīs's three speeches, which one might expect to be Rūmī's more important points.

Indeed, some mystics present Iblīs as a teacher. In one story, reported by Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) as well as others, Jesus (ʿĪsā) is sleeping, using a rock for a pillow. Jesus is often presented in the mystical tradition as an ascetic. Iblīs passes by and says, 'Oh ʿĪsā, you have desired something in this present world'. So ʿĪsā took the rock and threw it away from beneath his head, saying, 'You may have this along with this present world' (Al-Ghazālī 2010: 97).

12.4 The will and the command

The first argument that Iblīs makes to Muʿāwiya leads in other sources to a more complex claim. Did God command the angels to bow down to Adam, but actually will them not

to? Was this a test to see whether they would recognize the deeper claim of God's fundamental demand to worship Him alone? Was Iblīs the only one to pass the test? The question involves the difference between God's will, *irāda*, and God's command, *amr*. Among the many Sufis who explored this issue, contemporary author Peter Awn focuses on a little-known thirteenth-century writer, Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī (d. 697/1298), who explored this question in depth. Ibn Ghānim described an encounter between Moses (Mūsā) and Iblīs. Moses asked why Iblīs did not bow down to Adam. Iblīs answered, 'I have been summoned to proclaim one God alone [...]'. Moses replied, 'but you abandoned the command of God!' Iblīs responded, 'He did not really command me'. Moses objected, 'did he not tell you to bow to Adam?' Iblīs answered, 'that was the command of trial not the command of His will. If it had been the command of His will, I would have bowed'.

As Ibn Ghānim plays out the argument, he expounds upon God's expansive mercy, including providing respite to Iblīs, and even supplying him with a troop of followers. Iblīs wants more, and the 'more' that he receives is God's curse. Iblīs rests, agonizing that he may never be allowed to share in God's grace (Awn 1983: 103–109).

But could he? Some Sufis, most notably Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), counterpose Iblīs and Muḥammad. Both were entirely obedient to God. Both were preachers. Iblīs taught the angels about obedience in heaven, and humans about evil on earth. Without knowing evil, one cannot know the good. Iblīs is the tragic figure who, despite fulfilling the necessary function of teaching humanity about evil, and despite maintaining a passionate love for God, is nevertheless punished by Him. Al-Ḥallāj sees Iblīs as the ideal mystic, totally absorbed in his love of God (as Iblīs confesses in his first argument to Muʿāwiya), and willing to suffer whatever torment God inflicts upon him, for to be tormented by God is to be in relationship to God, which is always the goal of the lover of God (Awn 1983: 123–129).

Al-Ḥallāj imagined this telling exchange:

> When it was said to Satan: 'Venerate Adam!' he spoke these words to God: 'is the place of honor in veneration, thus snatched from my consciousness? How can it any longer be owed to You if I must now adore Adam? What You have commanded me to do now is what you had forbidden me to do!'
> 'I am going to torture you forever.'
> 'Will You not see me while You are Torturing me?'
> 'Yes!'
> 'Then Your glance toward me will help me bear the vision of my punishment! Do as You wish with me.' (Massignon 1982: 308 [vol. 3])

Al-Ḥallāj is best known for his exuberant and public claim, *anā al-Ḥaqq*, 'I am the True', which signifies total unification with God, a unified identity with the Real realized through direct experience. For this claim, his public antics, and certain political factors, he was

executed – crucified – in 922 in Baghdad in a most gruesome manner (Massignon 1982: 560–645 [vol. 1]).

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Ḥamadhānī (d. 525/1131) discusses the fate of Iblīs in terms of the basic Muslim profession of faith: 'There is no god but God'. The domain of 'there is no God' is the realm of falsehood, while the domain of 'but God' is the Divine Presence. Iblīs is the chamberlain of the Divine Presence, of 'but God'. As such he protects the Presence of God from the desecration of the unworthy. No one can come to God without the permission of Iblīs, who tests their faith and proves their piety. Muḥammad is the teacher and Iblīs is the tester. Both are necessary for God's plan, and both are willed by God. Nothing that Iblīs does can be contrary to God's will (Awn 1983: 134–146).

Finally, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār proposes that when Iblīs did not bow to Adam, he remained focused on the essence of the divine within Adam. Yes, he was guilty of the sin of pride, but even that was in service of the desire for the secret wisdom, the gnosis, of God's essence. He is the author of the 'I' of 'I am better than he', but also warns the faithful against that same error. The rehabilitation of Iblīs is up to God. Since Iblīs is a faithful servant in God's plan, he could be deserving of reward at the time of judgment. Although he is condemned as evil, the blame for his sins cannot be laid at his door alone (Awn 1983: 151–178).

13 Iblīs in modern literature

Given the importance of the Qur'an in Muslim societies, it is not surprising that Qur'anic phrases, themes, and reworkings appear in modern literature. Equally, given the Qur'an's sanctity, such uses will often produce controversy, especially when deployed to critique certain aspects of religion or society (Toorawa 2006). The severe reaction to the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which resulted in two near-lethal attempts on his life, is a prime example.

For modern writers, the story of Iblīs can fulfil the same role that it has throughout Islamic history: to expose evil in all its forms, whether that evil be the cruelty of the secular industrial state or the scourge of patriarchy.

Muhammad Iqbal's *Payam-i-Mashriq* (A Message from the East) is a critique of Western materialism. Upon the creation of Adam, Iblīs says:

> I am no creature of mere light
> That I should bow to man.
> He is a base-born thing of dust,
> And I am of fire born.
> […]
> The stars' bodies were made by You;
> I am their motive force.

> I am the substance of the world.
> I am life's primal source.
> The body draws its soul from You.
> But I arouse the soul.
> […]
> That low-born creature of earth, man,
> Of mean intelligence,
> Though born in Your lap, will grow old
> Under my vigilance. (Iqbal 1977: 47–49)

Iblīs is the spirit of the world, of human endeavour, of curiosity, industry, and art. Iqbal sees the industry of the West and the thrall of intellectual striving as an alluring temptation that leads people away from God. The very aspects that most represent our conquest of the world are, in fact, the world's conquest of us (Schimmel 1963). In this presentation, the role of Iblīs is closer to the Christian notion of Satan as the ruler of this world.

Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian Nobel Laureate novelist, caused a furore in much of the Muslim world with the publication in 1959 of *Awlād Ḥāratnā* (Children of Gebelaawi). There were immediate protests from conservative Muslims (Mahfouz 1995: vii–x) and, in 1994, Mahfouz was stabbed by extremists. The narrative of his novel follows a family in a neighbourhood of Cairo, an allegory of the human family. The father, Gebelaawi (God), has six sons: Adham (Adam), Gebel (Moses), Rifaa (Jesus), Qaasim (Muḥammad), Arafa (scientific modernism), and Idrees (Iblīs), the eldest.

Gebelaawi announces that Adham will manage the family trust (the world) in the future. Idrees, who expected the assignment, is shocked and angered, arguing that Adham is the son of a black slave and the youngest. Gebelaawi replies that Adham is familiar with the tenants and knows most of them by name, i.e. he has knowledge, and Gebelaawi demands obedience without having to explain himself. Idrees accuses his father of being a bullying strongman.

Adham tries to soothe Idrees, but Idrees says that he will become a bandit like his father: 'I shall drag you through the mud, you who think you're lords when you're really robbers'. Idrees demands of Gebelaawi a reason for his choice. He wishes to put reason, or at least his own reasoning, as the fundamental test for any decision. His reasoning does not include the virtue of brotherhood, the supreme value by which Adham swears. But for Idrees, a family that tolerates despotism, and the violence that accompanies it, is not a place where true brotherhood can thrive. He chooses to have no brotherhood at all rather than a brotherhood founded on falsehood.

Gebelaawi expects unquestioning obedience, but Idrees rejects a God who is not accountable.

Nawal el-Saadawi's novel, *Jannāt wa Iblīs* (The Innocence of the Devil), is something of an Egyptian feminist version of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (El-Saadawi 1998). Ganat is confined to an insane asylum and reminisces about the various times when she and other women in her family were prevented from fulfilling their abilities and were often beaten by men in their families and beyond. For her refusal to adapt to a patriarchal society, she is judged to be insane. Also in the asylum are her friend Nefissa, whose younger brother is nicknamed Eblis (Iblīs), and God. God is quiet and reflective in the asylum but has an image outside as one who gives orders, who shouts out that He is the greatest and wears rows of medals on His chest. Before Ganat dies, she pens a note to Eblis saying that he is the only one amongst the slaves who refused to kneel, 'Your head never bends down'.

Here Iblīs becomes a model for all women who defy the patriarchal system, who refuse to bow down. He tries to follow Ganat's coffin and dies in the attempt. When God finds his body, he says,

> How can you leave me alone like this? O my son! […] Forgive me, my son […] He who has authority is responsible. But the world was upside down. In the court they declared me innocent and made you the scapegoat. […] Forgive me, my son. You are innocent. (El-Saadawi 1998: 129–131)

El-Saadawi argues that all those who refuse to bow to unjust commands are, like Iblīs, the victims of a religious system gone awry. In the final analysis, it is God who is responsible for the wrong in the world, not Iblīs. Society, in the name of God, gives commands that defy the supreme divine imperative for justice for all God's people, women not excepted.

Tawfiq al-Hakim's *al-Shahīd* ('The Martyr', which also means 'witness'), bears some resemblance to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor section in *The Brothers Karamazov* in its assessment of the subversive role religion plays in society (El Hakim 1989).

Iblīs visits the Pope in the Vatican at Christmas, seeking to enter 'the haven of faith', repentant, desiring to be called 'the Accursed' no longer. The Pope refuses because the edifice of the church, the articles of faith, the Day of Judgment, and the surety of the Bible, all depend on the existence of evil. Iblīs then consults the Grand Rabbi and the Sheikh of El-Azhar with the same result. Confused and dejected, Iblīs wanders the streets, crying out. His pain is heard in heaven, prompting Gabriel to appear to him.

> 'What is it that you seek?'
> 'Forgiveness'.
> 'At this time?'
> 'Am I too late?'

> ‘On the contrary, you are too early. This is not the time to change the established order. […] The order of creation must not be upset by mercy and forgiveness.’ (El Hakim 1989: 43)

Gabriel tells him to do his duty without rebelling, to which Satan replies,

> If I had really wanted to rebel, I would have revolted, broken my loyalty, defied my orders […] But I love, and I seek not to revolt; my love for God is the secret strength by which the structure He has made of earth holds together. It is the secret of the harmony of His laws and His order. (El Hakim 1989: 45)

Iblīs is committed to obedient disobedience to God, though this obedience does not bring joy, mercy, and consolation, but rather suffering and self-hatred.

14 Iblīs and Judas Iscariot

A final suggestive comparison can be explored between Iblīs and Judas Iscariot in Christianity. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, betrayed Jesus to the priests, leading to the latter’s trial before the Sanhedrin and, finally, to his crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. In the Gospel accounts Judas is associated with Satan on several occasions (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Both Iblīs and Judas Iscariot are seen as the epitome of evil in their respective traditions, yet both narratives contain mysteries and contradictions. Why did Iblīs, whether angel or jinn, refuse to bow down to Adam? Why did he then take on the role of a dedicated adversary of humanity? As we have seen, various Muslim authors have struggled with these questions, generating a variety of answers. Similarly, why did Judas, a chosen disciple, betray (or ‘hand over’) Jesus to the priests (Paffenroth 2001)? How do we understand what he did given that the structure of Christian theology depends on the crucifixion of Jesus, which in turn depends on the action of Judas (Cane 2005)?

In both narratives, the despised person fulfils a vital role in the general theology of their respective traditions. Both have been interpreted as tragic figures, suggesting that their devotion to God be taken seriously, and that their role in the unfolding of the path towards God is both vital and perhaps even enlightening.

Attributions

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