



ISLAMIC POLITICAL ETHICS IN ADVICE
LITERATURE: IBN QUTAYBAH AND HIS *KITĀB*
AL-SULTĀN OF *UYŪN AL-AKHBĀR*

BY

FIQIH RISALLAH

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International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization

International Islamic University
Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This present study is designed to focus on Islamic political ethics in advice literature and takes *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* of Ibn Qutaybah's *Uyūn al-Akhhbār* as the object of the study. It aims to expound the ethical principles in it and outline it on the basis of political practices. In fact, some scholars of Islamic political thought, both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, less appreciate this work, along with its similar types. Having the elements of Mirrors for Princes Genre notwithstanding, *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* of *Uyūn al-Akhhbār* was not classified by some as a Mirror work. Yet, for others, they objectively see it as such and further argue that, with other similar works, it has its own merit in forming the theory of Islamic polity in general. For this, the discussion in the first chapter traces the genre of Mirrors for Princes and its development in Islamic advice literature, so as to clarify the *Uyūn al-Akhhbār*'s genre; with Ibn Qutaybah's life and works briefly presented. The second chapter is the core study expounding all the ethical qualities found in *Kitāb al-Sulṭān*, under three spectrums of discussion. Qualities within the spectrum on the practice of political authority are presented in fourteen topics, related to governmental and administrative circles. There are three dispositions pointed out within the second spectrum that Ibn Qutaybah tried to remind us in his book, which accordingly can abuse the political power such as following passion, oppression, and disloyalty. To overcome all of these, within the third spectrum on principles of political actions, Ibn Qutaybah puts an emphasis on uplifting the religious values such as justice, enjoining good and forbidding evil, trustworthy, moderation, and responsibility for those who engage in practical conduct of governance, the ruler and the ruled, in order to obtain success in managing public affairs. In chapter three, the discussion is on Ibn Qutaybah's contribution to Islamic political thought. It analyzes his method of assimilating the values of the great traditions, which are of course in conformity with Islamic teaching, as indicated in *Kitāb al-Sulṭān*. What he meant was an adjustment of the wisdom prevalent in the Persian and other lore into Muslim understanding. Still, in this chapter, the study then makes reflections of his ethical qualities on the contemporary significance, which are relevant to today's politics. In this respect, his mirror work, *Kitāb al-Sulṭān*, is also a kind of refinement and remedy for contemporary political paucity. This study subsequently arrives at the conclusion that, according to Ibn Qutaybah, religiosity with its ethical values is of the utmost importance in an Islamic polity, for it will therefore lead with God's grace to success here on earth as well as in the hereafter.

خلاصة البحث

يركز هذا البحث على أخلاقيات السياسة الإسلامية في أدب النصيحة من خلال دراسة كتاب السلطان من عيون الأخبار لابن قتيبة. والهدف من هذه الدراسة هو شرح المبادئ الأخلاقية وذلك من منطلق الممارسات السياسية. لقد أهمل بعض علماء الفكر السياسي الإسلامي - مسلمون وغير مسلمين - هذا الكتاب وانشغلوا عنه بكتب أخرى تحمل نفس المادة. ورغم أن هذا الكتاب يحوي عناصر من أدب النصيحة إلا أنه لم يصنف كجزء منها. يرى آخرون أن هذا الكتاب جزء من أدب النصيحة وله دور في تشكيل نظرية السياسة الإسلامية عملاً لا قولاً. لهذا، يناقش الباحث في الفصل الأول آثار هذا النوع الأدبي وتطوره في أدب النصيحة. كل ذلك من أجل توضيح النوع الأدبي من كتاب عيون الأخبار؛ وقبل ذلك بقليل يعرض الباحث في إيجاز مؤلفات ابن قتيبة وحياته. أما الفصل الثاني فيشمل ويشرح كل الصفات الأخلاقية الموجودة في كتاب السلطان تحت ثلاثة عناصر. ويقدم الباحث أربعة عشر موضوعاً تتعلق بالدوائر الحكومية والإدارية تحت العنصر الأول، بما يشجع على الممارسة في السلطة السياسية. وهناك ثلاثة أنواع من أنواع التصرف في العنصر الثاني مثل اتباع الهوى والظلم والخيانة. حاول ابن قتيبة في كتابه هذا أن يذكرنا بأنها تستطيع أن تسيء استعمال السياسة. وقصد ابن قتيبة أن يتجنب تلك التصرفات بالتأكيد على رفع مستوى القيم الدينية وهي العدالة والأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر والثقة والتوسط والمسؤولية لمن يعملون -الراعي والرعية- في مجال الإدارة الحكومية حتى يحصلوا على ثقة الناس وعلى النجاح في إدارة الشؤون العامة. يناقش الفصل الثالث مساهمة ابن قتيبة في الفكر السياسي الإسلامي محلاً طريقته في دمج التقاليد العظيمة الخارجية التي تتفق مع تعاليم الإسلام كما نجد في كتاب السلطان. فالمقصود هو أن تتكيف حكمة التقاليد الفارسية وغيرها في فهم المسلمين. فهنا، تعكس هذه الدراسة فكر ابن قتيبة عن الصفات الأخلاقية المعاصرة التي تتناسب مع الحالة السياسية اليوم. وهكذا، يكون كتاب السلطان لابن قتيبة علاجاً وتهذيباً للنقصان في السياسة المعاصرة. وفي حتام هذه الدراسة يؤكد ابن قتيبة على أن القيم الأخلاقية هي من أهم العناصر في السياسة الإسلامية لأنها سوف تؤدي إلى رحمة الله ورضاه ومن ثم إلى النجاح في الدنيا والآخرة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study, and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in World Muslim Issues.

.....
Muddathir Abdel-Rahim
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in World Muslim Issues.

.....
Muhammad Uthman el-Muhammady
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyyah of ISTAC and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in World Muslim Issues.

.....
Hassan Ahmad Ibrahim
Dean of International Institute of
Islamic Thought and Civilization

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Fiqih Risallah

Signature.....

Date.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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Date

Dedicated to
my mother Mukarromah and my father Suhud Wahyudi,
and all my family members, also to my wife and our qurrota a'yūn
Radhy Euwald Risalah

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INTRODUCTION

Intensified by the domination of a secular Western view in world politics today, religiosity is showing a decline in the political conduct of Muslim communities. This is in line with the theory of secularization in which its process leads to a decline in religious practice though not at the expense of religious faith,¹ indicating that it must only be for the private sphere. Yet, from the study of political thought and practice in Islam, religion can and even must be for both the private and public sphere. This is because, as understood by Muslims around the world, Islam is the divine religion (*al-dīn*)² having its own characteristics and features, differentiating itself from others on the basis that it is believed to have come down to guide all of human activities through God's revelation—*al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* and His messenger's *ḥadīth*.³

With regard to the Qur'ān as Divine Speech (*Kalāmullāh*), its verses have been classified into two types, which are called the *muḥkamāt* (fixed and clear meaning)

¹ For a general survey about the theory of secularization, see in Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), Brian Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Cf. Sarah Nicolet and Anke Tresh, *Changing Religiosity, Changing Politics? The Impact of Traditional and post-Traditional Forms of Religiosity on Political Attitudes: Evidence from the Swiss Case*, a paper presented at the MPSA Annual National Conference on 3-6 April 2008 held in Chicago. Retrieved from http://www.unige.ch/ses/spo/Members/Enseignants/Nicolet/researches/MPSA_Nicolet_Tresh. Moreover, they presented in their paper that the decline in religious practice of the Christendom does not affect their religious faith.

² *Al-dīn* simply means a way of life.

³ Leonard Binder, in his writing, admitted the difference of mindset between politics in Islam and in others. He pens, “once we have indicated that we have not the wherewithal to solve the normative controversy, we must further admit that no adduction of instances of good or bad political behavior can prove that the revelation on which Islam is based is either true or false. The Political Scientist (read: outside Islam) is not properly interested in that question at all.” Leonard Binder, “The Proofs of Islam: Religion and Politics in Iran,” in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton Alexander Roskeen Gibb*, (ed.) George Makdisi, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 118.

and the *mutashābihāt* verses (allegorical and vague).⁴ Moreover, as Divine guidance for human life, these two classifications illustrate that all aspects of human activity fall into two categories. First, it is the category that God has decided definitely, which is eternal and constant; the *muḥkamāt*. Second, it is the category that God has laid down as general rule, but has allowed humans to delve into and develop in accordance with the time and circumstance; the *mutashābihāt*. On the basis of this understanding, the realm of politics in Islam therefore falls in the latter, yet has the value⁵ aspects belonging to the former (namely ethics)⁶—such as justice, trustworthiness, moderation, etc.—or “rule of wisdom,” to borrow Prof. Majid Fakhry’s terminology.⁷ Despite the fact that Muslim theologians, philosophers, and Sufis have their own perspectives of ethics within Islam, the writers of advice literature view it through the perspective of political organization (*siyāsāt*). They argue that a state of *siyāsāt* must be conducted in accordance with the rule of wisdom in achieving the goal of life; happiness within the diversity of needs and capabilities of social life. In other words, ethical behavior, in an Islamic polity, is ideally viewed as a response to the recognition of divinity, as Islamic

⁴ The Message of The Qur’ān, *sūrah The House of ‘Imrān* (3) verse: 7. “He It is Who has bestowed upon thee (Muḥammad pbuh) from on high this divine writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves—and these are the essence of the divine writ—as well as others that are allegorical.” *The Message of The Qur’ān*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad, (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 93, hereinafter cited as *The Message of The Qur’ān*.

⁵ Value ought to be understood here in the light of Islamic worldview as “entities containing of concomitant truth.” See for detail in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 2001), 119, hereinafter cited as *Prolegomena*.

⁶ With regard to the verse, Muhammad Asad elaborates the sense that the ayat *mutashabihat* may be defined as those passages of the Qur’an which are expressed in a figurative manner, with a meaning that is metaphorically implied but not directly, in so many words, stated. The ayat *muḥkamāt* are described as the “essence of the divine writ” (*‘umm al-kitāb*) because they comprise the fundamental principles underlying its message and, in particular, its ethical and social teachings: and it is only on the basis of these clearly enunciated principles that the allegorical passages can be correctly interpreted. Cf. *The Message of The Qur’ān*, 93.

⁷ Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994), 136, hereinafter cited as *Ethical*.

ethics proceeds from thinking about God.⁸ This means politics are not excluded from morality (religious principles) since religiosity, based on this liaison, becomes a moral determinant/parameter in accomplishing worldly affairs.⁹ To agree with Muhammad Asad, this issue of social configuration has metaphysical implications, due to society and politics, which are closely connected with spiritual problems and cannot, therefore, be dissociated from what Muslims conceive of as religion.¹⁰

In fact, in the history of political thought and practice of Islam, this legal separation did not prevail until the fall of Ottoman Empire in 1924, by the so-called secularism, which intended to dampen politics from holistically religious concerns into corporeal existence. It denotes “the disappearance of religious determination of the symbols of cultural integration.”¹¹ Meanwhile, the history of political thought in Islam relate the distinct facts that always attract scholars to discussion because of the multitude of them, Muslim and non-Muslim have practically ignored their existence. This is because Islam has always been and is still becoming the most effective way of viewing the phenomena of life and guiding all human activities. This premise is noted comprehensively by Prof. Muddathir in his book that,

politics, government, and administration, like economic, financial, and socio-cultural forms of conduct, have always been regarded in the

⁸ Tamara Sonn, “Political Authority in Classical Islamic Thought,” in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Fall 1996), 310. Hereinafter cited as *Political*.

⁹ A.K.S. Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors for Princes,” *La Persia nel medioevo: Atti del Convegno internazionale, Rome, 1970. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Quaderno n. 160, Rome 1971*, 419, in A.K.S. Lambton, *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government*, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), hereinafter cited as *Islamic Mirrors*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992), 23. See also in al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 21. For a particular discussion on relationship between religion and politics within Islamic perspective of Muslim jurist, refer to Yūsuf al-Qardhawi, *al-Dīn wa al-Siyāsah*, (Madinat Nasr, Misr: Dār al-Shuruq, 2007). See also for the discussion on Sufism and politics in Islam which proofs a complementary relationship between spirituality as human-inner necessity and politics as human worldly phenomenon, Paul L. Heck (ed.), *Sufism and Politics*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publisher, 2006), hereinafter cited as *Sufism*.

¹⁰ Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009), (v).

¹¹ Definition was given by the Dutch theologian Cornelis van Peursen and cited in Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, (New York: n.p., 1965), 2. Cf. S.M.N. al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 2001), 17, hereinafter cited as *Islām*.

Islamic tradition as matters of great religious and ethical, rather than of purely practical and managerial, importance. The establishment of justice; the harmonization of the interests of individuals, groups, and the state; the defense of the *ummah* and the realm; and the determination of the rights and obligations of the rulers and the ruled (Muslims and non-Muslim alike), have therefore been major issues of concern in Muslim societies from the time of Prophet Muhammad *pbuh* to this day and age.¹²

Muslims scholarship therefore inherited many works to be studied for the benefit of our present time. If we look at them objectively, the true *ulamā'* or religious scholars,¹³ never exclude political discussions in their works, albeit in different scale of interests. All these works are undoubtedly imbued by the Qur'ān along with the Prophetic traditions, which is the fundamental source of Islamic ethics. One of the early political writings on Islamic ethics is *Uyūn al-Akḥbār*, written by a man of *adab* (*al-adīb*),¹⁴ named Abū Muḥammad Abdullāh Ibn Qutaybah (828 - 889 CE/213 - 276 AH).¹⁵ This book was presented in literary character, but this present study will examine it through the perspective of the political ideals presented in it.

Ibn Qutaybah was a versatile and prolific Muslim scholar, who authored many books and according to Ibn al-Nadīm was an authority on Arabic language, grammar,

¹² Muddathir Abdel-Rahim, *The Human Rights Tradition in Islam*, (London: Praeger Perspectives, 2005), 40, hereinafter cited as *Human Rights*.

¹³ In classical Islam, both the definition of knowledge and its classification was a major intellectual activity. An *'ālim* (scholar) was anyone who acquired *'ilm*, or knowledge, which was itself described in a broad sense. Knowledge in its truly Islamic culture meant everything from theology and philosophy to art, literature, and science both natural and social sciences as well. Therefore, all learned- men, scientists as well as philosophers, scholars as well as theologians, constituted the *'ulamā'*. The term *'ilm* unfortunately had been increasingly reduced into merely as religious knowledge, as the consequence the *'ulamā'* came to constitute only for religious scholars. Cf. Ziauddin Sardar, *Beyond the Troubled Relationship*. Retrieved from <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v448/n7150/full/448131a.html>.

¹⁴ Ibn Qutaybah is the man of *adab* (*al-adīb*) constituting of being the person who possesses either good manners or any of various sciences since the word *adab* in the 'Abbāsīd era denoted ideal manners and possession of the knowledge of various sciences. Al-ḫāṣṣī gives definition for *al-adīb* as someone who asks others to do what he has to do and how he himself should become, in his behavior, characters, actions, and speeches. See in Al-Murādī, *al-Ishārah ilā Adab al-Imārah*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1981), 237. Cf. Nasrat, *Semantics*, 198.

¹⁵ Imām Alī al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, (ed.) Muṣṭafā Abdu'l-Qādir 'Athā', (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 10: 168, hereinafter cited as *Tārīkh*. Also see in Fu'ad Sazkin, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, trans. 'Urfah Muṣṭafā, ed. Māzan 'Umaway, (Qum: Maṭba'ah Ismā'iliyān, 1988), 5: 288.

gharīb form in the Qur’ān, interpretation of poetry and law.¹⁶ Meanwhile, at some stage Ibn Qutaybah put his literary talents towards the service of the restoration of the Sunni ideology, which was undertaken by al-Mutawakkil and his followers. Unfortunately, to modern scholars in the West notwithstanding, he is better known as a humanist in the Abbasids era, rather than as a theologian.¹⁷ Meanwhile, by and large, all the religious, political, and literary works of Ibn Qutaybah combined make him an eminent representative, if not the exclusive spokesman, of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’ah*, which in fact from this period was a party of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty after the abandonment of the Mu’tazili’s ideology. In this respect, Ibn Taimiyyah once says about Ibn Qutaybah that, “he is to the *Sunni* like al-Jāhīz is to the Mu’tazili, as he is the spokesman for the *Sunni* and al-Jāhīz is the spokesman for the *Mu’tazili*.”¹⁸

From this background, this present study is about expounding Islamic political ethics promoted in the *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* of Ibn Qutaybah’s *Uyūn al-Akhhbār* in which *Uyūn al-Akhhbār* in general has been regarded as the first comprehensive manual on

¹⁶ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, trans. Bayard Dogde, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1: 170, hereinafter cited as *The Fihrist*. It is once cited that he was surprisingly the first scholar, if not, at least one of pioneers, ever introduced the systematic way of writing a book into chapters (in the second half of third century AH). Refer to al-Husaynī, *Ibn Qutaybah*, translated into Arabic by Hāshīm Yaghī (Bayrūt: Muassasah Arabiyah Li al-Dirāsah wa al-Nashr, 1980), 67-70, hereinafter cited as *Ibn Qutaybah*. Also, in his monumental book, Prof. Hitti credits Ibn Qutaybah as among the earliest formal historian in Islām. Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: from the Earliest Times to the Present*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002) 10th edition, 487.

¹⁷ Amnah Bahari noted in this regard that the term ‘*humanist*’ should not be understood as the person who fights for human rights as such but it should be viewed in terms of a person who holds to moral or ethical ideas in writing as well as practices these ideas in his life. See in Amnah Bahari, “Ibn Qutaybah on Certain Controversial Kalamīc Issues: A Thorough Analysis of his Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth,” (Ph.D dissertation, ISTAC-IIUM, 1998), 20, hereinafter cited as *Kalamīc*.

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū’ Fatāwā*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-‘Arabiyyah, 1978), vol. 17, 391-392. With the same regard, another expression given by Paul H. Heck that In Qutaybah and his predecessor, al-Jāhīz, were the two most prominent representatives of the movement to defend and develop the Arabo-Islamic heritage in response to those disparaging it, preference Persian and Sassanian values (*al-shu’ūbiyyah*); Ibn Qutaybah was not against Persian ideas and values *per se*, but rather sought to formulate them a new Arabo-Islamic forms of the highest literary standards. See in Paul L. Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudāma b. Ja’far and his Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā’at al-Kitāba*, (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2002), 45, hereinafter cited as *The Construction*.

the subject compiled from the Qur'ān, *aḥādīth*, pre-Islamic and Persian literatures.¹⁹ Unlike a theoretical book, *Kitāb al-Sultān* in particular was not written to present Ibn Qutaybah's theory of government in Islam,²⁰ but rather on the ethics of statecraft, which is devoted to advising rulers on various aspects of government with didactic narratives.²¹ It can be said that, for Ibn Qutaybah, it was intended to expound a politico-religious doctrine, which it might be expected would fill the gap in the ideological line of the Sunna after the abandonment of the Mu'tazili's policy.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Departing from an ubiquitous premise that politics, in its broader experience, is evil and depends on a sort of authoritarian's interest,²² the problem which this study discusses is that, as alluded to earlier, are the two principles, *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, of which all Islamic discussions pertaining to individual and social affairs are categorized. Despite the fact that politics resides within the latter realm, there are still values, which indeed belong to the former realm pertaining to political affairs; notions based on religious principles whose legal ground is constantly fixed forever e.g. justice, trustworthy, moderation, etc. Hence, this distinguishes politics in

¹⁹ Nik Roskiman Abdul Samad, *al-Ghazālī on Administrative Ethics*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC-IIUM, 2003), 9, hereinafter cited as *Administrative*. Professor Horovitz credits Ibn Qutaybah who seems to have been the first who treated the subject—of *'Uyūn al-Akhbār*—systematically. Josef Horovitz, "Ibn Quteiba's 'Uyun al-Akhbar," *Islamic Culture: the Hyderabad Quarterly Review*, (Hyderabad, Deccan, 1930), vol. 4: 171, hereinafter cited as *Ibn Quteiba*. See also in *the Encyclopaedia Britannica Guide to the Islamic World: Religion, History and Future*, introduction by Ziauddin Sardar, (UK: Robinson, 2009), 311.

²⁰ See Prof. Lambton's view on this work, A.K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 65, hereinafter cited as *State*. With regard to this, Erwin Rosenthal concluded that it is the nature of the views of the Mirrors' authors who do not offer a considered theory or systematic whole but rather are isolated reflections of a religious mind interested in the art of government. See Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: an Introductory Outline*, (Cambridge: The Syndics of The Cambridge University Press, 1958), 71, hereinafter cited as *Political Thought*.

²¹ Refer to Sajida Sultana Alvi, *Advice on the Art of Governance: an Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princess Mau'izah al-Jahāngīrī of Muḥammad Bāqir Najm al-Ṣānī*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 1, hereinafter cited as *Advice*.

²² See the footnote no. 27 in chapter three.

Islam from its western counterpart. These values in Islamic scholarship eventually find their roots in the form of Islamic advice literature.

For this very reason, this present study is on Islamic ethics, which is the axiological study of morality from the Islamic perspective.²³ Yet, there is no accurate nomenclature word in Islamic tradition for ‘ethics’ as used and understood in English.²⁴ Historically speaking, in terms of political science which is closely connected with ethics, Islamic political thinkers treated ethics as related to theology and not separated under moral philosophy, like that of the Greek thought.²⁵ In the Islamic tradition, the concept of ethics is unlike that of Christianity. Muslim scholars never accepted the classical Greek division of sciences into practical and speculative, upon which Christian theology is based; there is no theology as such in Islamic tradition but *kalām* (disputation or discussion).²⁶ One effect of this division is the separation of ethics (practical) from theology (speculative). Such a separation is unworkable in the Islamic paradigm, since ethical behavior in Islam is ideally viewed as a response to the recognition of God, which has its roots in the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s traditions.²⁷

In the study of moral philosophy, the most frequent term used to refer to ethics is *akhlāq* or *‘ilm al-akhlāq* (the science of virtue) and *adab*, which renders as

²³ It can be said that the main business of ethics constitutes the general study of goodness and the general study of right action though there are several division. Refer to John Deigh, “Ethics” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, general editor. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 244-9.

²⁴ Erwin Rosenthal consciously avers that by writing Islamic contents within English it actually does not carry their real comprehensive meaning as appeared in Arabic, in his words: “it is unfortunate that we must use Western terms to translate the Arabic ones, for in so doing we distort their original meaning and give them a Christian connotation.” See Erwin Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 7-9.

²⁵ Lambton, *State...*, xiv.

²⁶ *Kalām* science was developed in the early Islamic centuries to analyze rationally certain Qur’ānic descriptions of God and to demystify the Qur’ān by figuratively interpreting some of its statements about God, using Greek philosophical principles. The pioneer formulator of *kalām* is Imām al-Ash’arī (d. 935) who stated that God is beyond human comprehension and that only God’s effects are knowable.

²⁷ See footnote no. 19 in this chapter.

individual character; sometimes both are used interchangeably. *Adab* in the early period of Islam has three meanings, namely words, conduct, and good behavior.²⁸ In that period, certain forms of conduct were more particularly designated by the term *adab* rather than *akhlāq*. To an extent, the word *adab* in English is also translated as *belles-lettres*. Its other meanings include, to be well-bred, well-mannered, cultured, urbane, and have refined tastes.²⁹ For this reason unsurprisingly, the works on mirror for princess or advice for rulers, therefore, are categorized under *adab* literature. For instance, Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Ādāb al-Kabīr* and *Ādāb al-Ṣagbīr* are in this genre,³⁰ and as well as the subject of the present thesis, *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār*, which was written within the framework of Islamic ethics, excluding its pre-Islamic elements and Persian literature. Therefore, according to the understanding of Islamic administration, any action taken must be right and proper and in accordance with the teachings of Islam, for only then is an administrator or a ruler regarded as having performed "justice".³¹ For the very actualization of *adab* in individual selves, according to Prof. al-Attas, composing society as a collective entity reflects from the condition of justice (*'adl*). Justice itself is a reflection of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), which is the light that is lit from the

²⁸ Nasrat Abdul-Rahman further argues that the plural word of *adab* was not formed from *da'b* (دأب) because the word *adab* was not pluralized or preceded by the definite article in early Islam, as to counter the etymology of the word put forward by Vollers and Nallino in the Italian orientalist Francesco Gabrieli (*EP*) that, the plural of *da'b* after transmission to a noun should be *du'ūb/ad'ab* not *ādāb*. For surveys of comparison in this subject, see Nasrat Abdul-Rahman, "The Semantics of Adab in Arabic," *al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1997), 189-207, hereinafter cited as *Semantics*. Francesco Gabrieli, "Adab," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 175-6. In addition, the discussion on *adab* from Islamic perspective for the contemporary age has been done by Professor al-Attas as to show the proper and exact translation of given meaning "*al-ta'dīb*" for education in Islamic worldview instead of the common English meaning. S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 22.

²⁹ Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J.M. Cowan (New York: Spoken Language Service, 1976), 9, hereinafter cited as *Hans Wehr*.

³⁰ Lambton, *Islamic Mirrors...*, 422.

³¹ Roskiman, *Administrative*, 10.

lamp of prophecy, that enables the recipient to discover the right and proper place for a thing or a being to be.³²

Furthermore, this present thesis is an attempt to elucidate the fixed-value aspect of Islamic political thought, which influences political practices, in order to argue for the above-said premise with regard to the decay of politics at present. In addition, from that paradoxical stigma which underlines politics in general and admittedly has permeated even so-called Islamic political thought, these kinds of politics are actually the fruit of a long process of the secular view of the West, which is in its nature omitting of normative values; a manifestation of human spiritual needs. Thus, it is necessary for this thesis to argue that politics theoretically—even with human errors in its practice—is not corrupt, if it is to be understood properly from its normative principles. The emphasis is then that if one has trespassed on the line, that is the *muhkamāt* aspect, one can be regarded as doing an evil. Unfortunately, caused by this very action, sometimes it leads to a stigmatizing politics full of fraudulent activities. From the Divine signal, whereas God has reminded us not to disregard the principles He has set out, the consequence of which is the absence of His Mercy, meaning Muslims no longer have majesty in this world. Therefore, it implies that, subscribing and instilling politics with religiosity, in the Islamic worldview, is mandatory to secure God's grace within Muslim life.³³

This present study deliberately focuses on Ibn Qutaybah's '*Uyūn al-Akhbār*, particularly the first of the ten books within *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* (the book of

³² Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 17. See also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 132-151, hereinafter cited as *The Educational*.

³³ *The Message of The Qur'ān*, 5: 55-56.

authority/government), which actually discusses Islamic political ethics.³⁴ In addition, this work categorically falls in the genre of advice literature, which is well-known in Western scholarship as the ‘Mirrors for Princes’; in Latin it is ‘*Specula Principum*’ or ‘*Speculum Regis*’; in French, ‘*Miroir Aux Princes*’, and in German it is as ‘*Fürstenspiegel*’; while in Islamic scholarship it is sometimes called ‘*Arabic Naṣīḥah*’.³⁵

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this present study is to expound one of the earlier Islamic discussions on political thought, namely political ethics within advice literature, focusing on the book of authority by Ibn Qutaybah’s *Kitāb al-Sultān* of his ‘*Uyūn al-Akḥbār*. This study is also aimed to clarify the literary genre of this book, ever since Prof. Lambton³⁶ and Prof. Crone³⁷ did not categorize it in their writings on “Mirrors for Princes”. Due to such partial consideration of Western scholarship *per se*,³⁸ according to Prof. Black, it later monopolizes the study of political science, as though, the only history of political is Western. This subject has been hitherto taught and

³⁴ Ibn Qutaybah, ‘*Uyūn al-Akḥbār*, ed. Yūsūf ‘Alī Ṭawīl, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1998), vol 1-2, hereinafter cited as ‘*Uyūn al-Akḥbār*. In addition, Sir Hamilton Gibb translated ‘*Uyūn al-Akḥbār* with “the Fountains of Story” as his appreciation of that book in the function of a literary thesaurus. The researcher, however, would prefer to render it as “Springs of Narratives” since it narrates the focal information of its time to take its essence as exemplary horizon of political knowledge. See H.A.R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, (England: Oxford University Press, 1926), 55, hereinafter cited as *Arabic Literature*.

³⁵ Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 149, hereinafter cited as *Medieval*.

³⁶ Lambton, *Islamic Mirrors...*, 419-442.

³⁷ Crone, *Medieval*, 148-164.

³⁸ Writers dealing with Islamic Political Thought—from Ibn Khaldūn in the fourteenth century to Rosenthal and Lambton in the twentieth—have not given enough importance to the Mirrors literature, primarily because of its literary character. It is true that this genre neither offers a systematic interpretation of political thought in a given period nor ventures upon a systematic treatment of the problems of government, state, and society. However, it can complement other historical and philosophical works. See Alvi, *Advice*, 1.

studied ubiquitously because the study of political science, far and wide, has a basis solely from the Western experience.³⁹

Through this present study, the ethical ideas of Islamic political thought in *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* will be outlined. Therefore, with the prevalence of this study and those like it, the Islamic history of political thought can be viewed and studied along with other histories of political thought objectively. In addition, this present study is also an attempt to point out that Islamic polity, which is based on its principles, does not produce extremism or tyrannical ideas, as now has become the popular image in the West.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Studying an authoritative work of classical Muslim scholars like Ibn Qutaybah's *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* is significant for the present time, especially with the challenges of the modern secular view that has been permeating in political affairs, resulting in the lack of moral, practical conduct. Dealing with this classical work, the present thesis will prove that such discussion, in response to the degradation of political conduct, has already existed in the early work of Muslim religious scholars. *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* in Ibn Qutaybah's *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār* fills this need respectively.

The book was written in literary Arabic *naṣīḥah* style, intended to refine the misconduct of political practices, the result of which is both pleasing and interesting notwithstanding.⁴⁰ This furthermore makes the book compatible and relevant to discuss in our contemporary period. Arranged by the author systematically, *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* is the first of ten books in *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār*. It is indeed a classical Islamic

³⁹ See in the introduction. Antony Black, *the History of Islamic Political Thought; from the Prophet to the Present*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 4, hereinafter cited as *The History*.

⁴⁰ Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, 55.

work, which is generally classified as a historical book containing narrated events, yet not in the sense of historical events but moral messages lying therein, during and before Ibn Qutaybah's time. Hence, it is the political ideas in this book, concerned with *adab*⁴¹, which are the subject of this study.

Finally, this discussion on the ethical principles of Islamic polity, which underlies the practice of a state to which Islamic law is the basis of its constitution, has not outlived its usefulness for today. Nevertheless, the unfortunate fact is that none of the existing Muslim countries have so far achieved a form of government that could be considered as genuinely Islamic. For this very reason, it makes this present study necessary, if not imperative, at least for those for whom Islam represents as the dominant reality in their lives. Also, it is a hope that this effort will benefit in recapturing the classical Islamic scholarship on political thought and projecting it into the needs of the contemporary world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ibn Qutaybah's *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār* is well known as a book of history, with its literary character in nature notwithstanding. Given that this book comprises Islamic ethics, this study will extract the political ethics present therein. It is limited in focus, however, only on the first book namely *Kitāb al-Sulṭān*, and outlines its ethical ideas of political conduct therein. In addition to this limitation, a query may arise for using only the first instead of the entire ten books of *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār*. The contents within *Kitāb al-Sulṭān* deliberately discuss administrative and governmental issues apart from the other nine books. For this reason, this study then meets the point to grasp the Islamic ethical values of political conduct prevalent in this book. Furthermore, after

⁴¹ *Adab* necessarily means ethics in English words.

outlining them, we will reflect the points regarding their significance pertaining to contemporary world politics.

This present study is a qualitative research that will rely on methodological textual analysis.⁴² As far as the research material is concerned, there are two editions found; the first being published in Egypt in 1963 by *al-Muassasah al-Miṣriyah al-‘Āmah*,⁴³ and the second published by *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah* in *Bayrūt* Lebanon in 1998. For the latter, it was edited along with citations by Yūsuf ‘Alī Ṭawīl. We, however, will rely mostly upon the *Bayrūt* edition, without necessarily ignoring the former edition as its primary source.

Pertaining to the word *sulṭān*,⁴⁴ which appears as the first book of *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, it ought to be understood clearly between two meanings; the first is simply an authority or a power, and the second is a ruler who has worldly legitimation of authority/political power. In addition to this, Bernard Lewis rendered it as a government, not a ruler.⁴⁵ To avoid such misconception, however, the use of the word will be elucidated within the bracket, so as to be clear of what Ibn Qutaybah means. Also, all translations from the selective citations of Arabic in this study are based mostly on Professor Joseph Horowitz’s translation, which was published in *Islamic Culture Journal* in 1930. In addition, in rendering some Qur’ānic verses within this present study, the researcher therefore will refer to Mohammad Asad’s English

⁴² *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 451.

⁴³ This edition was reprinted from periodic edition of *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah* which its volume one of *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār* was published in 1343/1924, volume two in 1346/1926, volume three in 1348/1928, and volume four in 1349/1930.

⁴⁴ It literally translates as ‘authority’ or ‘power’.

⁴⁵ *Hans Wehr*, 422, Refer to Bernard Lewis (ed.), *Islam: from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1976), 1: 184.