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Does the Qur'an Teach Creation *Ex Nihilo?*

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The canonical scriptures of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition are content to affirm that God is the sovereign of creation, without giving a precise description of the creation and without offering a full account of where matter came from. On the doctrine of creation, however, mainstream theology in the three great monotheistic religions has gone considerably beyond the mandate of their respective scriptures.

The Judeo-Christian Matrix

"Traditional Christian doctrine," as W. R. Inge terms it, is "that the world was created out of nothing by an act of the Divine will, and in time."¹ "Believing Jews and Christians," writes J. A. Goldstein, "have long been convinced that their religion teaches that God created the world *ex nihilo*, from absolutely nothing. Yet medieval Jewish thinkers still held that the account of creation in Genesis could be interpreted to mean that God created from preexisting formless matter, and ancient Jewish texts state that he did so."² "It would be wrong," the editors of the New Jerusalem Bible say of Genesis 1:1, "to read the metaphysical concept of 'creation from nothingness' into the text." This notion, they say, was not to be formulated earlier than 2 Maccabees 7:28, which is to say in the period between the close of the Hebrew scriptures and the rise

of Christianity.³ “The Hebrew words conventionally rendered ‘create,’ ” notes T. H. Gaster, “though they came eventually to be used in an extended, metaphorical sense, are derived from handicrafts and plastic arts, and refer primarily to the mechanical fashioning of shapes, not to biological processes or metaphysical bringing into existence.” They originally denoted actions such as to cut out or pare leather, to mold something into shape, or to fabricate something.⁴ Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Bible can describe creation as “the work of [God’s] hands.”⁵ (And it scarcely needs to be pointed out that the presupposition underlying such terms and such a description is anthropomorphic in the extreme.)⁶ “Throughout the Old Testament,” writes Keith Norman, “the image is that of the craftsman fashioning a work of art and skill, the potter shaping the vessel out of clay, or the weaver at his loom.”⁷ With that modifying fact in mind, we can proceed to Theodore Gaster’s recognition that, in the Bible, “All things are represented as coming into being solely by the fiat of God. [But] it is nowhere stated out of what substances they were composed, for the central theme is not the physical origin of phenomena but their role in human existence and the orchestration of their several functions, what John Donne called ‘the concinnity of parts.’ ” (Nonetheless, water and wind, because of their inchoate and apparently ungenerated nature, seem to have been granted some kind of priority.)⁸

In the intertestamental period, Gaster finds “a certain amount of ambivalence regarding the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.”⁹ As noted above, 2 Maccabees 7:28 seems to affirm it – a fact which had been noted as early as Origen of Alexandria.¹⁰ Was Origen correct in his interpretation? The Syriac recension of 2 Maccabees as well as some Greek manuscripts describe rather an organization of inchoate matter, which is the explicit position of *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:17.¹¹ And this latter notion seems, indeed, to fit the

argument of 2 Maccabees 7 considerably better than does a notion of creation out of nothing. In that argument, a zealous Jewish matriarch exhorts her sons to die rather than submit to the unrighteous demands of Antiochus: Do not fear, she tells them. God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and created man in the same way within the mother's womb. So, also in the same way, will he raise you up to life after death. But of course, as Jews of the Maccabean period well knew, human conception does not occur *ex nihilo*. Not surprisingly, therefore, recent scholarship on 2 Maccabees has denied that that work teaches an origination out of nothing, noting along the way that the Greek words often translated as "out of nothing" are ambiguous.¹²

Still, the connection between an expectation of physical resurrection and faith in God's creative power, so clearly enunciated in 2 Maccabees 7, is of considerable interest for Qur'anic studies. "In essence," says Jonathan Goldstein, who nevertheless denies that 2 Maccabees teaches it, "creation *ex nihilo* is a polemical doctrine, invoked to defend the belief in bodily resurrection!"¹³ When critics of resurrection-faith pointed out the difficulties posed by the corruption of corpses, by the ingestion of human bodies by cannibals and predators and scavengers, and by other easily imagined cases, the concept of *ex nihilo* creation suggested a direct, effective, and essentially irrefutable rejoinder.¹⁴

However, David Winston meets Goldstein's argument head on. "Christian theologians," he declares, "did not feel the need to invoke the concept of creation *ex nihilo* in order to demonstrate the possibility of the resurrection of the flesh."¹⁵ And as we shall see below, Winston's position is probably to be preferred. Certainly it accounts for the Qur'anic passages on the subject.

By the time of the New Testament, Gaster sees an increasing dominance of the doctrine, believing it to be

affirmed at Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3.¹⁶ However, even in the latter two passages creation *ex nihilo* is at most ambiguously attested; the standard work on the subject of *ex nihilo* creation denies that any such doctrine is to be found in the Greek New Testament at all.¹⁷ It would seem, in fact, that the notion is not clearly taught by anybody until well past the period of primitive Christianity, that it was a non-issue for the earliest Christians, that it does not come to dominate theological thinking and writing even for some period beyond that, and that it must be read into early Jewish and Christian texts if it is to be found there at all.¹⁸ (This is exactly the thesis that I shall advance with regard to the Qur'an.)

Winston notes that "there is no evidence that the [early] rabbis were especially attached to a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Indeed, there is *prima facie* evidence that such a doctrine was far from being commonly accepted by them." He cites one ancient rabbinic text which, in order to establish the uniqueness of divine acts as opposed to human ones, gives ten examples which notably fail to include the most obvious one—namely the ability to make something from nothing. (In fact, one of the examples assumes the preexistence of water!)¹⁹

It may be that Tatian, a Christian writer and student of Justin Martyr who flourished at about A.D. 160, teaches the doctrine unclearly.²⁰ If he does, he seems to have developed it out of a confrontation with Valentinian Gnosticism, or, possibly, in response to the dualism of Marcion.²¹ And, indeed, it is striking that the first Christian thinker to advance a clear doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation was not an adherent of the "main church" at all. This was Basilides, the great Gnostic teacher who, along with Valentinus and Marcion, actively taught during the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius (A.D. 130-160).²² (The most sophisticated, most significant, and best educated Gnostics all seem to have denied the eternity of matter, although

only he developed a true theory of *ex nihilo* creation.)²³ Basilides, who seemed put off by any notion that the supreme God might act directly in history, advanced a rather sophisticated negative theology – prior even to the more famous forms of negative theology which would come to dominate the philosophical schools some decades later.²⁴ It seems that it was precisely this negative theology, with its intense preoccupation with the absolute transcendence of the supreme being, which led to his promulgation of a doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation. If God transcended this world utterly, then his mode of creation – and Basilides, contrary to many Gnostic thinkers, thought of the supreme God as the creator of this world – must also transcend worldly analogies and models like the demiurgic “potter” of the *Timaeus*. Indeed, as God was to be incomprehensible, so also must his creative act be.²⁵ Even to describe the creation as occurring through the “will” of God was to speak too anthropomorphically, since God has no “will” – although Basilides would allow such talk as the most appropriate way to discuss the ineffable.²⁶ But the anthropomorphism of God-as-potter was simply more than Basilides could allow, and, besides, it seemed to limit God’s omnipotence in the same way that the craftsman’s power is constrained by the resistance and quirks of his materials.²⁷

Educationally, the leading Gnostic thinkers of the first half of the second century were far better trained and equipped than the representatives of what would become the “orthodox” tradition or “main church.”²⁸ This may go some distance toward explaining why it was that the notion of creation from absolutely nothing took hold among the Gnostics so much earlier than among mainstream Christians, who seem simply not even to have thought about it.²⁹ “Some Christian writers of the middle of the second century write of God’s creative acts as if they were performed upon pre-existent matter,” writes J. A. Goldstein, “as if the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* never entered the

author's mind."³⁰ And indeed, the idea probably had not, and would not until the third century.³¹ Athenagoras, for example, who addressed his *Plea for the Christians* to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus about A.D. 177, taught a creation by God from preexisting matter, on the analogy of a potter and his clay.³² Justin Martyr, too, affirmed God's creative role to be that of a giver of forms and shapes to matter already present.³³ So natural to him was the idea of creation from matter already present that he seems not to have regarded it as a problem at all.³⁴ Indeed, Gerhard May seems clearly irritated with him because he did not realize that creation *ex nihilo* was the allegedly logical implication of the biblical creation narrative.³⁵ It is worthy of note that, as I have mentioned previously, Justin had been a Platonist before his conversion, and he was the first Christian to equate the Genesis narrative with the account of the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*. On this particular point, dealing with cosmogony, he evidently saw no distinction between Christian doctrine and Platonism.³⁶ Further, creation *ex nihilo* is at most ambiguously attested in the writings of Philo and Clement of Alexandria.³⁷ (Gerhard May denies it to both of them. He is again rather dismayed to note that Philo saw no contradiction between the Bible's account of creation and the notion of creation as an organizing of preexistent matter.)³⁸ However, as I have alluded to above, it is clearly taught in the works of Clement's successor at the Alexandrian catechetical school, Origen (who cannot, he says, understand how so many distinguished earlier thinkers had been able to think of matter as uncreated).³⁹

By the early third century, creation *ex nihilo* had become a fundamental doctrine of orthodox Christianity.⁴⁰ Probably, it entered Christianity through Theophilus of Antioch, who is generally linked with Tatian as the first non-Gnostic Christian to have a clearly stated doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation (and for whom the case is considerably clearer than for the latter). His position in this regard was

vastly influential in later Christian history, and most of the arguments used by later polemicists in this connection find their first expression from his pen.⁴¹ (Basilides, like Theophilus, was from Syria, and this may point either to influence by the Gnostic thinker upon the catholic bishop, or, more likely, to their having drawn from a common Syrian source or tradition.)⁴² For Theophilus, the idea of creation *ex nihilo* is necessary to safeguard the absolute freedom of God the Creator, whose omnipotence, he feels, cannot admissibly be constrained, as is that of the Timaeon Demiurge, by the resistance of self-existent matter.⁴³ This is the argument picked up by the first great Latin Father, Tertullian (d. ca. A.D. 220), as well. Eternally existing matter, he contended, would subject God to limitations and would destroy the divine liberty. Even though the positing of a resistant and independently existing material realm would allow a fairly powerful theodicy or explanation of evil, it would do so at the expense of God's unutterable omnipotence, and this Tertullian was unwilling to countenance. It would be more worthy to believe that God freely creates evil than to view him as a slave – that is, to see him as limited in any way whatsoever by the presence of coexistent matter.⁴⁴

Both W. R. Inge and Gerhard May have maintained that the notion of a temporally specifiable creation out of nothing was developed and accepted by Christian theologians of (what would become) the mainstream in response to Gnosticism – and to a philosophy which was manifestly related to Gnostic ideas – during the latter half of the second century.⁴⁵ This may well be true, since the theory to which many of the earlier Judeo-Christian Platonists leaned was, rather, that of emanation – a theory shared by the Gnostics. In Philo, for example, the “cause of the creation is the divine bounty, an ungrudging overflow of benevolent giving in which the Giver remains unaffected and undiminished, like a torch from which

other torches are lit, like the sun in giving out sunlight, like a spring of water."⁴⁶ (The same metaphor, of one torch lighting another, was used by Justin Martyr and by Numenius of Apamea.)⁴⁷ Certainly the Christian insistence on *ex nihilo* creation crystallized in the writings of Irenaeus (d. ca. A.D. 202), the bishop of Lyon, from whom it received, in many ways, its lasting form.⁴⁸ And the literary production of Irenaeus was dominated by his confrontation with the Gnostics.⁴⁹ According to this understanding, ascription of the creation of the cosmos to the Supreme God was a way of undercutting the devaluation of the physical world by the Gnostics, who by and large – Basilides himself is the obvious exception – attributed its origin to a rebellious lesser deity. "Ironically," Keith Norman observes, "the reaction against the Marcionite and Gnostic views put the orthodox Christian God up to compete for superlatives with the Supreme Hidden God of Gnosticism, until finally the biblical Father was pushed into a transcendent alienness beyond comprehensible reality. Obviously this Super-Being could be no mere craftsman or artificer."⁵⁰

The Qur'an

The Qur'an, on the other hand, seems in this regard to reflect no influence from the intellectual currents agitating Alexandria and other centers of late Hellenism. Instead, its themes are much closer to those of the biblical canon. It is insistent that God is the creator of everything (e.g., at Q 13:16; 39:62; 40:62). He is the "creator [*badīʿ*] of the heavens and the earth" (Q 2:117; 6:101). Indeed, this is a major theme of the book, which likewise insists that God's creative role and power are among the things which distinguish him from false deities (Q 34:49; cf. 6:102; 7:191; 10:3, 34; 13:16; 14:32; 16:17, 20; 22:73; 25:3; 30:40; 31:11; 32:4; 35:40; 46:4; 52:36). Yet a survey of the words used in the Qur'an in connection with "creation," and an examination of the way in which they are used, reveals little or no

reason to suppose that any of them involve a creation from nothing. Ibn Rushd's contention has much to recommend it, when he alleges that the theologians' adherence to creation from nothing rests upon – of all things – an allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an, whose literal sense rather teaches a preexistent matter which simply received the form given it in God's creative act.⁵¹ (Conceivably, the Qur'an's innocence of emanationist speculation is simply the flip side of its failure to assert creation *ex nihilo*; as Goldstein points out, not only 2 Maccabees but also "the other earliest Jewish and Christian texts which might seem to assert the [latter] doctrine are all in Greek.")⁵²

The most common relevant Qur'anic root is *khalaqa*. Significantly, its original meaning seems to have been associated, much like the creation-related vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible, with such things as working leather. It expressed, too, "the idea of determining parts, and . . . the idea of polishing, equalising."⁵³ "What then," R. Arnaldez asks rather plaintively in the light of this and certain other aspects of the word, "can be said about the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in the Qur'an? Quite simply that Arabic, like all other languages, has had to use a word which originally signified something concrete and material for an ineffable reality."⁵⁴ But to assume from the start that Qur'anic creation was "ineffable" rather than "concrete and material" is to beg the question at issue.

Let us examine the evidence. We are told that God created the heavens and the earth in six days (Q 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 50:38; 57:4),⁵⁵ and that mankind is also among his creations (as at 2:21; 6:94; 7:11; 26:184; 37:96; 41:21; cf. 5:18; 50:16; 51:56; 55:3; 56:57). What does this mean? An examination of the occurrences of the verb virtually rules out creation *ex nihilo*: Thus, Iblis in particular (Q 7:12; 38:76) and the *jinn* in general (Q 15:27; 55:15) are created of fire [*min nār*]. Man, on the other hand, is said to have been created "from dust" [*min turāb*] (Q 30:20; this

is specifically stated of Adam and Jesus at Q 3:59), from the “earth” [*ard*] (Q 20:55), “from clay” [*min ṭīn*] (Q 6:2; 7:12; 32:7; 38:71, 76; cf. 17:61), “from sounding clay, from mud” [*min ṣalsāl min ḥamāʾ*] (Q 15:26, 15:28, 33), “from an extraction of clay” [*min sulālat ṭīn*] (Q 23:12), “from sticky clay” [*min ṭīn lāzib*] (37:11), and “from sounding clay like earthenware” [*min ṣalsāl ka-al-fakḥkhār*] (Q 55:14).⁵⁶ God created man with his hands [*khalāqtu bi-yadayya*] (Q 38:75) – recalling Jesus’ “creation” of a bird from clay at Q 3:49 and 5:110 – but was not at all wearied with the labor (Q 46:33; 50:38). R. Arnaldez, whose article on “*Khalk*” in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* seeks to maintain the idea of *ex nihilo* creation, is forced to admit that “True, many Qur’anic verses call to mind a demiurgic action when the verb *khalāqa* is followed by the preposition *min*.” He therefore offers a suggestion which has, to my view, utterly nothing to recommend it: The various examples which can be cited, he says, “indicate clearly that the preposition denotes the matter with which these created beings are created, and not a pre-existent matter from which they would be created.”⁵⁷ However, this is not to let the Qur’an speak for itself, but rather to impose upon it a previously held theological view. It is not even certain that such a position is intelligible.

Thomas O’Shaughnessy, commenting upon the *mu-khallāqa* of Q 22:5 – rendered variously as “formed” (A. Y. Ali, Zafrulla Khan, Arberry, Bell), “shapely” (Pickthall), and “(wohl)gestaltet” (Paret) – notes that the association of *khalāqa* with “proportion” or “symmetry” would tend to “suggest that it is closer in meaning to ‘form’ or ‘shape’ than it is to ‘create’ in the strict sense of that word.”⁵⁸ This is precisely the sense in which, according to Theodore Gaster as cited above, we are to take most if not all elements of the biblical vocabulary of creation. (We might perhaps recall here certain German words signifying creation, like “Schöpfung,” “schöpfen,” “schaffen,” and “erschaf-

fen" – clearly cognate as they are with the English verb "to shape.")⁵⁹

The Qur'an also names yet other materials out of which man was created. He was produced from a single soul [*nafs*] (Q 4:1; 7:189; 39:6), or from a male and a female (Q 49:13). He was created from a kind of water (Q 25:54; 77:20-22; 86:5-7), as were all animals (Q 24:45). In other words, he was created from a drop of sperm [*min nutfā*] (Q 16:4; 36:77; 76:2; 80:18-19; cf. 53:45-46; 86:5-7).⁶⁰ But he was also created "from a blood clot" [*min ʿalaq*] (Q 96:2). How are we to reconcile these various statements? It would seem that there is really no contradiction, for the Qur'an affirms that human beings are created "by stages" [*atwāran*] (Q 71:14).⁶¹ "He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation" [*khalqan baʿda khalqin*] (Q 39:6). Man, the Qur'an says, was created from flesh and bones, which were created from "a lump of flesh [*mudgha*] formed and unformed," which was created from a blood clot, which was created from a drop of semen, which was created from dust or clay (cf. Q 18:37; 22:5; 23:12-14; 35:11; 40:67; 75:37-38).⁶²

Of course, the precise physiological conceptions which underlie such statements as those above do not concern us here. It suffices to notice that, in every case, the "creation" spoken of occurs from preexisting materials. (Can it be doubted that, when Q 78:8 describes God as having created mankind in "pairs" [*azwāj*], it intends thereby simply the divine role in normal human reproduction?) As Arnaldez puts it, with considerable understatement, "creation *ex nihilo* is not the incontestable deduction from the root *khalaka* in these Qur'anic contexts."⁶³ Only two passages would seem to be susceptible of an *ex nihilo* interpretation. Both occur in Sūra 19, "Maryam." When Zachariah expresses some doubt that he and Elizabeth should have a child at their age, the Lord replies, "Easy is that for Me, seeing that I created thee aforetime, when thou

wast nothing [*wa-lam taku shay'*]" (Q 19:9, Arberry). Later, it is the unbelievers who express doubt, and this time they are doubting the possibility of fleshly resurrection. "Man says, 'What, when I am dead shall I then be brought forth alive? Will not man remember that We created him afore-time, when he was nothing? [*wa-lam yaku shay'*]" (Q 19:67). As O'Shaughnessy points out, if these two passages teach creation *ex nihilo*, they stand alone in the Qur'an in so doing.⁶⁴ This fact by itself is reason to suspect that they teach nothing of the sort.⁶⁵ And, indeed, we learn from Aristotle that the Platonists called preexistent matter "the non-existent," *to mē on*.⁶⁶ (Gerhard May notes that the earliest occurrences of the formula *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing," invariably refer to relative nonbeing, rather than to an absolute and ontologically understood nothingness. The formula existed, in fact, many decades before the doctrine, and was only pressed into service to support the notion of absolute creation out of utter nonbeing—as happened with *Mandate* 1:1 of the *Shepherd of Hermas*—when its original meaning was no longer comprehensible.)⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Syrian monastic writer Aphraates (d. A.D. 345)—whose connection with the Qur'an has been asserted by others in other contexts⁶⁸—uses a similar argument to make precisely the same point as does the latter of the two passages in Q 19—and he clearly does not intend creation *ex nihilo*: "About this resurrection of the dead I shall instruct you, most dear one, to the best of my ability. God in the beginning created man; He molded him from dust and He raised him up. If, then, when man did not exist, He made him from nothing, how much easier is it for Him now to raise him up like a seed sown in the earth."⁶⁹ What is involved here is, as O'Shaughnessy rightly says, creation from, not absolute, but relative nonexistence, "when man did not exist *as man*, but existed only as dust or clay."⁷⁰ It is God's ability to give life to inanimate matter, both at birth and at the resurrection, which is the ultimate proof

of his power. Creation *ex nihilo* is not the point at issue. Thus, the Qur'an follows not only Aphraates but other Syriac fathers, including St. Ephrem and Babai the Great, in taking Deuteronomy 32:39 as a resurrection text, when it seems to have referred wholly to the affairs of Israel and its enemies in this world alone. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." So reads the pentateuchal text, and the Qur'an agrees with Aphraates not only in its eschatological application but in its attribution to Moses: "Has [the unbeliever] not been told of what is in the scrolls of Moses . . . that it is He [God] who makes to die, and that makes to live?" (Q 53:36, 44, Arberry).

If *khalaqa* is associated with preexisting material, the same is true of other words used Qur'anically in connection with God's creative activity. The root *ja'ala*, for example, is used to describe God's creation of earth and sky (Q 40:64), of the constellations or zodiacal signs (Q 25:61), of darkness and light (Q 6:1; 10:67; 40:61), of the night, the sun, and the moon (Q 6:96). Indeed, it is very often used in precisely the same sense as *khalaqa*—as, for instance, when we are told that every living thing, including particularly the posterity of Adam, has been made from a kind of water (Q 21:30; 32:8; cf. also 23:12-14, in which, when it is taken with other similar passages, *ja'ala* seems synonymous with *khalaqa*). But it is also used to refer to God's transforming of Sabbath-breakers into apes (Q 5:60), to the transformation of what is on the earth into barren sterility (Q 18:8), to the laying out of gardens (Q 36:34), to the production of fire from a green tree (Q 36:80), and to the building of ships and the reproduction of cattle (Q 43:12). It is a form of this root which is used when the children of Israel demand of Moses that he "make" them a god like the gods of the idolators (Q 7:138)—where presumably what is meant is the fashioning of a material idol. Likewise,

it is the verb used by pharaoh when he orders Hāmān and his servants to build him a tower out of fired clay bricks, so that he may climb up to the god of Moses (Q 28:38).

Other verbs used in the Qur'an seem similarly to imply a preexistent material, an *Urstoff*, out of which the universe was made. At the very least, there is nothing in them which would necessitate reading the Qur'an as advocating creation *ex nihilo*. Heaven, for example, of which we are repeatedly told that God is the creator (using the root *khalaqa*, as at Q 65:12; 67:3; 71:15, and throughout the book), is said to have been "built," as an "edifice" [in both cases, the root is *bny*] (Q 2:22; 40:64; 50:6; 51:47; 78:12; 79:27; 91:5). In another version of pharaoh's order to Hāmān to build him a tower, *bny* is used as a synonym of *ja'ala* (Q 40:36).

In the case of *bada'a*, too—which is used as a synonym of *khalaqa* at Q 7:29—there is no reason in the text as it stands to infer a creation out of nothing. In the passages relevant to our present concern, the root *bada'a* invariably serves as an inceptive helping verb, with the actual content relating to the creation being supplied by another root. (See, for example, Q 10:4, 34; 21:104; 27:64; 29:19-20; 30:11, 27; 32:7; 85:13 [by implication].)

So much for *bada'a*. But the ammunition of those who would argue for an *ex nihilo* creation in the Qur'an is by no means yet exhausted. "While the root *bd'* suggests the idea of a 'beginning' which involves a continuation," Louis Gardet asserts, "the root *bd'* implies, strictly, not a 'first time', but a radical innovation, an absolute bringing into existence."⁷¹ Is this so? The root *bada'a* occurs only four times in the Qur'an—and never in the fourth form of the verb, which will prove so significant in the writings of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and the other Ismā'īlī Neoplatonists, as well as in Pseudo-Aristotle. The verbal noun of that fourth form is quite rightly rendered by M. Gardet as "absolute creation, primordial innovation." This is a good translation of its use in later philosophers and theologians

(although it is apparently not the sense in which it is used in the *Theology of Aristotle*). “The commentators emphasize,” remarks M. Gardet, “that God is called *Badīʿ* by virtue of His absolute creation of the heavens and the earth, and *Khālik* by virtue of His creation (*khalk*) of man (‘made of clay’, LV, 14).” However, it is a grave and obvious methodological error to use the later commentary literature uncritically as a guide to the meaning of the Qur’an itself. Only factors external to the Qur’anic text would impel us to see in *badaʿa* an indication of “absolute origination” in its pages; on its own, it offers no inducements to such a reading. In two of the four occurrences of the root, as mentioned above, God is simply declared to be the “creator of the heavens and the earth.” Neither requires us to infer a creation *ex nihilo*.⁷² The third instance of the root is as a Form VIII verb describing the allegedly unauthorized “invention” of monasticism by Christians (Q 57:27). The fourth occurrence is of the noun *bidʿ*, “innovation.” Admittedly, the latter two cases might be interpreted favorably to the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, but there is nothing in the context to suggest that they should be so taken.⁷³ (One might speculate that it is M. Gardet’s immersion in the works of later theologians, or perhaps even his own theological background, which leads him to see in *badaʿa* what is, quite simply, not Qur’anicly there.)

The root *baraʿa*, cognate with the verb *bārāʿ* of Genesis 1:1, occurs almost solely (in the contexts which concern us) in the neutral meanings of “creator” (Q 2:54; 59:24) or “creature” (Q 98:6-7). The one exception to this is Q 57:22, which speaks of misfortunes as being foreordained before God brings them about. But it is evident that misfortunes in this life, whether earthquakes or diseases or war, are “brought about” out of preexisting matter or circumstances. Thus, again, nothing in the Qur’anic use of *baraʿa* compels one to assume *ex nihilo* creation — as we have seen, its biblical cognate *bārāʿ* was taken for centuries to mean

an organization of preexistent matter – and, indeed, what evidence the book does furnish would seem to militate against such an assumption.

Much the same thing can be said of the root *nasha'a*, which in its Qur'anic incarnation means, basically, "to cause something to grow." God produces gardens, for example (Q 6:141; 23:19), and he makes trees grow (Q 56:72). He also causes clouds to swell up, heavy with rain [*yunshi'u al-sahāb al-thiqāl*] (Q 13:12). Significantly the root occasionally seems to be used as a synonym for *khalaqa*, as at Q 36:77-79 and 29:19-20. God created mankind from a single soul (Q 6:98) or from the earth (Q 11:61; 53:32). Verbs derived from this root are also used to describe the raising up of a new human generation (Q 6:6, 133; 21:11; 23:31, 42; 28:45), the birth of a child (Q 23:14), and the development of sensory apparatus (Q 23:78).

The most dramatic assertion of God's creative power in the Qur'an is the repeated declaration that he has merely to say to a thing " 'Be!' and it is" [*kun fa-yakūn*] (at Q 6:73; 36:82; and elsewhere).⁷⁴ This would seem, at first glance, to be promising material for the construction of a theory of *ex nihilo* creation and, indeed, the verses which fall into this category are the ones most commonly used to support such a theory.⁷⁵ But first glances can be deceptive. In several of the passages where this phrase occurs, creation *ex nihilo* is excluded by the context; in no passages is it required. As O'Shaughnessy puts it, these passages are "non-committal."⁷⁶ Thus, the subject of Q 3:47, 3:59, and 19:35 is the virginal conception of Jesus, of whom the second passage affirms that God first created him from dust, then said to him *kun fa-yakūn*.⁷⁷ This points up a rather odd characteristic of these passages: Q 2:117 is typical of them in stating that God "decrees a matter [*amr*]" and then "says to it [*lahu*] 'Be,' and it is" (cf. 3:47; 40:68). Q 16:40 actually speaks of a "thing" [*shay'*] to which God says *kun fa-yakūn*.⁷⁸ There seems, thus, to be an underlying and preexisting

substrate to which the divine imperative is addressed, as clearly is the case in the story of the sabbath-breakers who are told "Be ye apes!" [*kūnū qirdatan*] (Q 2:65; 7:166). The command *kun!* would therefore seem to be more determinative or constitutive than productive of something out of utter nothingness.⁷⁹

A further clue to the Qur'anic doctrine of creation occurs in certain polemical passages which might seem at first only marginally relevant. In accordance with the ancient notion of history as cyclical, almost every element of the traditional creation myths was taken up again in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic, which taught that God would renew the world in a new creation [*palingenesia*; *hadosh ha-^colam*].⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, the same doctrine is abundantly attested in the Qur'an (as at Q 10:34; 21:104; 27:64; 29:19-20; 30:27). God creates once, and then he repeats the process to bring men before his tribunal at the judgment day (Q 10:4; 30:11; 32:10; 46:33-34). For we are dealing here, particularly, with the resurrection of the dead. Men will be "created" again when they are but bones and dust (Q 13:5; 17:49-51, 98-99; 32:10; 34:7; 36:77-82).⁸¹ "Were we wearied in the first creation, that they should be in doubt about a new creation?" (Q 50:15). "Do they not see that God, who created the heavens and the earth and was not wearied thereby, is able to give life to the dead?" (Q 46:33).

The nature of resurrection as a revivification of once animate, now inanimate, matter, and the pointed comparisons to the initial creation (emphatically so at Q 22:5-6; 36:77-82; 75:37-40; 86:5-8), are significant in many ways. They sustain my contention that creation, for the Qur'an, was most likely conceived as the determination of pre-existent matter. They are reminiscent of the argument of 2 Maccabees 7 and are precisely parallel to the concern for the resurrection of the dead which, according to Jonathan Goldstein, drove Jewish and Christian speculation on the origins of the world. Yet they support David Winston's

denial that such a connection involves argument for *ex nihilo* creation.

“What,” exclaim Muhammad’s Makkan critics, “when we are dust shall we indeed then be raised up again in new creation?” (Q 13:5, Arberry; cf. 32:10; 34:7). “They say, ‘What, when we are bones and broken bits, shall we really be raised up again in a new creation?’ To this, Muhammad is instructed to reply, “ ‘Let you be stones, or iron, or some creation yet more monstrous in your minds!’ Then they will say, ‘Who will bring us back?’ Say: ‘He who originated you the first time’ ” (Q 17:49-51, Arberry). “Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth, is powerful to create the like of them?” (Q 17:99; cf. 17:98, Arberry).

The argumentation of the Qur’an is remarkably similar to that of several earlier patristic writers. Justin Martyr wrote in his first *Apology*,

We expect that our own bodies, even though they should be dead and buried in the earth, will be revived; for we claim that nothing is impossible with God. And what would seem more incredible to a thinking person than if we were not in a body and someone were to affirm that from a little drop of the human seed it were possible to shape bones, muscles and flesh into the human form we now see? . . . But as in the beginning you would not have believed it possible that from a little sperm such persons could be produced, and yet you actually see that they are, so now realize that it is not impossible that human bodies, after they are dead and disseminated in the earth like seeds, should at the appointed time, at God’s command [*prostagma*], arise and assume immortality.”⁸²

We have seen Justin did not believe in creation from nothing. Similarly, Theophilus of Antioch, later in the same century, while he seems to have accepted a notion of *ex nihilo* cosmogony, nevertheless argues for resurrection

from God's ability to form man "out of a small moist matter and a tiny drop."⁸³ Even Tatian, who has been adduced by some writers as a believer in *ex nihilo* origination, seems rather to imply creation from preexistent stuff in the very passage which is cited to prove such belief: "Before I was born," he writes, "I did not exist; I did not know who I was and was only latent in the substance of physical matter; it was through my birth that I, previously non-existent, came to believe that I did exist. In the same way, when I who was born, cease to exist through death and am no more seen, I shall once more be as in my previous state of non-existence followed by birth"⁸⁴ – i.e., latently present in physical matter. "If fire consumes my bit of flesh, the vaporized matter is still contained in the world. If I am annihilated in rivers and seas, or torn to pieces by wild beasts, I am still stored in a rich lord's treasuries. The poor, impious man does not know what is stored up, but God the ruler, when he wishes, will restore to its original state the substance [*hypostasin*] that is visible only to him."⁸⁵

Amidst all his disagreements with the philosophers, al-Ghazālī found only three issues upon which to call them infidels. These were, as he lists them in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, "i) the problem of the eternity of the world, where they [the philosophers] maintained that all the substances are eternal, ii) their assertion that Divine knowledge does not encompass individual objects, iii) their denial of the resurrection of bodies. All these three theories are in violent opposition to Islam. To believe in them is to accuse the prophets of falsehood."⁸⁶ It is perhaps not coincidental that the same thinkers who denied *ex nihilo* creation denied also the resurrection of the body, and that an al-Ghazālī would insist on both, and on giving both equal weight. Nevertheless, despite the insistence of al-Ghazālī and others on the centrality of the dogma of creation out of absolute nothingness for Islamic belief, I must agree with Thomas O'Shaughnessy and Oliver Leaman that "it is questiona-

ble . . . whether the Qur'an itself gives any valid foundation for this teaching."⁸⁷ "For," as Ibn Rushd quite correctly points out, "it is not stated in Scripture that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this effect is nowhere to be found."⁸⁸ It is true that al-Ghazālī has the vast majority if not all of the commentators on his side, and that normative Islam, then as now, is decisive in its view of the issue. "But in abstract matters of this kind," as O'Shaughnessy notes, "the opinions of important commentators like Zamakhsharī, Rāzī, and Bayḍāwī reflect a later stage of the development of religious and philosophical thought in Islam, when this faith of desert tribesmen had come into closer contact with Christianity and with Hellenistic philosophy. The refinements of thought presupposed in an understanding of absolute non-existence were foreign to those who first heard Muhammad's preaching at Mecca and Medina."⁸⁹ Ironically, al-Ghazālī, concerned at what he saw as an uncritical acceptance of Hellenistic presuppositions by Muslim intellectuals, seems clearly in this case to advance as essential to Islam a doctrine whose roots are not only extra-Qur'anic but, indeed, Greek.

Notes

1. William R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1923), 1:145.
2. Jonathan A. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (Autumn 1984): 127. Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre von der Creatio Ex Nihilo*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte*, 48 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), vii, contends that a concept of *ex nihilo* creation is the most natural expression of the biblical view of the origins of the cosmos, and that it was logically inevitable that such a doctrine should arise. Creation by "forming" or "shaping" pre-existent matter was, he contends, ultimately incompatible with Genesis 1, properly viewed (cf. also 75, 135, 153, et passim). But even May admits that his doctrine is simply not present in the text. His is a strange position, in view not only of the etymologies of the

words used for "creation" in the Bible, but also in the face of the fact that the Hebrews of the biblical period, as well as the rabbis and the early Christian Fathers, saw no difficulty in holding to precisely the idea of creation as the organization of preexistent matter.

3. New Jerusalem Bible, 17, n. "a" (on Genesis 1:1). We shall see below that even 2 Maccabees 7:28 is not beyond question as a proof text for *ex nihilo* creation.

4. T. H. Gaster, "Cosmogony," in George A. Buttrick et al., eds., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:702.

5. Psalm 102:25; cf. Psalm 8:3.

6. Keith Norman, "Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity," *BYU Studies* 17 (Spring 1977): 295.

7. Ibid. Among the passages cited by Norman are Isaiah 29:16; 40:22; 45:9; 51:13, 15-16; Psalms 74:13-17; 89:11; 90:2; Romans 9:20-23. We might also think of the ram-headed Egyptian god Khnum, of Elephantine, who formed the souls of men and women upon his potter's wheel, or of Ptah, the artificer-god of Memphis. Cf. Alan W. Shorter, *The Egyptian Gods* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 8, 10.

8. Gaster, "Cosmogony," 702-4. 2 Peter 3:5 may reflect the notion of the priority of water.

9. Ibid., 706.

10. Origen, *De Principiis* II, 1, 5.

11. On the alternate readings of 2 Maccabees 7:28, see the remarks on that passage in the New Jerusalem Bible, 731, n. "e." For a discussion of *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:7, consult May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 6.

12. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," 127, 130; May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 6-8.

13. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," 134.

14. Ibid., 129-30.

15. David Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (Spring 1986): 88.

16. Gaster, "Cosmogony," 706.

17. Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited," 90-91, doubts that Romans 4:17 clearly asserts the idea, as does May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 27 (where such an interpretation of Hebrews 11:3 is likewise contested). The standard work is certainly the aforementioned

tioned treatise by May, which at *ibid.*, 26, categorically denies the presence of *ex nihilo* creation anywhere in the New Testament.

18. On the lack of interest the question held for earliest Christian thinking, see May, *ibid.*, 183.

19. Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited," 91; cf. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 23.

20. Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited," 88, n. 1. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," 132, and May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 121, would have it that Tatian taught the doctrine "unambiguously," and that he is the first Christian to do so. Winston has, I think, effectively disposed of that claim. The so-called "Shepherd of Hermas," who wrote no later, probably, than A.D. 148, might have taught *ex nihilo* creation. See *Vision* 1.6 and *Mandate* 1.1. But, again, the relevant Greek phrase is not definite in positing absolute, rather than relative, nonbeing. Indeed, there seems good reason to prefer the latter.

21. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 62, 154-55.

22. *Ibid.*, 71, 121, 183-84.

23. *Ibid.*, 41, 42 n. 2, 184.

24. *Ibid.*, 68, 69 n. 26. On his dislike of a God active in history, see *ibid.*, p. 82. McKim's contention will be recalled: "Whereas the scriptural accounts spoke of the actions of God in history, Greek philosophy centered attention on the question of metaphysical being," Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 8. It has been suggested that Valentinian Gnosticism is a predecessor of Neoplatonism; in its concept of emanation as well as in its positing a God higher than the Intellect, it appears to foreshadow Plotinus. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 110, n. 233.

25. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 76, 85.

26. *Ibid.*, 71-72, 75.

27. *Ibid.*, 75.

28. *Ibid.*, 85.

29. *Ibid.*, 84.

30. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," 132; cf. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 139. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 1:145: "Christian orthodoxy denies . . . the theory that Matter is uncreated, and that creation consists in shaping it." This was almost certainly not always so, and it is difficult anyway to see what necessary connection might exist between absolutely fundamental constitutive Christian beliefs and this particular doctrine.

31. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 149. Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 307: "In fact, the rash of arguments in favor of *ex nihilo* creation at the end of the second century points to the newness of the concept. Tertullian's tract [*Against Hermogenes*] especially adds to the evidence that the argument was against an established belief within the Church, since it was directed against a fellow Christian rather than against Platonism."

32. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 141.

33. See Justin Martyr, *Apology* 10: "And we have been taught that He in the beginning did of His goodness, for man's sake, create all things out of unformed matter." (See, too, his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* XX, 29-33.) H. Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 161, declares rather weakly that "Justin does not insist on creation *ex nihilo*." (He evidently sees an ambivalence in Justin's mind, when the passages just cited are juxtaposed to *Dialogue* 5.) Gerhard May, on the other hand, argues—convincingly, in my opinion—that Justin absolutely does not teach creation *ex nihilo*. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 121, 127, 134.

34. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 126.

35. *Ibid.*, 135.

36. *Ibid.*, 124-125, 183.

37. Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," 171.

38. See, for example, May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 9-20; cf. 126, n. 33. Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 308, contends that Clement was aware of the concept of *ex nihilo* creation, but that "he does not view it as crucial to orthodoxy."

39. See Origen, *De Principiis* II, 1, 4. See also Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," 189.

40. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 183; Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 316. Although even then, Origen, for instance, could relegate it in his *Against Celsus* to the secondary sphere of "physics" rather than "theology," cf. *ibid.*, 309.

41. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 75, 121, 149, 151, 159, 162, 169.

42. *Ibid.*, 78, 160, 183-84.

43. *Ibid.*, 164.

44. Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 307. Tertullian does not care to insist on *ex nihilo* creation, although it is clear that he personally believes in it. See his *De Resurrectione Carnis* 11, and Winston, "Creation Ex

Nihilo Revisited," 89-90. The dilemma of theodicy, basically stated, is that it seems impossible to reconcile the existence of a wholly good and all-powerful deity with the existence of evil. Why has he not eliminated it? Two clear and extreme alternatives immediately present themselves: Perhaps he is not truly good, or perhaps he is not able. Tertullian seemingly preferred the former option to the latter, although I am sure that he would have protested such an unnuanced statement of the dilemma.

45. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 1:145; May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, viii, ix, 119, 151, 153, 183, 184. It was around the middle of the second century that the confrontation between Christianity and philosophy began to grow serious. The two leading philosophies of the day were Stoicism and (Middle) Platonism – peripatetic philosophy was too much a school tradition during this period to be much of a practical challenge. For Middle Platonism, which reigned supreme from roughly 50 B.C. to A.D. 250, Plato's *Timaeus* was by far the preeminent text. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 1-4.

46. Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," 142.

47. Ibid., 164; Phillip Merlan, "Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus," in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 102.

48. On the pivotal role of Irenaeus, see May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, x, 151; Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 303.

49. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 167-68.

50. Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 303; cf. the discussion on 303-4.

51. Ibn Rushd, "Decisive Treatise," in George F. Hourani, ed. and tr., *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1961), 56-57.

52. Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," 127.

53. R. Arnaldez, "Khalk," in E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1960-), 4:980-88.

54. Ibid., 981.

55. Q 41:9 speaks of two days of creation.

56. The idea of man's creation from dust or clay is very old. For ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian parallels, see Gaster, "Cosmogony," 705.

57. Arnaldez, "Khalk," 981.

58. Thomas O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing and the Teaching of the Qur'an," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 120 (1970): 279.

59. Suggested by O'Shaughnessy, *ibid.*, 279, n. 17. See the relevant entries in *Der Grosse Duden: Herkunftswörterbuch*; also the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

60. This is reminiscent of the Mishnaic injunction (TB *Avot* 3:1) to "know whence thou art come." The answer to this question, obviously designed to promote humility in humankind, is "from a putrid drop [*tippah serukhah*]." I am indebted to David P. Wright for bringing this passage to my attention.

61. Compare Q 71:17: *wa Allāh anbatukum min al-ard nabātan*. See also Q 3:37.

62. Obviously, there exists a third possible mode of cosmogony, distinct both from creation *ex nihilo* and from creation as organization of preexisting material, that being creation as biological or sexual generation. This mode occurs in many ancient mythologies, as well as in a number of Gnostic systems. (See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 97-98, 102, for Valentinian Gnosticism). However, since such a position does not seem to occur among Muslims, and since no passage in the Qur'an—emphatically including those cited here—seems to teach such a concept, I shall omit discussion of it in this study. With Islam's explicit denial of the fatherhood of God, it is far less susceptible to such an interpretation than is Christianity.

63. Arnaldez, "Khalk," 982.

64. O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing," 277.

65. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that the Qur'an is a monolithic, totally consistent text, on this or any other matter. However, I see no *a priori* reason to take the opposite position, assuming that the Qur'an is inconsistent and self-contradictory. The situation must be weighed on a case-by-case basis, and, as I hope is clear from the argument that follows, the evidence of these two particular passages simply does not compel us to see the Qur'an as self-contradictory at this point. In the absence of compelling evidence, my inclination is to take the book as internally consistent.

66. Aristotle, *Physics* I, 9, 192a 6-7.

67. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, vii, 21, 78, 121, 155. For the case of the *Shepherd*, see 27.

68. O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing," 277-78, 280.

69. Cited in *ibid.*, 278.

70. *Ibid.*, 278 (emphasis in original).

71. All quotations from L. Gardet in this paragraph come from his article, "Ibdā'," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3:663-65.

72. I will, however, return below to Q 2:117, which is interesting for its use of another important and relevant Arabic form.

73. Innovation and invention are perfectly comprehensible as new insights based upon, or new utilizations of, preexisting ideas. Probably most intellectual historians and historians of science would insist on understanding them in this way.

74. According to one Egyptian myth, Ptah created the other gods by no act, but by spoken command. See the translation of the so-called "Memphite Theology" at Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume 1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975): 51-57.

75. Arnaldez, "Khalk," 982.

76. O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing," 274.

77. *Ibid.*, 275, says that this verse refers to Adam, which is also true. The point remains the same.

78. The situation here is analogous to what Werner Foerster calls the evident "logical impossibility" expressed in Romans 4:17, where Paul represents God as "calling forth those things which are not as though they were" [*kalountos ta mē onta hos onta*]: "One can call forth only that which already exists. But God calls forth that which does not yet exist. He commands it, and in obedience to this command creation takes place. We must not try to evade the logical inconceivability of this statement by taking the *mē onta* [i.e., 'non-existent things'] as though in some sense they were *onta* [i.e., 'existent things']." See Werner Foerster, "Ktizo," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:1010. Foerster is perhaps more tolerant of logical inconceivability than I am. In any case, whatever the merits of his position with regard to the Pauline position, it seems clear that we ought precisely to take the *mē onta* of the Qur'anic passages under discussion as though in some sense they were *onta*.

79. Presumably, when the Ikhwān al-Safā' promise the righteous a power like God's, to say to a thing "Be!" and have it be, they were not pledging to human beings, even in Paradise, the capacity to produce *ex nihilo*. See *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'* 1:158. I discuss this passage elsewhere, in a related but as yet unpublished paper.

80. Gaster, "Cosmogony," 708.

81. The point of Q 31:28 may be to affirm the complete identity of the person in both his mortal and resurrected state.

82. Justin Martyr, *Apology* I, 18-19. The translation is that of Thomas B. Falls. Compare Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 17, and the resurrection proceeding from preexistent materials portrayed in Pseudo-Justinian, *On the Resurrection* 6. See, too, May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 137, 139.

83. Theophilus, *Ad Autolycom* I, 8. Cf. Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited," 89.

84. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 6.

85. The translation and edition is that of Molly Whittaker. For human conception as a creation from relative nothingness, see Justin Martyr, *Apology* 10: "He created us when we were nothing." Tertullian (d. ca. A.D. 220) is apparently the first Christian writer to argue for the probability of resurrection from the alleged fact of God's *ex nihilo* creation of the cosmos generally. See May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts*, 139.

86. Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, tr. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, Pakistan Philosophical Congress Publication No. 3 (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), 249.

87. O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing," 274; cf. Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 25-26.

88. Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise*, 57.

89. O'Shaughnessy, "Creation from Nothing," 276-77.