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Conversations on Islamic Nonviolence with Thinkers and Activists

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We have until now been preoccupied with the description and analysis of salient Muslim advocates for nonviolence in what one might call a long twentieth century. We have followed them from the 1880s to the 2010s and from West Africa to South Asia, the Middle East, and North America. Yet all of these remarkable figures have now passed away. Some have done so recently, such as Jawdat Said and Wahiduddin Khan in 2022 and 2021, respectively. The present chapter is dedicated not to these but to the now-living generation which succeeds them. In several cases they do so directly: as friends, students, and protégés. The following reflections are drawn from a series of interviews in English and Arabic held with living proponents, practitioners, and theorists of nonviolent Islam during 2021 and 2022. They come from a range of cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds, and each approaches the understanding and practice of Islamic nonviolence in their own way. Every one is nevertheless a committed and informed voice of Islamic nonviolence with decades of experience, and each enjoys considerable national and international respect. Their continuities – both

conscious and otherwise – with their predecessors are moreover considerable. This not least in their shared concern for personal moral improvement and the careful avoidance of schismatic separatism.

Though each speaker was interviewed individually, the same broad questions were raised with each in turn. All explored these from their own vantage point, and each is quoted as extensively as possible so as to give the clearest expression to their views. Their perspectives are presented concurrently rather than as a succession of disparate conversations, however. We thereby illustrate both points of overlapping consensus and of divergence among them. The themes explored concern each interlocutor's understandings of 'Peace' as a concept; their views on the moral status of war and violent self-defence; the connection (if any) between peace and justice; the nature of nonviolence in civil, familial, and interpersonal contexts; and the implications of nonviolence towards nature and non-human animals. These same general concerns – informed by ongoing discussions among moral philosophers concerned with pacifism and nonviolence [see Introduction] – have of course also guided previous chapters' investigation of earlier thinkers and activists. As such, bringing together these informed voices offers us the opportunity not only to relate them to one another but also to those Muslim pacifists who came before them. This wider conversation is returned to systematically in the concluding chapter of this book and itself brought into dialogue with the secular scholarship on pacifism and nonviolence, which has until now neglected Muslim perspectives.

Before any such general reflection, however, it behoves us to introduce the five experts on Islamic pacifism and nonviolence who inform the present chapter:

- Amina (or Amneh) Khoulani is a Syrian educator, activist, and student of the late Jawdat Said. Involved in nonviolent activism for the past two decades, she has lost friends and siblings to political crackdowns by the Syrian state – particularly following the so-called Arab Spring. She has played leading roles in nonviolent and humanitarian organisations from the *subul al-salām* [Paths of Peace] centre in the Damascene suburb of Dārayyā to today's *ʿā'ilāt min ajl al-ḥurriyyah* [Families for Freedom] which advocates for the rights of Syrian political detainees: work for which she was in 2020 awarded the United States' International Woman of Courage award.

- Chaiwat Satha-Anand, also known as Qader Muheideen, is a professor of political science at Thammasat University in Bangkok, founder of the Thai Peace Information Centre, and chair of the Thai Strategic Nonviolence Commission. He was a founding figure in the academic study of Islamic nonviolence even before his attendance of the seminal Bali Conference in Indonesia, and has worked with pre-eminent scholars in the field including Gene Sharp.
- Haytham Alhamwi is a Syrian doctor now living in the United Kingdom, having fled the Syrian civil war. Like Amina Khoulani, he is a past student and avowed admirer of the late Jawdat Said. Also like Amina Khoulani, he was involved in nonviolent activism in Syria, where he similarly underwent politically motivated imprisonment and violent mistreatment by state authorities as a result.
- John Muhammad Butt is often described as the first Englishman to have graduated from the prestigious and conservative Dar al-Ulum Islamic college in Deoband. While there, he read and befriended Wahiduddin Khan – who remains a major inspiration for his own advocacy of nonviolence. Proudly describing himself as a 'Pashtun Englishman' (including in the title of his recent memoire [Butt, 2021b]), he has lived in Afghanistan's Swat Valley since 1970 and became a household name among Afghans through his work as a journalist and broadcaster.
- Rabia Terri Harris is an American writer, public speaker, and peace activist. She founded the Muslim Peace Fellowship in 1994 and has worked extensively with the (largely Christian) Fellowship of Reconciliation among other groups promoting nonviolence and ecumenism. She also works as a chaplain and organises the work of the Muslim Chaplains' Association.

WHAT IS PEACE?

All five contributors were initially asked to give an account of what the notion of 'Peace' means to them, as an ideal they each seek to attain, to practice, and to protect. It has already, in this book's Introduction, been acknowledged that this is a far knottier question than one might initially imagine. Each interviewee naturally approached it from a different angle, some direct and some oblique. But all were circumspect in trying to recognise both its entanglement with other ideas and practices and to

respect the fact that fellow Muslims will justifiably differ from their own positions. Amina was perhaps the most direct, asserting in unequivocally universalistic terms that:

> Peace is a fundamental understanding [*mafhūm asāsī*] inscribed in the human person in and of themselves [*bi-nafsihi*]. Within themselves and without: on social and international levels. I believe that God wants us to pursue peace and justice between people [*al-salām wa al-ʿadl bayna al-nās*] – and this on the very basis of our being believers. Equally so whether Muslim or Christian or any other religion. To believe in God is to believe in a God of peace and justice. And this must be embodied in humanity – be its level that of the familial, or the societal, or the political and international. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

John Muhammad offered a similarly encompassing account of peace, stressing like Amina the importance of private and familial relationships as well as those more public questions of politics and state policy with which the concept of pacifism in particular is often equated. He then went further to place the main focus on closer relationships with those close to one and with one's own drives and feelings:

> There is the lexicographical similarity between Islam, the establishing of peace, and peace itself [each deriving from the same root letters *sīn-lam-mīm*] … One is peace on a society level, that there shouldn't be any war. And one is peace on an individual level, on a family level. There are three states in Islam: one is the individual, one is the family, and one is the society … Controlling your anger is something which someone who is committed to peace has to start off [with] … On the family level, they might quarrel with their wife – which is one of the worst types of violence, even if it doesn't turn to violence [it] can be very troublesome. An then there's on the *as-siyasat al-madaniyya*, the civil society level, which is having a peaceful society. I would say that all three, individual, family, societal level are important. But we always say *it has to start with the individual*. Eliminating anger or controlling it. Hindu teachers … say you shouldn't have any anger in you, but Muslims say everyone has anger but you have to control it. So that's a sort of difference … It's finding a peaceful solution to any type of disagreement, any type of problem you encounter. [Butt, interview, 2021]

When quizzed on the matter of limits to such a peaceable approach, John Muhammad expressed the view that God does permit limited violence in self-defence – but that even then there are always better options. In doing so he furthermore presents an argument concerning proportionate double-effect we encountered in earlier chapters [see Chapters 5 and 6] and which is discussed again further in this chapter:

> In self-defence – and Wahiduddin Khan also says this – you are allowed to fight. But is it going to be the best option? I think there are very few instances where you can say it's the best, wisest option – even if you are being attacked … And then

there's collateral damage, civilian casualties … In the old days you just had a sword and a spear, you could just attack your enemy. Now the weaponry available is such that you're going to be indiscriminate. *Any type of weaponry you use is going to be indiscriminate.* [Butt, interview, 2021]

While the initial accounts offered by Amina and John Muhammad contain a roughly equal admixture of political and psychological elements, those of Haytham and Rabia differ markedly on precisely these points. Each focused particularly on one or the other aspect. For Haytham, the political and interpersonal aspect predominated – reflecting the especially close association he draws between peace with justice. Peace and nonviolence were for him first and foremost to be understood in terms of duty and of dignity:

So: [peace is] the absence of oppression … of any action against you that makes you feel that you are undignified, that prevent you from [enjoying] your dignity. So that you feel like you are for example a slave, or less than others, or you are behaving not like yourself, you are forced to do something that's *not you*. Anything that makes you feel that you are not yourself … Peace is not only not to feel oppressed but also not to oppress others. When you oppress others you do not live in peace, even if you are physically safe … It's not only about what others are doing to us – it is about how we are acting with them. One of the main ideas in Gandhi's philosophy, and in Jawdat Said, is that *we do not ask for our rights: we should fulfil our duties. Others' rights are our duties*. So, we should take care of duties. When everyone fulfils their duties then everyone will get their rights without asking for their rights … All religions have this very important, essential, principle: treat people as you want them to treat you. This is how we feel real peace. [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]

This appreciation for the importance of human dignity is one which Haytham himself relates directly to the experience of the so-called Arab Spring. The concept was after all a mainstay of revolutionary rhetoric from Syrian chants *of ḥurriyyah wa karāmah wa thawrah* ['freedom and dignity and revolution'] to calls of *ʿaysh, ḥurriyyah, karāmah insāniyyah*' [idiomatically 'bread, freedom, human dignity'] in Egypt's now-iconic Taḥrīr Square demonstrations. Haytham, however, expressed his own belief in the centrality of dignity by recounting not public demonstrations but personal experience:

When I was in interrogation in Ṣaydnāyā prison [described by Amnesty International as a 'Human Slaughterhouse' (Amnesty, 2017) and site of crimes against humanity], the interrogator asked me to ask for mercy. He said: 'do you want to ask for mercy … or do you want to make yourself a hero like your friend?' (because my friend before me refused to ask for mercy). I said: 'look sir, I'm not against you … I'm not your enemy. But what you're asking me to do is something I can't agree to. You are asking me to humiliate myself. And I will never do that. I can't humiliate myself.' In the end, *we are dignified by our Creator, and we will not allow anyone to humiliate us*. That's it. [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]

Where Haytham, Amina, and John Muhammad frequently related their understanding of nonviolence to their experience of Syrian and Afghan conflicts, Rabia was more comfortable in communicating her understanding of 'Peace' in cosmological and spiritual terms than in the often combative language of politics. She did so while consciously avoiding its reduction to any specific and fleeting political contest or circumstance. Instead, she maintained that

> tactics in a conflict are conditional, and I'm not going to go through that conversation here. But we need to continually *make space for the reality of error*. *People make mistakes*. They get lost. They go astray. Everybody does it all the time … I'm not in the position of judging anybody's decision: I refuse to do that. [Harris, interview, 2022]

Application must furthermore change according to time and place – a view she attributed explicitly to the same Islamic jurisprudential maxim on contextuality introduced in the Introduction. Yet the underlying principle of peace, she maintains, remains constant once it has been disentangled:

> It's a large notion. And usually when somebody asks that question ['what does peace mean to you?'], it's in a political context that the question is being asked. *But I don't think that the root of the question is political*. I think that the politics derives from something much deeper than that, because in Islam 'Peace' is a Divine Name. There is a sense that if one is coordinated with the divine work in the world, peace flows from that – that God manifests in the Name of Peace. *And so we look to that individually, even if we're not politically successful*. We want to conform ourselves to what the universe really is, what it's about, what the divine *raḥmah*, Mercy, intends or hopes for us. There is a little difference in the sort of Sufi background that I have, coming from [panenthistic Murcian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn] Ibn ʿArabī [d. 1240], between the divine creative command and the divine command which is hoping for human response, that [which] gives room for human response. So, we are called upon to respond so as to permit that mercy to flow which is held up in reserve for us – if we say '*yes*'. To me, *salām* [peace] comes from saying '*yes*' to what God is and does in the world. Because then everything is as it should be. I mean, *peace comes from the side of beauty*. If there's no beauty in it, it's not really peace … Politically, it's like 'where does peace come from?' It comes from everything having its proper right. Everything having its proper dignity. *Everything being acknowledged for what it is and what it needs*. And that is what Allāh expects from us, but which we almost never fulfil: to give to everything in Creation its proper right. [Harris, interview, 2022]

Notwithstanding their differences of style and of focus, each of these seasoned civil society advocates for Islamic nonviolence engaged directly with the question of what 'Peace' peace' means to them. The scholarly Professor Satha-Anand, by contrast, initially approached the question in

more tentative and circumspect terms. He spoke first of the reality of religiously motivated violence and explicitly recognised that some Muslims do hold such views. This, he points out, is equally true of adherents of faiths less linked to violence in the Western popular imagination, citing Trevor Ling's *Buddhism, Imperialism and War* by way of example. Not only do some Muslims hold such views, he added, but their grounds for doing so can be respectable even when he disagrees profoundly with them. 'I will never chastise those who use violence to pursue the cause of justice – because in Islam the justification for that is so clear in the Quranic verses as well as the Ḥadīth: fight oppression wherever you find it' [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]. His goal, he explained, was more to understand than to command: 'I parse religion as a variable in understanding human violence' [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]. Indeed, '[m]y work *Islam and Violence* [1986] was my attempt to understand the ways in which Islam has been used to justify violence in pursuit of a cause the users believe is just' [Satha-Anand, 2022]. In contradistinction to the approach taken by Rabia, his concern was less with ontological generality than with empirical specificity. Indeed, he famously prefers to describe his work as 'Muslim studies' rather than 'Islamic studies', favouring the practical and historical over the transcendental. His first interest is in the immediate consequences manifested in this act of violence or that nonviolent practice, particularly in the South-East Asian context. This is a practical and contextual approach he directly credits to his conversations with the great secular writer on nonviolence Gene Sharp [d. 2018]. Nevertheless, he did not confine himself to empirical examples alone but also appealed to Islamic principles to frame nonviolence as the only workable course now available to humankind:

> It is important to underscore the point that I'm talking of *nonviolence as practices*, and Islamic imperatives as justification for that . . . I argue very strongly that there are *Islamic imperatives* for Muslims to fight for justice using nonviolent action. Why imperatives? Because there are two ethical lines that a Muslim needs to negotiate . . . While you have to fight against injustice, you have also to protect innocent lives. How can you negotiate between these two seemingly contradictory poles? So that's why I argue that nonviolence *has to* become an alternative for Muslims. And *it is the imperative alternative of our time*. And that is important and I want to underline [it]. Not only because of the doctrinal injunctions but because of the time that we live in. *The time that we live in makes it possible to kill indiscriminately, to destroy indiscriminately. If you do that, then you violate another pillar of your sacred belief*. So how can you then do both: fight against injustice *and* protect the lives of the innocents? Because of these Islamic imperatives grounded in traditional Islamic teachings, nonviolence becomes an imperative alternative for Muslims. [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]

This is a broadly consequentialist argument which Chaiwat initially developed at the height of the Cold War, with its looming prospect of humankind's thermonuclear extinction. We saw other versions of this in earlier chapters [see Chapters 5 and 6] – as well as from John Muhammad earlier in this chapter. For her part, Rabia explicitly cites and attributes it to Chaiwat during her own interview when asked about the morality of war. It is, however, open to the objection that it might be understood as permitting other forms of suitably targeted killing – such as those advanced by defenders of drone warfare or even a hypothetical regime of targeted assassination or 'pacifism with death squads'. When this was put to Chaiwat directly, he replied that

> [o]ne could argue that the argument I made was limited to the kind of modern weaponry which is not accurate. There may come a time when weapons become so accurate that they target only those [whom] you really want to destroy, such as those who are terrorists or killers or what have you, and in so doing you don't have to harm any innocent lives. But then this has to do with *another* argument I make. *Islam also talks about the value of life itself*. [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]

Chaiwat then explicitly invokes Jawdat Said's discussion of Cain and Abel in expanding upon this more thoroughly theological case for peace:

> The interesting thing I think is that *God did not punish Cain the killer – he was not killed*! That was the beginning of a political society, or if you will, of the beginning of the political world. In Islam you can make the argument that *all life, regardless of who you are and what you are, is always, always sacred*. These three Islamic beliefs: *life is sacred, God is always forgiving, and Allāh's Mercy is infinite*: 'My Mercy prevails over my Wrath' say [the authoritative Hadith collections] Sahih Bukhari and Muslim – [these three beliefs] serve as legitimation basis for the *preference of nonviolence* in all Muslims' struggles. Apart from the fact that we are all connected – which some religions like Hinduism and Buddhism make very clear, and I argue Islam also makes very clear – the other thing is that the *judgement of another's life comes from God, not from us*. We do not have the whole picture . . . only God knows. It is important to underscore this because one's life must be seen in its totality all through [to] one's very last moment on this earth. This, of course, is possible only from God's perspective [and] not [from any] human's. [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]

Throughout these initial discussions, several themes have already become apparent. In Chaiwat's case in particular, one recognises an awareness on the part of these advocates for Islamic nonviolence that the moral and normative positions they support are not shared by all of their co-religionists. Yet along with this goes a marked disinclination to separate oneself too absolutely from those others. Interviewees are often

at great pains neither to condemn other Muslims who remain uncommitted to nonviolence nor to question their good faith. The same apparent desire to maintain a sense of (real or imagined) community with those against whose understanding of the faith one argues runs throughout these conversations. It also parallels observations made about several pacifists to be found in previous chapters (perhaps most particularly Shaykh Amadou Bamba [see Chapter 1]).

All interviewees furthermore agree that the ultimate warrant for a nonviolent ethics must come from God, and expresses itself as mankind's duty owed not only to itself but to God. Recourse to the central Islamic scriptures of the Quran and Hadith litter these conversations – for all that they also mention and pay respect to faiths other than Islam. More than one speaks not only in the language of rights but more pointedly of obligations: of obligations to oneself and to one's fellow human beings, which ultimately reflect one's obligations to the Creator. This last point is one which we have seen repeatedly in earlier chapters, and perhaps most saliently in the thought of Jawdat Said [Chapter 6]. This is no coincidence, and we repeatedly find Said explicitly invoked in this chapter both by his students and by those who had no direct contact with him.

The sense that peace, and by extension nonviolence, reflects the fundamental order of Creation also appears repeatedly. It betokens a theocentric perspective where the world is understood as a manifestation of God's Will. The world is even seen, particularly in the panentheistic Sufi tradition explicitly invoked by Rabia, as expressing His very nature, outpouring in a flood [*fayḍ*] of Being through His Divine Names and into Creation. Inferring from the lexicographical observation made by John Muhammad (that 'Peace' and 'Islam' share the same root letters) to a pacifist essence of Islam may be a questionable move – not least as root letters are sometimes shared by Arabic words with opposing or completely unrelated meanings [e.g. *taʿdhīb* and *ʿudhūbah* for 'torture' and 'sweetness'; or *mismār* and *musāmarah* for 'nail or rivet' and 'soirée']. Yet the fact of which Rabia reminds us, that 'Peace' [*al-salām*] is an Islamic epithet of God, is unambiguously Quranic [e.g. Quran 59:23].

Even within this small cohort of avowed adherents to nonviolence, moreover, one sees not only close parallels but also divergent paths. Whereas Rabia concentrates on metaphysical discussion, Chaiwat looks first to normative ethics and practical consequences. Where John Muhammad's focus is on domesticating those elements of human nature which might lead to interpersonal rancour and disharmony, Amina and

Haytham set their sights also on more institutional and systemic questions of mass human organisation. Where Haytham spoke of duty and of dignity, Rabia also repeatedly referred to beauty and to harmony. Where John Muhammad's thoughts turned first to household dynamics, Chaiwat contemplated geopolitics. Yet perhaps the most pertinent point of distinction among these voices, particularly for those readers who are more interested in normative and political ethics than in theology and metaphysics, revolves around the relationship between the concepts of 'Peace' and 'Justice'.

PEACE, WAR, AND JUSTICE

Tensions between peace and justice form a nexus between numerous attempts both at justifying and at discrediting nonviolence. It is precisely to the establishment and maintenance of justice which those who support the institutions of war and state violence most often appeal in defending their use of force. This remains the case whether expressed in the language of the Ottoman Circle of Justice [*dā'ire-i ʿadliye*] or the post-Westphalian convention of the sovereign state's monopoly on violence; in the words of Jean Bodin or Kınalızâde Fehmi Çelebi [both d. 1596], of Thomas Hobbes [d. 1679] or of Max Weber [d. 1920]. Exemplifying the distinction sometimes made among moral philosophers between narrow pacifism (as opposition to war) and broader nonviolence, and indeed parallels with the ideas of (initially Catholic and latterly secular) 'just war' theorists, one of our present group of nonviolent activists makes precisely this argument to justify war by a suitably constituted government:

> I'm not anti-war. War is something which happened and will continue happening and is part of imposing justice in this world – but again, it's *the last sort of thing* to think about. You are *forbidden to think about it* before thinking about the [just] state and thinking about the [competent and democratically elected] leader, and thinking about the law [of self-defence and non-aggression]. *If we do not have these things first we will not have justifiable war*. We will have fighting among gangs, and the winner will be the worst [of them]. [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]

We have already seen Chaiwat Satha-Anand refer directly to the difficulty of reconciling peace and justice as political ideals, even as in earlier chapters we have discovered various attempts at both uniting and decoupling them. When considering that relationship more deeply, Chaiwat renewed his critique of violence while at the same time recognising that the Islamic intentional motivations (or in his terms 'imperatives') which

sometimes underlie violence may in fact be conducive to peace in their challenge to the structural brutality of injustice:

> Ali Shariati did something on that … I think he's so right about Islam's role as a faith that has been destined to fight against injustice and oppression. If you follow Johan Galtung's notion, injustice or social injustice is called 'structural violence'. Islam may be blamed left and right for violence, but it is difficult to blame the faith for its imperative to fight injustice and oppression, that is to stand up and *fight against structural violence*. [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]

Where Wahiduddin Khan went furthest [see Chapter 5] in criticising what he saw as the counterproductive conflation of peace and justice, his friend and student John Muhammad Butt concentrated on resisting doing injustice oneself while actively avoiding those who are not so scrupulous. He cheerfully recounted eluding some more hostile elements of the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda, remarking with astonished irony that 'I have never been persecuted for being a Muslim by a Jew, or by a Christian, or by a Hindu … But by Muslims!' (Indeed, he has also suffered torture at the hands of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan [Butt, 2021b: 86, 90]). His conclusion is that it is best '[p]robably just to stay out of their way. You know you couldn't say that to Gandhi, because he wanted to get rid of the British [Empire]. But if you do have the option, you stay out of the way … *violence is always counterproductive*' [Butt, interview, 2021]. Strategic non-confrontation seems in his case to establish a distance between nonviolence and the desire to establish justice in its absence. 'Wahiduddin Khan asked me once which of his books I liked best', John Muhammad recounts by way of elucidation,

> and I said: *Ẓuhūr al-Islām* [*The Emergence of Islam*]. Because he's got a chapter in there, you know, the Imām Ḥasan model and the Imām Ḥusayn model. Imām Ḥasan abdicated [his claim to leadership of the Muslims against that of Umayyad Caliph Muʿāwiyah, whom Shi'ites regard as a tyrannical usurper] and refused to fight, and the Imām Ḥusayn model is that you fight [against Muʿawiyah's son and successor the Caliph Yazīd]. Wahiduddin Khan said *he didn't criticise Ḥusayn, but he praised Ḥasan*. [Butt, interview, 2021]

It is important to understand that the Sunni John Muhammad does not intend this as a sectarian intervention, in spite of the centrality of the Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom to that great divide in historical Islam. His concern is with the embrace or avoidance of violence, not with adjudicating ancient disputes between the Umayyads and the Party of ʿAlī. To avoid any such misunderstanding, he goes on to quip that in this sense '[t]he Sunnis [today] are even more Ḥusaynite than the Shias!' [Butt, interview, 2021]. Rather, he is expressing a preference for

conflict-avoidance and political quietism over fighting a righteous lost cause. (It may be notable here that another of our interviewees, Rabia Harris, elsewhere also uses the martyrdom of Ḥusayn as a positive example of Islamic nonviolence [as did Shariati in Chapter 4], comparing it with Gandhi's notion of *satyāgraha* or 'truth-force' [Harris, 1998: 100].) It is furthermore notable that the theme of avoiding the censure of those who take a different path from oneself is again in evidence: while armed struggle is be to be avoided, those who engage in it must not automatically be condemned. John Muhammad expresses the same ambivalence when asked about organised violence taking place within a community rather than between rival groups. Rulers may for their part resort to prescribed forms of judicial violence 'under certain conditions, as a deterrent . . . [for] the establishment of the rule of law', he admits when pressed on what are regarded as severe crimes under Islamic law [*ḥudūd*], 'but the ideal is *not to*' [Butt, interview, 2021].

A similarly subterranean engagement with justice might be sensed in Rabia's deliberately apolitical discussion of mankind's obligation to meet the needs and respect the rights of all created beings. This will strike many as implying one common conception of justice: one which is founded on the principle of equity. But again, had she wished to make such an argument explicitly she would likely have done so. She instead chose not to. When pressed on the matter, she both reiterated the importance of a divinely established harmonious order and gave voice to some misgivings about the materially and spiritually destructive potential of the rhetorical appeal to justice:

> I believe that there is an intrinsic connection [of peace] to justice. I'm just a little wary of the use of that word ['justice'] in English, because we always seem to connect it somehow or another to punishment or retribution. And I don't think that that's at the foundation of what the word means. But we think that way, because there's that in us which says: 'oh! someone has transgressed, so they need to be punished for their transgression – and that would be justice'. I don't think it is. That's a concession to human weakness. That kind of thinking is a *concession to human weakness*. True justice is precisely that respect for the balance of creation in which everything has a place, everything has an intrinsic place. [Harris, interview, 2022]

Amina and Haytham, who share profound personal experiences of violent oppression – including torture and bereavement – were in contra-distinction the most insistent in connecting peace and justice. Indeed, for Haytham, justice appeared to be the overarching principle to which nonviolence was subsumed, rather than the other way around: '[w]e used

to think about peaceful ways more than what is peace. If I want to define peace … maybe I'd just say justice. The usual chant about *no peace no justice* is the right thing to say. The ultimate peace is when there is justice' [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]. One might perhaps infer a sense of priorities or precedence from Haytham's (perhaps unconscious) reversal of the traditional order of a famous slogan among African American civil rights activists: from *no justice no peace* to *no peace no justice*. Yet the implication that both are indissolubly linked is unmistakable. Amina, meanwhile, quite emphatically agreed that peace and justice are mutually constitutive, while also underlining that nonviolence is the best path to both:

I think that nonviolence [*al-lā-ʿunf*] is a means [*waṣīlah*] by which justice might be achieved [*li-iḥqāq al-ʿadl*], but at the same time it is a goal [*hadaf*] through which peace may be arrived at [*lil-wuṣūl ilā al-salām*]. But as far as I am concerned peace must always be a just peace or nothing. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

Amina then went on to elaborate on her view that it was a mistake to understand nonviolence in instrumental terms as a means to an end. Rather, its importance lay in shaping a particular kind of personality and sort of civic culture. The inherent justice of such a culture, rather than the justice administered by a court or commander, is that which she connects with the concept of peace. Hers is in other words what some theorists call a 'positive peace'. Demonstrating that the unhelpful presumption that justice must be punitive is not limited to the English-speaking world, Arabophone Amina echoed Rabia's comments above:

People tend to connect justice to the juridical, but I think that … [Instead] peace starts among and between us [*baynanā*]. I take the example of the beginning of the [Syrian] revolution. Before the revolution, my friends and I in the Dāriyyā [pacifist] group [*subul al-salām*] saw nonviolence as a means for change. We only wanted to sow the seeds of an idea – because the people [in general] hadn't entertained this idea, even though it is deeply rooted … In 2003 we simply called it 'sowing seeds' – sowing the seeds of an idea, putting a cat among the pigeons so to speak [*an nulqī ḥajar fī al-mustanqaʿ*]. At the time, it was a new experience for the city, and many people were surprised and asked 'what's happening?' Some back in 2003 even thought that it was stepping outside of the bounds of Islam! But when the [2011] revolution came, and they had already heard and witnessed this nonviolent approach, they did not find it difficult to understand. When we were discussing this idea, be it with representatives of the regime or with the demonstrators [against that regime], we would say to them that nonviolence or pacifism [*al-lā-ʿunf aw al-silmiyyah*] is *not just a method* [*ṭarīqah*] to remove the regime [*izālat al-niẓām*]. Absolutely not! It is also a means to build a new and modern Syria: a way of relating to one's children, to one's spouse, to one's neighbours … It's not about protests and calling for the fall of the state; *it is a culture which we have to live out as human beings*, through which we deal with

one another [*nataʿāmal maʿ baynanā*]. For that reason, even were the Assad regime to fall, nonviolence must remain the model for our interactions. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL NONVIOLENCE

We have already seen several activists relate their understanding of Islamic nonviolence to cultural and interpersonal practices, habits, and dispositions. Where John Muhammad spoke of the importance of harmonious relations with one's spouse, Amina also draws upon her experience as a mother: 'When I raise my children, I also do it in the same spirit of nonviolence. Whether one's young or old, on any subject, there needs to be nonviolence, discussion, and consultation in the family before a decision is reached' [Khoulani, interview, 2022]. At the same time, Amina recognised that even the most idealistic family must exist within a wider society. The attitudes and mores of that wider context must be taken into account, accommodated, and challenged. She particularly identified obstacles to nonviolent culture in the form of media narratives on the one hand and the material conditions of working life on the other. In both cases she highlights the crucial role played by gender roles as they impact upon both male and female persons:

I remember that on television there are all kinds of stereotypes: for the boys violence and killing and for the girls there are programmes about princesses. I tried to challenge these with my children. For my son, all the shows were about fighting evil by blowing up the baddies with bullets and tanks: all killing. I explained to him that this wasn't the only way to deal with problems – indeed that it is *the most deficient means* to do so [*al-waṣīlah al-khāsirah*]. But through our conversations, the situation shifted, and my son changed his perspective. And he started choosing other programmes which instead promote intelligence (something which I encouraged!): like [*Inspector*] *Conan* and *Ikkyū-san*[1] ... It's the same with both sons and daughters but I concentrate especially on the boys because I recognise the impact of society ... I also always tried to send this [nonviolent] message to my [high school] students, such as when teaching history – and likewise in dealing with my colleagues. This approach can be difficult, time-consuming, and demanding of heart-ache. But I remain convinced that it's the right way, and that it has a positive influence on the children, both boys and girls. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

[1] Japanese Anime series are perennially popular in Syria and across the Arab World. Those mentioned by Amina respectively concern a crime-solving child prodigy named after Sherlock Holmes' creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the fictionalised biography of a fifteenth-century Zen Buddhist monk who meets famous artists and poets while solving people's problems.

These socially constructed gender roles are not only the products of narrative and storytelling, she adds, but also arise from the forms of labour people are expected to practice:

> The problem [of violence and gendered injustice] is fundamentally cultural. Even in the West, where things are in this respect better than in the Arab world, the culture [of equality and dialogue] is incomplete. I think it derives largely from *forms of labour*. In the Arab world many people work as farmers and as factory workers – and here the strength that is called for is muscular strength, which men more often possess. For that reason I think the Industrial Revolution has influenced gender stereotypes: when work is carried out instead with computers, then men and women are equally capable of mental effort, of intellectual strength, and thus of advancement. This change has taken place to a greater extent in Europe than in the Arab world or the Middle East more broadly. And this too is connected to nonviolence, I believe – through the medium of culture. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

Considerations not only of normative ethics but of emotional states and responses, of dispositions and intention, arose unprompted in all of these conversations. When then asked what might be the ideal attitude to take towards those whom one opposes, Haytham was particularly frank in rejecting a commonplace of both secular and religious discourse on nonviolence:

> When we first met Jawdat [Said] and his colleagues and group, we were thinking – and heard many people saying – we should love even our enemies, and distinguish between the man and his actions. We love them but we dislike their actions. Actually, [to paraphrase the first *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī,* the *ḥadīth* of *niyyah*:] *we are our actions*! I think we are our actions. It's not only not easy, it's not reasonable, I think, to distinguish between people and their actions. *We are our actions.* [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]

Rather than some abstractly affective interpretation of the Biblical injunction to 'love thine enemy', Haytham argued that one loves one's opponent by engaging critically with them. One does not accept their mistakes but seeks to correct them without resorting to coercion through the practice of *naṣīḥah* [giving moral advice]:

> So going back to 'love or to tolerance?': I prefer '*living together*' [*taʿāyush*]. Sometimes tolerance means 'let everyone do what they do'. I think that I should *advise* others, and they should advise me if they see me doing something wrong or thinking in a wrong way. I think we should *discuss* these things. *Al-amru bil-maʿrūf wa al-nahyu ʿan al-munkar* ['enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong', a phrase used nine times in the Quran] is very important. It's not something marginal in religion or in society in general . . . I think we should accept the idea that we are living together, we should accept that everyone will do what they believe in and behave according to their beliefs. But at the same time we

should believe that *we have to discuss our ideologies, our actions, and to advise each other – without forcing others* to do what we think is right or wrong. [Alhamwi, interview, 2022]

A similar liberalism was evidenced in Amina's response to the same set of questions. In her case, however, she drew a line between magnanimity towards those with whom one disagrees in good faith and those who place themselves entirely outside the bounds of decency through their crimes against humanity. In the former case:

If one's difference with the opponent is a difference of ideas, then they should not be called an enemy [*ʿadūw*]. It is natural that there should be differences among people, and the Noble Quran says 'verily We have made you peoples and tribes that you might come to know one another' [Quran 49:13]. I think that a civil society does not need people to think the same or look the same or share the same descent. It only needs them to *recognise their equality*. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

Of the latter group, 'those with whom one differs in the basis of fundamental values [*bil-qīmah*]'; however, it is unreasonable to expect a human being to cultivate an attitude of love. She listed a number of notorious war-criminals (whose names need not be reproduced here) by way of example, before declaring that such people

must be brought to justice before a court and face their sentence. I know that Jesus, peace be upon him, says love your enemies … I don't know. If someone hurts you or steals from you, sure: love and forgive them. But if you think of people like [these committers of genocide] … These people are just monstrous [*wuḥūsh*]. *It just isn't in human nature to love such creatures*. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

Rabia echoed this final point explicitly, just as we have seen John Muhammad foreshadow it in the distinction he draws between his understanding of Hindu and Muslim approaches to the respective elimination or control of anger. Nonviolence cannot be realised if it demands emotional feats from its practitioners of which they are by nature incapable, each argues: it must begin from the reality of their condition and situation. Rabia then presented an alternative which depends neither upon love for nor enmity towards another human being. Rather, mercy and humility should be our guides:

Mercy is a much bigger deal than tolerance or conviviality or even how we usually mean love. You can't love someone who has killed your family. Give it up! When love is understood as a feeling [that is]. You can't command your feelings. People who try and command their feelings are fooling themselves. The heart of the faithful is between the two fingers of the All Merciful and He turns it however

He wishes [*ḥadīth* number 2655 in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*]. Sometimes you hate somebody or something. You just *do*. That's an *emotional reality*. But that *hate cannot determine how you behave*. It cannot determine how you behave – but it *is* how you feel. So what is our responsibility toward the opposition? To *recognise that they're human* beings no matter what they do. *Because it could have been me!* If I think I'm too good and pure to have created horrors in this world, I don't know myself. I do not know myself. They are human beings. They have brought something wicked into the world. That wickedness needs to be drawn out of the world. But they're still human beings. *Whether they are forgiven or not is up to Allāh*. My business is to contest the wickedness, and not to fall into it myself. That's the whole point of the teaching about the *shayṭān* [Satan; the 'whisperer' who tempts moral agents to evil]. In my view that's the whole reason that the *shayṭān* is in Islam: [so as] not to identify the evil in a situation with another human being. We have a common enemy [in Satan], and that enemy is out to get all of us and will use any of us to that end. [Harris, interview, 2022]

This mercy, what is more, is not only a matter of recognising one's common humanity, in all its frailty. Rather, it is also an eschatological matter of one's obligations to and final judgement before God:

The whole point of saying '*lā illāhah illā allāh*' ['there is no God but God'; the first half of the Muslim profession of faith or *shahādah*] is that *Allāh is the god of your opponent as well*. You are going to be responsible for how you behave toward Allāh's creature on the other side of this dispute. To pretend that we're not is going to land us, on the Day of Judgement, in a terrible position. So *the harm to be minimised is the overall harm to the overall Creation and the Sovereignty of Allāh*. It's *taqwah* ['god-consciousness']. We have to know that if we're called to engage in a conflict, whether it's an armed conflict or an unarmed conflict, we have to realise that *we're responsible for the opposition*. And the opposition that I find in most circumstances are the people who don't feel that way, who say 'God is on my side, and to hell with you'. I don't care who it is who says that: whoever says that is in serious error because *lā illāhah illā allāh* [there is no God but God]. [Harris, interview, 2022]

NONVIOLENCE AND THE NON-HUMAN WORLD

Rabia's argument concerning one's duties to God as they result in obligations towards His creations is clearly intended first and foremost to concern human beings: those with whom one can be said to have a 'dispute' (as opposed to non-human threats such as viruses or earthquakes). That being said, it might also be extended to non-human animals or even to the natural world at large ('the overall creation'). These are equally the creations of God from a theistic perspective, and it is not uncommon for discussions of nonviolence to extend also to these. Such moves have been made on grounds both religious (such as the typically

Jain concept of *ahiṃsā* famously adopted by Gandhi) and secular (such as variations on Peter Singer's notion of *The Expanding Circle* of altruism [2011]). When this was put to her, Rabia was quick to agree:

> Well, of course *it encompasses animals and plant life and the entire natural world*, which belongs directly to Allāh. That is our responsibility here as *khalīfahs* ['deputies' or 'viceregents'] of Allāh, for which we were created. That's our *job*. It's our job to look out for all that stuff. If we're not looking out for all that stuff we're *not doing our job*. Again, everything for me comes back to the *Day of Judgement*. You're going to stand there, and you're going to be asked what did you do with your life. If we're not taking that stuff seriously, we're wasting our life. Our business here is to *take care of Creation*. If we're not doing that, we're wasting our life. [Harris, interview, 2022]

One might be tempted to infer from such an unequivocal assertion of the need to respect and care for the natural world that the deliberate killing of animals is not to be permitted. One could, however, be mistaken in doing so – and not least because animal husbandry often involves killing performed by conscientious farmers who genuinely believe themselves to have the animals' interests at heart. In an echo of the broader discussions with which this chapter opened, we find Rabia – and indeed several other interviewees – take a deliberately equivocal position with respect to the lives of non-human animals and the human violence which so often ends them. In Rabia's case, this ambivalence results not only from a refusal to prohibit acts which scripture has apparently permitted but also from a naturalistic appeal to her understanding of the innate order of the natural world:

> I think the vegan position [that animals are not to be killed, eaten, or abused] is *legitimate; I don't think it's obligatory*. But if you're going to eat meat, eat meat *responsibly*. The Quran gives us permission [to eat meat]. If there were no permission there would be no *qurbān*, there would be no Feast of Sacrifice [*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*]. There's something deep there about understanding how life works which is very painful. A friend of mine (who's not a Muslim but Jewish) says 'no food without death, no life without food'. And that's just a fact, a very painful fact about the world that we inhabit. But if we don't come to terms with it, we'll be *against the grain of the whole ecological order* in which we have been immersed and to which we are responsible. So if that's a fact, how do we do that with *taqwah* ['god-consciousness'] and with the recollection that our *first responsibility is to the raḥmah* [Mercy] of Allāh? [Harris, interview, 2022]

This final naturalistic argument for the desirability of some form of meat-eating is not uncommon among prominent American Muslims of Sufi inclination, it should be noted – though we have also seen America's great exponent of cosmic spirituality Bawa Muhaiyaddeen reject it [see Chapter 3]. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has, for instance, written that 'ritual

killing of animals that can be eaten and whose flesh then becomes *halal* or permissible is of profound import in creating a spiritual bond with the natural world' [Nasr, 2010: 83].

For his part, Chaiwat was reluctant to take any specific position on the question of whether nonviolence entails responsibilities towards non-human creation: '[t]he focus that I chose is human life' [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]. He was, however, happy to explore some potential answers by way of reference to some of his academic writing:

> Though the relationship between humans and other life forms in the world is not my real focus, I have discussed how Islamic teachings on respect of lives of animals contribute significantly to the advance of nonkilling politics because in Islam the notion of *'overkill' is prohibited while protecting young animals is encouraged* as a way to protect the future (see my 'Ants, Birds, Infants and Humans: Notes on Islam and Nonkilling Politics' [Satha-Anand, 2008]). In addition, relying on [Rāshidūn Caliph] Abū Bakr's advice to his troops according to [the authoritative *ḥadīth* collection] *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, the Islamic injunction *not to cut down trees, burning forest, nor slaying animals but for food* has also been identified in my [essay] "The Nonviolent Crescent" [Satha-Anand, 2017: 33–56]). [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]

Haytham exemplifies the last of these themes by identifying practical purpose (and specifically nutrition) as the decisive criterion in deciding whether violence against the non-human world is permissible. 'We are allowed to kill animals to eat them. But we will be punished by Allāh if we kill the same animal just for fun. So, Spanish bullfighting is forbidden, because you are killing animals for fun. We are allowed to cut [down] a tree to benefit [practically] from that, but to cut [down] a tree just for fun: that is not permissible' [Alhamwi, interview, 2022].

For Amina, by contrast, the key consideration was less one of utility and the rationality of means and ends than of the vices and virtues which the treatment of an animal might manifest in the human actor. Cruelty and sadism are to be avoided, while understanding and gentleness are to be encouraged: the intentions and dispositions of the human actor are central. Concomitantly, she notes one's care for nature more broadly for its positive effects on the human being's affective development:

> On this point … As I've said before, when human beings starts to use their intellect, it has a positive influence on everything: protecting the environment, kindness to animals … From a religious perspective, it is *forbidden in Islam to torture an animal* which is being slaughtered. There are several scriptural bases for this. Any sacrificed animal must be killed quickly and painlessly, and not in sight of another animal [which would be frightened by the sight and would suffer dread]. And on the level of mere humanity: if one sees an injured bird on the ground, one naturally helps it – as opposed to stamping on it, for

example … *Tending for nature*, even in one's own garden, is something which helps one to deal with the stresses of life and which *brings real inner peace* [*salām dākhilī haqīqī*]. Of course, eating meat is religiously *permissible* – so long as some conditions are observed. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

John Muhammad is something of an outlier in this group as an avowed vegetarian of many decades. But his initial response to questions concerning the relationship between nonviolence and the non-human world resembles that of Amina in giving primary consideration to the effects one's actions have upon the actor rather than the object of one's actions. Avoiding harm to animals inclines one to avoid doing harm more broadly, he argues, while harming them inclines one towards violence – even if meat-eating is religiously licit:

One of the first things, when I arrived in Peshawar, when Partition had just happened and people who lived in a united India were still alive, and Muslims used to say to me at that time: 'you know, *if you eat meat it makes you violent*'. I remember hearing that from Muslims – not from Hindus! I do think that I'm not in a position to really substantiate that, but there's that element of it. I have as a Muslim to accept that it is *acceptable* to eat meat. *I can't say it is ḥarām* [prohibited] to eat meat, *but I prefer not to* … You know the Quran says that these [beings] have been made subject to you and that this is for you to eat of them. So I can't really get into that area of saying that this is something against the rights of the animal. It's just that *the person I want to be is vegetarian, peaceful.* [Butt, interview, 2021]

We may recall that John Muhammad's friend and teacher Wahiduddin Khan was also a lifelong vegetarian who explicitly connected that diet with his nonviolence [see Chapter 5]. John Muhammad brought up this very fact. It is notable that he explained both his and Wahiduddin Khan's vegetarianism in cultural and affective aesthetic terms rather than by recourse to a dogma or theology which might conflict with mainstream Islamic law:

I said recently to Wahiduddin Khan, actually, I said: *Mawlānā* [honorific 'our master'], obviously I am religiously a Muslim; culturally I am Hindu'. And he said 'I am exactly the same!'. You know, living in India, this [vegetarianism] is one way you fit in with the ambience of that society … You know, all this *dhal* [pulses, particularly lentils] is available, all these vegetables are available, all this *paneer* [pressed cottage cheese] is available if you want a sort of meat substitute. *What do you want to go and buy meat for?* The meat shop is smelling to high heaven. [Butt, interview, 2021]

Throughout the course of these discussions, one is struck both by fundamental points of agreement and by differences in style, focus, and

normative prescriptions. One is also struck by a significant degree of awareness among interviewees of earlier generations of advocates for pacifism and nonviolence. Indeed, such consciousness suggests a growing mutual awareness among advocates of Islamic nonviolence when contrasted with the comparatively isolated accounts given by earlier figures in the preceding chapters. Where both generations more closely align is in their preoccupation with Islamic thought as opposed to the ideas of other traditions. The reader may be surprised by the paucity of reference to some of the most famous figures in this field's non-Muslim religious history: Gandhi's name occurs only occasionally and in passing, Martin Luther King, Jr's still more rarely, while Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau do not appear at all. Academic theorists of nonviolence – notably Johan Galtung and Gene Sharp – do appear, but only in a single interview (though I can report from other interactions that the latter was being read in the circle of Jawdat Said). Reference to earlier Muslim thinkers and activists – and indeed to one another, as seen in Rabia's praise for Chaiwat's work – is far much more frequent in these conversations, to say nothing of their written works [e.g. Rabia's quoting of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen in Harris, 1998: 107]. The frequency with which Jawdat Said is recalled stands out most particularly, in spite of his persistent anonymity in the West, while both Ali Shariati and Wahiduddin Khan are repeatedly mentioned (particularly by Chaiwat, Amina, and John Muhammad). Amina goes so far as to offer what she considers to be her intellectual lineage in terms of nonviolence, while at the same time bemoaning its marginalisation by conservative clerical mainstreams whom (like Jawdat Said [see Appendix]) she regards as more interested in personal ambition than moral principles:

> [Indian poet-philosopher Sir] Muhammad Iqbal [d. 1938], the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi [d. 1973], Jawdat Said [d. 2022]: *one can consider this a lineage* [*silsilah*] in this field [of Islamic nonviolence]. These thinkers urge the re-visiting of the religious scriptures. But all of them faced considerable *backlash from other Muslims, and from Muslim scholars*. Even, far before them, Ibn Rushd [d. 1198] the famous philosopher [known in Europe by the latinised name Averroes, the 'Father of Rationalism' and a major influence on the Aristotelianism of St Thomas Aquinas], spoke about this long before. Not about nonviolence as such but about the importance of reason. He faced resistance from a *certain class of religious scholars who were married to power – a marriage of convenience* [*tazāwuj maṣlaḥī*], just as there was a marriage between the church and the state in mediaeval Europe. I also have a great respect for Ali Shariati's thought [in terms of its critique of the clerical servants of power]. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Before proceeding in the Conclusion to reflect upon the various continuities and discontinuities between the perspectives on Islamic nonviolence encountered throughout this book, and indeed their connections to ongoing debates in moral philosophy, a final note of caution is called for. That caution is not, however, without hope – indeed it is in a sense defined by it. It is the following: one might be mistaken in viewing either these conversations, or the more extensive accounts in earlier chapters, as constituting fixed and final ideological commitments. On the contrary, while the reader may regard these views as idiosyncratic, they are not dogmatic. Not only in our subjects' repeatedly remarked-upon refusal automatically to condemn those who are not committed to nonviolence but also in their openness to recognising limits to their own understanding of it, one is struck not only by the depth of their convictions but their cultivation of humility. This humbleness is not only the epistemological caution of the conscientious scholar who knows too well the weakness of their own case and the strength of its opponents' to pretend that they have an absolute answer. Rather, it relates very directly to their experience as religious believers in a God who by definition absolutely exceeds them in knowledge and in wisdom.

The scholars and activists who inform this chapter both continue traditions of those earlier thinkers who inspired them (notably in the cases of John Muhammad's relationship with Wahiduddin Khan and those of Amina and Haytham with Jawdat Said), while in their own ways developing upon them. The relatively greater salience of environmentalist and broadly feminist concerns is a case in point and clearly reflects wider social and ecological developments over the past century. Yet all share with one another and with their precursors a sense that one's obligation is to do and be one's best, in full knowledge that one's perspective is inescapably a limited one. All understand their nonviolence through a theocentric relation of All-Wise Creator and contingent human being. One's infinitely unequal relationship with God occurs again and again as an articulation and a foundation for the sorts of moral growth understood by Muslim pacifists throughout this study to be an essential element of nonviolence. Even Amina, whose approach to Islam (like that of Jawdat Said, whom we saw was even accused of materialism [Chapter 6]) is arguably the closest to secular humanism among our exemplars in its special regard for reason and democratic liberalism, makes this point directly:

If we think today about the three great symbols of nonviolence in the world today, they are Gandhi and Martin Luther King and Jawdat Said – and *all of them have a religious background*. All three had a different religious background but they all believed in God – even if each in their own way. This is what struck me. [Khoulani, interview, 2022]

For Amina, as for others discussed in this text, belief in God is less a challenge to nonviolent ethics than a precondition for it. This may be a particularly valuable insight for those wedded to the presumption that religion in general, and perhaps Islam in particular, is defined by irrational and inflexible dogmatism. While for some of its forms some this may well be true, it is manifestly not the case for all. No better evidence for this could be expected than Chaiwat's modestly open-ended summation of his decades of research and advocacy for nonviolent Islam:

My interest is: how can Muslims pursue the path of change for justice without throwing away a new alternative, grounded in accepted Islamic teachings, that *nonviolence should be an alternative for Muslims based on Islamic imperatives*. I think when religious teachings make one *puzzle at the world as to how one should proceed in life*, that is the wonder that is there to enhance one's horizon. *And that is what religion is all about*! [Satha-Anand, interview, 2022]