

Author's accepted manuscript of Jon Hoover, 'Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence with His Vision of Universal Salvation', in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Mongols to European Imperialism*, ed. Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

Introduction

Ibn Taymiyya is notorious as the 'spiritual father of Modern Muslim terrorism'.¹ This reputation derives from the fact that some modern Muslim perpetrators of violence, most famously the assassins of Egyptian President Anwār al-Sādāt in 1981 and more recently Usāma b. Lādīn (Osama Bin Laden), have appealed to Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Mongol *fatwās* to justify their acts.² These *fatwās* advocated *jihād* against the Mongols who invaded Syria at the turn of the fourteenth century. Although the Mongols had recently converted to Islam, Ibn Taymiyya deemed them beyond the pale of true religion and maintained that they thus had to be fought.³ It is not clear that Sadat's assassins and their ilk can reasonably turn to Ibn Taymiyya to support attacks against their own governments. Ibn Taymiyya was hardly a revolutionary, and he never rebelled against his own Mamlūk rulers. Moreover, it has been argued that even though he did justify violence against open and inveterate deviants, he was generally forbearing with the sins of the morally lax and religiously ill-informed and he wrote his anti-Mongol *fatwās* merely to mobilise Syrians against a foreign invader.⁴ Be that as it may, what appears to make best sense of Ibn Taymiyya's thought on violence is a distinction between political and theological conflict. He completely rejected involvement in political violence. Muslims should not engage in armed rebellions because their benefits never outweigh their harm, and they should not support rulers in quelling rebellions either. Only

¹ Johannes J.G. Jansen, 'Ibn Taymiyyah and the Thirteenth Century: A Formative Period of Modern Muslim Radicalism', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5-6 (1987-8), pp. 391-96, 393.

² Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York, 1986); Rosalind W. Gwynne, 'Usama bin Ladin, the Qur'an and Jihad', *Religion* 36 (2006): pp. 61-90; and Osama Bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence and trans. James Howarth (London, 2005), see index for Ibn Taymiyya.

³ Denise Aigle, 'The Mongol Invasions of Bilād Al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three "Anti-Mongol" Fatwas', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11.2 (2007), pp. 89-120.

⁴ Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 45-58; and Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Against Extremisms* (Beirut, 2012), pp. 47-50.

theological rebellion and religious error should be opposed with force.⁵ So, in addition to his anti-Mongol *fatwās*, Ibn Taymiyya wrote *fatwās* declaring the Nuṣayrīs of Syria the worst of heretics and apostates to support the squashing of Nuṣayrī resistance in Syria,⁶ and he was especially rigorous in prescribing the death penalty for grievous religious offences. A Muslim who deifies a human being, prays to the dead, or gives saints priority over the Prophet Muḥammad, and refuses to repent should be beheaded,⁷ and anyone – Muslim or non-Muslim – who curses the Prophet Muḥammad should be killed without further recourse.⁸

Alongside Ibn Taymiyya’s reputation for justifying religious violence, recent research has made apparent that he also set forth arguments for universal salvation. The mainstream view of his day was that Muslims would attain Paradise, perhaps after some time in Hell-Fire to expiate their sins, while unbelievers would spend eternity in the Fire as just retribution for their unbelief. Against this, Ibn Taymiyya argued that God’s mercy would overtake God’s justice such that chastisement in the Fire would eventually come to an end for all human beings. Unbelievers and polytheists would certainly spend some time in the Fire, but even they would eventually enter Paradise. Ibn Taymiyya’s foremost student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya expanded these arguments, and in more recent times the prominent Qatari-based scholar Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī has endorsed them.⁹

⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 271-279.

⁶ Yaron Friedman, ‘Ibn Taymiyya’s Fatāwā against the Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Sect’, *Der Islam* 82.2 (2005), pp. 349-63.

⁷ Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Against Extremisms*, pp. 30.

⁸ Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and coercion in Islam. Interfaith relations in the Muslim tradition* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 149-152.

⁹ Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford; New York, 2012), pp. 74-102 (on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim); Jon Hoover, ‘Islamic Universalism: Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya’s Salafī Deliberations on the Duration of Hell-Fire’, *The Muslim World* 99.1 (2009), pp. 181-201; Hoover, ‘Against Islamic Universalism: ‘Alī al-Harbī’s 1990 Attempt to Prove that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya Affirm the Eternity of Hell-Fire’, in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin, 2013), pp. 377-399; Hoover, ‘A Muslim Conflict over Universal Salvation’, in *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Hannah Bacon, Wendy Dossett and Steve Knowles (London, 2015), pp. 160-171; Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī, ‘Allāh lam yakhluq al-insān li-yu‘adhdhibahu.. wa-lan takhlud al-nufūs fī al-nār’, *Al-Ahrām al-‘arabī*, 29 July 2002, pp. 36-37; ‘Ā’isha bint Yūsuf al-Mannā’ī, ‘‘Aqīdat fanā’ al-nār bayna Ibn ‘Arabī wa-Ibn Taymiyya wa-Ibn al-Qayyim’, *Majallat markaz buḥuth al-sunna wa-l-sīra* (University of Qatar) 11 (2004), pp. 85-141 (also on al-Qaraḏāwī).

To modern ears the combination of Ibn Taymiyya's legitimisation of violence against heretics and his vision of universal salvation often appears incongruous. Take, for example, a 2008 opinion piece in the American online magazine *Religion Dispatches* by the progressive Muslim writer Svend White. White's main purpose in writing is to criticise dispensationalist currents in American Christian eschatology. However, he also observes along the way that while most Muslim scholars have held that unbelievers will suffer punishment eternally in Hell, a few have argued against this view from the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. Among these few scholars, White notes, Ibn Taymiyya was perhaps the most famous. White continues that Ibn Taymiyya's belief in universal salvation is 'an ironic fact, given the role played by other aspects of his thought in inspiring modern extremist movements not exactly known for their ecumenical leanings'.¹⁰ The reason that White finds this ironic is that he associates belief in universal salvation with an ecumenical spirit. Presumably there is warrant for linking universalism with open-mindedness and tolerance toward those who differ. However, White finds this openness lacking in Ibn Taymiyya's modern heirs and those aspects of his thought that inspire them.

So, is there then a contradiction in Ibn Taymiyya's thought between his universalism and his legitimisation of violence against heretics, or, has he perhaps been radically misunderstood on either one or the other? Both Ibn Taymiyya's universalism and his justifications of violence have been well documented and studied, and they cannot be dismissed easily as misapprehensions of the historical evidence. Nor, I want to argue, is it especially ironic or inconsistent that Ibn Taymiyya should adhere to both in his thinking. As I intend to show, this is because a consequentialist and rehabilitative theory of punishment stands behind both Ibn Taymiyya's eschatological universalism and his legitimisation of violence in temporal affairs. In both this world and the next Ibn Taymiyya is convinced that violent punishment and the threat thereof are effective means for improving the human religious condition. This result undermines White's ready correlation of universalism with ecumenism. While that linkage may seem intuitive to many in modern liberal culture and may often hold true, Ibn Taymiyya shows that open-mindedness and tolerance does not follow from belief in universal salvation with any kind of logical necessity. A rehabilitative approach to punishment can in fact lead in the opposite direction. To elaborate the argument,

¹⁰ Svend White, 'Blessed Be the Warmakers', *Religion Dispatches*, 20 February 2008, www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/88/blessed_be_the_warmakers (accessed 2 December 2015).

I will first examine Ibn Taymiyya's universalism and its theological roots and then his justifications for the use of violence.

Ibn Taymiyya's Universalism

Ibn Taymiyya's universalism has been a source of consternation to some of his recent admirers because it undermines the mainstream Muslim view that the just retribution for unbelief is eternal Fire. A few scholars have tried to absolve him of having written in support of universal salvation by pointing to a lack of evidence for the doctrine in his writings and marginalising reports of it in later polemical literature.¹¹ However, this strategy is no longer tenable in view of the 1995 publication of his treatise on the very issue, which I have dubbed *Fanā' al-nār* (Annihilation of the Fire) for short.¹² The origins of *Fanā' al-nār* lie in Ibn Taymiyya's relationship with his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, who once asked him what he thought about the everlasting chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire.¹³ Ibn Taymiyya observed that the question was great and did not venture a reply. It appears that he was not sure what to think. Later on, Ibn al-Qayyim came across a report from the second Sunnī caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in a commentary by the ninth century scholar 'Abd b. Ḥamīd [or Ḥumayd] al-Kissī. 'Umar's report reads, 'Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand in 'Ālij, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out'. 'Ālij is a large sand tract near Mecca, and the meaning is that no one will remain in the Fire forever even if they might remain in it for a very long time. Given that classical Sunnī eschatology relegates unbelievers to Hell-Fire eternally, 'Umar's statement naturally perplexed Ibn al-Qayyim. So, he sent 'Abd b. Ḥamīd's book to Ibn Taymiyya, who was then enduring his final imprisonment in the Citadel of Damascus. In response, Ibn Taymiyya wrote *Fanā' al-nār*, the last work that he composed before he died in 728/1328.

Among other things, *Fanā' al-nār* discusses texts touching on the duration of the Fire, the mainstream argument for eternal Fire from consensus (*ijma'*), and theological considerations. I will take these up in turn. Ibn Taymiyya examines a number of Qur'anic texts and early reports that admit of an end to chastisement in the Fire. He notes for example

¹¹ Hoover, 'Against Islamic Universalism', examines one attempt to exonerate Ibn Taymiyya of this belief.

¹² Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd 'alā man qāla bi-fanā' al-janna wa-l-nār* [hereafter *Fanā' al-nār*], (Riyadh, 1415/1995).

¹³ See Hoover, 'Islamic Universalism', pp. 182-191, for documentation and elaboration of what follows here on *Fanā' al-nār* and its reception by Ibn al-Qayyim and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī.

that ‘Abd b. Ḥamīd quotes ‘Umar’s report about the sand in ‘Ālij to elucidate the Qur’ān’s statement that those in Hell will remain therein ‘for long stretches of time’ (*lābithīna fihā aḥqāban*) (Q. 78:23). While ‘long stretches of time’ may indicate a very long span of time, it will not last forever, which supports the limited duration of the Fire. Ibn Taymiyya does acknowledge that the Qur’ān often says that unbelievers will ‘abide in [the Fire] forever’ (*khālidīn fihā abadan*)’ (Q. 33:65, see also 2:39, 3:116, 4:169, etc.) He counters however that such statements must not be taken absolutely and without qualification. They mean simply that unbelievers will remain in the Fire as long as it lasts. These verses do not preclude an end to unbelievers’ chastisement.

Beyond the many Qur’ānic verses suggesting eternal Fire for unbelievers, the bedrock of the classical Sunnī case for eternal Fire for unbelievers is consensus. The argument is that the Muslim scholars have come to a consensus that Hell is eternal for unbelievers. Ibn Taymiyya rejects on principle a consensus reached later than the Salaf, the first two or three generations of the Muslim community, as simply too difficult to verify. He also denies that the Salaf had come to a consensus on this particular issue one way or the other. They certainly had not reached a consensus that chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire was eternal.

Most decisive in *Fanā’ al-nār* are Ibn Taymiyya’s theological arguments. He explains that the paradisiacal Garden flows naturally from God’s attribute of mercy while Hell-Fire follows from God’s wrath. Now, as it says in the Ḥadīth, God’s mercy will overcome His wrath. Thus, the Garden of Paradise will endure forever, while the Fire will not. The predominance of God’s mercy precludes everlasting punishment. Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya argues that God in His wise purpose could have no good reason for chastising someone forever. Chastisement is for a limited time only, and its purpose is to purify and cleanse even unbelievers.

Ibn Taymiyya’s vision of Hell-Fire is thoroughly therapeutic and rehabilitative – retribution for unbelief is not the main point – and in the mid-740s/1340s Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya elaborated the arguments for this reformative vision and graced it with some vivid metaphors. The Fire is the great remedy for the worst of human maladies and the post-mortem whip that God uses to bring unbelievers into line and make them fit for Paradise. It also appears that Ibn al-Qayyim brought Taymiyyan argumentation for the limited duration of Hell-Fire to wider public attention. His theologising on this and other matters clashed with the dominant Ash‘arī theology of the day and drew strong reactions from the powerful Shāfi‘ī

chief judge of Damascus Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), including a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār* in 748/1348.¹⁴ The refutation does not mention Ibn al-Qayyim explicitly, but he is the obvious target of al-Subkī's ire, seeing that Ibn Taymiyya had died 20 years earlier. Al-Subkī castigates Ibn Taymiyya – and Ibn al-Qayyim by implication – for breaking with the consensus of the Muslim community that unbelievers would spend eternity in the Fire, and he lists numerous Qur'ānic verses that he believes support this. In the classical Sunnī doctrine that al-Subkī defends, believers in one God will all reach Paradise eventually, but some of them may first need to undergo a period of punishment and purification in the Fire. However, unbelievers can have no hope of leaving the Fire, and they face everlasting chastisement as retribution for their unbelief.

Toward Squaring Universalism and the Legitimation of Violence

Let us return now to the dilemma with which we started: how can Ibn Taymiyya's vision of universal salvation be squared with his justification of violence against heretics and religious deviants? Given the fact that Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār* was the last thing that he wrote, one could suggest that he mellowed out with the passing of years. His latest anti-Mongol *fatwā* dates to 1312-1313,¹⁵ and the last of his anti-Nuṣayrī *fatwās* appears to have been written in 1317.¹⁶ So, it could be argued that by 1328, when Ibn Taymiyya wrote *Fanā' al-nār*, he had moderated his hostility toward heretics and unbelievers and even countenanced their eventual salvation in God's mercy. There is unfortunately little further evidence to support this hypothesis, and there is a more persuasive solution at hand. Rather than imagining Ibn Taymiyya's journey toward universal salvation as a change of heart toward heretics, it is more plausible to see his universalism as a logical outworking of his longstanding theological vision, a ramification of his pervasive theological optimism, which simply required a prompt or two from a student like Ibn al-Qayyim to think through.

Ibn Taymiyya's theology differs substantially from classical Ash'arism in which God wills and creates all things, human acts included, without cause or purpose such that God's justice in what He does cannot be called into question. For Ash'arīs God is perfectly just to

¹⁴ On Ibn al-Qayyim's conflict with al-Subki, see Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman, eds., *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought in Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah* (Rome, 2010), pp. 22-26; and Hoover, 'Against Islamic Universalism'.

¹⁵ On the dating of this *fatwā*, see Aigle, 'The Mongol Invasions', pp. 117-120.

¹⁶ Friedman, 'Ibn Taymiyya's *Fatāwā*', pp. 359-360.

create evil without reason and to punish acts of disobedience that He wills. His theology also differs from the retributivism of Mu'tazilism. According to the Mu'tazilīs, God creates the world for the purpose of providing human beings opportunity to earn reward through free acts of obedience, and God's justice consists in meting out reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience in perfect proportion and compensating those who suffer unfairly. Ibn Taymiyya rejects the Ash'arī view of God as capricious and the Mu'tazilī view of God as unworthily tied down to human notions of retributive justice. In Ibn Taymiyya's theology, the logic of retribution is subordinated to a teleology of worship. The whole aim of God's creation is love and worship of God alone, and God has a wise purpose (*ḥikma*) in everything that He creates such that this is the best of all possible worlds. Nothing lies outside of God's creative power, and God creates even evil to purify, educate and motivate human beings for exclusive worship of Him.¹⁷ From this perspective, Hell-Fire is simply one of several means at God's disposal to achieve this aim. In the imagery of Ibn al-Qayyim, the Fire is God's whip and God's remedy to make unbelievers fit for the Garden of Paradise. Or more positively, God in His love, mercy and wise purpose will not fail to bring creation to its perfect fulfillment. God in his wise purpose could have no good reason for consigning some creatures to the Fire forever. Rather, God will prevail in turning all creation around to worship Him alone, and Hell-Fire is God's tool of chastisement to cleanse and rehabilitate unbelievers to that end. Universal salvation is the logical culmination of Ibn Taymiyya's grand theological vision of God's creative purposes for the world.

Ibn Taymiyya's vision of Hell-Fire as purification and rehabilitation for even unbelievers stands in sharp contrast to the mainstream Muslim view that unbelief deserves eternal damnation. The root of this vision is found in his view of God's punishing activity in the Hereafter as decidedly consequentialist rather than retributivist. When we move to the level of this-worldly affairs, we find the same logic of punishment at work in his justifications of violence. The primary purpose of violent punishment in this life is to promote exclusive worship of God, not mete out due recompense.

Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence

To examine how Ibn Taymiyya rationalises and legitimises violence as punishment, I turn to his major work on Sharī'a guided public policy *Al-Siyāsa al-shar'iyya* (hereafter

¹⁷ Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden, 2007), especially chapters 1, 5 and 6.

Siyāsa).¹⁸ Congruent with his theology more generally, Ibn Taymiyya observes in *Siyāsa* that the ultimate aim of humanity is to devote religion to God alone, and he adds that the purpose of rulers is to bring their followers to this end. Their role is to ‘reform the religion of the people’ (*iṣlāḥ dīn al-khalq*) and reform those worldly affairs essential to the establishment of religion.¹⁹ To aid this effort, God sent messengers with books to show the way of justice, and He sent iron, that is, the sword, to correct those who deviate from what has been revealed. As Ibn Taymiyya puts it, ‘The establishment of the religion is by the Book (*mushāf*) and the sword’.²⁰

Ibn Taymiyya divides punishments (*‘uqūbāt*) into two kinds in *Siyāsa*: those inflicted upon people who live under Muslim rule and those inflicted upon defiant groups that cannot be subdued without a fight.²¹ The first category includes the *ḥudūd* punishments for wine drinking, adultery, theft, and highway robbery, as well as discretionary punishment (*ta‘zīr*) for other offences. While noting the expiatory and retributive functions of the *ḥudūd* punishments, Ibn Taymiyya is most concerned with their role as a deterrent, and he decries the practice of public officials accepting payments to forgo implementation of the *ḥudūd* because it reduces their deterring effect and spreads corruption.²² Under the first category also fall discretionary punishments imposed to enforce performance of religious duties and

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya* is found in *Majmū‘ fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* (hereafter MF), 37 vols. (Riyadh, 1961–1967), vol. 28, pp. 244–397. The reprint of MF (Medina: Mujammā‘ al-Malik Fahd, 2004) available at www.archive.org/details/mfsiaitmmfsiaitm is set in slightly different type but retains the pagination of the original. For an English translation of *Al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya*, see Omar A. Farrukh, *Ibn Taymiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam* (Beirut, 1966). For exposition and analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya*, as well as his related treatise on the inspection of public spaces *Al-Ḥisba*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 60–178, see Baber Johansen, ‘A Perfect Law in an Imperfect Society: Ibn Taymiyya’s Concept of “Governance in the Name of the Sacred Law”,’ in *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Shari‘a. A Volume in Honor of Frank E. Vogel*, ed. Peri Bearman, Wolfhart Heinrichs and Bernard G. Weiss (London, 2008), pp. 259–94. An English translation of *Ḥisba* is found in Ibn Taymiyya, *Public Duties in Islam: The Institution of the Ḥisba*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Leicester, 1985).

¹⁹ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 262–263, quote on p. 262. Ibn Taymiyya outlines the same rationale for temporal authority at the beginning of *Ḥisba*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 61–65.

²⁰ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, p. 264.

²¹ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, p. 349.

²² *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 299–306, 318, 347. On the deterrent function of the *ḥudūd*, see also *Siyāsa* MF, vol. 28, pp. 313 and 329.

omission of forbidden acts.²³ In the worst case, anyone who refuses to practice a religious duty such as ritual prayer or deem it not binding should be killed as an unbeliever (*kāfir*).²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya also prescribes killing the wine drinker on the fourth offense to cut off the perpetration of corruption.²⁵

Under the second category of punishments noted in *Siyāsa*, punishments applying to those who cannot be subdued without a fight, come *jihād* against the unbelievers until they submit to the authority of Islam and putting down rebels like the Khārijīs and those who reject religious laws. The main purpose in fighting is quelling open defiance and rebellion against religion. Deviance kept out of the public eye poses far less danger. Ibn Taymiyya explains that the preacher of innovation (*bid'a*) must be punished much more severely than the unbeliever who does not impede Islam because that latter harms no one but himself.²⁶ The category of rebels who compromise the religion of Islam is where Ibn Taymiyya classifies the Mongols and the Nuṣayrīs in his various *fatwās* justifying *jihād* against them.²⁷

Generally speaking, according to Ibn Taymiyya in *Siyāsa*, ‘Punishing omission of religious obligations and commission of forbidden acts is the purpose of *jihād* in the path of God’,²⁸ and the primary aims of this punishment are deterring potential offenders, reducing corruption in society, and promoting greater obedience of God. This consequentialist and especially rehabilitative approach to punishment becomes even more distinct in the images with which Ibn Taymiyya illustrates it. He compares the ruler punishing a criminal to a father disciplining his son in order to correct him and keep him from corruption. He also compares the ruler to a doctor who prescribes a disagreeable remedy for his patient. The patient endures the misery caused by the medicine to find healing. The just ruler’s intention in executing punishment is to reform his subjects, and this in itself is an act of worship just like undertaking *jihād* in the way of God.²⁹

²³ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 359-360.

²⁴ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 308, 359-360.

²⁵ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 336, 347. Ibn Taymiyya writes in *Hisba*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 108, ‘When someone who spreads corruption in the earth cannot be repelled except by killing, he is killed.’

²⁶ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 349-359. At MF, vol. 28, p. 181, Ibn Taymiyya explains that open offenders are punished more severely than the more discrete in order to protect the religious and mundane spheres.

²⁷ Aigle, ‘The Mongol Invasions’, pp. 27-103; Friedman, ‘Ibn Taymiyya’s *Fatāwā*’, pp. 351, 355-360.

²⁸ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, p. 308.

²⁹ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 329-330.

Ibn Taymiyya's views on punishment in *Al-Siyāsa al-shar'iyya* may appear severe and idealistic, but he is also exceedingly pragmatic in his counsel to rulers seeking the greater good of Islam. He counsels rulers to be gentle in prodding their subjects to do things that they dislike and to be attentive to the pleasures that human beings need in order to endure difficulty.³⁰ He permits buying off highway robbers with *zakāt* funds instead of fighting them if the ruler deems that to be the most effective means of bringing public order.³¹ Additionally, while Ibn Taymiyya criticises rulers who put their own interests before religion, he also allows use of public funds to win people of influence over to the cause of religion, and he criticises rulers who might be too pious or fastidious to employ such techniques. In Ibn Taymiyya's pragmatic political vision, the ruler should take a middle path between excessive scrupulousness and raw self interest in the advancement of religion.³² The ruler must weigh up the benefits and detriments in every action and chose the most beneficial course overall.³³

Conclusion

To recapitulate the argument of this essay, a consequentialist theory of punishment strongly focused on rehabilitating human beings and bringing them around to worshipping God alone informs both Ibn Taymiyya's vision of universal salvation and his legitimisation of violence. In this temporal world, violent punishment in the hands of the ruler deters wrongdoing, reduces corruption and increases obedience to God's law. In the hereafter, Hell-Fire purifies and chastises even unbelievers until it has achieved its purposes in God's mercy, and all are made fit for Paradise. This reformist and therapeutic view of Hell differs distinctly from the classical Muslim doctrine of the Fire as eternal retribution for unbelief. While it may be attractive to see in Ibn Taymiyya's universalism a turn toward a tolerant ecumenism, there is little historical evidence to warrant this conclusion, and, more significantly, there is nothing that necessitates it theologically. On the contrary, Ibn Taymiyya's vision of universal salvation coheres well with his legitimisation of violence in that both reflect confidence that violent punishment – whether by the sword or the Fire – is among the means for realising the goal of God's creation: exclusive worship of God.

³⁰ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 364-370.

³¹ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, p. 322.

³² *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 293-295.

³³ *Siyāsa*, MF, vol. 28, p. 284. See *Hisba*, MF, vol. 28, pp. 129-131 for a full statement on weighing up benefits and detriments.