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The dominant Sunnī Muslim theology of salvation is based on the principle of retribution. Believers in one God will be rewarded with everlasting Paradise while unbelievers will suffer eternally in Hell-Fire for their failure to believe. Believers may first have to endure time in the Fire to expiate their sins before entering Paradise, but no such hope may be entertained for unbelievers. Many Sunnīs support the eternal damnation of unbelievers with Qur'ānic verses such as 'Truly God has cursed the unbelievers and prepared for them a flaming fire, abiding therein forever' (Q. 33:64-5), but further support for this doctrine has also been found in an appeal to consensus (*ijmā'*) as in the words of medieval theologian al-Ījī (d. 1355), 'The Muslims have reached a consensus that the unbelievers will abide in the Fire forever; their chastisement will not be cut off' (1997: 3:397). In the traditional Sunnī doctrine of consensus, what Muslims have come to agree upon is binding and no longer subject to debate.

However, not everyone has always agreed. The doctrine of eternal damnation of unbelievers in the Fire received one of its most forceful critiques in the theology of fourteenth-century Damascene theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and his foremost disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350). Ibn Taymiyya was a prolific and insightful thinker who has inspired a wide range of reform-minded Muslims in the modern period, and he is most famous as a key source of authority for Islamic militants such as Osama Bin Laden (d. 2011). Ibn Taymiyya's student Ibn al-Qayyim was equally prolific, and his books are popular in Salafī circles throughout the world today. These two figures are not usually known for their moderation or their tolerance. So, it often comes as a surprise that they set forth arguments on both Qur'ānic and theological grounds that chastisement of unbelievers in Hell-Fire would come to an end, arguments that, as we will see later on, continue to attract some Muslim scholars today.

What follows is the story of how Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya bypass the alleged consensus on eternal damnation of unbelievers in the Fire in order to give precedence to a reformist and therapeutic rationale for chastisement leading to universal salvation, and then how the Damascene jurist Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1355), by all appearances, forced Ibn al-Qayyim to back down on his views with a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya. This account draws together into a single narrative findings published earlier in

two studies on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's texts and argumentation (Hoover 2009; Hoover 2013; see also Khalil 2012: 80-102).

### **Ibn Taymiyya's case for universal salvation**

Ibn Taymiyya's case for universal salvation was known to several medieval writers, but modern scholars were unable to locate it in his own writings until his treatise on the topic was published in Saudi Arabia in 1995. The treatise is called *Al-Radd 'alā man qāla bi-fanā' al-janna wa al-nār* (The Response to Whoever Says that the Garden and the Fire Will Pass Away) or *Fanā' al-nār* (The Passing Away of the Fire) for short. *Fanā' al-nār* is the very last work that Ibn Taymiyya wrote before his death in 1328, which explains why no reflection on the subject has been found elsewhere in his corpus. His disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya had asked him earlier about the duration of chastisement for unbelievers, but Ibn Taymiyya could only reply that it was a great question. He apparently did not know what to think. A while later, Ibn al-Qayyim presented Ibn Taymiyya a saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad's Companion 'Umar b. al-Khattāb that he had found in a ninth-century Qur'ān commentary. The statement from 'Umar reads: 'Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand of 'Ālij, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out'. The amount of sand of 'Ālij, a sandy expanse on the way to Mecca, was presumably very great, and the duration of punishment for people in the Fire will be similarly very long. Nonetheless, 'Umar's saying indicates that there will come a time when everyone in the Fire will leave it. This affirmation of universal salvation contradicted the mainstream Sunnī view of the Ibn Taymiyya's day, and it bothered Ibn al-Qayyim enough to ask his teacher what it meant (Hoover 2009: 182-5).

The central arguments of Ibn Taymiyya's response in *Fanā' al-nār* are worth reviewing in some detail. A key section of the treatise presents textual support for the limited duration of chastisement in the Fire. Ibn Taymiyya begins with 'Umar's report just noted, 'Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand of 'Ālij, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out'. According to Ibn Taymiyya, this report interprets the quranic witness that those in Hell will be 'staying in it for long stretches of time (*lābithīna fīhā aḥqāban*)' (Q. 78:23). 'Umar's report clarifies that the 'long stretches of time' in this verse do come to an end. Medieval Sunnī theologians like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) interpreted this verse to apply only to believing sinners in order to reconcile it to mainstream Sunnī doctrine: monotheistic sinners will be the ones suffering in the Fire for

‘long stretches of time’ before entering Paradise. However, Ibn Taymiyya rejects this interpretation and maintains that the verse applies to unbelievers as well.

Ibn Taymiyya also supports his case with the Qur’ānic verse claiming that the residents of the Fire will be ‘abiding in the Fire, as long as the Heavens and the Earth endure, except as your Lord wills’ (Q. 11:107). To interpret this, Ibn Taymiyya turns to a report from the Prophet’s Companion Ibn ‘Abbās, which reads, ‘It is not necessary for anyone to judge God with respect to His creatures or to assign them to a garden or a fire’. In Ibn Taymiyya’s view, this report means that the time spent in the Fire need not last forever in an absolute sense. Instead, it is contingent upon God’s will and the continuing existence of this world (Ibn Taymiyya 1995: 52-70; Hoover 2009: 186).

The next section of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Fanā’ al-nār* refutes arguments for the perpetuity of the Fire, and two of these are pivotal. According to the first argument, the Qur’ān demonstrates the Fire’s perpetuity with verses such as Q. 33:64-5 quoted above indicating that unbelievers will abide in the Fire forever. Despite such verses, Ibn Taymiyya counters that the Qur’ān does not say that the Fire will never pass away. Rather, those in Hell-Fire will ‘abide therein forever’ only for the duration of the chastisement. The terms ‘abide’ and ‘forever’ need not mean that chastisement will continue without end.

The second argument is that the Muslim community has come to consensus on perpetual chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire and that there was no disagreement over this matter among the Salaf, that is, the first two or three generations of Muslims following the Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn Taymiyya denies that the Salaf have come to consensus on the everlasting chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire. He asserts instead that none of the Prophet’s Companions ever said that the Fire would last forever in an absolute sense. Moreover, the Successors, the generation following the Companions, had divergent opinions on the matter. For Ibn Taymiyya a consensus of the Salaf is the only authoritative kind of consensus, and such a consensus does not exist on this question. He rejects the dominant Sunnī understanding of his day that the Muslim community may come to a binding consensus after the era of the Salaf. Such a consensus, Ibn Taymiyya believes, would simply be too difficult to verify given the size and spread of the community, and it would be susceptible to correction should a stronger proof emerge. This Salafī approach to religious authority is the fundamental difference dividing Ibn Taymiyya from traditionalist Sunnism (Ibn Taymiyya 1995: 71-9; Hoover 2009: 186-7; al-Matroudi 2006: 57-9, 186-7).

In *Fanā’ al-nār* Ibn Taymiyya also provides theological arguments based on God’s attributes, beginning from God’s mercy. God’s mercy (*raḥma*) and God’s forgiveness

necessarily entail that the blessing of Paradise last forever without end. However, none of God's names or attributes necessarily entails the perpetuity of chastisement. Moreover, God's mercy is overwhelming and all-encompassing in accord with the Qur'ān—'[God] has written mercy for Himself' (Q. 6:12)—and with hadith reports from the Prophet: 'My mercy precedes my anger', and, 'My mercy overcomes my anger'. In view of God's overpowering mercy, Ibn Taymiyya reasons, there can be no everlasting chastisement. In a further argument, Ibn Taymiyya appeals to God's attribute of wisdom, God's wise purpose (*ḥikma*), in everything that God creates. Given that God's wise purpose in chastisement is cleansing and purifying souls from sin, there could be no imaginable wise purpose in God creating everlasting chastisement (Ibn Taymiyya 1995: 80-83; Hoover 2009: 188-9).

Not only does Ibn Taymiyya's Salafī approach to consensus and religious authority clash with Sunnī traditionalism, but his optimistic appeal to God's wise purposes in all that God creates conflicts with the dominant Ash'arī theological view that God's acts without purpose or reason. For strict Ash'arīs, there is no explanation for what God does apart from God's sheer will. Ibn Taymiyya spends considerable energy refuting this Ash'arī voluntarism in other works, and he affirms that God creates all things for wise purposes such that this is the best of all possible worlds. God creates even evils for wise purposes that contribute to the greater good of educating and purifying human beings and spurring them on to worship God alone. The rebellion of Pharaoh and his destruction teach all later generations a lesson concerning what to avoid. Illness and falling into sin foster humility, and suffering expiates sins. Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the Sunnī traditionalist notion of consensus and reports like those noted above from 'Umar and Ibn 'Abbās open the door to rethinking the mainstream doctrine of eternal chastisement. Then it was probably Ibn Taymiyya theology of God's wise purposes that, above all else, impelled him to argue for limited chastisement. Punishment of unbelievers in everlasting Fire does not fit with Ibn Taymiyya's view of a God who creates all human beings for wise purposes and draws them to worship God alone. Ibn Taymiyya never states absolutely in *Fanā' al-nār* that salvation will be universal, but that is clearly the upshot of his argument (Hoover 2009: 189-190; Hoover 2007).

### **Ibn al-Qayyim's arguments for universal salvation**

Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār*, written just before his death in 1328, seems not to have aroused much interest until his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya copied portions of it into his book on eschatology *Hādi al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrah* (Spurring Souls on to the Realms of Joys). To the best of our knowledge, this book dates to 1345, some seventeen years after Ibn

Taymiyya's death. As we will see below, this is also when Ibn al-Qayyim begins having difficulties with the Shāfi'ī chief judge in Damascus Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī. In *Hādī* Ibn al-Qayyim follows the order of presentation in Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār* closely and examines the relevant texts from the Qur'ān and reports from 'Umar, Ibn 'Abbās and others in support of limited chastisement. He also greatly elaborates the theological arguments for limited chastisement in the Fire in a strongly therapeutic direction. God's wise purpose in the Fire is cleansing, not vengeance, therapy, not retribution. Ibn al-Qayyim writes in *Hādī*, 'Trial and punishment are the remedies appointed to remove maladies. They are not removed by any other means. And the Fire is the Great Remedy' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya n.d.: 332; trans. Hoover 2009: 189). He explains elsewhere in *Hādī*, 'The wise purpose [of God]—Glory be to Him—required that He make a remedy (*dawā'*) appropriate to each malady (*dā'*) and that the remedy for the malady be among the most toilsome of remedies. The Compassionate Physician cauterizes one who is ill with the Fire, cauterization after cauterization, to remove the vile matter besmirching the upright nature' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya n.d.: 326; trans. Hoover 2009: 190).

Ibn al-Qayyim also appeals to considerations of benefit and God's attributes. He argues that eternal chastisement does not benefit anyone. God is above needing any benefit that might be derived from it, and God's beloved do not gain any blessing from it either. With respect to God's attributes, Ibn al-Qayyim argues that God's mercy and good pleasure are essential attributes that will overcome God's non-essential attributes of wrath and anger thus implying that the Fire will end. Moreover, God's wise purpose precludes the evil of eternal Hell-Fire: 'It is not in the divine wise purpose that evils remain perpetually without end and without interruption forever such that [evils] and goods would be equivalent in this' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya n.d.: 341; trans. Hoover 2009: 190).

These arguments might lead us to think that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya unequivocally affirms limited chastisement in the Fire. At the very end of his discussion, however, he quotes the Qur'ān, 'Surely your Lord does whatever He wills' (Q. 11:107), and notes that this final appeal to God's will was the view of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. It thus appears that Ibn al-Qayyim backs away from his arguments and simply withholds judgment on the duration of the Fire. Ibn al-Qayyim makes this agnostic position much clearer in his later work *Shifā' al-'alīl* (The Healing of the Sick) where he quotes several more sayings of the Salaf leaving the duration of the Fire to God's will beyond that of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Hoover 2009: 190-193).

In *Shifā'* Ibn al-Qayyim expands Ibn Taymiyya's theodicy of optimism in which God creates all things for wise purposes, and he raises and responds to numerous questions about evil, one of which is, 'What pleasure or good ensues from severe chastisement that does not break off or abate?' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1994a: 540; trans. Hoover 2009: 191). The answer in short is none; there is no good reason for everlasting chastisement. Ibn al-Qayyim elaborates his arguments for limited duration of chastisement in the Fire much as he does in *Hādī*, but he encounters a somewhat more difficult theological dilemma. In *Hādī* Ibn al-Qayyim argues that God's attributes of mercy and good pleasure are essential but anger and wrath are not, which allows him to say that the chastisement that flows from God's anger and wrath need not be eternal. In *Shifā'* Ibn al-Qayyim locates the source of chastisement instead in God's essential attributes of justice, might and wise purpose. This has the advantage of bringing chastisement under the apparently more rational regime of God's justice and wisdom—God's attribute anger may imply volatility and capriciousness—but it would also seem to imply that chastisement must be eternal by virtue of the eternity of these attributes. Ibn al-Qayyim denies that this is so. Rather, God's attributes of justice, might and wise purpose indicate when chastisement should end as these attributes come under the rule of mercy and forgiveness. Ibn al-Qayyim explains:

If it is said, 'Chastisement emanates from His might, His wise purpose and His justice. These are beautiful names and attributes of perfection. What emanates from them is perpetual by virtue of their perpetuity', it is said, 'By God, chastisement indeed emanates from might, wise purpose and justice. The end [of chastisement], when what is intended is obtained, emanates from might, wise purpose and justice. Chastisement and its interruption do not fall outside the sphere of His might, His wise purpose and His justice. However, when it ends, might is conjoined with mercy, and mercy is conjoined with liberality, beneficence, pardon and forgiveness. Might and wise purpose do not cease and do not decrease. On the contrary, everything that He created, that He creates, that He commanded and that He commands emanates from His might and His wise purpose' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1994a: 562; trans. Hoover 2009: 192).

As already noted above, Ibn al-Qayyim ends his discussion of chastisement in *Shifā'* by making his agnosticism more explicit than he did in *Hādī*. He also notes that there is no textual support for the perpetuity of the Fire. However, he himself is left with textual support in the Qur'ān and in traditions such as those of 'Umar and Ibn 'Abbās for two different positions: the passing away of the Fire and agnosticism as to its duration. In *Hādī* and *Shifā'* he takes the safer course of favouring the agnostic texts, but in a third work he gives freer rein to the arguments for limited duration of the Fire (Hoover 2009: 192-3).

This third work is Ibn al-Qayyim's *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala* (The Thunderbolts Sent Out), an extensive work of theology written soon after *Hādī* and *Shifā'*. As the second half of *Al-Sawā'iq al-mursala*, in which Ibn al-Qayyim discusses the duration of the Fire, is not known to be extant, we must rely on the abridgement *Mukhtaṣar al-ṣawā'iq al-mursala* by Ibn al-Qayyim's contemporary Muḥammad b. al-Mawṣili (d. 1372). The abridgement is reliable so far as we can tell, and for the sake of simplicity I will speak of *Mukhtasar al-ṣawā'iq* as Ibn al-Qayyim's work and refer to it henceforth simply as *Ṣawā'iq*.

As in *Hādī* and *Shifā'*, Ibn al-Qayyim in *Ṣawā'iq* undermines the claim of consensus for eternal punishment of unbelievers, interprets the relevant texts from the Qur'ān and the Salaf, and argues that God's mercy will overcome all else. He also calls the Fire God's whip 'to lead His servants to His mercy and His Garden' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 2004: 664; trans. Hoover 2009: 195), and he marshals a new argument against eternal chastisement: God's justice and blessing preclude chastising someone forever for associationism and unbelief that is only of limited length in this life. Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim leaves aside his earlier agnosticism on the duration of the Fire and urges his readers to recognize that considerations of benefit, the character of God's names and attributes, the texts of revelation and the witness of the Salaf all lead to the conclusion that chastisement must come to an end. Agnosticism as to the duration of chastisement is an option only for those who cannot grasp all of this. In Ibn al-Qayyim's own words:

Those who say that the chastisement of unbelievers is a benefit to them and a mercy to them circle around this sense and do not penetrate its depth. But what benefit to them is there in chastisement that does not end, that is perpetual by virtue of the perpetuity of the Lord—Most High is He?! Ponder this point very thoroughly, and give it its due reflection. Join that with the senses of His names and His attributes, with what His word and the word of His Messenger indicate, and with what the Companions and those after them said. Do not rush to speak without knowledge or to condemn. If the dawn of what is correct shines on you, [that is good]. If not, then ascribe the judgment to what God ascribes it in His statement, 'Surely your Lord does whatever He wills' (Q. 11:107), and hold firm to the statement of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib—May God be pleased with him. He mentioned that the People of the Garden enter the Garden and the People of the Fire enter the Fire. He described their state. Then he said, 'After that, God does what He wills' (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 2004: 663; trans. Hoover 2009: 196).

Ibn al-Qayyim here overcomes his earlier misgivings about the duration of the Fire. His therapeutic rationality completely eclipses the retributive logic of mainstream Sunnī eschatology, and this, supported by the relevant textual indicants, leads him on to unreserved affirmation of universal salvation.

### **Al-Subkī's opposition to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya**

There is very little for the historian to go on to ascertain how Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's arguments for the limited duration of Hell-Fire were received. Ibn al-Qayyim does not tell us anything about his audience and their responses, nor do there appear to be reports about this controversy in contemporary chronicles. However, we do know that in 1348 the powerful Shāfi'ī chief judge in Damascus Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī intervened with a treatise called *Al-'Itibār bi-baqā' al-janna wa al-nār* (The Consideration of the Perdurance of Paradise and the Fire) to shut down Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's argumentation for limited duration of the Fire, and, as we will see below, it appears to have worked. This intervention was part of a wider conflict between al-Subkī on the one hand and Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim on the other. Al-Subkī had written against Ibn Taymiyya on divorce and other legal matters while the latter was still alive. The first sign of trouble between al-Subkī and Ibn al-Qayyim appeared in 1341 when al-Subkī tried to prevent the release of Ibn Taymiyya's books that had been locked up in the Citadel of Damascus from the time of his death. Al-Subkī suffered the humiliation of having his efforts thwarted, and the books were turned over to Ibn al-Qayyim and one of Ibn Taymiyya's brothers. Then, in 1345, al-Subkī confronted Ibn al-Qayyim over legalities concerning the correct conduct of horse races, and Ibn al-Qayyim had to back down. Later, in 1348 or 1349 and soon after completing *I'tibār*, al-Subkī wrote a long refutation of Ibn al-Qayyim's anti-Ash'arī theological poem *Al-Kāfiya al-shāfiya* (The Sufficient Healing [Poem]). Al-Subkī is explicit in stating that one specific follower of Ibn Taymiyya—obviously Ibn al-Qayyim—is insidiously spreading Ibn Taymiyya's beliefs. Apparently, Ibn al-Qayyim's poem and his Taymiyya doctrines had become sufficiently popular that al-Subkī saw need to refute them. Finally, in 1349 the two scholars also disagreed on divorce law and had to be reconciled in public (Bori and Holtzman 2010: 22-6; Hoover 2013: 397-9).

Al-Subkī's 1348 *I'tibār* is a direct refutation of Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār*. Al-Subkī does not refer to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and he does not quote or discuss any text from Ibn al-Qayyim's books not already found in Ibn Taymiyya's treatise. Nonetheless, the target of al-Subkī's ire in historical context is clearly Ibn al-Qayyim. By 1348, Ibn al-Qayyim's extensive argumentation for limited duration of the Fire in *Hādī, Shifā'* and probably *Ṣawā'iq* had seeped out into the public domain enough to threaten the orthodoxy of the day, much as had Ibn al-Qayyim's anti-Ash'arī polemic in his *Al-Kāfiya al-shāfiya*, and it called for al-Subkī's response (Hoover 2009: 200 n 21; Hoover 2013: 399).

Al-Subkī's refutation neither engages Ibn Taymiyya's reformist rationale based on God's mercy and wise purpose nor elaborates the retributive basis of his own views with any sophistication. Rather, he spends much of *I'tibār* quoting Qur'ānic verses traditionally understood to support the eternal damnation of unbelievers in the Fire, and he invokes the authority of consensus at the very beginning of the treatise: 'The doctrine of the Muslims is that the Garden and the Fire will not pass away. Abū Muḥammad b. Ḥazm has transmitted that this is held by consensus and that whoever opposes it is an unbeliever by consensus' (Al-Subkī 1987: 32; trans. Hoover 2009: 187). Expressing any doubt about the Fire's eternity is to break with the consensus of the Muslim community and fall into unbelief.

The full import of al-Subkī's appeal to consensus becomes clear in his response to Ibn Taymiyya's charge that there was no consensus among the Salaf. According to al-Subkī, reports from the Salaf like those invoked by Ibn Taymiyya to support the limited duration of the Fire should not be understood literally. They should be subjected to reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*) to correspond with the consensus, and statements of the Salaf that appear to challenge a consensus should be interpreted so as 'to give a favorable opinion of them [that is, the Salaf]' (Al-Subkī 1987: 79, trans. Hoover 2009: 187). Al-Subkī thus asserts the superior authority of a later consensus within the Muslim community over the earlier testimony of the Salaf. He leaves no room for Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's reformative appeal to the Salaf. The consensus on eternal damnation of unbelievers is inviolable (Hoover 2009: 187-8).

### **Ibn Qayyim's affirmation of eternal chastisement for unbelievers**

It appears that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya bowed to al-Subkī's pressure to stop arguing for the limited duration of the Fire just as he yielded to al-Subkī in their conflicts over horse racing legalities and divorce procedures. There is no evidence dating Ibn al-Qayyim's latest lengthy deliberation on the duration of Hell-Fire—that found in *Ṣawā'iq*—to after al-Subkī's 1348 *I'tibār*, and it most likely came before. Additionally, Ibn al-Qayyim briefly affirms the eternity of Hell-Fire in three books. One of these, *Zād al-ma'ād* (The Provision for the Afterlife), is the last work that he wrote before his death in 1350 and thus definitely dates to after al-Subkī's refutation. The other two works, *Al-Wābil al-ṣayyib* (The Heavy Shower) and *Ṭarīq al-hijratayn* (The Road of the Two Migrations), may also be late, but they cannot be dated precisely.

The discussions in all three of these works draw a contrast between people who are fair (*ṭayyib*) and foul (*khabīth*) and explain that the fair and the foul are mixed in this world

while only Paradise is fitting for the fair and Hell-Fire for the foul in the hereafter. In *Al-Wābil al-ṣayyib* Ibn al-Qayyim sets out the traditional Sunnī view that the disobedient in whom the foul and the fair are mixed will eventually leave Hell for Paradise, the abode of pure fairness. However, the abode of pure foulness will remain forever. In *Ṭarīq al-hijratayn* Ibn al-Qayyim simply affirms that the abode of Paradise and the abode of Hell both serve God’s wise purpose and are permanent. This work also includes an extensive review of eighteen levels of humans and jinn in Paradise and the Fire in the hereafter. Throughout these discussions, the question of an end to the chastisement of foul unbelievers is never entertained (Hoover 2013: 392-4).

Ibn al-Qayyim’s last work *Zād al-ma‘ād* is a wide ranging collection of hadith reports from the Prophet. The introduction to this multivolume tome explains how following the Prophet leads to happiness in this world and in the hereafter, and Ibn al-Qayyim includes observations on how God in his power and wise purpose chooses some things over others and how he creates some creatures to be fair and others foul. This leads him to consider the ultimate destiny of the fair and the foul, and he proceeds to exclude the completely foul from any possibility of reform: ‘When an associator (*mushrik*) is foul in constitution and foul in essence, the Fire does not cleanse his foulness. On the contrary, if he were to come out of it, he would return as foul as he was [before], like a dog when it enters the sea and then comes out of it. Therefore, God—Most High is He—forbade the Garden to the associator’ (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1994b: 1:68; trans. Hoover 2013: 391).

It has been argued that Ibn al-Qayyim says nothing in this passage that opposes his earlier arguments for universal salvation. Ibn al-Qayyim never formally retracted his belief, and he is simply exercising prudence here in view of Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī’s wrath while in fact affirming nothing more than that the purification of associators will take an extremely long time (Khalil 2012: 100-1). It is very well possible that Ibn al-Qayyim continued to harbour belief in universal salvation in his heart, especially as he does not explicitly renounce it. However, the statement from *Zād al-ma‘ād* just quoted clearly states that an associator can never attain Paradise, and there is no sign in the surrounding discussion of Ibn al-Qayyim’s earlier therapeutic concern to show that God’s wise purpose in chastisement is cleansing foul unbelievers to render them fair. Ibn al-Qayyim’s final testament, at least outwardly, is thus to everlasting punishment of the foul in Hell-Fire, and it is apparent that al-Subkī succeeded in preventing Ibn al-Qayyim from writing in any way that might betray belief to the contrary (Hoover 2013: 391-2, 396-9).

## Epilogue

Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya present a powerful challenge to the dominant Sunnī doctrine that condemns unbelievers to everlasting chastisement in Hell-Fire. Their Salafī rejection of traditionalist Sunnī consensus undermines the structure of religious authority in which the doctrine of eternal damnation is rooted, and their theological vision of God’s mercy and wise purpose using Hell-Fire as a therapeutic instrument leading even unbelievers to eventual salvation overwhelms the retributive rationality giving it sense. Al-Subkī’s rejoinder misses this theological aspect entirely, and he devotes his efforts to restoring mainstream Sunnī doctrine primarily through Qur’ānic quotation and appeal to consensus. In the end, al-Subkī succeeded in squelching Ibn al-Qayyim’s voice for universal salvation in the late 1340s more by virtue of his influence as a leading scholar in the dominant Shāfi‘ī legal school than by force of argument.

Many other opponents through the centuries and down to the present have condemned Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim for denying the eternity of Hell-Fire. The charge has obviously stung as some defenders of the two fourteenth-century theologians have tried to absolve them of holding such a purported error. In a prime example ‘Alī al-Ḥarbī, a scholar working in Saudi Arabia, argued in 1990 that Ibn Taymiyya upheld the Fire’s eternity. Despite very modest evidence to the contrary—this was before the publication of *Fanā’ al-nār* in 1995—al-Ḥarbī could not imagine that so great an Islamic reformer as Ibn Taymiyya could believe in the limited duration of Hell-Fire. Al-Ḥarbī also side-stepped important clues for the dating of Ibn al-Qayyim’s works in order to portray his undeniable arguments for universal salvation in *Ḥādī*, *Shifā’* and *Ṣawā’iq* as little more than youthful exuberance before he settled down to correct belief in his mature years (Hoover 2013). Despite such valiant efforts to advance the orthodoxy of the Fire’s eternity, even for Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim themselves, the Muslim community has not been able to thwart the allure of a therapeutic vision of Hell-Fire, and other scholars have expressed deep admiration for Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s universalist argumentation. The early twentieth-century reformer in Egypt Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) cited and praised Ibn al-Qayyim’s arguments for universal salvation in *Ḥādī* to challenge exclusivist attitudes and commend God’s great mercy. Riḍā’s views provoked considerable opposition, and in response he moderated his enthusiasm for universalism by clarifying that both he and Ibn al-Qayyim ultimately left the duration of Hell-Fire to God’s will. A generation later, the rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo Mahmūd Shaltūt (d. 1963) wrote favourably of Ibn al-Qayyim’s arguments, and much more recently, in 2002 and 2003, the widely influential Qatarī-based

revivalist Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (b. 1926) affirmed Ibn al-Qayyim's universalist argumentation as well (Khalil 2012: 101-6, 126-32). Given the powerful precedents for both sides of the argument, there is little doubt that Muslim deliberation over universal salvation will continue well into the future. At stake is whether retribution or therapy is the fundamental purpose of God's chastisement of wayward and unbelieving human beings. Both rationales for punishment are deeply embedded in the Islamic religious tradition and in human experience more generally.

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