Ibn Taymiyya's "Common-Sense" Philosophy

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14.1   INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary philosophy of religion (PoR) in recent decades, there has been much talk of what has been coined "the epistemology of religious belief." Like many topics in PoR, Alvin Plantinga often features prominently in the discussion. Much of Plantingian thought seems to have its roots in the intuitions of the "common-sense philosophy" championed by Thomas Reid (d. 1796 CE). However, some of the ideas that come to contemporary expression in Plantingian thought can be seen as having a much longer history outside of exclusively Christian and European circles. It is the aim of this chapter, to suggest that in fact, the essence of these ideas can be found in the theological epistemology of the Damascene Islamic theologian, Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE).

In what follows, I will attempt to show the ways in which Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra*-based epistemology anticipates the later Reidian common-sense philosophical approach as developed by Plantinga by over 400 years. The chapter begins with an overview of the key Reidian intuitions found in

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Plantingian thought, which I will suggest are anticipated by Ibn Taymiyya. Then the chapter will proceed to outline Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology, before moving on to make the comparisons and overlaps more explicit. The chapter will conclude with suggestions as to how Ibn Taymiyya could be productively incorporated into a contemporary philosophy course.

14.2   Plantinga's Reidianism

In developing his epistemology, Plantinga has relied on important intuitions from Reidian philosophy. At the heart of the Reidian inspiration has been Plantinga's rejection of classical foundationalism (CF) in favor of what he coins "Reidian Foundationalism" (Plantinga 1993, 183),[1] and a faculty-based externalist account of *warrant* (cf. Plantinga 1993; Poore 2015).

Both Reid and Plantinga embrace foundationalism *simpliciter* (cf. Reid 1941, 361; Hanink 1986; Plantinga 1993) but crucially reject CF.[2] The classical foundationalist according to Reid arbitrarily restricts the sorts of beliefs deemed foundational (Reid 1915, 92), and unreasonably demands of them infallibility (De Bary 2002, 25–31; Greco 2011, 151). Following Reid's lead, Plantinga broadens the sorts of beliefs that may be deemed foundational, or as he coins them, "properly basic beliefs," that is, warranted beliefs not based on any others.[3] Such beliefs need not be infallible, but are instead *defeasible* (cf. Plantinga 1993, 40–42).

For Reid, foundational beliefs obtain their status in virtue of being products of our faculties operating properly (Poore 2015). Reid adopted a form of externalism, where warrant is grounded in the workings of one's cognitive faculties (Bergmann 2008). Central to Reid's externalism is a faculty of "common sense", that faculty of "judgement" which produces non-inferential beliefs in principles both common and central to human beings (Reid 1941, 330–1; cf. also Greco 2011). Plantinga (1993) develops his account of warrant along Reidian lines, emphasizing the centrality of our cognitive faculties in producing basic beliefs: when the latter are

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[1] Hanink (1986) refers to it as "Common Sense Foundationalism" due to the centrality of the faculty of common sense in Reid's foundationalism.

[2] As Plantinga puts it, classical foundationalists roughly have it that "a proposition *p* is properly basic for a person *S* if and only if *p* is either self-evident to *S* or incorrigible for *S* or evident to the senses for *S*" (Plantinga 1983, 59).

[3] "Warrant" simply refers to that special ingredient (whatever one may take it to be) that turns a mere true belief into knowledge.

produced by faculties functioning properly, successfully aimed at truth, in congenial environments for which those faculties have been designed to apply, they will count as properly basic with respect to warrant. At the heart of Plantingian Reidianism is the maintenance of the common-sense intuition which Reid inspires: that the beliefs we ordinarily take to be warranted are indeed warranted. Finally, Plantinga (1981, 1983, 2000), in reference to John Calvin's (d. 1564 CE) concept of a *sensus divinitatis* (i.e., a faculty for theistic belief), applies this Reidian faculty-based epistemology to develop a robust account of what has come to be known as "Reformed epistemology". This latter thesis is the idea that belief in God can be warranted apart from argumentation (Plantinga 2000).

But might Plantinga have looked to an even earlier figure working in another tradition for historical support and inspiration for all of these ideas? I think that in fact the fourteenth-century Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyya can be seen to anticipate some of the Reidian-Plantingian ideas that have been developed in contemporary Western philosophy, as well Plantingian-style Reformed epistemology. In order to explore how this might be so, let us consider Ibn Taymiyya's own epistemology.

14.3   Ibn Taymiyya's *Fiṭra*-Based Epistemology

Ibn Taymiyya was born in Harran (1263 CE) to a reputed family of Hanbalite traditional scholars and was raised in Damascus during the reign of the Mamluk Sultanate. Following formal training in his early years, Ibn Taymiyya wrote a vast number of voluminous works in all subjects related to Islamic disciplines, from jurisprudence and theology to philosophy and spirituality. It is to the more philosophical currents in his writings that I aim to pay attention here, outlining the essential elements of his epistemology, with Reidian anticipants in mind.

Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology has sometimes been described as empiricist (Heer 1988), and to a large extent this seems accurate. For Ibn Taymiyya, there are three primary sources of knowledge: sense perception (*ḥiss*), reason (*'aql*), and report (*khabar*; i.e., testimony) (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 7:324).[4] Sense perception is the most fundamental: it grasps the particulars which reason requires to do its work of abstraction and inference and stands as superior to testimony, in the directness of its grasping these particulars. However, at the heart of Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology is the concept of *fiṭra*.

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[4] All translations of Ibn Taymiyya in this chapter are mine.

At the outset, it ought to be noted that the concept of *fiṭra* is not unique to Ibn Taymiyya; rather, it finds its basis in the primary sources of Islam—i.e., the Qur'an and Sunna. In the Qur'an we read, "So [O Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition that God instilled in mankind" (*fiṭrat Allāhi allatī faṭara al-nāsa ʿalayhā*).[5] This Qur'anic verse highlights that *fiṭra* refers to a sort of natural and original constitution with which God created all of humanity, and hence as something innate or part of the intrinsic fabric of all humans. On Ibn Taymiyya's understanding "*fiṭra* is the original nature of man, uncorrupted by later beliefs and practices, ready to accept the true notions of Islam" (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 4:245–6). The *fiṭra* immediately comes packed with theological connotations, for it is, as Ibn Taymiyya suggests, a potency (*quwwa*) that urges the human being toward the recognition and worship of God (1979, 8:458).

Carl Sharif El-Tobgui writing on Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of *fiṭra*, suggests that the concept is "perhaps best rendered as by the term 'original normative disposition'." He suggests this "strong sense of normativity is both moral *and* cognitive [i.e., epistemic]" (El-Tobgui 260). The normativity of *fiṭra* is coupled with its primordiality and enriched further still by its evident connotations of innate-ness. Hence, Jon Hoover suggests that *fiṭra* may be viewed in Ibn Taymiyya's thought "as an *innate* faculty" (Hoover 2007, 39). However, it does not seem that *fiṭra* represents a faculty for knowing in its own right, but instead perhaps functions as the operative focal point to which all other faculties turn for direction—a disposition which steers our faculties toward truth. Ibn Taymiyya claims that

> [God] made the *fiṭra* of His servants disposed to the apprehension and understanding of the realities [of things] and to know them. And if it were not for this readiness (i.e., *fiṭra*) within the hearts/minds (*qalb*) to know the truth, neither speculative reasoning would be possible, nor demonstration, discourse or language. (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 5:62)

Thus, it is this innate and primordial compass which, as Mehmet Sait Özervarlı remarks, represents the "original and distinctive qualities that would direct activities if left unaffected by his or her family

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[5] Qur'an 30:30, trans. Abdel Haleem (2008).

or social environment" (Özervarlı 2013, 47).[6] *Fiṭra* acts as the very ground for the necessary concepts or principles through which experience and knowledge itself can be obtained and made understandable. When sound (*al-fiṭra al-salīma*; lit: the sound *fiṭra*), *fiṭra* just is that which allows one to judge the truth of premises (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 7:37), necessary precepts such as one being half of two (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 2:15), or a metaphysical principle of causality, for example, that every effect which has a temporal beginning requires a cause (Ibn Taymiyya 1999, 3:202). If *fiṭra* were not "sound" or had been corrupted in some sense, this hindrance would prevent our faculties from obtaining these sorts of knowledge; in fact as we shall see knowledge *itself* would not be possible. Yet, what seems to be of particular novelty about this notion of *fiṭra* is its capacity for broadening the epistemic foundations of knowledge. That is, Ibn Taymiyya widens the scope of knowledge which is deemed *ḍarūrī* (necessary; foundational), or as he often phrases it *fiṭrī-ḍarūrī*: knowledge grasped in the immediate sense which is non-inferential.

Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra*-oriented epistemology is able to widen the scope of foundational or necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*), contrary to the "medieval-classical" foundationalist model upheld by many speculative Islamic theologians (*mutakallimūn*). The model of foundationalism upheld by the *mutakallimūn* restricts the foundations to self-evident truths, beliefs formed by sense perception, beliefs about one's mental states, and beliefs held by way of mass report (*tawātur*) (cf. Abrahamov 1993; Farahat 2019, 50–52). In affirming foundationalism *simpliciter*, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

> The proof which leads to knowledge through discursive reasoning (*bi'l-naẓar*) must be one that goes back to premises known necessarily from the *fiṭra* (*muqaddimāt ḍarūrīyya fiṭrīyya*). For all knowledge that is not known necessarily (*ḍarūrī*) must go (back) to necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*). For if rationally inferred premises are always established by other rationally inferred premises, it will lead to circularity or an infinite regress. (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 3:309)

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[6] The basis for the idea of "corruption" by external influence for Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fiṭra* is the famous report of the Prophet: "Narrated [by] Abu Hurayra: God's Messenger said, 'No child is born except upon a natural constitution (*fiṭra*), and then his parents turn him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian'" (al-Bukhārī 2001, 6:114).

He goes on to add that the latter two accounts (i.e., a circular-based or regress account) ought to be rejected, and so "there must be intuitive primordial knowledge which God initiates in [a person's] heart/mind (*qalb*), and the aim of all proofs is to go back to it" (1979, 3:309). Ibn Taymiyya recognizes then that some beliefs count as knowledge, not by way of inference, but rather in and of themselves so to speak, forming our necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*) and the foundations upon which other bits of knowledge may be built. On the one hand, he admits the same sorts of "necessary knowledge" upheld by most of the *mutakallimūn*: self-evident a priori logical truths (*badīhīyyāt*), as exemplified by the law of noncontradiction (*al-jam' bayna al-naqīḍayn*) and beliefs by way of sense perception (*ḍarūra ḥissīyya*), which, given sense perception's internal (*bāṭin*) and external (*ẓāhir*) dimension for Ibn Taymiyya (ibid., 7:324), covers both beliefs about one's mental states, and those which correspond to extra-mental particulars. At the same time, he also admits of other kinds of necessary knowledge, for instance, knowledge of God (cf. Hallaq 1991). Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, most *mutakallimūn* considered theological truths of this type as being only obtainable "through [discursive] reasoning (*naẓar*) […] because such knowledge is not necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*), but is, on the contrary, acquired knowledge (*muktasab*) [i.e., based on inference]" (Heer 1993, 187–8). But, according to Ibn Taymiyya, "the affirmation of the Creator and His perfection is innate (*fiṭrīyya*) and necessary (*ḍarūrīyya*) with respect to one whose *fiṭra* remains intact" (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 6:73).

Ibn Taymiyya admits of at least two additional kinds of necessary knowledge: first, knowledge by mass transmission or testimony (*al-akhbār al-mutawātir*), and second, necessary knowledge of moral truths. As for the former, he holds that knowledge obtained from mass report is necessary and certain (Ibn Taymiyya 1964, 233). In other words, it is a principle of rationality that mass testimonial reports are not based on mere fiction. In the case of the latter, Ibn Taymiyya suggests that such knowledge is *fiṭra* (i.e., natural to uphold) and *ḍarūrī* (necessary), stating that "the foundations of these [ethical] principles are necessarily known to people's inner selves, for indeed they are formed by *fiṭra* to love what is agreeable to them, and detest what harms them" (Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 474).

The significance of these moves that Ibn Taymiyya makes in emphasizing the epistemic centrality of *fiṭra* and in broadening foundational knowledge, is in terms of the *externalist* epistemology that it implies: a

faculty-based approach to knowledge acquisition. In all such cases out-lined above, these foundational beliefs obtain their status not (necessarily) in virtue of some reasons accessible to a subject, but because they are a consequence of one's faculties operating properly, grounded in *fiṭra*. For on his scheme, "the proper functioning of *all* our epistemic faculties […] is predicated in *all* cases on the health and proper functioning of the *fiṭra*" (El-Tobgui 2020, 271), and it is in virtue of *fiṭra* that a human's "knowl-edge of truth […] and the recognition of falsehood" is grounded (Ibn Taymiyya 2014, 49). For according to Ibn Taymiyya "children are born with sound *fiṭra*, which if left sound and intact, will make them choose knowledge (*ma'rifa*) over its denial" (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 8:385). Thus, a central common-sense philosophical intuition is maintained here because the sorts of "common-sense" beliefs we hold (e.g., about the past, other minds, or the external world) are thought to be grounded in our natural cognitive dispositions as human beings, not in virtue of some collection of proofs.

Now, with all this in mind, it appears to me that much of Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology as laid out thus far is suggestive of and even anticipates cen-tral ideas taken up by Plantinga inspired from Reid. In the following sec-tions, I attempt to explore two things: (1) how the Taymiyyan ideas just presented anticipate Plantingian Reidianism in epistemology and contem-porary PoR, and (2) what the basic elements of a "Taymiyyan common-sense methodology" might look like.

14.4   IBN TAYMIYYA AND CONTEMPORARY REIDIANISM

As we have seen previously, Plantingian thought inspired by Reid centers on a rejection of classical foundationalism and the adoption of a faculty-based externalism, an account centering around what Plantinga calls "warrant" (that special property turning true belief into knowledge). Following Reid's common-sense thesis that the proper operation of our cognitive faculties is (nearly) sufficient for our beliefs to have warrant (cf. Poore 2015), Plantinga (1993) cemented this epistemological view in his epistemological theory of proper functionalism. This theory stipulates the necessary and sufficient conditions for a belief to be warranted. Plantinga theorizes that a belief has warrant if and only if it is produced by cognitive faculties successfully aimed at truth, in circumstances for which those faculties are designed to apply. In similar Reidian fashion, Plantinga reinstates a "moderate and broad" com-mon-sense-based foundationalism with his theory of proper functionalism

(cf. Greco 2011, 148), legitimizing many of our "common sense" beliefs as properly basic with respect to warrant. In both cases—a faculty-based externalism and a moderate foundationalism—the Reidian inspiration is evident. Indeed, Plantinga himself considers his epistemology to be "broadly Reidian" (Plantinga 1993, x). However, it seems to me that the Taymiyyan epistemic scheme anticipates the essence of many of those ideas Plantinga draws on from Reid. Let's try to spell this out more clearly.

First, as Nurcholish Madjid puts it, on the Taymiyyan scheme "knowledge is founded on *fiṭra*, and acquired through religious instruction [or true testimony] (*khabr*), sense perception (*ḥiss*), and rational reflection (*naẓar*)" (Madjid 1984, 72). That is—to put it Plantingian terms—that warrant is grounded on the proper function (or epistemic health) of *fiṭra* (i.e., when this natural cognitive disposition is sound), in conjunction with the various faculties we have for acquiring different kinds of knowledge. This is significant in laying the foundations for an externalist faculty-based epistemology. In putting the human being's natural disposition (*fiṭra*) at the center of his epistemology, Ibn Taymiyya anticipates Reidian talk of the "constitution of the human mind" (Reid 1941, 384), or the "principles […] which the *constitution of our nature* leads us to believe" (Reid 1915, 50) and "the immediate effect[s] of our constitution, which is *the work of the Almighty*" (Reid 1941, 181).

For Ibn Taymiyya, *fiṭra* just is that disposition created by God (cf. Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 4:245; Qur'an 30:30) which guides human cognition to form certain types of beliefs in the appropriate circumstances, steering it to the acceptance of "common sense" or *fiṭrī* beliefs/principles that are "natural" for humans to accept. Indeed, this is what Ibn Taymiyya perhaps has in mind when he states that "there are some mental conceptualizations and affirmations which are primordial concepts and not themselves in need of proof by definition or syllogism" (Ibn Taymiyya 2014, 339). Similarly, he anticipates the emphasis on the proper functioning of our cognition which is stressed by both Reid and Plantinga. For Ibn Taymiyya, "clear rational thought is that which can be understood by sound and proper *fiṭra*—[at least for] those whose capability to understand is not corrupted" (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 7:43). In other words, rational thought is grounded in one's *fiṭra* being sound or operating properly. As Ovamir Anjum puts it, for Ibn Taymiyya "when *fiṭra* is corrupted, intellect loses its 'true north'" (Anjum 2008, 221). Without *fiṭra* operating as it ought, the whole cognitive framework is distorted. Cognition and the warrant of our

beliefs then are ultimately based on the proper functioning of one's cognitive system, grounded in *fiṭra*.

Therefore, we might surmise that on Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology what grounds the condition of warrant, is the external criterion of *fiṭra* properly functioning (in conjunction with the relevant cognitive faculties), in an epistemic milieu congenial to its working.[7] That is to say the belief is causally sustained by conditions external to the agent's first-person purview. This we might surmise is what it means for a belief's warrant to be grounded in *fiṭra*. This knowledge necessitated by *fiṭra*, Ibn Taymiyya states (with externalist implications), "needs no proof (*lā yaḥtāj hādhā ilā dalīl*), because it is the most firmly-rooted of recognized truths, the most solid of all knowledges, and the foundation of all foundations (*aṣl al-uṣūl*)" (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 2:72).

Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra*-based epistemology allows him to broaden the epistemic foundations that classical foundationalists restrict, as has already been made evident. In taking *fiṭra* to be the ultimate ground of the warrant of one's beliefs, the Taymiyyan scheme allows for a more moderate and broader version of foundationalism, perhaps similar to the sort we see defended by Reid and Plantinga. On the Taymiyyan scheme, a number of beliefs can be foundational whether the belief in question be "sensory (*ḥissiyya*), experiential (*mujarraba*), demonstrative (*burhānīyya*), or by mass transmission (*mutawātira*)" (Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 133). These beliefs can be, using Plantinga's terminology, properly basic with respect to warrant because they are a natural output of *fiṭra*: a direct consequence of the human being's cognitive disposition functioning as it has been designed to do so.

This *fiṭra*-based foundationalism allows for *broadness* when predicated on *fiṭra*, as opposed to narrowly restricting foundational beliefs, and grounds them in a proper function-esque epistemology. Further, this foundationalism is *moderate* in that it allows for potentially fallible belief sources to nevertheless produce foundational knowledge. Ibn Taymiyya admits that our sensory faculties (*al-ḥiss al-bāṭin aw al-ẓāhir*) and intellect ('*aql*) may succumb to error (*ghalaṭ*), but are nonetheless in essence sound (*ṣaḥḥa*). This he states is because "God created His servants upon *fiṭra*" (Ibn Taymiyya 2014, 45). In other words, when unimpaired, *fiṭra* will generally guide our cognition to truth even if it may at times be distorted.

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[7] By a design plan Plantinga means roughly the specific way in which our faculties are supposed to function given their design (by God, evolution, or both). Cf. Plantinga (1993).

Moreover, these matters of distortion are something identifiable and known. Hence one can distinguish between those beliefs that are the products of sound cognition and those which are not. Further, as Anke von Kügelgen puts it, for Ibn Taymiyya "the evident or speculative character of a concept does not depend on the subject matter, but on the soundness of the innate intelligence [i.e., *fiṭra*] and the senses [i.e., the other conjoined "organs of perception"]" (von Kügelgen 2013, 300). Thus, the deliverances of one's cognitive faculties may be necessary (*ḍarūrī*) i.e., properly basic, or acquired (*muktasab*) i.e., non-basic, depending on the state of one's *fiṭra* and relevant cognitive faculties. In either case, the cognitive faculties are potentially fallible, but nonetheless can deliver properly basic beliefs. Hence, the *moderate* nature of a *fiṭra*-based foundationalism.

Thus, given that it appears Ibn Taymiyya developed a faculty-based externalism, coupled with a broad-moderate version of foundationalism both predicated on his notion of *fiṭra*, we find the two central Reidian epistemic tenets inspiring Plantingian thought already present in the work of this fourteenth-century Islamic theologian. Yet, we may also add the following: Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology anticipates Plantingian Reformed epistemology (which is inspired by both Calvin and Reid).[8] According to Ibn Taymiyya, "the affirmation of a Creator and His perfection is innate and necessary with respect to one whose *fiṭra* remains intact" (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 6:73). When *fiṭra* is sound, human beings will naturally come to believe in God. Indeed, much of Ibn Taymiyya's discourse on the theology of *fiṭra* is reminiscent of Plantingian talk of a *sensus divinitatis*, by which one can come to knowledge of God properly basic fashion. I have argued at some length elsewhere that Ibn Taymiyya's theological epistemology is broadly compatible with Plantingian Reformed epistemology (cf. Turner 2021; 2022).

Therefore, three central elements of the "Contemporary Reidianism" (Byrne 2011) championed and defended by Plantinga appear to be anticipated by Ibn Taymiyya: (1) A moderate Reidian foundationalism, (2) faculty-based externalism, and (3) a model of Reformed epistemology centered on the notion of a *sensus divinitatis*. In the next section, I want to explore what a Taymiyyan "common-sense methodology" might look like.

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[8] The extent to which Reid's epistemology may or may not *actually* be similar to the sort of religious epistemology developed by Plantinga is questionable, as is the extent to which Reid has been an important influence on Plantinga's Reformed epistemology. On this point, cf. for example, Byrne (2011), and Nichols and Callergård (2011).

14.5 TAYMIYYAN "COMMON-SENSE" METHODOLOGY

In his *Common Sense: A Contemporary Defense*, Noah Lemos summarizes the general philosophical tenets observed by (Reidian) common-sense philosophers. Crucially, he explains that the "common-sense tradition" affirms,

> [t]hat there are some propositions that almost everyone knows, that are matters of common knowledge […] [and] it assigns a great deal of weight to these propositions, holding it to be more reasonable to accept them than any philosophical theory or premise that implies that they are false. (Lemos 2004, 5)

For a Reidian common-sense philosopher, these "common-sense" beliefs or principles that humans readily acquire have at least prima facie epistemic weight over philosophical theses which challenge them or assume them to be false. *This* is the central methodological assumption of the common-sense tradition. Interestingly, Yasir Kazi notes that Ibn Taymiyya at times "appears to use the term [*fiṭra*] to be synonymous with what may be termed 'common sense'" (Kazi 2013, 270; cf. Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 6:571). However, what I take to be even more significant is the way in which Ibn Taymiyya draws on the idea that commonly held "*fiṭrī* beliefs" are to be given methodological and epistemic priority.

According to Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, on the Taymiyyan epistemic scheme if our "necessary knowledge ['*ilm ḍarūrī*] should somehow fall prey to scepticism or doubt on account of some cognitive impediment, then a sort of *tawātur* of the human *fiṭra* as a whole must be summoned to witness as a corrective" (El-Tobgui 2020, 268). In other words, if the apparent deliverances of *fiṭra* (e.g., self-evident logical truths) are brought into disrepute or are contradicted, an inductive survey of the commonly held beliefs human beings hold can guarantee what sorts of beliefs are *fiṭrī* and hence epistemically superior from those which are dubious. This can be seen in Ibn Taymiyya's response to Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE), regarding the spatial locality of God (cf. El-Tobgui 2020, 269–71). For Ibn Taymiyya, al-Rāzī's argument can be rejected on the grounds that it contradicts a form of knowledge which human beings universally accept cross-culturally (Ibn Taymiyya 1979, 6:12). Hence, the consequences of views grounded on those principles or beliefs natural to humans must be true products of *sound fiṭra*, not the arguments which bring them

in disrepute. Ibn Taymiyya makes a similar observation with respect to those who deny the causal efficacy of "secondary causes" (*al-asbab*), a view to which we naturally acquiesce as humans, which is thus taken to be grounded in *sound fiṭra* (cf. 1999, 6:396–397).

What is striking about this methodology is the way in which Ibn Taymiyya takes the apparent products of *fiṭra* to trump arguments that call those beliefs or principles into question. To put it in Reidian terms, the Taymiyyan scheme gives methodological priority to widespread "common-sense" beliefs/principles over and above arguments which attempt to *defeat* them. But how does one know these are genuine products of *fiṭra*? By *tawātur*, i.e., examining the sorts of beliefs human beings commonly accept.

This Taymiyyan move also anticipates Plantinga's earlier method of distinguishing merely basic beliefs from properly basic beliefs.[9] Previously Plantinga argued that the way to sort out the two types of beliefs is, in essence, "inductive" (Plantinga 1981, 50). The idea seems to have been that rather than applying a pre-theoretical criterion to sort out which beliefs are properly basic, we can determine those sorts of beliefs in reference to those which we tend to agree are of that kind, having conducted an inductive survey of those beliefs we tend to commonly accept as properly basic. Ibn Taymiyya's *tawātur*-based approach anticipates this move, but rather than drawing on this method to determine what sorts of beliefs are necessary and *fiṭrī* (i.e., properly basic), Ibn Taymiyya uses this approach in an attempt to dismiss *arguments* which call those beliefs into question. By determining the sorts of beliefs which are near to universally held, we have strong reason to suspect these beliefs are the products of sound *fiṭra*, and so we ought to favor them. The common-sense methodology is apparent in these epistemic moves because it favors those "propositions […] that are matters of common knowledge […] holding it to be more reasonable to accept them than any philosophical theory or premise that implies that they are false" (Lemos 2004, 5). The *tawātur*-based approach grants epistemic priority to the beliefs common to human beings, because they are apparently the products of sound *fiṭra* and hence genuine forms of knowledge.

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[9] By "early" I mean Plantingian ideas before the development of his "warrant" trilogy.

14.6   Conclusion: Teaching Ibn Taymiyya

In sum, Ibn Taymiyya makes reference to an epistemic concept (*fiṭra*) which acts as the focal point of his epistemic and philosophical system, playing a pivotal methodological role in systematizing a coherent worldview. In giving *fiṭra* epistemic center stage, Ibn Taymiyya appears to adopt a form of externalism, where the warrant of one's beliefs is ultimately grounded in the health and proper function of *fiṭra*. In doing so, Ibn Taymiyya offers a broad-moderate version of foundationalism, opens space for an Islamic version of "Reformed epistemology", and employs epistemic methodological tactics that in some sense anticipate those of the common-sense tradition. In virtue of these novel epistemic twists, Ibn Taymiyya's epistemic scheme and general method can be seen in crucial ways to anticipate central intuitions in contemporary Reidianism, as exemplified in the work of Alvin Plantinga.

This chapter hopes to have demonstrated that important ideas in analytic (religious) epistemology are not merely compatible with Muslim philosophical theology, but may in fact have been anticipated by Muslim thinkers much earlier than the philosophers drawn upon in the Western tradition. In the present context, an examination of Ibn Taymiyya's own theological epistemology perhaps goes some way in suggesting that this is indeed the case.

Finally, I ought to say something by way of suggestion as to how Ibn Taymiyya may be incorporated into the philosophy classroom. As has been already alluded to, Ibn Taymiyya offers a unique contribution to the debate concerning religious epistemology. I have argued elsewhere (and noted in this chapter) that Ibn Taymiyya developed and anticipated a Reformed epistemological thesis which broadly overlaps with aspects of Plantinga's own recent developments. Nevertheless, there is much more to explore and to debate on that front. It would certainly be worthwhile to consider the extent to which elements within Ibn Taymiyya's own thought may in fact offer solutions to problems Plantinga's Reformed epistemology fails to offer. This would be of interest to courses on global philosophy of religion, aiming to move beyond merely Christian theological figures.

In the spirit of the present discussion, I'd also suggest that comparative philosophical discourse between Ibn Taymiyya and Reidian epistemology opens the door to a number of intriguing topics. Consider Table 14.1 as

Table 14.1 Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra*-based philosophy and Reid's common-sense philosophy

	Taymiyyan *fiṭra-based philosophy*	**Reidian common-sense philosophy**
Key epistemic concept	*Fiṭra*: the natural disposition, central to warrant and one's overall worldview	Common sense: faculty for judgment tied to human nature, grounds warrant, and is the basis of a coherent worldview
Epistemic structure	Anti-classical *fiṭra*-based foundationalism (moderate)	Anti-classical common-sense foundationalism (moderate)
Internalism versus externalism	Externalism—grounded ultimately on the epistemic health of *fiṭra*	Externalism—grounded for the most part on the proper function of common sense
Methodological priority	Epistemic and methodological priority always given to deliverances of *fiṭra*	Epistemic and methodological priority given to *prima facie* deliverances of common sense
Weltanschauung	Built up from the beliefs warranted in virtue of *fiṭra*	Constructed on the basis of *prima facie* deliverances of common sense

an example of the various discursive arenas in which the two may be compared in ways that can help the discourse grow and flourish.

Table 14.1 gives a sense of what a comparison between Ibn Taymiyya and Reid might look like, and specific areas which may be explored in the future and could be worthwhile for in-classroom discussion and research.

Finally, if it is not already clear by now, it must be emphasized that Ibn Taymiyya is a much more important thinker than philosophers have traditionally recognized, and yet there is much more exciting work to be done in exploring the complexities and treasures hidden behind his voluminous works of theological philosophy.

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