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## Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya's *Himma* Entrepreneurial Leadership as an Expression of Islamic Tradition

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# IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA'S *HIMMA*: ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP AS AN EXPRESSION OF ISLAMIC TRADITION

Davide Ravazzoni\*

**Abstract:** Risen to a prominent role in the 2030 visions of economical and societal transformation of several Arab nations of the Gulf, entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a new paradigm of disseminated leadership whose function has less to do with notions of political power and hierarchy and more with the shared task of converting vision into reality. Yet the link between entrepreneurship and Islam has only received limited attention at the individual level thus far. Following the multiple semantic threads of the Arabic word *himma*, this article seeks to further the discourse by exploring the distinctive account of the word emerging from the writings of Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). By bringing into a dialogue the implications of this account with the classic portrait of the entrepreneur by economist Joseph Schumpeter, the contribution of the Damascene scholar comes to light as particularly meaningful and momentous for furthering the discourse on entrepreneurial leadership as an expression of the Islamic tradition. It also opens the door to critical reflection and further enquiries into a topic of high relevance for a new generation of Muslim leaders across geographies.

**Keywords:** *entrepreneurial leadership, himma, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Joseph Schumpeter, socio-economic development*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 15 years, several Arab nations of the Gulf have launched ambitious plans aimed at reforming their societies and sustaining prosperity through the diversification of the economy. Given its well-established role in economic development, these plans emphasise entrepreneurship not only as a tool to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, but also as a new paradigm of disseminated leadership whose function has less to do with notions of power and hierarchy and more with the shared task of moving from vision to reality. Equally prominent in all these plans is the central role of Islam as a repository of values and traditions to be

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preserved and, above all, as the indispensable guide in the journey of transformation and social progress.

The idea that religion can be connected positively with entrepreneurial leadership is not novel and continues to attract scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> While Christian scholars have focused on the topic to motivate the historical rise of a capitalist economy as inspired by religion or driven by something greater and higher than pure profit, Muslim scholars started from an overall positive view of earthly exchanges in the canonical texts of Islam to proceed swiftly with the inclusion of related practices and behaviours in a framework of norms within which economic activities should be performed.<sup>2</sup> To date, experts of Islamic finance continue to engage in the design of sophisticated Sharia (religious law) compliant versions of the entrepreneurial process and broad conceptual frameworks that redeploy, in current terms, traditional Islamic concepts such as *falāḥ* (prosperity), *maṣlaḥa* (communal welfare) or institutions like *waqf* (pious endowment).<sup>3</sup> Yet, the role of religion in motivating individuals towards entrepreneurship has not been given as much consideration thus far. Numerous contributions engage in the study of the Prophet's traditions for their relevance in the professional life of individuals,<sup>4</sup> yet these studies typically do not articulate any distinctive traits of Muslim entrepreneurs in a dialogue with current theory or research.

To explain why university students of the Gulf do not report strong interest in launching their own ventures, Muslim and Western researchers would still raise the debatable motive of the collectivist culture of Arab nations as non-supportive of entrepreneurial behaviours.<sup>5</sup> Yet, Hofstede's individualist-collectivist cultural dimension has long been proved to be neither in a positive nor negative correlation with entrepreneurship. The economic success of the collectivist-oriented East Asian countries not only put the cross-cultural approach under scrutiny, but gave credit to the role of religion (Confucianism) in their economic prosperity. But if the question of whether the religious orientation of an individual can play a role is not given prominence in the current discourse, leading academic institutions of the Gulf confirm

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus. Vollständige Ausgabe (1905)* [The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Complete Edition (1905)], ed. D. Kaesler (München: Beck, 2004). For a recent contribution, see Luigino Bruni, *Capitalismo Meridiano: Alle Radici dello Spirito Mercantile tra Religione e Profitto* [Meridian Capitalism: The Roots of Mercantile Spirit between Religion and Profit] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> See Mohammad Reza Sheikh Robaat, "The Status of Economic Operations and Business Ethics in the Historical Mindset of Muslim Scholars," in *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*, ed. Abbas Mirakhor, Zamir Iqbal and Seyed Sadr (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Rasem Kayed and Kabir Hassan, *Islamic Entrepreneurship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Tariqullah Khan, "The Islamic Vision of Entrepreneurship in the Era of Circular Economy," in *Localizing Entrepreneurship Education. Global Perspectives, Qatari Experiences*, ed. Evren Tok and Asmaa Al-Fadala (Doha: Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Junaid Qadir, Amana Raquib and Hafiz Ahmed, "Spiritual Excellence (Iḥṣān) for Professionals: A Ḥadīth-Based Perspective," in *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*, ed. Abbas Mirakhor, Zamir Iqbal and Seyed Sadr (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> François Facchini, Louis Jaeck and Chafik Bouhaddioui, "Culture and Entrepreneurship in the United Arab Emirates," *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* 12, no. 3 (2021); Muhammad Kahn, Sadia Iqbal and Irfan Hameed, "Economic Transformation through Incubation and Entrepreneurship (in Light of Vision 2030)," in *Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia - Vision 2030*, ed. Muhammad Khurran Khan and Muhammad Babar Khan (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

that exploring the moral awareness of entrepreneurs, and the role that religiosity and spirituality play in their decisions, remain an important avenue to explore at the individual level.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I will further this exploration by engaging the Arabic word *himma*,<sup>7</sup> which, for its potential to describe the entrepreneurial spirit as a native expression, is frequently used by different stakeholders in relation to current plans of transformation. Starting from examination of its occurrences in the Qur'ān, sunna and classical lexicography, I will first note some of *himma*'s rich and, to a large extent, elitist manifestations across different genres of classical Arabic letters, including ethical compendia, advice literature and religious treatises. Equipped with deeper understanding of the word's composite semantic field, I will then focus on the distinctive account of *himma* emerging from the writings of the Damascene Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350, "Ibn al-Qayyim"). In view of his current popularity with Arabic and Western scholars alike,<sup>8</sup> the inclusion of Ibn al-Qayyim in the discourse on entrepreneurial leadership is timely and warranted. If socio-economic themes are not alien to his interest and prolific output, there are key tenets of his theological thought that, in their pragmatic implications, emerge as particularly momentous for critical reflection on entrepreneurial leadership as a distinctive expression of the Islamic tradition.

Following in the steps of earlier Muslim scholars, Ibn al-Qayyim expressed a positive view of economic pursuits and, on this basis, gave his contribution to the impressive output of innovative economic thought within *Dār al-Islām* (Abode of Islam) throughout its first few centuries.<sup>9</sup> For his writing, the social context of 7<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century Mamluk Damascus was one of economic prosperity and political stability (especially when compared with the turmoil of the previous century). By his time, financial mechanisms for capital commitment and forms of 'enterprise partnership' combining capital, trade and labour, had been firmly founded on Islamic law, and enabled widespread economic diversification in the major urban centres of Egypt and Syria.<sup>10</sup> While it would be inappropriate to describe Ibn al-Qayyim's Damascus as an 'entrepreneurial eco-system,' the overall social infrastructure and dynamics of the city, comprehensively studied and documented in a number of seminal works, created the conditions

<sup>6</sup> Rabia Naguib, "Integrating Ethical and Gendered Perspectives Using a Multi-Level Lens," in *Localizing Entrepreneurship Education. Global Perspectives, Qatari Experiences*, ed. Evren Tok and Asmaa Al-Fadala (Doha: Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> To allow *himma* to express all its semantic implications, the word will not be translated in this article. For the challenge posed by its translation into another language, refer to the ensuing discussion regarding the different manifestations of *himma* in Arabic letters.

<sup>8</sup> Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman, eds., *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought in Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah* (Roma: Herder, 2010); Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer, eds., *Islamic Theology, Philosophy, and Law. Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> On this, see Abdul Azim Islahi and Mohammad Ghazanfar, "Explorations in Medieval Arab-Islamic Economic Thought: Some Aspects of Ibn Qayyim's Economics (AH 691-751/1292-1350 AD)," in *Medieval Islamic Economic Thought. Filling the "Great Gap" in European Economics*, ed. Mohammad Ghazanfar (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Gene Heck, *Charlemagne, Muhammad and the Arab Roots of Capitalism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 89-114, 127-157.

for social mobility and enabled the rise of an enterprising class of merchants and craftsmen.<sup>11</sup> These new actors not only blurred formerly clear-cut social divisions, but increasingly took an interest and active role in the educational and cultural life of the city.<sup>12</sup> Against this background and in view of the traditional Ḥanbalite attention to economic issues and labour,<sup>13</sup> it seems relevant, if not warranted, to reflect on the pragmatic implications of the theological ideas of Ibn al-Qayyim in the world of work and occupations.

In a recent contribution, Caterina Bori compellingly argues for furthering the study of the ‘missing link’ between theological production and the society of ordinary people in the Mamluk period, and offers an insightful overview of the many complexities and venues for research.<sup>14</sup> In this article, I will limit my enquiry to, first and foremost, bringing out the key ideas and themes of Ibn al-Qayyim’s theology that are relevant for my topic, before any further investigation or hypothesis regarding their potential transmission and reception in his historical context. I will do so by bringing key passages on *himma* from select works of the Damascene scholar into a dialogue with the classical theory of entrepreneurial leadership by the 20<sup>th</sup> century economist Joseph Schumpeter (d. 1950), one of the first economists to place the figure of the entrepreneur at the heart of economic development and still seen as the foremost scholar in the field.<sup>15</sup> Given due consideration to the anachronism of the proposed application of modern thought to the literary output of a pre-modern scholar, this dialogue will nevertheless offer the benefit of drawing our attention to ideas and themes of a still popular scholar, particularly influential in some of the countries in focus, which may prove useful to inspire a critical reflection on the link between religion and entrepreneurial leadership in the evolving context of societies in the Gulf.

## THE COMPOSITE SEMANTICS OF *HIMMA*

The word *himma* is not found in the Qur’ān and its source root *hmm* occurs only nine times in two forms: *hamma*, eight times, and *ahamma*, only once, conveying the intention to do something about an issue or concern.<sup>16</sup> In the traditions of the Prophet, *hamma* makes a significant appearance in the hadith that narrates how God will count the intention in doing a

<sup>11</sup> Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Carl Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word on the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 376-379.

<sup>14</sup> Caterina Bori, “Theology, Politics, Society: The Missing Link. Studying Religion in the Mamluk Period,” in *Ubi sums? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies - State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Goettingen and Bonn: V&R Unipress and Bonn University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Schumpeter developed his theory of entrepreneurship in his book *The Theory of Economic Development*, published in German in 1911 and in a revised edition, in English, in 1934. I will refer in brackets to both editions collected in the volume: *The Entrepreneur. Classic Texts by Joseph A. Schumpeter*, ed. Markus Becker, Thorbiørn Knudsen and Richard Swedberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Elsaid Badawi and Muhammad Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 992.

good deed (*hamm bi-ḥasana*) as a full good deed, even if it is not fulfilled. The root *hmm* also appears in supplications to seek refuge in God from worry (*hamm*), grief and other adversities. God will relieve human beings from worldly concerns (*humūm*) if they focus with attention (*hamma*) on the Hereafter.

*Himma*'s composite semantics, conveying the idea of cognition and agency, comes further to light in classical lexicography. In the relevant entry from al-Azharī's (d. 370/980) *Tahdhīb al-lughā* (The Refinement of Language), "*hamm* is what you are concerned about in your mind...*himma* is what you intend to do about something in order to accomplish it."<sup>17</sup> *Himma* is a derivative of *hamm*, but, with a morphological change and a different vocalisation, it acquires a more positive sense of engagement and fulfilment of intentions. Al-Azharī's contemporary lexicographer al-ʿAskarī (d. c. 400/1010) gives an elegant definition of *himma* as the "extension of *hamm* and a departure from it, the outcome of resolution (*ʿazīma*) and will (*irāda*) in fulfilling intentions," a faculty a person is highly praised for.<sup>18</sup> Three centuries later, at the apex of the lexicographical progress of the classical period, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311-12) further defines *himma* in relation to leadership, describing a type of leader whose foremost function is to execute on intentions, think about opportunities and energetically make them happen. "*Humām*, the valorous leader who is great in *himma*, because when he intends to do something, he fulfils it, he does not procrastinate, rather he executes it as he wanted...The *humām*, the courageous, generous leader."<sup>19</sup>

While these few entries alone unfold an impressive breadth of semantic implications, they also highlight the challenge *himma* poses at the level of translation into a foreign language. Frequently rendered in English as 'aspiration' or 'ambition,' a closer look at the Arabic lexicon reveals a word with a broader semantic reach implying a start, a desired end and the mobilisation of all it takes to get from one to the other.

## ELITIST VIEWS OF HIMMA

The composite semantics of *himma* explain the rich manifestations of the word across different genres of Arabic classical letters, where, as it happens, it initially acquired a markedly elitist connotation. Exemplary in this regard is how the Arab Christian philosopher Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (d. 363/974) resorts to *himma* to describe a virtue that carries a significant relationship with the Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsychia* (magnanimity, sense of pride).<sup>20</sup> In his compendium dedicated to the refinement of character (*Kitāb tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) Yaḥyā defines

<sup>17</sup> Abū Maṣṣūr Al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā* [The Refinement of Language], ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: al-Muʿassasa al-Miṣriyya, 1964), vol. 5, 381. All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated in the footnotes.

<sup>18</sup> Abū Hilāl Al-ʿAskarī, *Al-Furūq al-lughawiyya* [The Distinctions of Language], ed. Muḥammad Salīm (Cairo: Dār al-ʿIlm wa'l-Thaqāfa, 1998), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Muḥammad ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* [The Language of the Arabs], ed. Amīn ʿAbdul Wahhāb and Muḥammad al-ʿUbaydī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī and Muʿassasa al-Tārikh al-ʿArabī, 1999), vol. 10, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* [The Refinement of Character], ed. Naḡī al-Takritī (Beirut and Paris: Editions Oueidat, 1978), 91-92; Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Adam Beresford (London: Penguin, 2020), (1123b-1124b), 85-91.

‘greatness of *himma*’ (*‘izām al-himma*) as disdaining the mediocrity of things, disregarding material wealth and seeking the utmost outcome in all endeavours and describes it as a sense of proper self-esteem and pride.<sup>21</sup> Predictably, he adds that this virtue is prevalent in persons occupying positions of power and eminency; as the translator of Plato’s *Laws*, Yaḥyā conceptualises social order in terms of hierarchies where differences in social standing also reflects people’s different intellectual capacities and moral qualities.<sup>22</sup> One generation later, Miskawayh receives Yaḥyā’s legacy and includes ‘greatness of *himma*’ (*kabīr al-himma*) in his classification of virtues, but his account of the word is more nuanced. In the meaningful context of a learned discussion about the appropriateness of boasting about one’s merits and achievements, Miskawayh makes the most of the word’s semantic potential depicting ‘greatness of *himma*’ in terms of a continuous, future-oriented drive towards excellence and disdain of pride in one’s achievements. “The great-spirited person...belittles the virtues he possesses on account of his aspiration to what surpasses them; for however high the level of excellence a person acquires, it is nugatory compared with that which surpasses it.”<sup>23</sup> But if greatness of *himma* is, in this way, better received and integrated into the Islamic ethico-religious space by sidelining any hint of pride (*takabbur*), it remains nevertheless associated with the educated elite that formed the privileged audience of his books, including translations of Sasanian advice literature and reflecting a firm belief in the benefits of social stratification in the interest of order and stability.<sup>24</sup>

*Himma*’s connection with elites and the inherent tension with the egalitarian orientation of early Islam appears in sharper colours in the secular genre of mirrors for princes. Typically written by court secretaries with the aim of having people in power reflect on their character and conduct, these texts not only appeal to the canonical texts of Islam for the articulation of virtuous behaviours, but also to the secular wisdom of the ancient Persian and Indian civilisations. In the book *Kalīla wa-Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (d. 139/757), the Persian scholar widely acknowledged as a progenitor of the genre and, in general, of Arabic belles-lettres, *himma* makes a significant appearance at the beginning of the tale of the Lion and the Ox where it describes the ambition of the jackal Dimna to rise through the ranks and get closer to the lion king.

People who approach kings don’t do it to fill their stomachs. Stomachs can be filled anywhere. People who approach kings seek eminence: a position that enables them to

<sup>21</sup> ‘Sense of pride’ is understood here in a positive sense implying a strong sense of self-worth, self-esteem and integrity. See also the translator’s note in Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, (1123b-1124b), 85-91, 355-356n.

<sup>22</sup> For a broader review of social stratification in the works of the *falāsifa*, see Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49-55.

<sup>23</sup> Abū Ḥayyān Al-Tawḥīdī and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh, *The Philosopher Responds, An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century*, ed. Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz, trans. James Montgomery, Sophia Vasalou (New York: New York University Press, 2019), vol. 1, 199. See also the analysis of this passage in Sophia Vasalou, *Virtues of Greatness in the Arabic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 65-66. Sophia Vasalou translates greatness of *himma* as ‘greatness of spirit.’ While well suited to Vasalou’s discussion of the word within the framework of virtue ethics, the translation ‘spirit’ risks leaving out the more concrete aspects of *himma*’s composite semantic field.

<sup>24</sup> Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 85-86.

gladden their friends and rise above their enemies... Their ambition (*himma*) aspires to what they deserve.<sup>25</sup>

This passage is revealing of a word that developed, early on, a strong connection with hierarchy and respect for noble birth. When associated with a commoner like Dimna, who is concurrently lacking in moral standards, *himma* becomes inappropriate, ill-directed and leads to tragedy and a ruinous end.

Even when goals are properly redirected away from worldly ambitions, the account of *himma* emerging from the writings of religious scholars and mystics continues to reflect an elitist view of human beings. In his best-known ethical work, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. c. 502/1108), the literary and religious scholar known for the integration of philosophical ethics into a solid Qur'ānic framework, integrates *himma* at the centre of his ethical and religious project as elevation from the satisfaction of animal desires, disdain for hedonist enjoyment and pursuit of distinction in the 'noble traits of the religious law' (*makārim al-sharī'a*). However, he also justifies differences in distinction of human beings as predetermined by God, who as the All-Creator equips each of them with the necessary tools to pursue the occupations predetermined by Him.<sup>26</sup>

In Sufi manuals, *himma* features notably as a driving force in the aspirant's progress along the mystical path. For instance, in a passage of *Laṭā'if al-mi'rāj* (Subtleties of the Ascension) by Nīshapūrī scholar al-Sulamī (d. 421/1021), *himma* appears at the most crucial moment of the ascension of the Prophet to heaven in the night journey.

When Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was honoured with the most magnificent honour during the night journey, his aspiration (*himma*) exceeded turning towards signs, marvels, heaven or hell. 'His eye swerved not' (Q. 53.17) toward created things, a glance at which could blind him. One who witnesses the sea considers little river beds and rivers.<sup>27</sup>

Sustained by his *himma* the Prophet attains the highest point of his ascension with the vision of God that, in the Sufi allegorical-esoteric interpretation, represents the highest rank of gnoseological achievement in the mystical path, a rank that only the 'elite of the elite' (*khaṣṣat al-khaṣṣa*) can achieve.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalīlah and Dimnah. Fables of Virtue and Vice*, ed. Michael Fishbein, trans. Michael Fishbein and James Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 67.

<sup>26</sup> Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 153-155. Al-Rāghib is considered by Marlow as a 'moralist' who was "able to combine philosophical explanations of human differences with their own predestinarian understanding of the social order."

<sup>27</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Rasā'il ṣūfīyya li-Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī* [Sufi Epistles by Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī], ed. Gerhard Böwering and Bilal Orfali (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 2009), 28. For this quotation, unfailing support and encouragement throughout my research on *himma*, I am indebted to my thesis supervisor Jason Welle.

<sup>28</sup> See Alexander Knysh, *Sufism. A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 124-136. Knysh further develops this view of the Ṣūfī mystical path as the embodiment of an 'intensely elitist vision of human beings' based on the common neoplatonic underpinnings shared by different religions and cultures across the Mediterranean.



It is only when we turn our attention to a traditionalist scholar like Ḥanbalite Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) that searching for excellence in one's path in life is reformulated in a way that seems to refer back to the basic semantics of *himma*, by describing it as “emanation of the self with perfection as its objective, that perfection which is possible for the self through knowledge and action.”<sup>29</sup> It is, however, in a longer passage from one of the most popular works of the later Ḥanbalite scholar Ibn al-Qayyim that *himma* comes to light as a human potential stripped of any notion of hierarchy, be it secular, religious or mystical.

## AN EGALITARIAN ACCOUNT OF *HIMMA*

Limning its relationship to action prompted by concern, Ibn al-Qayyim defines “*himma* [as] action from *hamm*, a concern about something. While the latter is the point of departure of will (*irāda*), the former is its end station.”<sup>30</sup> The context of this definition is *Madārij al-sālikīn* (Ranks of the Divine Seekers), a manual of spiritual guidance that Ibn al-Qayyim wrote as a commentary on the early Sufi treatise *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* (Stations of the Spiritual Travellers) of 11<sup>th</sup> century Sufi master and Ḥanbalite theologian al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089). In the same passage, Ibn al-Qayyim quotes al-Anṣārī's definition of *himma* as “what enables the achievement of an objective in a perfect way [and whose] possessor is neither restrained nor does he turn away from it.”<sup>31</sup> Then he proceeds by explaining its inclusion as a spiritual station in the believer's path toward God.

When the servant's *himma* is attached to God (*al-Ḥaqq*), Exalted is He, in a spirit of quest, sincerity, purity and urgency, then his *himma* is lofty and *its possessor is not restrained*, that is, he cannot procrastinate...obstacles do not deter him and contingencies do not stop him.<sup>32</sup>

In line with the character of a manual meant to guide the believer's progress towards God, the servant's *himma* is attached to God in a way that resonates with the Sufi ethical outlook involving a general awareness of the universal presence of God and resulting in lack of self-regard and selfless behaviour in the spiritual quest of His proximity. A strong interest in mysticism had likely been instilled in the younger Ibn al-Qayyim by Sufi master Ibrāhīm al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311), who had also been a close associate of his master Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Yet, in the varied ascetic and mystical life of Mamluk Damascus,<sup>33</sup> this spiritual quest did not materialise for Ibn al-Qayyim into embracing any form of institutionalised Sufism nor any claim of privileged access to the truth. On the one hand, his eloquent attacks on extravagant Sufi practices and eccentric ‘holy men’ leaves no doubt as to his rejection and

<sup>29</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣayd al-khāṭir* [Captured Thoughts], ed. Nājī al-Ṭantāwī and ‘Alī al-Ṭantāwī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1960), 225.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn fī manāzil iyyāka na ‘budu wa-ıyyāka nasta ‘ın* [Ranks of Divine Seekers between “Thee alone we worship and in thee alone do we seek help”], ed. Muḥammad al-Fāsī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004), vol. 3, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe s. Vie et Structures Religieuses dans un Métropole Islamique* [Damascus in the 7th/13th century. Religious Life and Structures in an Islamic Metropolis] (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1986), 207-243. Emphasis in original.

downright condemnation of popular forms of Sufism bordering antinomianism; loss of conscience and ecstatic states are by no means markers of a higher spiritual status, but are signs of an imperfection of the soul. On the other hand, following in the steps of Ibn Taymiyya and his ‘spiritual anti-elitism,’ Ibn al-Qayyim propounds an ideal of proximity to God that is within the reach of all ordinary Muslims and does not require any form of initiation or affiliation to unfold.<sup>34</sup> Gino Schallenberg has shown that one of the key strategies Ibn al-Qayyim employs to this end, particularly in *Madārij al-sālikīn*, is a ‘manipulation’ of Sufi terms that consists of dismantling them from their specific Sufi meanings to bring them back to conventional language. In this way, the same terms are redeployed in the elaboration of an alternative spiritual project, which is aimed at offering to all believers an alternative to the Sufi path in the shape of an internalisation of ethical and religious precepts that become elements of a piety experienced also on a sentimental level and not only as norms prescribed by the religious law.<sup>35</sup>

Leaving the discussion on the further implications of this account to the following pages, it is worth noting how Ibn al-Qayyim’s idea of *himma* reflects, on this basis, a latent quality of all Muslims without distinction of status or affiliation. If this view fully resonates with the traditionalist Sunni view of equidistance from God for all human beings, as “the title of the book of success for humankind,”<sup>36</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim’s *himma* unfolds as a disseminated faculty that is no longer the prerogative of any kind of elite, but can instead be triggered in any individual. It also embodies a conception that marks a clear paradigm shift away from any view of leadership as a Divine gift (broadly identified as ‘charismatic’) to focus on it as a potentiality of efficacious human agents in this world.

## HIMMA AND HUMAN ACTION

If, in *Madārij al-sālikīn*, *himma* is presented as the end station of *irāda* (will), Ibn al-Qayyim uses both terms interchangeably in combination with *‘ilm* (knowledge) in a passage from his treatise *Miftāḥ dār al-sa‘āda* (The Key to the Abode of Happiness).

No one will ever be brought to Him except those with knowledge (*‘ilm*) and will (*irāda*). For will is the door to reaching up to Him, and knowledge is the key (*miftāḥ*) that can open the locked door. Perfection in humans can only be achieved through these two qualities: *himma* which makes them move forward and knowledge (*‘ilm*) which makes them understand and provides them with guidance.<sup>37</sup>

People devoid of *himma* are vividly depicted as “untended grazing cattle,” while the servant equipped with it is portrayed as “someone to whom a banner is hoisted and who girds himself

<sup>34</sup> See Diego Sarrió, “Spiritual Anti-elitism: Ibn Taymiyya’s Doctrine of Sainthood (*walāya*)” in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>35</sup> See Gino Schallenberg, “Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s Manipulation of Sufi Terms – Fear and Hope,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy, and Law. Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, vol. 3, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Miftāḥ dār al-sa‘āda wa manshūr walāya al-‘ilm wa al-irāda* [The Key to the Abode of Happiness and Proclamation to Generate Knowledge and Will Power], ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qā’id (Makka: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id li’l-Nashar wa’l-Tawzī‘, 2015), vol. 1, 124.

to it, blessed with personal initiative (*tafarrud*) in his way and quest, persisting and standing upright in it.”<sup>38</sup> The opposite of a passive agent intent in the dull satisfaction of basic needs, “his will is dependent on a purpose that does not dwindle and does not cease, and the resolution of his *himma* moves forward toward the presence of the life which does not die.”<sup>39</sup>

Stressing the connection between *himma* and energetic action and sharpening the focus on the latter, it is notable the way Ibn al-Qayyim pairs action (*amal*) with knowledge (*ilm*) in his depiction of perfection in human beings. In the treatise *Al-Jawāb al-kāfi li man sa’ala ‘an al-dawā’ al-shāfi* (The Sufficient Answer to the One who Seeks a Cure), prophets come to the fore as paradigms of perfection in combining discernment in religion with strength in fulfilment of the truth (Q. 38:45). For all other human beings, strength in intellectual and practical activities are represented as two poles around which their perfection ultimately gravitates.<sup>40</sup> As the tone of this account leaves no doubt that *ilm* and *amal* are to be understood in their broader meanings and not only in their religious dimension, this passage offers, in its implications for the praxis of work, a markedly different view from previous classifications of professions and crafts involving thought and action (*sinā’at al-‘ilm*, *sinā’at al-‘amal*), with the former typically placed at the apex of the hierarchy by other scholars.<sup>41</sup>

In view of its prominence in ample theological disputations, the above spotlight turned on human action is not random and is especially meaningful if it is considered in the light of Ibn al-Qayyim’s distinctive theory of human acts. In a *kalām* fashion, he articulates this theory in a disputation with a fictional Ash‘arite opponent that he identifies as Jabrī, a follower of the early doctrine of *jabr* (compulsion).<sup>42</sup> Upholding a belief in Divine absolute determinism, this doctrine basically states that human acts are created by God and compelled on human beings so God is the real agent of those actions. Ash‘arites initially disputed this thesis of pure compulsion to articulate their concept of *qadar*, which theorises that human acts, while predetermined by God, are not forced on them, but acquired (doctrine of *kasb*). This argumentation could not hide, however, a substantial resemblance between the concepts of *qadar* and *jabr*. In fact, by the time of Ibn al-Qayyim, the doctrine of *jabr* had been the object of a revival propounded by eminent Ash‘arī scholar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and justified on the basis of the concepts of *dā’i* (motive) of the human act and human *qudra* (power): since *dā’i* and *qudra* are created by God, the thesis of compulsion is, for al-Rāzī, inescapable.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Miftāḥ dār al-sa’āda*, 125.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Al-Jawāb al-kāfi li man sa’ala ‘an al-dawā’ al-shāfi* [The Sufficient Answer to the One who Seeks a Cure] (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2002), 118-119.

<sup>41</sup> See Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 158-162.

<sup>42</sup> The debate occupies one of the chapters of Ibn al-Qayyim’s theological treatise *Healing the Person Afflicted with Wrong Concepts about Predetermination, Wisdom and Causality* (*Šifā’ al-‘alīl fī masā’il al-qadā’ wa-l-qadar wa-l-ḥikma wa-l-ta’līl*).

Comprehensive analysis of Ibn al-Qayyim's response to al-Rāzī's doctrine has been given by Livnat Holtzman.<sup>43</sup> In summary, Ibn al-Qayyim substantially agrees, since motive and human power are created by God, human action itself becomes necessary. However, he crucially argues that 'creator' and 'effective agent' are not the same thing.

That the human action is necessary, does not contradict that it is chosen (*mukhtār*) by the [human being], wanted (*murād*) by him, and is the object of his power (*maqḍūr*). The action neither is compelled (*mukrah*) nor forced (*majbūr*) upon him.<sup>44</sup>

Although necessary, human action is not simply forced on human beings as its motive is only a condition (*shart*) or part of the cause (*juz' al-sabab*) of it.

The power of the human being, his will and motives are but one part of the many parts of the complete cause (*sabab tāmm*), which necessitates the act...Whoever claims that the human being has no effect...on the action, that the existence of his power and will is the same as their nonexistence, as far as the action is concerned, arrives at a conclusion which contradicts reason and the senses.<sup>45</sup>

For my enquiry, this conclusion is crucial, as it reveals a deep conviction in the full accountability of human beings in the performance of their acts. In her short biography of the scholar, Birgit Krawietz argues it is exactly Ibn al-Qayyim's emphasis on human beings as efficacious agents of their acts that has made him a contemporary icon and reference for an "authentic method" of understanding religious doctrine.<sup>46</sup> Far from being a minor theological point, his standing up against any fatalistic view in the behaviour of human beings is not only a challenge to any still resounding effects of Ash'arism in today's Sunni world view, but also of great relevance in connection with current plans for societal transformation and the central role of individual action in moving from vision to reality.

## HIMMA AND DIVINE LOVE

Following the multiple thread of *himma*'s semantic field leads to another meaningful passage of *Madārij al-sālikīn* and the inclusion of the lexicon of love and emotions in our discourse.

The fuller our heart is of life, the loftier the *himma*, the firmer the will, the stronger the love (*maḥabba*). In fact, will and love follow from deeply knowing (*shu'ūr*) the desired aim (*al-murād al-maḥbūb*), as does the safety of our hearts from those obstacles which hinder us and are in the way of our will and searching.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Livnat Holtzman, "Debating the Doctrine of jabr (Compulsion). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya Reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy, and Law. Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 61-93.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>46</sup> Birgit Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya: His Life and Works," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 32.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, vol. 3, 291-292.

In another passage regarding the spiritual station of “honouring God’s sacred ordinances” Ibn al-Qayyim explains that ‘honouring’ means shunning (*taḥarruj*) acts of opposition:

in reverence of the command and prohibition [of God], not for the fear of punishment, as that would amount to belligerence on behalf of one’s ego... The noble, pure souls worship Him because He deserves to be worshipped, exalted, loved, and magnified.<sup>48</sup>

The latter means seeking to arrive (*tawaṣṣul*) at His perfection. Resorting to a concrete simile taken from the real life, he further explains:

The servant must not be like a mediocre wage earner who works only so long as he is paid, for he is the slave of the wage not a servant filled with love and aspiration... Workers can be divided into two ranks, the wage earners and the seekers of nearness (*qurb*) to the One whom they obey.<sup>49</sup>

If this articulation of Divine love clearly propounds a view of morality, which is not only about respecting norms in expectation of a reward, its articulation as a distinctive motivation in performing work activities is not a mere rhetorical device.

In fact, if love may appear as an odd subject in connection with the rigidity of thought and conduct normally associated with the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence, Ibn al-Qayyim stands out for his strong and pointed interest in the topic.<sup>50</sup> In his monograph on the theory of love in later Ḥanbalite thought, Joseph Bell argues the key to understanding Ibn al-Qayyim’s interest is the way he approaches its elusive definition. “Like a point on a line, [love] can only be described in terms of what lies on either side of it,”<sup>51</sup> which is in terms of the personal experience of the causes and effects of the affection. While Ibn al-Qayyim’s definition does not imply the assertion that experience alone can tell us what love means (something that would clash with his firm belief in the primacy of the texts of the revelation as the primary source of moral knowledge), it nevertheless underlines a conception of love that differentiates between merely knowing about it and actually experiencing it; the latter is preferable to the former for a full life.

It is, however, in its Divine dimension that Ibn al-Qayyim’s conception of love acquires a broader ethico-religious meaning that bears suggestive implications for the topic at hand. Before his time, the possibility and necessity of love between God and human beings had been established by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his investigation on God’s most beautiful names (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*). If some of God’s names are an obvious prerogative of the Divine, others indicate exemplary qualities that can be shared (*mushtaraka*) between God and human beings on the basis of a hidden affinity (*munāsaba khafiyya*). It is precisely at this intersection that the believer can experience longing for God’s beautiful names and desire to conform to God as the

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of Divine Seekers*, ed. and trans. Ovamir Anjum (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2020), vol. 2, 336-338.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim devoted a full treatise, *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* (The Garden of Lovers), to the subject of profane and sacred love.

<sup>51</sup> Joshua Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 106.

highest example (*al-mathal al-a'la'*; Q. 16:60).<sup>52</sup> With a higher degree of concern in excluding any trace of the Divine from human nature, Ibn al-Qayyim reformulates al-Ghazālī's notion of affinity as a relationship of complementarity. However, he reaches a similar conclusion by asserting that human beings can experience love for God, first, through the gate of the natural love felt for a benefactor, and, at a higher stage, for the beauty and perfection of God's names and attributes.<sup>53</sup>

In the light of this conception of Divine love, when Ibn al-Qayyim marks a clear distinction between common 'wage-earners' who work as long as they receive compensation and another category of workers who, filled with love and aspiration, seek to conform to God's ideal, it not only reflects a view of morality, which goes beyond acts of piety prescribed by the religious law, but invites us to go further and consider its implications for the experience of work and engagement in economy and society at large. We now turn to these implications.

### **IBN AL-QAYYIM'S *HIMMA* AS AN ISLAMIC EXPRESSION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP**

In Schumpeter's classic definition, entrepreneurial leadership is a function of individuals that consists in thinking and carrying out new combinations of existing elements in the economy.<sup>54</sup> Innovations do not, as a rule, take place spontaneously, but are initiated and carried out by individuals who combine existing means in new ways and create, in this way, disruptive change.

A first corollary to this definition is that there is no need for this type of leadership to manage the ordinary routine or achieve incremental economic growth. Therefore, being an entrepreneur does not imply, as a rule, a lasting condition nor a specific profession.

Entrepreneurs do not form a social class in the technical sense, as, for example, landowners or capitalists or workmen do. Of course the entrepreneurial function will lead to certain class positions for the successful entrepreneur and his family...but in itself it signifies a class position no more than it presupposes one.<sup>55</sup>

As a latent function of all individuals that can be triggered in circumstances favourable to change and transformation, entrepreneurial leadership corresponds to a disseminated function that does not signify, imply nor assume any higher standing in society. As a latent potential of individuals, it consists in the composite faculty required for thinking out new combinations of existing elements and, crucially, for carrying them out from start to finish. Noting how Schumpeter's definition resonates strongly with the composite semantics of *himma* (thinking with intensity about an issue or opportunity, intending to do something about it and fulfilling intentions), it is in Ibn al-Qayyim's egalitarian account that *himma*, stripped of any elitist

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<sup>52</sup> Ida Zilio-Grandi, *Le virtù del buon musulmano* [The Virtues of a Good Muslim] (Torino: Einaudi, 2020), 11-13.

<sup>53</sup> Bell, *Love Theory*, 119-121.

<sup>54</sup> Schumpeter, *The Entrepreneur* [1934], 49-57.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* [1934], 60.

association, takes the shape of a leadership function latent in all human beings regardless of their social status.

Schumpeter identifies two essential features of this type of leadership in individuals. First, the ‘energy of action’ and second, a ‘particular type of motivation.’<sup>56</sup> Entrepreneurs do not just come up with a new idea: the essence of what they do is to carry it out or fulfil it. The energy of their action carries at least as much weight as thinking about something new. Therefore, “it is not about invention: inventions, as long as they are not carried into practice, are economically irrelevant. It is this ‘doing the thing’ without which possibilities are dead, of which the leader’s function consists.”<sup>57</sup> Entrepreneurs, in other words, are not passive agents that follow given demands, but individuals who use ‘action’ to shape opportunities and put them into new forms or contexts. In fact, action is so central in their approach that it even affects their mode of thinking about issues and opportunities. As described in a recent study, “to be an entrepreneur is to act on the possibility that one has identified an opportunity worth pursuing;”<sup>58</sup> that is, to act as a means to thinking about that opportunity. Noting once again how the Arabic *himma* manages to sum up in an economical and effective way the whole idea of acting on issues or opportunities to make them real, it is only in combination with Ibn al-Qayyim’s elevated conception of human agency that the word unfolds in a powerful articulation of energetic action that becomes fully aware of all its potential, as found in the eloquent passages from *Miftāḥ dār al-sa’āda* and *al-Jawāb al-kāfi* cited above.

Regarding motivation, entrepreneurs stand out in that the motive of their endeavours is not the satisfaction of needs. Starting from the widely observed impulse to go on ever further once needs are more than satisfied, Schumpeter argues that entrepreneurs’ continuous drive to do things (*schaffen* in German) comes from the “pleasure they get from creative construction.”<sup>59</sup> Similar to artists, their endeavours are driven by the pleasure of producing something new that represents a creative expression of their inner perceptions and personal experience. This special type of motivation is not, therefore, rational nor logical, but a yearning for personal experimentation and a desire to leave an impactful, original and personal mark on society. Current research refers to this motivation by studying the influential role of emotions in entrepreneurs.<sup>60</sup> The general proposition is that an emotional experience not only causes a subjective evaluation of that experience (its valence), but also an impulse to act, an urge to move towards or away from the emotional stimulus (its motivational intensity). Ibn al-Qayyim’s conception of love (*maḥabba*) and its articulation in terms of causes and effects not only resonates with the concept of motivational intensity of the affection, but, in its Divine dimension, it outlines its potential to mobilise emotions for the sake of a positive ethical goal.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. [1911], 100.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. [1934], 67.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Mitchell, Trevor Israelsen and Ronald Mitchell, “Entrepreneurial Cognition Research. An Update,” in *The Psychology of Entrepreneurship. New Perspectives*, ed. Michael M. Gielnik, Melissa S. Cardon and Michael Frese (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 12.

<sup>59</sup> Schumpeter, *The Entrepreneur* [1911], 107.

<sup>60</sup> Yi Huang et al., “Mapping the Heart. Trends and Future Directions for Affect Research in Entrepreneurship,” in *The Psychology of Entrepreneurship. New Perspectives*, ed. M. M. Gielnik, M. S. Cardon, M. Frese (New York and London: Routledge, 2021).

Framed in the Islamic view of morality that sees in God and God's attributes the highest example (*al-mathal al-a'lā*), love and aspiration for the beauty and perfection of God is not just a cause for an aesthetic and spiritual response, but also the impulse for an ethical one that consists of striving to conform to God also in the everyday life of work and occupations.

At a time when entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a vehicle and strategy in furthering sustainable development of economies and societies, Ibn al-Qayyim's idea of individuals who not only work to receive compensation, but are driven by love and aspiration in seeking to conform to God, has the potential to outline a distinctively Islamic expression of their motivation. Meditating on God's beautiful names has the potential to offer concrete moral inspiration and guidance, particularly for entrepreneurs who are driven by a concern and desire to address contemporary priorities in our societies (for example, environmental sustainability, broader access to healthcare and education, etc.). That this is a concrete possibility is raised in a recent contribution by Ida Zilio-Grandi, where, rather compellingly, she argues for *al-Hafiz* (the Protector) as the name that can inspire environmental awareness and sustainable behaviours from an Islamic perspective.<sup>61</sup> Meditating on this and other Divine names has the potential to represent the 'particular type of motivation' for a new generation of Muslim entrepreneurs that connect who they are and what they want to achieve with the highest example of what ennobles morality in human beings.

## CONCLUSION

In my investigation of the link between Islam and entrepreneurship, the study of the Arabic term *himma* has offered the opportunity to note its manifestations across a broad range of Arabic literary sources and Islamic sciences. An examination of its occurrences in the Qur'ān, Sunna and ancient lexicography (al-Azharī, al-'Askarī, Ibn Manẓūr) allowed me to refine my understanding of the composite semantic implications included in the term. All these contents emerged in the different manifestations of *himma* in the writings of religious scholars (al-Rāghib, al-Jawzī, al-Sulamī) and in different secular genres of Arabic letters (Ibn al-Muqaffa', Yahyā b. 'Adī, Miskawayh). However, it was examining the distinctive account unfolding in the contributions of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya that one can observe how *himma* is fully deployed in the context of the scholar's distinctive spiritual, theological and ethical system. True to its broader semantic implications and in combination with key tenets of his theological thought, *himma* emerges as a disseminated leadership faculty that is not limited to high aspirations, but implies cognition, agency and mobilisation of emotions. Brought into dialogue with Schumpeter's modern theory of entrepreneurship, Ibn al-Qayyim's *himma* emerges as a powerful conceptualisation of entrepreneurial leadership in Islamic tradition. Through the ideas and themes emerging from this account, the same richness of semantic implications that let *himma* develop vigorous roots in Arabic letters may be effectively deployed in the

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<sup>61</sup> Ida Zilio-Grandi, "Environmentalism and Sustainability as an Expression of Islamic Morality." *Lagoonscapes, The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2021).



contemporary discourse and reflection on the new type of leadership necessary for the shared task of making the vision of societal development a reality.

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