Philosophicus, written by Ludwig Wittgenstein while he was a soldier on leave during World War I in 1918, and first published in German in 1921 as Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung:

“Not how the world is, is mystical, but that it is” (No. 6.44); 
“Feeling the world as a limited whole is mystical” (No. 6.45); and 
“What one cannot speak about, about that one should remain silent” (No. 7).

Murad Wilfried Hofmann


The study starts with stating certain facts about the movement of Muslim Brothers, considering it the first modern Islamic mass movement and the mother organization of all modern Islamist movements. The period 1928–1942 in the history of the movement is considered its formative phase. The author states that there is a gap in the historiography of the Muslim Brothers among Egyptian as well as Western historians of the movement (see pp. 1–2). He criticizes Richard Paul Mitchell’s study because of its negligence of this formative period before 1940 and concentrating mostly on the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s, and because it is lacking in its historical perspective (see p. 2).

With such criticism, the raison d’être of the present work is obvious. It tries to describe and explain the rise of the Society of Muslim Brothers from its founding in 1928 until the first repression of the movement in the autumn of 1941. The author also declares that a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of the Society’s ideology will not be given in his work since most of the essential writings by Hasan al-Banna [Hasan b. Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Banna (1324–1368/1906–1946)] on the political and religious ideology of the

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Society were written and published in the 1940s. The work’s main objective is to look for characteristics and qualities other than just ideological particularities. Once again, the author stresses the fact that his work’s focus is on the actor rather than the structure in order to explain “how the movement managed to exploit the favourable societal conditions in 1930s for the building of a mass movement” emphasizing “the organization, internal structure, modes of actions, methods of recruiting, reform programmes, ideological appeal and class interests of the members” (pp. 2–3).

The book is divided into three main parts covering three main periods in the formative history of the Society of Muslim Brothers. “The Formation of A Community 1928–1931” (pp. 19–49), deals with the birth of the Society under ctors al-Bannā’s leadership. The process of its development into a movement covers the period from 1931–1936 (pp. 51–148) with emphasis on charismatic leadership, organization of the movement and its interest in social work. The expansion and the rise of a mass movement is the main feature of the years 1936–1942 with emphasis on the making of class cadres and the rise of the Society as an ideological-political party with activism and radicalism as two main features of the movement (pp. 149–277).

The findings of Brynjar Lia represent, as he states, a radical breach with the traditional view about the Muslim Brothers especially as given by Mitchell. The first important result of Lia’s study is that the rise of the Society of Muslim Brothers was an essential part of the rise of modern mass politics in Egypt and not an aggressive reassertion of religious traditionalism. As an Islamic welfare association, the Society began to reinterpret Islam and traditional religious values as a basis for their demands for political participation and implementation of their programmes of reform. Thus, according to Lia, the pillar of the Society’s growth was not the appeal of religious traditionalism. His argument is based on two facts. The first is the failure of the movement to win a significant following at al-Azhar, and the second is the predominant effendi character of the movement. The Society became the first non-élite political force to challenge the ruling classes in Egypt. The author emphasizes the role of the leadership of ctors al-Bannā, but also acknowledges the role played by local factors and mentions the open opposition to al-Bannā’s policies inside the Society. The author raises doubts as to the significance of blind obedience and stresses the elements of dedication and productive work as criteria for the attainment of position in the Society of Muslim Brothers.

In his analysis of the Society, the author defines some of the characteristics of the movement. The modernity of its modes of action and different manifestations of mass politics, political activism, modern methods of
political propaganda, broadening the base of political participation are some of its modes of action. The issue of social justice is discussed as an integral part of the Society’s ideology. This became manifest from a programme of political, social and economic reforms based on the interest of the lower classes. In his analysis, the author rejects Mitchell’s view of the movement as permeated with the spirit of “violence inspired by a social and religious exclusiveness (p. 279).” Lia interprets political violence “as in the main acts of disobedience on the radical fringes rather than a sponsored policy in the Society as a whole.” He characterise the Society as a new element in the Egyptian religious landscape. It was not associated with religious conservatism and it faced opposition from the traditional religious élite who felt that the Society threatened their authority. The author considers the Society as relatively more open to Western innovations and influences. Religion, for them, is related to the modern age, and to all aspects of modern life (pp. 285–286).

In its main arguments, the work of Brynjar Lia is a sort of clear criticism of the earlier works on the Society of Muslim Brothers especially of the well-known work by Richard Mitchell. As Jamal al-Banna has stated in his foreword, the author’s work is distinguished in two respects. It is more comprehensive and original than the other works on the subject because it deals with new material and information about the Society which was not available to previous authors. The second distinction is the author’s impartiality and his full dependence on facts and events drawn from a wealth of recent documents (see, p. xi). Surely the work of Lia sheds new light on the Society of Muslim Brothers and enables a better understanding of the movement and its place in the modern history of Islamic thought.

Muhammad Khalifa Hasan Ahmad


Gleaned from heterogeneous Islamic sources, gems of wisdom in this well-produced book are spread over four chapters: (i) The Self (pp. 1–25); (ii) The Self and God (pp. 27–55); (iii) The Self and Mankind (pp. 57–81); and (iv) The Self and the World (pp. 83–112). This thematic arrangement provides a certain