The Intellect and Intellectualit in Islamic Heritage

عقل و عقلانیت در میراث اسلامی

Selected Readings and Studies / گزیده مطالعات و نگارش‌ها

1

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ʿAḵl

(F. Rahman)

Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition

, intellect or intelligence, the Arabic equivalent to Greek νοῦς.

(1) In neoplatonic speculation, which in many respects resembles the late Greek doctrine of the Logos and also in many respects corresponds to the Logos christology, ʿaḵl is the first, sometimes the second, entity which emanates from the divinity as the first cause, or proceeds from it by means of intellectual creation, nafs and tabīʿa etc. coming after ʿaḵl in succession. As first created entity the ʿaḵl is also called “the representative” or “the messenger” of God in this world. The neoplatonic idea of ʿaḵl as first creation also appears in the ḥadīth: “The first thing created by God was the ʿaḵl etc.” (cf. I. Goldziher, Neuplatonische und gnostische elemente im Hadit, ZA, 1908, 317 ff.). [Cf. also falsafa, ikhwān al-safāʾ; for the role of ʿaḵl in Ismāʿīlism, ismāʿīliyya and durūz; for ʿaḵl in šūfī theosophy, e.g. ibn ʿarabī and ʿabd razzaḵal-ḵāshānī].

(Tj. de Boer*)

(2) According to the theologians (mutakallimūn), ʿaḵl is a source of knowledge and, as such, is the antithesis of nakl or tradition (see e.
g. I. Goldziher, Vorlesungen über den Islam, ch. iii); the words fiṭra and tabīʿa (φύσις) are also used for it. ʿAḵl is thus a natural way of knowing, independently of the authority of the revelation, what is right and wrong. (Thus it corresponds to the λόγος of the Stoics, who understood by this term a “natural light” (lumen naturale), which was their criterion for distinguishing between good and bad.) This ʿaḵl, possessed by all human beings, is also called al-raʿy al-mushtarak (al-Fārābī, R. fi l-ʿaḵl (Bouyges); cf. the κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι of the Stoics and the κοινὸς νοῦς of Alexander of Aphrodisias, De anima (Bruns)). Allied to this meaning of ʿaḵl is the view qualified by al-(raʿy) Fārābī (op. cit.) and Ibn Sīnā (al-Ḥudūd) as that of the masses (al-djumhūr), according to which ʿaḵl must lead to praiseworthy conduct, so that a man of bad character, however ingenious he might be, is not an ʿāḵil (cf. the ὁρθὸς λόγος of the Stoics and the distinction made by Aristotle between φρόνησις and πανουργία, Nic. Ethics); ʿaḵl here means “wisdom”.

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The philosophers of Islam followed in their accounts of ‘ākl Aristotle and his Greek commentators, more especially Alexander of Aphrodisias. According to them ‘ākl is that part of the soul (for their psychology in general see nafs) by which it “thinks” or “knows” and as such is the antithesis of perception. Mostly, however, ‘ākl is not regarded as a part of the soul at all, which is then restricted to the lower mental functions, but as an incorporeal and incorruptible substance differing in kind from the soul—an ambiguity which also pervades Aristotle's psychology. ‘Ākl is broadly divided into the theoretical (al-nażārī) and the practical intellect (al-‘amālī); the former apprehends the quiddities or universals, while the latter deliberates about the future actions and through the appetitive faculty moves the body to the attainment of the good.

The development of the theoretical intellect in man is the most widely and richly discussed subject of the doctrine. In a brief and rather obscure passage (De anima, iii, 5) Aristotle had said that the potential intellect in man is actualized by an eternally actual intellect (an application of the general Aristotelian principle that for the realization of a potentiality the agency of something already actual is necessary); the latter acts upon it as light acts upon our faculty of sight or art on its material. The disparity between the two analogies obscures Aristotle's view of the relationship between the passive and active intellects, but it was Alexander's interpretation which provided the basis for the Arabs' discussions. According to Alexander (op. cit.) our intellect is initially a pure potentiality which is actualized by the active intellect which is God; when our actualized intellect is not operating, it is intellectus in habito, which in actual operation becomes intellectus in actu. Most of the succeeding commentators, especially Themistius and (pseudo-)Philoponus (Stephanus), reject Alexander's equation of the active intellect with God and declare it to be a part of the human soul. According to Muslim philosophers, the active intellect (‘ākl fa‘‘āl) is the lowest of the separate intelligences, which gives individual forms to material objects and universal forms to the human intellect—hence its name: wāhib al-ṣuwar (dator formarum of the later scholastics). According to al-Fārābī (op. cit.) the first stage of actualization consists of the abstraction of forms from matter by the “light” of the active intelligence: the second stage is reached when the thus actualized intellect (‘ākl bi ‘l-fi‘l = intellectus in effectu) reflects upon itself and attains to a knowledge of the categories and becomes ‘ākl mustafād (intellectus acquisitus or adeptus). According to Ibn Sinā (al-Shifā‘, De anima) the potential intellect (‘ākl bi ‘l-kuwwa, or ‘ākl hayālānī = intellectus potentialis or materialis) reaches the first stage of its actualization when it acquires the axiomatic truths (this is called ‘ākl bi ‘l-malaka = intellectus in habitu), the second stage (called ‘ākl bi ‘l-fi‘l = intellectus in actu) when it acquires the secondary intelligibles from the primary
intelligibles or axioms, the final stage (‘ākl mustafād = intellectus acquisitus) when it actually contemplates these intelligibles and becomes similar to the active intellect. Ibn Sīnā, inspired by Neo-platonism, affirms that the universal cannot be acquired by abstraction from the particulars, but by direct intuition from the active intelligence. The final stage of human bliss comes when the human intellect becomes one with the active intellect, which happens, according to al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, only after death, although Ibn Rushd allows such a union during earthly life.

One of the chief difficulties of this whole Greco-Arabic doctrine is the individuality of intellect which they affirm to be incorporeal and therefore, according to their general principle of individuation by matter, universal. Although its individuality is recognized, seeing that the subject of thought is the individual “I”, the basic principle of their theory of knowledge, viz. that of the identity of subject and object (a principle laid down by Aristotle in order to ensure the objectivity of knowledge, but rejected by Ibn Sīnā), prevented the formulation of the individual ego. This difficulty culminated in Ibn Rushd (De anima), who declared the intellect to be one for all humanity, while recognizing that his theory did not do justice to the individuality of the act of thought.

(4) The Muslim philosphers recognized a hierarchy of separate intelligences (‘uḵūl muḏfiʁaḵa), each lower one emanating from the higher. These incorporeal beings, usually ten in number and endowed with life, intuitive thought and bliss in varying degrees, create and govern their respective spheres which themselves are regarded as being possessed of souls. Like the Greco-Christian thinkers (e.g. (pseudo-)Philoponus, De anima (Hayduck), 527), the Muslims identified the separate intelligences with certain angels, the lowest of these, the active intellect, called Gabriel, being the ruling ‘ākl of the sublunar sphere.

(F. Rahman)

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Citation:

Ašliyyāt

(L. Gardet)

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, (a.), technical term in ‘ilm al-kalām (scholastic theology). Its use is common (see the commentators on al-Taftazānī, al-Baḍjūrī etc.), as expressing a certain concept, and to denote a genus of theological dissertations, which go back at least to the 6th/12th century with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and are clearly stated in the 8th/14th century by al-Īdī, al-Taftazānī and Dīurdānī. The term refers to the earlier expression al-ʿulūm al-ʿakliyya, derived from falsafa, signifying the rational (and natural) knowledge which the reason (‘akl) can acquire by itself. Al-Ghazzālī uses this phrase freely (cf. Ihyā’, iii) and opposes it to al-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyya wa ʿl-dīniyya (revealed and religious knowledge). According to Muʿtazilite tradition, and Saʿādīya al-Fayyūmī, ‘akliyyāt denotes that which is accessible to the reason especially, on the ethical level, the natural values of law and morals. Cf. the Muʿtazilite MS al-Madīma‘ fiʾl-Muḥīt (abridged from the Muḥīt of the Kādī Abdal-Dībābār, end of the 10th century) by Ibn Mattawayh (Berlin, MS Glaser 526; information supplied by G. Vajda).

In classical kalām, this distinction operates also within the “religious sciences”. Traces of it are found from the time of the first Muʿtazilite disputation, when ‘ilm dīnī is sometimes subdivided into ‘ilm ʿaklī and ʿilm sharʿī. In later works (Ashʿarī and Ḥanafī-Māṭūrīdī schools), ʿakliyyāt denotes the aggregate of subjects in kalām (i.e. “religious science”) which are amenable to reason; that is to say subjects the fundamentals of which, even where they are provided by the sharʿ, can be “proved” by “apodictic arguments” (kāṭī). These are contrasted with the subjects called samʿīyyat, ex auditu, the fundamentals of which derive only from Qurʾānic or traditional texts (ḥadīth, idjmāʾ). In this latter category, reason only intervenes to resolve arguments of expediency. Two kinds of problems are considered as ʿakliyyāt: (1) The preliminary subjects of kalām, which deal with “essentials and accidents”, subjects which are in the strict sense “rational”, and which assemble the products of logic, natural philosophy, and ontology; (2) ilāhiyyāt, which deal with (a) the existence of God (wujūdAllāh), and his attributes (ṣifāt), with the exception of the three attributes of Sight, Hearing, and Speech, and of the “vision of God” (ruʿyat Allāh), which are considered as samʿīyyat; and (b) the “acts of God” (afʿāluḥū taʿālā). The ilāhiyyāt must always have a scriptural basis, but a basis which reason, for its part, can prove by apodictic arguments. The other subjects, such as prophecy, eschatology, the “statutes and the names”, the

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“command and prohibition” (*imāma*), are *sam iyyāt*. The great classic of Ḍjurджānī, the *Sharḥ al-Mawākif* (8th/14th century) for example, has six principal sections; five of these treat of *ʿaṭliyyāt*, and one only, the final section, comprises all the subjects called *sam ʿiyyāt*.

(L. Gardet)

[Print Version: Volume I, page 342, column 2]

**Citation:**

Intellect

Navid Kermani

Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān

As opposed to emotion or will, the power or faculty through which humans perceive and understand the world. The concept of ‘ʿaql, “intellect,” is probably one of the most controversial in the history of Muslim thought. The word ‘aql itself does not occur in the Qurʾān. The root ‘-q-l, however, appears forty-nine times and always as a verb in the first form (ʿaqala-yaʿqilu) meaning “to understand, to recognize.” Other meanings of the verb ‘aqala, such as “to tie (up),” e.g. a camel, “to arrest,” “to pay blood money (q.v.)” are not found. In all but three verses the verb is in the second or third person plural, usually in formulae of admonition (see exhortations) such as a-fa-lā taʿqilūna, wa-laʿallakum taʿqilūna or fī dhālika la-āyatin li-qawmin yaʿqilūna.

The cognitive process described by ʿaqala is based primarily on the human's ability to perceive, to reflect and to evaluate obvious facts. This meaning of ʿaqala is very close to that of the word ‘aql in pre-Islamic poetry. But in a noticeably large number of verses ʿaqala is related to the senses. Quite often it also has direct associations with the senses and the heart (q.v.; fuʿād, qalb), which in the Qurʾānic semantic is not the seat of emotions, but an organ of perception and understanding. ʿAqala as the process of recognition which leads to belief (see belief and unbelief) is taken in the Qurʾān to include sensory perception and the understanding of the heart, and it relies in any case on the use of the senses. It does not, therefore, correspond to our modern notion of reason, which is regarded as the capacity to attain knowledge through thinking and mental reflection, being distinguished from knowledge achieved through sensual perception, i.e. sounds, smells, optical impressions or feelings.

The various manifestations of understanding in the Qurʾān, that is, all the different contexts in which the root ‘-q-l makes its appearance, are part of the Qurʾānic concept of āya, “sign.” In the Qurʾānic Weltanschauung all creation is an āya, i.e. a sign from God (see signs). Nature (see natural world and the Qurʾān) no less than civilization, human history (see history and the Qurʾān) and divine writings (see book), the pleasures of love and of food — everything that exists and takes place in the cosmos (see cosmology) and on earth (q.v.) is a revelation of God to humankind (see revelation and inspiration). God speaks to humankind through his signs, those that are spoken being manifested in the books of revelation, the unspoken ones through the world itself. The act of interpreting the signs is called in
the Qurʾān ʿaqala, while the ways and means of doing so are as manifold and varied as the signs themselves. For example, in q 30:21-4 four different kinds of expression for the recognition of signs are used in rapid succession. The expression used in the first of these four verses is *inna fī dhālika la-ayātin li-qawmin yatafakkarūna.* “There are truly signs therein for a people that thinks.” In the next verse they are called signs “for those that have knowledge,” then signs “for a people that listens” (*li-qawmin yasmaʿūna,* see *seeing and hearing; hearing and deafness*), and finally signs “for a people that understands” (*li-qawmin yā qilūna*). The four expressions here are not synonymous; they indicate different ways of attaining understanding, the intellectual (*tafakkara*) and the sensual (*samiʿa*), and ultimately ʿaqala, which embraces the ones already described. Neither here nor elsewhere in the ¶ Qurʾān does the term *al-ʿālimūna* denote people who have acquired great knowledge or learned a great deal, but rather people who are endowed with a special religious insight, however that may be defined; ʿūlū l-albāb, as it is also called. The difference between the two conceptual areas ʿaqala and ʿalima is that only the latter can also refer to God, insofar as God is “knowing” (*ʿalīm,* see *god and his attributes*). ʿAqala, on the other hand, refers to a purely human activity, namely the understanding of divine signs.

According to Qurʾānic precepts the reality of God can be understood and even physically perceived by all humans, by virtue of the comprehensible arguments and clear and self-evident facts (hence the emphasis on the clarity of the signs). Unbelief (see *belief and unbelief*) is in the first place not attributed to a lack of will but to a lack of intellectual ability and perception — the unbelievers fail to see and understand the signs “in the world at large or in themselves” (q 41:53). God gives signs, but it is up to the individual whether he or she recognizes them and accepts their guidance — *laʿallakum taʿqilūna.* This eventuality is the reason for the apparently incongruous *laʿalla,* “perhaps,” one of the most common modal expressions in the Qurʾān (see *language of the Qurʾān*). It has a firm place within the Qurʾānic Weltanschauung and by no means for stylistic reasons alone: *laʿalla,* which may (like the word ʿasā) have the secondary meaning “that which is desired,” expresses an individual's own responsibility, i.e. the possibility that he or she will remain in *darkness* (q.v.).

Thus ʿaqala has its very special and constantly reinforced function within the relationship between God and humankind. Whereas words like *shaʿara, faqiha* or *fakkara,* which likewise belong to the area of “understanding, grasping, reflecting on,” are ¶ used in other, general contexts, the activity described in the Qurʾān as ʿaqala relates solely to signs from God. In contrast to the concept of reason in the Enlightenment, the activity is not an end in itself; its goal is the reaction the signs
are intended to elicit, namely praise (q.v.) of God (see glorification of god) and belief in him. These are the responses appropriate to humankind when confronted with God's message to all, which is made manifest through signs.

The noun ʿaql occurs in a somewhat different guise from its Qurʾānic one in numerous hadīths (see hadīth and the Qurʾān), particularly in some which are not regarded as canonical. There it is used in a general sense that does not refer to God's relationship to humankind (cf. the compilation of hadīths in Ghazālī, Ihyāʾ, i, 83-9). Hence a general evaluation of intellectual understanding in Islam can only be established from post-qurʾānic sources. Although the Qurʾān's appeal to humankind's insight and its desire to — in its own words — “make clear” (bayyana) are indisputable, as is its description of ignorance (q.v.) as darkness and God as light (q.v.), the Qurʾān does not discuss, let alone glorify, ʿaql in terms of the human ability to attain all kinds of understanding through thought and reflection.

Starting from the Greek concept of nous, Islamic philosophy, theology and mysticism each developed their own content, meanings and connotations for the concept of ʿaql which were based only loosely on the ʿaqala of the Qurʾān (see philosophy and the Qurʾān; theology and the Qurʾān; Sūfīsm and the Qurʾān). In the aftermath of the modern renaissance (nahḍa) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ʿaql became the cornerstone of a reformist, rationalistic conception of religion. Today, reference to the intellect is commonplace among Muslim authors of almost all persuasions (see also knowledge and learning).

Navid Kermani

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Citation:

‘AQL –

(F. Rahman, W. C. Chittick)

IRANICA (Vol. II, Fasc. 2, pp. 194-198)

“intellect, intelligence, reason”.

‘AQL, “intellect, intelligence, reason.”

i. General.

ii. In Persian Literature.

i. General

The term ‘aql is said by Arab philologists to mean originally “to restrain” or “to tie.” It then comes to mean “reason” because it “restrains man from precipitous conduct” (see standard Arabic dictionaries). Its use in Islamic philosophy, theology, Sufism and literature is very wide-spread but has different nuances in each. Particularly in philosophy and theology (kalām) its use is technical and has developed under the impact of Greek philosophical ideas. In this technical literature it translates the Greek terms noûs and diánoia. The philosopher al-Farābī, at the beginning of his Resāla fi’l-‘aql (ed. M. Bouyges, Beirut, 1938) distinguishes several meanings of ‘aql, on the basis of Aristotle, including one he attributes to kalām-theologians.

In its philosophical usage ‘aql perceives universals as opposed to sense-perception which perceives particulars only. The operation of the intellect is described as abstracting the object of perception from matter and material relationships and making a concept out of it that is applicable to all the members of a species. The manner in which this is done is that the mind composes and contrasts the images of perceptibles stored up in memory and this activity enables it to receive the universal intelligible from the Active Intelligence (‘aql faʿʿāl), a cosmic intelligence (see below) that acts upon the potential human intellect and renders it actual. The universal intelligible, thus, does not “come out of” the images in the mind but is an influx “from the outside.” Ebn Sīnā developed the theory of the
intellect most elaborately among the Muslim philosophers. According to him, by exercising intellection, man develops a capacity within himself for creative knowledge. This capacity or power which he calls “simple intellect” (al-‘aql al-basīṭ = scientia simplex of medieval Latin philosophy) enables man to create knowledge ab initio which had never been acquired before. This newly created knowledge he terms “discursive knowledge” (see his De Anima, Arabic text, ed. F. Rahman, Oxford, 1959, pp. 241f.).

At the highest point of its development, where the human intellect becomes like the Active Intelligence, the Prophetic Intellect comes into being where all truth is deposited in a coupe and from where intellectual Revelation arises in the form of revealed messages in the Prophet’s mind (see F. Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, Chicago, 1979, pp. 30-36).

Under the impact of the neo-Platonic theory of emanation, Muslim philosophers developed the theory of ten metaphysical Intelligences. The First Intelligence arises directly from God. From this Intelligence arises the Second Intelligence, on the one hand and the highest Sphere on the other. This process, where each Intelligence moves its corresponding heavenly sphere goes on until the 10th Intelligence which has weakened so much that it can not give rise to another Intelligence; instead it produces the sub-lunar world of matter. It is this intelligence, called the Active Intelligence, which gives forms to the spatio-temporal world’s hierarchy of beings, culminating in the Prophetic Intellect where this world rejoins the Active Intellect. What seems to have made this theory irresistibly powerful over the minds of medieval philosophers—Muslims, and, following them, the Latin thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas—is that it satisfied both scientific and religious demands at the same time. Scientifically, there were eight planets and one High Sphere (containing all “stationary” stars), and, religiously, the number of Arch-Angels was believed to correspond to the number of spheres (see E. Gilson, Les sources gréco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennissant, in Archives d’Histoire Doctrinaire et Littérature du Moyen Âge, 1938).

As for kalām, it did not develop any elaborate theory of the intellect or reason, but, as al-Farābī points out in the reference given above, theologians often speak of a “natural reason” or a “sound reason” (‘aql be’l-feṭra; ‘aql salīm). This appears to have its source in the Stoic concept of a natural reason which they also call lumen naturale (natural light). While for the Mu’tazilites, this natural reason is autonomous in giving man guidance independent of Revelation, the orthodox theologians consider its operations to be decisively subordinate to Revelation:
Particularly in the sphere of law, orthodox theologians reject the autonomy of reason.

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See also *Et*² III, p. 943.


(F. Rahman)

ii. In Persian Literature

The term ‘*aql* (which will be translated as intellect throughout) is widely discussed in Islamic texts, a fact that is hardly surprising since knowledge (*`elm*), which is the content of intellect if not in some way identical with it, is central to Islamic civilization and dominates “over all aspects of Muslim intellectual, spiritual and social life” (F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, Leiden, 1970, p. 334).

Definitions of intellect and disputes over what exactly is denoted by the word are common in the works of various authorities in the different sciences. It is often divided into several kinds. For the philosophical discussion, see above (see also S. M. Afnan, *A Philosophical Lexicon in Persian and Arabic*, Beirut, 1969, pp. 178-85). The famous theologian Abū Ḥāmed Ḥazzāli (d. 505/1111) suggests that one of the reasons for difference of opinion over the nature of the intellect is that the word ‘*aql*’ denotes four different realities (*Eḥyā’ *`olūm al-dīn*, Cairo, 1327/1909, I, p. 64): 1. The attribute which distinguishes human beings from animals and makes them capable of learning arts and sciences; as such, intellect is an innate capacity (ḡarīza) that is related to knowledge as the eye is related to vision. 2. Knowledge that is possessed innately by children once they have gained a certain power of discernment, e.g., that two of a thing are more than one. 3. Knowledge that gained through experience. 4. The understanding by man’s innate capacity for knowledge that all affairs have certain consequences and that passion and self-interest must be restrained. The first of these kinds of intellect, says Ḥazzāli, is the foundation and source, the second the initial consequence of the first, the third the consequence of
the first and second combined, and the fourth the ultimate fruit and final goal. The first two are innate, while the third and fourth are acquired (Ḡazzālī then quotes three verses from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb that provide a traditional basis for this classification; Abū Ṭāleb Makkī [Qūṭ al-qolūb, Cairo, 1961, I, p. 324] quotes the same verses with the word ‘elm in place of ‘aql; see the translation by Rosenthal, Knowledge Triumphant, p. 184).

In the early Islamic texts and in discussions by authorities such as Ġazzālī, intellect is accorded a highly positive role. Nevertheless, in Persian literature and in Sufism in general, intellect is often criticized for its shortcomings, especially in the face of love (‘ešq, maḥabba); the remainder of the present entry will deal mainly with the theme of the contrast between intellect and love.

Although the word ‘aql as such is not found in the Koran, various verbal forms (e.g., yaʿqelūn) occur forty-nine times, always in a positive sense. Through intellect mankind understands the signs (āyāt) of God, whether in the phenomena of nature (Koran 2:164, 13:4, 16:12, 23:80, etc.), or in the Koran and other scriptures (2:44, 3:65, 3:118, 10:16, 11:51, etc.). Intellect prevents man from falling into hell (67:10) and allows him to understand that the next world is better than this (6:32, 7:161, 12:109, 28:60). The vilest of creatures in God’s sight are those who have no intellect (8:22). Intellect’s importance is enhanced by the fact that commentators identify the lobb possessed by the ūlu’l-albāb, mentioned in sixteen verses, with intellect; a typical verse reads, “Are they equal—those who know and those who know not? Only the ūlu’l-albāb (the possessors of intellects) remember” (39:9).

The very few Hadiths in the primary Sunni collections referring to intellect always mention it in the same positive sense that is seen in the Koran. Later works add numerous examples of Hadith in praise of ‘aql (e.g., Ġazzālī, Ehyā’ I, pp. 63-64). The Shiʿite Hadith collections are particularly rich in traditions praising intellect (see Majlesi, Behār al-anwār, repr. Beirut, 1983, I, Ketāb al-ʿaql wa’l-jahl, pp. 81-162). In both Shiʿite and Sunni Hadiths, the connection between intellect and sound religious faith and practice is stressed. Thus Ġazzālī (loc. cit.) quotes the Prophet as saying that the pillar of the believer is his intellect, which determines the measure of his worship (‘ebāda). Similarly Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq defines intellect as “That through which the All-Merciful is worshipped and Paradise is attained” (Majlesi, Behār I, p. 116). The Shiʿite sources emphasize the idea that all positive moral qualities depend upon intellect; the lists of these qualities seem to be prototypes for the later discussions of the maqāmāt or “stations” of spiritual perfection in Sufism (cf. the one hundred branches of intellect according to the
Prophet, ibid., pp. 117-19, or the seventy-five soldiers of intellect—as opposed to the seventy-five soldiers of jahl “ignorance”—according to Imam Jaʿfar, ibid., pp. 109-11).

Though intellect is highly praised in the early sources, it is always recognized as a creature of God, who has no equals. Hence intellect must have certain limitations; among these are the fact that God Himself can only be known to the intellect to the extent that He chooses to reveal Himself to it, either through scripture or through the created world. But man as a possessor of intellect will never be able to comprehend God as He is in Himself; the verse “They measure not God with His true measure” (Koran 22:74) is often cited to prove this point. Similarly, a prophetic Hadith that is sometimes quoted in this context states, “Meditate (tafakkor) upon God’s creation (or: God’s bounties), but not upon God (or: upon God’s Essence)” (Ḡazzālī, Kīmīā-ye saʿādat, ed. A. Ārām, Tehran, 1319 Š./1940, p. 779). ‘Alī’s Nahī al-balāḡa contains several passages alluding to the intellect’s inability to grasp true knowledge of God (ed. Ș. Şāleḥ, Beirut, 1387/1967, pp. 217, 225, 238; cf. W. Chittick, A Shiʿite Anthology, Albany, 1981, pp. 28, 32; on the whole question of man’s ability to know God in the Islamic context, see Rosenthal, Knowledge Triumphant, pp. 129-42). In general, the great emphasis placed by kalām upon the concept of tanzīh, or “incomparability,” the idea that God is dissimilar to created things and transcends our understanding, is closely connected to the inability of the intellect to reach a true comprehension of God’s inmost nature (konh), however necessary intellect may be in order for the individual to establish sound religious faith and practice. Many early Sufis also allude to the limitations of intellect. Thus Abu’l-Ḥasan Nūrī (d. 295/908) said that the intellect is “impotent (ʿāǰez), and this impotent can only point to that which, like itself, is impotent” (Ḵolāsa-ye šarḥ-e taʿarrof, ed. A. ʿA. Rajāʾī, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, p. 155; cf. J. Nurbakhsh, Sufism: Meaning, Knowledge, and Unity, New York, 1981, pp. 46-47; Kalābāḡī, The Doctrine of the Sufis, tr. A. J. Arberry, Lahore, 1966, pp. 51-55).

Intellect was also suspect because the philosophers and many of the theologians claimed to base their doctrines upon its findings, while the majority of the community felt that these thinkers had strayed far from the letter and spirit of Islam; “man of intellect” (ʿāqel) is often a derogatory term alluding to a rationalistic thinker or philosopher, someone who is perceived as placing intellect even above revelation. Thus we find Sanāʾī (d. 525/1130-31) writing that intellect is blind in religious love: “Exercising intellect (āqelī) is the work of Ebn Šīnā (Avicenna)” (Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa, ed. M. T. Modarres Rażawī, Tehran, 1329 Š./1950, pp. 300-01). In his Dīvān, Sanāʾī stresses the superiority of the šarīʿa over
intellect and remarks that Avicenna will not be able to provide you with šefāʾ and najāt (“healing” and “salvation,” the titles of two of Avicenna’s works; Dīvān, ed. idem, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962. p. 43; cf. pp. 57, 127). In a similar way he points out that intellect is useless without revelation and that the “partial intellect (ʿaql-e jozvī) cannot encompass the Koran: How can a spider snare a phoenix?” (p. 191).

Criticisms of Avicenna as the archetypal ʿāqel are made by Ḵāqānī (Toḥfat al-ʿErāqayn, ed. Y. Qarīb, Tehran, 1333 Š./1954, pp. 65-66) and Rūmī (Maṭnawī, ed. R. A. Nicholson, London, 1925-40, IV. v. 506; cf. ʿAṭṭār’s arguments that the philosopher’s intellect takes him outside of Moḥammad’s religion; Asrār-nāma, ed. Š. Gowharīn, Tehran, 1338 Š./1959, pp. 49-51, especially v. 801). In a famous verse (Maṭnawī V, v. 4144) Rūmī places Faḵr-al-dīn Rāzī, the great theologian, in the same category; he seems to be repeating the sentiment of his celebrated compatriot Šams Tabrīzī, who remarks, “If these meanings (maʿānī) could be perceived through study and discussion, then Bāyāzīd and Jōnayd should heap all the dirt in the world on their own heads in regret for [not having attained the rank of] Faḵr Rāzī” (Maqālāt, ed. M. ʿA. Mowḥḥed, Tehran, 2536 = 1356 Š./1977, p. 135; on the complicated problem of whether or not the Sufis’ criticism of intellect was justified, see S. H. Nasr, “The Relation between Sufism and Persian Culture,” Hamdard Islamicus 6/4, 1983, pp. 33-47).

When Persian poets look at the positive side of intellect and praise its role in supporting religious faith and practice, they are often being influenced not only by the picture of the intellect drawn in the Koran and the early religious literature, but also by the praise that was lavished upon it in Iranian sources (where kerad [Pahl. xrad, q.v.] is used interchangeably with ʿaql; see Adab; Andarz) and in Greek wisdom literature. Whatever the extent of this sort of influence, it served to accentuate the positive role given to intellect in Islam. A glance at Wolff’s concordance of the Šāh-nāma shows almost 1,000 instances of the use of kerad and various derivatives, such as keradmand (= ʿāqel), invariably in a positive sense (F. Wolff, Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname, Hildesheim, 1965; cf. M. Dabīrsīāqī, Kaṣf al-abīyāt-e Šāh-nāma-ye Ferdowsī, Tehran, 1348-50 Š./1969-71, II, pp. 461-63, for the first mesrā’s of about one hundred lines beginning with kerad). Nāṣer Ṭosrow (d. 481/1088-89), who was well versed in Peripatetic philosophy, praises intellect in numerous verses as man’s indispensable companion in religion (e.g., Dīvān, ed. M. Mīnovī and M. Moḥaqeqeq, Tehran, 1353 Š./1974, pp. 44, 84, 270, 273, 313, 452, 453).

But the Persian poets could not ignore intellect’s weakness and incapacity in the face of God Himself; this negative side of ʿaql came to be expressed most vocally in discussions of love (see ʿEṣq), which was considered to be opposed to the
intellect from early times. The connection between love and madness (jonūn), and the fact that the latter is the opposite of rationality (ʿaql, ʿaqelī), was clear to everyone; the story of Laylā and Majnūn serves as the mythical expression of this understanding. Already Ferdowsī refers to the coming of love as coinciding with the departure of intellect (Šāh-nāma, ed. Borūḵīm, I, p. 152, v. 441). Similar verses can be found in Faḵr-al-dīn Asʿad Gorgānī’s Vīs (Ways) o Rāmīn (ed. M. M. Todua and A. A. Gwakharīa, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 94, 117-18), written in about 446/1054. Thus, “Intellect discerns good from bad, but when love comes, no intellect remains in the heart” (p. 117; most authorities locate intellect in the heart, not the mind; thus also Koran 22:46). Eventually the contrast between love and the intellect becomes a standard motif in the Persian ḡazal.

Given Islam’s tremendous emphasis upon the positive role of intellect, it might be expected that the “Islamic” view would be to denigrate love whenever it acts in opposition to intellect, and this is indeed the tenor of such works as Ebn al-Jawzī’s Ḍamm al-hawā (see J. N. Belt, Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam, Albany, 1979, p. 37). But Sufism had long emphasized the importance of love for God over all other human attributes. A respected master of kalām like Abū Ḥāmed Ġazzālī could write, “Love for God is the ultimate goal of the spiritual stations (maqāmāt). . . . Every station beyond it is one of its fruits, and every station before it leads up to it” (Eḥyāʾ IV, p. 209).

As the Sufis increasingly wrote about the central importance of love in religion, they adopted the imagery and themes employed in poetry and prose to describe a man’s love for a woman. Of seminal importance here for the development of Persian literature is the Sawāneh, a masterpiece of prose by Abū Ḥāmed’s younger brother Āhmād Ġazzālī (d. 520/1126). His succinct observation on intellect in this work sets the tone for all subsequent treatments of mystical love: Alluding to the Koranic verse, “They will ask you about the spirit, say: " The spirit is from the command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been given but a little’” (17:85), he writes that intellect’s eyes are shut toward the perception of the spirit (jān, rūḥ), which is the shell surrounding love. “Since knowledge has no access to the shell, how should it find its way to the pearl hidden within?” (Sawāneh, ed. N. Pūrjavādī, Tehran, 1359 Š./1980, p. 55; cf. pp. 42-43; cf. also his Bahr al-haṣqa, ed. idem, Tehran, 1977, pp. 2, 6). The theory of intellect’s relation to love was greatly elaborated by Āhmād Ġazzālī’s disciple, ‘Ayn-al-qoẓāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), especially in his Arabic Zobdat al-haṣqa’eq (ed. ‘A. ʿOsyrān, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 25-36), where he explains that love belongs to a stage of human perfection “beyond the stage of the intellect” (warāʾ tawr al-ʿaql). Hamadānī’s much longer Persian work, Tamhīdāt, is devoted largely to explaining the nature of
love and the imagery that is used to express it; the limitations of intellect are implicit throughout the discussion, but mentioned explicitly only in a few lines of poetry (Tamhīdāt, published with Zobdat al-ḥaqāʾeq, pp. 116, 151).

Among poets, ʿAyn-al-qoẓāt’s contemporary Sanāʾī continues the tradition of praising intellect as man’s great aid in religion (see Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa, chap. 4, pp. 295-314). But he pointedly distinguishes between the intellect that takes man to God and the counterfeit intellect that is possessed by the devil (p. 303). He describes the spiritual ascent of the man who seeks refuge in intellect, “becomes a sun through intellect’s shadow,” then gains the robe of fervent desire (šawq) for God and passes beyond even the Universal Intellect, God’s first creation (p. 308). At the beginning of the Ḥadīqa, Sanāʾī had alluded to the inability of intellect to grasp the true nature of God (p. 16; this admission of intellect’s impotence becomes a standard feature of the sections on tawḥīd that begin so many majnawīs, cf. e.g., J. A. Boyle, tr., The Ilāhī-nāma or Book of God of Farīd al-Dīn Āṭṭār, Manchester, 1976, pp. 1-2; G. M. Wickens, tr., Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned: The Būstān of Saʿdī, Toronto, 1974, pp. 5-6). In chapter five of the Ḥadīqa, Sanāʾī tells us that love is beyond intellect and spirit and that it transcends the dualities that the intellect discerns, such as faith and infidelity (p. 328). Sanāʾī’s Dīvān devotes a far larger proportion of its verses to love than does the Ḥadīqa, so in general it is more critical of intellect. Love deals with a domain beyond intellect; the latter asks about the licit and the illicit, while the former is only interested in “non-existence” (p. 337). In other words, the lover of God must smash the snare of everything other than his Beloved (including his own self): “Call everything other than love "heartache" (ḡamm)” (p. 499).

Sanāʾī’s verses set the pattern for the contrast between intellect and love in Persian poetry. However, he also emphasizes the cosmological role of intellect, and this in turn becomes a common feature of Persian verse, especially among Sufis. The Hadith stating that God’s first creation was intellect is found in both Sunni and Shi’ite sources, though its authenticity was questioned by some of the ‘olamā. It was often quoted by the philosophers, who found in it a confirmation of neo-Platonic teachings, and Sanāʾī was well versed in the philosophical tradition (J. T. P. de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanāʾī of Ghazna, Leiden, 1983, pp. 208f.). Like later Sufis, Sanāʾī was happy to make use of philosophical views to explain Islam’s vision of man’s origin and destiny. Thus he speaks of the Intellect as the cause of all existent things (Ḥadīqa, p. 295) and alludes to the Universal Intellect as the closest thing to God (p. 298). In his Sayr al-ʿebād ela ‘l-maʾād (ed. Modarres
Rażawī in *Maṭnawīhā-ye Ḩakīm Sanāʾī*, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 212-14), he describes the cosmological role of the ‘ʿaql-e koll (or kollī) in some detail.

ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1220) devotes his *Dīvān* and *maṭnawīs* mainly to love and its concomitants, so he seldom speaks of the positive side of intellect, emphasizing instead its incapacity in the face of love, the intoxication produced by love’s wine, and the madness and bewilderment (*ḥayrat*) that overcome the lover at the vision of his Beloved’s face (e.g., *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, ed. Š. Gowharīn, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963, pp. 186-87; *Asrār-nāma*, ed. idem, Tehran, 1338 Š./1959, p. 35; *Dīvān*, ed. T. Tafażzolī, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 6, 12, 31, 32, 38, 53, 56, 57, 61, 72, 77, 78, 82, 108, 110, 135, 136, 150, 156, 169, 176, 192, 200, 209, 216, 235, 241, 243, 271, 283, 296, 299, etc.). In contrast to Sanāʾī, ʿAṭṭār rarely refers to intellect’s role in the cosmos.

Among ʿAṭṭār’s contemporaries, a number of important prose writers contributed to the discussion of intellect’s relation to love. Though the master prose stylist Šehāb-al-dīn Sohravardī (d. 587/1191) writes constantly of intellect in his mystical recitals (*Majmūʿa-ye āṯār-e fārsī*, ed. S. H. Nasr, 2nd, ed., Tehran, 1977, index; cf. W. M. Thackston, Jr., tr., *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi*, London, 1982, passim), his emphasis is upon the positive role of intellect as the source of the knowledge that brings about spiritual transformation, and here he is influenced not only by Sufi ideas of spiritual realization but also by Avicenna’s cosmology and psychology; in Sohravardī’s view, the Active Intellect, identified as Gabriel in the angelic hierarchy, is man’s inward guide to felicity (see ‘ʿAql-e Sorḵ). Rūzbehān Baqlī (d. 606/1209), a great theoretician of love, has little to say in criticism of intellect other than to acknowledge that it is a stranger (*bīgāna*) to God (*Ḡalaṭāt al-sālekān*, ed. J. Nūrbaḵš, with *Resālat al-gods*, Tehran, 1351 Š./1972, p. 83); however, he praises intellect as the instrument of man’s servanthood and classifies it into four different kinds, showing that the highest kind belongs to the prophets and saints (*Resālat al-gods*, pp. 71-74). The Sufi Najm-al-dīn Ṣāzī (d. 654/1256) provides a detailed and systematic discussion of the relationship between love and intellect in his ‘ʿEšq oʿʿaql (ed. T. Tafażzolī, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966), explaining the cosmological basis for love’s superiority. He concludes that intellect concerns itself with discernment and separation among things and thus with plurality and the establishment of this world, but love bridges gaps and annihilates multiplicity. The opposition (*ẓeddīyāt*) between intellect and love is based upon the fact that “Intellect is the great champion (*qahramān*) of constructing the two worlds, corporeal and spiritual, while love is a fire that consumes the haystack and overthrow the existence of both these worlds” (p. 63). Hence love carries the lover to the Beloved on the feet of effacement of the self
(nīstī), but intellect cannot take its possessor farther than its own object; “And all
men of knowledge and wisdom agree that God cannot be the object of anyone’s
intellect” (ibid.; cf. Rāzī’s explanation of the conflict between love and intellect in

One of the subtlest and most detailed discussions of the relationship between
intellect and love is found scattered throughout the works of Jalāl-al-dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273). The ideas he expresses and the poetical imagery that he employs mark
the highpoint of this tradition; for the most part the poets who come after him
contribute to discussions of intellect not by offering new concepts or imagery but
by refining the literary technique. It is also true that Sufi writing after Rūmī
undergoes profound changes because of the influx into Persian of Ebn al-
ʿArabī’s ideas and terminology, but this has little if any effect on the tradition of contrasting
love and intellect (e.g., a poet like Mağrebī [d. 809/1406-07] is totally dominated
by Ebn al-ʿArabī’s teachings, but in the few instances where he alludes to the
opposition between love and intellect, his concepts and images are no different
from those of earlier poets (*Dīvān-e kāmel-e Šams-e Mağrebī*, ed. A. Mīr ʿAbedīnī,
Tehran, 1358 Š./1979, ġazals, vv. 43, 478, 744, 789, 1111, 1330, 1336; *tarjīāt*, vv.
52, 160-85). Ebn al-ʿArabī and his followers place far less emphasis upon love
than do Sufi poets such as Sanāʾī, Ṭṭṭār, and Rūmī; they were far more concerned
with the construction of an elaborate theory of the nature of existence, and here
intellect plays a major role, at least cosmologically. But intellect, and the
knowledge it is able to acquire, are always subordinated to knowledge received
directly from God, most often referred to as kašf “unveiling” (see, e.g., Ebn al-
Triumphant*, pp. 188-92. For a Persian example of this school’s writings, see Ṣadr-
72; cf. Chittick, “Mysticism vs Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History,” *Religious

Rūmī acknowledges that in the end love is superior to intellect, but he never
ignores intellect’s positive dimension. Even more than Sanāʾī or Naǰm-al-dīn Rāzī
he gives intellect a clear role to play in the cosmos and in the stages of spiritual
growth undergone by the traveler (sālek). He teaches that intellect is one in
substance with the angels and is constantly engaged in seeking God; he contrasts it
with the ego (nafs), which was originally one substance with Satan. Most men are
veiled from the light of intellect by their egos; hence their intellects are in fact
partial, while only the prophets and saints have reestablished contact with the
Universal Intellect, through which all things were created. If intellect has a
negative side, it is because “the partial intellect has disgraced the Intellect”
(Maṭnawī V, v. 463). But in spite of the intellect’s fundamentally positive role, it must eventually be left behind in the quest for God. Just as Gabriel could only go so far in guiding the Prophet on his celestial ascent (meʿrāj), so the intellect must be finally naughted, since it pertains to creation and therefore duality. The intellect takes the saints to the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary (ibid., VI, v. 4139; cf. Koran 53:14), but “Intellect is a shadow, God the Sun: How can the shadow stand up to the sun?” (ibid., IV, v. 2111). Hence Rūmī devotes many lines, especially in his Dīvān, to criticizing intellect from the point of view of love, which burns away all multiplicity and leaves only the One God. Rūmī also makes clear the close connection between sobriety and intellect on the one hand and intoxication and love on the other: “The form of intellect is all stricture of heart, but the form of love is nothing but drunkenness” (Dīvān, v. 33781).

Bibliography:

See also A. Schimmel, Mystical Dimension of Islam, Chapel Hill, 1975, pp. 18-20 and passim.


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CONCEPT AND FUNCTION OF REASON IN ISLAMIC ETHICS

by

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Los Angeles

Hellmut Ritter zum 70. Geburtstage*

The universal mission of French civilization has been argued on the ground that it is, as it were, made to the measure of man (M. Lambliollette, Mission pacifique et universelle de la culture française. An address before the Troisième Congrès de l’Union Culturelle Française, Fribourg, Switzerland, September 21, 1956. “La culture française est vraiment à la taille de l’homme”). The same conviction of its perfect adjustment to human nature and human needs supports the claim to universality of Islam. Both civilizations are fond of contemplating their own reasonableness and both take for granted the effective existence in mankind of reason as a fairly uniform capability to which this reasonableness is fitted as key to lock. But where in France, as perhaps in the West as a whole, reason is primarily an instrument to expand the known universe and to organize it through understanding, in Islam it is above all an instrument to accept and befriend a universe which God not only has made but of which He indicated the interpretation by revelation; so that there is a distinct limit beyond which the sacrificium intellectus will become the most profitable attitude for man to take—a limit neither epistemological nor introspective but rather a limit set by supreme and benevolent Wisdom in the interest of man whose rescue from himself and from perdition the Lord would wish to see accomplished.

This is why not only a very considerable number of messengers and prophets were, at different times and in different places, entrusted with conveying to mankind the information—facts as well as commands—necessary to guard them in this and to guide them in the next world; but this benevolent satisfaction with man as the most noble of His creatures must, more particularly, be recognized as the cause due to


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which the facts of life as well as the positive law to which man is to submit in his own interest are so perfectly attuned to his God-given nature. So to achieve salvation man needs to discipline but not to cripple or distort his gifts, as the foremost of which he may be well advised to recognize his rationality.

For Islam, to say it once more, takes man safely through both worlds and it does so because it is the religion of the mean. “We have made you a community in the middle, ummatan wasaṭītan” (Koran 2:137/142, transl. R. Bell, Edinburgh 1937-39). This brief statement (clear enough in itself but introducing in the Holy Book a statement not altogether clear in its intent) has become the locus classicus for that sentiment of the Muslim that his faith enjoins the middle path between dedication to the life of the body as this is peculiar to polytheists and idolaters and hostility to the body as this is peculiar to the Christians and their monkery (e.g., Tabari — d. 923—Tafsīr, Cairo 1321/1903, II, 5; likewise still the recent Shiite commentary Kitāb al-Mizān fi tafsīr al-Qur‘ān by Saiyid Muhammad Ḥusain at-Ṭabāṭabā’i, Teheran, n.d., 1955 or 1956, I, 322-323; the commentators are agreed on assigning the Christians to the one extreme but are somewhat at variance with regard to the upholders of the other). And God has called the Muslims wasaṭī, those in the middle, “because of all things God loves best the intermediate ones” (Ṭabari, Tafsīr II, 514: iḏ hāna aḥabb al-umūr ḥabībahu ṣawaṭī 2). Thus the preferred position which the Islamic community enjoys in the favor of the Lord is due to its moderation; and this moderation is nothing but an expression of the unequalled adaptation to human nature which distinguishes the Muslim revelation and hence the ethics implicit in it. God has made man rather than the angels his xāliṣa or deputy on earth (Koran 2:28/30). His qualification for this xāliṣa (deputyship) is that knowledge of the

1 If H. Lammens, Tāif à la veille de l’hégire (Beirut 1922), p. 70 and again, La Mecque à la veille de l’hégire (Beirut 1924), p. 306, should be right when he argues that umma wasaṭī actually meant in the mouth of the prophet ‘un peuple d’élite’ the interpretation given the phrase by the Muslim community would only gain in significance in terms of its self-view.

2 Cf. also the praise of the fourth (of the seven) cliomes as the middle one and of the Persians as its rulers; e.g., Maṣūdī (d. 956), Kitāb at-Tanbih wal-iṣrāf, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden 1893), p. 6**: the author glorifies the kings of Persia for having ruled over ausaṭ al-and wa-aṣrāf al-aqālim, ‘the middlemost part of the earth and the noblest of cliomes’ (the passage is translated by Carra de Vaux, Le livre de l’avertissement et de la révision, Paris 1897, p. 9); similarly Barhebraeus (d. 1286), Muxtaṣar ad-duwal, ed. A. Sālīḥānī (Beirut 1890), p. 79*: the Persians are ausaṭ al-umām āṭar wa-aṣraḥukum igīmānan, ‘the nation with the most central homeland and the noblest in regard to the clime (they inhabit)’. Both passages have been included in ‘Alī Akbar Dahxudā’s Amāl wa-hikām (Teheran, n.d.), pp. 1665 and 1548 respectively.
names of things—an archaic mode of expression which we may in our terms interpret as that of the true being, the essential reality of things—which God has taught him in preference to the angels; in other words, God relies on man’s reason or on his rationality when he entrusts him with the vice-regency of the earth to administer it and enjoy its usufruct.

Man is the summit of creation and reason the noblest quality of the many with which God has honored him (al-Ǧazzālī, Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn, Būlāq 1289/1872, IV, 10819). “It is God’s greatest blessing to us, and there is nothing that surpasses it in procuring our advantage and profit... By Reason we have comprehended matters obscure and remote, things that were secret and hidden from us;... by it we have achieved even the knowledge of the Almighty, our Creator, the most majestic of all that we have sought to reach and our most profitable attainment” (The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes, i.e. Muḥammad b. Zakariyāʾ ar-Ṛāzī—d. 925—at-Tibb ar-riḥānī, trans. A. J. Arberry, London 1950, p. 20).

There is no divergence of outlook between a freethinker like Rāzī, the great physician, and a theologian like Gazzālī (d. 1111) who declares Reason “the means to attain felicity in this world and the next” and who reflects that even “Turks, Kurds and the coarse Bedouin”, despite their closeness to the order of the beasts, will by a natural instinct honor the old because their reason, sharpened by experience, has given them an incontestable superiority (Ǧazzālī, Iḥyāʾ I, 83). And both the scientist and the theologian derive a moral obligation from man’s possession of this supreme treasure. We must not degrade reason nor counteract it in conducting our affairs. “We must not give Passion the mastery over it, for Passion is the blemish of Reason,... Nay, but we must discipline and subject our Passion, driving it and compelling it to obey the every dictate of Reason. If we do thus, ... we shall be happy in God’s free gift and grace of it” (Spiritual Physick, p. 21).

Linking his anthropology to ethics by a different path, Gazzālī insists on man’s duty to be grateful to his Lord for having received reason (or: intelligence, ʿaql) as well as good character and knowledge. And he observes on the side—with perhaps more seriousness than we would tend to ascribe to this remark—that it is part of the nobility of reason that he who does not possess it enjoys it as much as he who does and that, in fact, there is a general inclination to consider oneself better endowed with it than one’s fellows—all the more cause, Gazzālī concludes, to render thanks to God for as much of it as one fancies oneself to have been granted by Him (Ǧazzālī, Iḥyāʾ IV, 1238-9).

Ibn al-Cauzī (d. 1200) justifies the writing of his Axbār al-ḥamqā or Stories of Fools by arguing that these stories “will move intelligent persons to give thanks to their Creator that they were not made that way”; cf. F. Rosenthal, Humor in...
What, however, is the nature of that ‘aql, or reason, whose possession is such an essential characteristic of humankind? And are the associations called up by the term the same in a Muslim as in a Western milieu? Two circles, one may say with some oversimplification, two circles or types of thinkers have been leading in the analysis of the concept of reason. The falāsīfa, the Aristotelians and neo-Platonists of Islam, resumed and developed the Greek notions of ‘aql as the antithesis of perception, studying it in its function as the theoretical and the practical intellect and attempting to meet the difficulties inherent in the description of individual psychological experience in terms of universals not really amenable to individuation. The direct bearing of their constructs on the ethical ideas of the Muslim community has not been considerable. The theologians and moralists, on the other hand, moving on a more practical level reflected popular ideas which they consolidated by systematizing them. Ġazzālī is well aware that the word ‘aql is used in more than one sense and that a good deal of disagreement on the subject of “reason” is due to the failure to realize the multiple connotations of the term. He discusses four principal meanings in which ‘aql is used. (1) It is the quality that distinguishes man from beast and predisposes him to the reception of the theoretical sciences, al-‘ulūm an-nażariyya; (2) it is the knowledge which teaches a child to distinguish the possible from the impossible and makes him discern “axiomatic” facts such as that two is more than one; (3) it is also the knowledge which experience yields; finally—and here we meet with that ethical turn that is characteristic of the theological examination of ‘aql—(4) we call him possessed of ‘aql who realizes the consequences of actions and manages to control his emotional impulses in the light of his foresight (Iḥyā’ I 84–85). 1 The connection between reason and right conduct is as firmly established in popular as in theological consciousness; intellectual brilliancy per se does not suffice to make a man an ’āql. For the basic definition conceives of ‘aql not merely as a source of knowledge but specifically as “a natural way of knowing, independently of the authority of the revelation, what

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1 This passage is not to suggest that Ġazzālī’s view of ‘aql does justice to all aspects of Arabic usage. The philosophers proper developed a considerably more elaborate classification of the concept. Avicenna (d. 1037), for example, distinguishes no less than eleven kinds of ‘aql; his terminology has been listed conveniently by J. Bielawski, Deux périodes dans la formation de la terminologie scientifique arabe, Rocznik Orientalistyczny 20/1936, 281, note 32 (on the basis of the more extensive discussion by A. M. Goichon, Lexique de la langue philosophique d’Ibn Sinā, Paris 1938, 226-233).
is right or wrong," the lumen naturale of our tradition (cf. F. Rahman, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., I, 341b f. s.v. "aql"). What we miss (but our medieval forebears, the contemporaries of the thinkers whose ideas we are attempting to summarize, would probably not have missed) is the endeavor to analyze the epistemological relation between human reason and the extrahuman data with which it is concerned, the range (or the limitation) of the sphere within which its judgment may claim ("objective") validity, and the conditions which its very structure (it, too, left unanalyzed by the medieval Muslim) imposes on the world so as to render it perceptible and organizeable by the means with which reason is endowed.

For from an epistemological viewpoint, the mutakallim is content to contrast "aql as a source of knowledge with tradition, or naql; in this contrast, "aql will be coordinated with aprioristic, naql with "accidental", historically determined, factual or positive knowledge. This elementary typology of knowledge has been developed into a classification of the sciences or, to be more exact, of the religiously relevant sciences, that is, to stay within the terminology and the value-world of the ethically oriented theologian, the "useful" sciences.¹ Here the "aqlīyāt, the (kinds of) knowledge which are accessible to (divinely) unaided reason are confronted with what is variously called al-ʻulūm as-šarīʿya waddīnīya, legal and religious knowledge as based on revelation, or sam-īyāt, subjects that cannot be proved by apodictic arguments but derive from Koranic or traditional data. The "aqlīyāt include, as the name implies, all that reason can acquire by itself, as "on the ethical level, the natural values of law and morals." Ilāhīyāt, theology proper, maintains a somewhat ambiguous position in that it is samī as being based on scripture but "aqlī as being amenable to rational argument; prophetology, on the other hand, as well as eschatology and the positive statutes of law and government are merely samī, ex auditu, that is, they could not have been developed at all correctly without God’s assistance through revelation (for this paragraph cf. L. Gardet, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., I, 342b-343a, s.v. “aqlīyāt”).

Even though human nature has been so constituted as to be able to obtain its fundamental moral orientation without ad hoc guidance, the concrete precepts man is to follow are not simply derivable from innate insights nor are the concrete precepts which require fulfilment neces-

sarily in harmony with what courses of action human reasoning would suggest. What has recently been called “theistic subjectivism” (by G. F. Hourani, Ethical Value, Ann Arbor, Mich. 1956, p. 31),¹ that is to say an outlook which defines as ethically good “whatever is approved by God” and as the “rightness of acts” their being commanded by God, has become the orthodox position in Islam and in a sense, the theoretical justification of Islamic law. Consequently it has been the existence or non-existence of an element of rationality or rational purposiveness in religious precept which became the crucial issue for those to whom God’s pedagogical arbitrariness seemed incompatible with their concept of the divine or with their sense of human dignity. A Hellenizing philosopher such as Miskawaih (d. 1030) cannot reconcile himself to the thought that any injunction of the šari‘a could lack a direct relation to an inborn disposition or need of man. Companionableness or “social feeling”, uns, is an elementary human trait. It is to cultivate this trait that the šari‘a imposed the duty to perform the five daily prayers in common rather than in isolation. The purpose of that community prayer is, as Miskawaih expressly states, to actualize the natural companionableness which is in man in potentia. The Friday Service, which will bring together people from different parts of town, the two principal festivals of the Muslim year, which will unite villagers with townpeople, and even the pilgrimage to Mecca, which unites Muslims from every country, are viewed and if you wish, accounted for, by the same consideration (Miskawaih, Tahdib al-axldq, Cairo 1323/1904, p. 46; cf. R. Walzer, Aspects of Miskawaih’s Tahdib al-Akhldq in: Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Rome 1956, II, 619-621; but cf. p. 621 n. 1).

Gazzāli, on the other hand, insists on the educational value of obedience to irrational command. Without self-restraint and control of desires, God cannot be approached. This realization motivated the monks and recluses of earlier religions to retire from this world. But for the Muslim God established the obligation to pilgrimage as a substitute for permanent abnegation of the world. He asked the believers to foregather in Mecca to His glory even as visitors will foregather at the court of a human

¹ An unusually clear formulation of this outlook occurs in Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), al-Iḥkām li-‘usūl al-‘akhkām (Cairo 1345-48), VIII, 120-132, whose argumentation is designed to support the tenet that “Allāh does what he wishes with no regard to cause or reason.” Brief excerpts from this passage have been translated by E. Gräf, Probleme der Todesstrafe im Islam, Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft 59/1957, 118-19. The same author, ibid., 119-121, quotes Ibn al-Mal‘ak (not al-Malik as Gräf writes; ca. 1427) commenting on Nasaffi (d. 1310), Manār al-‘usūl, for the opposite outlook which strives after a reconciliation of the structural order of reason with that of revelation.
monarch, submitting to His majesty in humility and recognizing that He was too great to be encompassed not only within any house but within any one country. To induce their devotion and to deepen their sense of dependence, God “imposed on them” during the *hāj* “actions which are not agreeable to the hearts and to whose meaning the minds, *‘uqāl*, would not be guided by themselves” such as the so-called stoning of the devils at Minā and the courses between *aš-Šafā* and al-Marwa. “By actions of this kind the completeness of submission and servantship becomes evident.” Other precepts such as the poor-tax have an easily understood objective with which reason will readily agree; fasting is an obvious technique to combat desire; prostration during prayer a persuasive gesture of devotion; but in ritual actions like the stoning of the devils there is nothing to attract heart or mind; they are done merely in response to a command; so their execution testifies to that sacrifice of intellectual reservation which is required for absolute obedience; and it is in such unqualified self-dedication that Ğazzālī finds the religious purpose of the believer’s obligation to visit the sanctuary of Mecca once during his life—not by way of a journey planned as he pleases but bound to an irrefrangible ritual order compliance with which will, in part at least, run counter to every inclination of will and reason (cf. Ğazzālī, *Iḥyā’* I, 252-53).

To the Muslim the fact of a religious truth seemed to imply its changelessness; validity meant validity for ever and anon; on the analogy of religious truth—and in which truth would there not be an element connecting it with the edifice of the more specifically religious verities?—truth as such, that is any statement about the universe commanding rational assent, was conceived of as descriptive and static. Developmental change, predictable modification were uncongenial concepts, the deliberately provisional, heuristic or at any rate conditional character of much of our “scientific” truth was an irritant, not to say a counter-sense. Authority could be trusted and followed not only because ancient excellence was unlikely to be reached again, let alone to be surpassed; but also and mostly because in a universe that had been delimited by revelation and largely accounted for by reason the yielding up to empirical observation or other fact-finding methods, of orientation points already safely fixed would have injected an element of uncertainty into human thinking as well as acting that seemed intolerable to medieval man and incompatible with the kindness of the Creator who had placed His creatures into a finite and firmly scaffolded universe.

The paramountcy of strictly “scientific” interests in some thinkers led to their proposing a concept of rational truth that is a close kin to our
own idea of the validity of scientific insight. It was not merely the orthodox who resisted and ultimately defeated their approach. The sectarian, too, opposed any attempt to deabsolutize scientific and philosophical knowledge. The conflict between the two ideas of the nature of scientific truth has found expression in one of the most curious documents which we possess of the intellectual life of the Muslim Middle Ages. The Ismāʾīli, Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī, seems to have been in the habit of writing up succinct yet in part at least verbatim accounts of his discussions with Muhammad b. Zakariyāʾ ar-Rāzī (d. 925), the great philosopher-physician whom we have encountered earlier in this presentation. One day, they came somewhat obliquely onto the problem of the nature of scientific truth. The uniqueness of the document will, I hope, suffice to justify my presenting it in full even though the fact that the disputants broach their subject in a slightly circuitous way might have made a summary a more convenient means of bringing their arguments into focus.

"I (Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī) challenged him (Muḥammad ar-Rāzī) at another meeting and said to him: Tell me about the principle you maintain which asserts the five pre-existents: the creator, the soul, matter, space, and time (301). Do the ancient philosophers agree with you on it or differ from you?

He said: The ancients held varying opinions on this subject. But I have remedied this by much investigation and reflection on their principles; and so I have found what is the truth that cannot be refuted or escaped.

I said: How was it that the mental powers of those sages failed and their views diverged?—when, as you claim, they were independent thinkers, mustahidin, devoting all their concern to the study of philosophy until they attained the subtlest sciences and became scholars and models in them. Yet you claim that by much investigation of their writings, rusūm, and books you have attained what they failed to attain;—while they were your leaders and you their follower, for you studied what they left behind, looked into their principles, and learned from their books. And how can it be that the follower should rank higher than he who is followed and that he who is led be more perfect in wisdom than the leader?

He said: I shall offer you evidence on this, which will show you that the case is as you say, and which will let you tell truth from error on this subject. Know then that any latecomer among the philosophers if only he devotes his interest to the study of philosophy and gives himself over to it incessantly, exerting himself independently with all his might and investigating the points on which, because of their subtlety and diffi-
culty, the ancients differed, will acquire and preserve what his prede-
cessors knew and improve on it by his own intelligence, the multitude
of his studies, and his consideration of other materials. For he is versed
in the knowledge of his predecessors and is perceptive of other informa-
tion, which he considers superior; for investigation, reflection and
independent effort cannot but result in addition and improvement.\(^1\)

I said: If the remedies arrived at by the latecomer are at variance
with the position of his predecessors, as you are at variance with those
who preceded you, then this variance is not an advantage; rather, vari-
ance is an evil, an increase in blindness, added support for falsehood, a
contradiction, a corruption. Indeed we find that by your many investi-
gations and speculations you philosophers have increased solely the
variety and contradictoriness of your opinions. And when you stipulate
in your own case that the latecomer will attain to what the predecessor
did not, as you have claimed that you have done in offering views at
variance with your predecessors, you cannot be sure that there will not
come after you one striving to dissect what you have been trying to do;
who will know what you did but will add to it (302) and attain through his
intelligence and personal effort and reflection what you failed to attain.
He will contradict your judgment and oppose your very principles just
as you contradicted your predecessors and opposed their very principles
when you asserted the five pre-existents and claimed that your prede-
cessors were mistaken where they were at variance with you. It is just
as if you were each at variance with the other. On this basis, šariṭa,
corruption, ḟasād, would be established in the world, truth disappear
forever, and falsehood become methodically organized. Those who are
at variance with you have accomplished only vanity and error; for
variance is vain, and a mistake is error. And you too, on this basis, will
necessarily accomplish only vanity and error since those that will come
after you will on the pattern, qiyās, of your views offer some new point,
faḍīda, and hit upon something you missed.

He said: In this there is neither vanity nor error; for each of them
(i.e. both the predecessor and the successor) is giving his best effort,
muctahid. If he exerts himself and occupies himself with reflection and
investigation he is proceeding on the path of truth; for souls are not
purified of the turbidness of this world or freed for that other world
except through the study of philosophy. So when someone studies it and

\(^1\) The idea of the time element in scientific progress (but without the ethical
aspect of such progress) occurs already in al-Kindī (d. 873) \(apud\) F. Rosenthal,
Studi 2, 445-46, where also references to other (later) supporters of this view.
The origin of this idea Rosenthal traces back to Xenophanes.
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attains something of it, however little it be, he purifies his soul from this turbidness and renders it free. ¹ And if the common crowd who ruin their souls and are neglectful of study would devote but the slightest concern, nazar, to it (i.e. philosophy), this would liberate them from this turbidness, even though they attained only a little of it. ²

I said: Are you not insisting that study of philosophy is itself achievement of the truth and escape from vanity?

He said: Yes.

I said: But you have also asserted that the people are ruined through antagonism and disagreement. Thus, by your own assertion, those that study philosophy increase simply in being ruined. For you have declared that the philosophers hold varying views and that what you believe yourself is at variance with the opinions of your predecessors; and you have yourself accepted the presupposition, šariṭa (lit.: theory), that your successors may be at variance with you as well as with others. On this supposition, šariṭa, the cause of ruin will become stronger every day and vanity, bāṭil, and error increase.

He said: I do not count this either vanity or error; for he who examines and exerts himself independently is on the way to the truth, muḥiqq, even if he does not reach his objective, as I have already explained to you; because souls are not purified except through study and investigation. This is the whole of what I have to say.

I said: Now if you persevere in this assertion and reject the truth and resist it stubbornly, then do tell me what you think of one who studies philosophy while yet believing in the ordinances of the prophets: does his soul become purified and do you expect him to be freed from the turbidness of this world?

He said: How could he become a student of philosophy while yet believing in those fables, xurāfāt, retaining those varying tenets, and persevering in ignorance and submission to established opinion, taqlīd!

I said: But did you not claim that anyone studying philosophy even though not very deeply and examining into it the least bit would purify his soul?

He said: Yes.

¹ Here we have, as it were, a ‘de-Islamicised’ version of the common idea that the muṣtaḥād’s effort even if a failure is meritorious in itself.

² The confrontation of the roots ṯawr and ḥār is, of course, not an innovation of Rāzī’s. Cf., e.g., already Muḥammad b. Yaṣir ar-Riyāḍī (d. under al-Muṭaṣīm, who ruled from 833 to 842), ed. C. Pellet, 20, i (in: al-Maṣāriq 49/1955, 316): “Is there anything pure that does not turn turbid, anything pleasant that does not tend toward changing for the worse?” Cf. also the passage quoted by Qudāmā b. Caṭfār (d. 922), Cavāhīr al-alfāz (Cairo 1350/1932), p. 74, to illustrate inversion, ‘aḥs.
I said: Now someone who does not go deeply into philosophy and studies only a little part of it will imitate his predecessors and submit to their opinions as established, not achieving anything but imitation in being at variance, and submission to established opinion. What fables, *xurāfāt*, could be more numerous, what submission to opinion go beyond this and what ignorance be greater. What purification could come to the soul of such a one, and what could he achieve except the rejection, *rafād*, of prophetic ordinances, loss of belief, *kufr*, in God and His prophets and messengers, the denial of God’s existence, *ilhād*, and voiding the very concept of God, *ta’līl*! Is not a person of this kind more deserving than anyone else to be called an ignoramus, a submitter to opinion, and a believer in fables and contradictions?

He said: When the discussion has come to this, silence is indicated. Rāzī, *Opera*, ed. P. Kraus (all published; Cairo 1939), I, 300-303; translated by the writer and M. G. S. Hodgson (ed.), *Introduction to Islamic civilization, Course Syllabus and Selected Readings* (Chicago 1958-59), I, pp. 387-90. (Quoted by permission of the publisher, the University of Chicago Press.) The tone of this discussion is reminiscent of those disputationes frequent in the Patristic period of which minutes were prepared with the knowledge of the participants. Origen (d. ca. 254) who allowed himself to become involved in a number of such διαλεκτοὶ on occasion complains that the minutes were falsified by his opponent. Cf., e.g., *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide et les évêques ses collègues sur le père, le fils, et l'âme*, ed. J. Scherer (Cairo 1949; Publications de la Société Fouad I; Papyrologie. Textes et documents IX; for the form of the *entretien* cf. esp. pp. 50-58). With respect to the *munāẓara* of the two Rāzī our confidence in the accuracy of the account is strengthened by the manner in which Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā breaks off the conversation when he realizes that he cannot convince his interlocutor and when he comes to feel that by continuing the exchange he may be led farther than would be prudent even in the circles in which he moved.

It is the emotional strength and the theoretical weakness of any Islamic system of ethics that the allocation of ultimate responsibility remains problematical, or to put it more concretely, that the latitude of choice allowed to man is uncertain. His responsibility is required to uphold divine justice and to secure his active and conscious collaboration in the service of the community of True Believers, but it must be experienced, or at least formulated in a manner not to curtail the unqualifiable omnipotence of the Lord. Muslim ethics oscillates between motivation by a concern with human freedom, human guilt, human self-education, and a concern, almost a delight, in God’s inscrutable and unrestrained lordship, which has often enough allowed the faithful to draw strength and self-respect from a sense of utter and almost reckless surrender and submission. The command of God and the interest of man create a tension in Islamic ethics (cf. Hourani, *Ethical Value* p. 205) ¹

¹ The kinship with Calvinism of the Muslim religious attitude has often been
which is not to be seen as a dialectical process to be resolved by a synthesis of some sort; rather the conflict is retained as a permanent incentive for man to adjust to the divine demands. It has been the tendency of what has come to be orthodox Islam to concede to man, in its ethical theory, that minimum of freedom and responsibility which is implicit in unsophisticated experience and which, at the same time, allows doctrine to stand in the face of man’s pride in reason. The Koran with its many striking expressions of the existential truth of man’s simultaneous dependence and freedom has throughout the ages provided the necessary documentation for a position that renders difficult not the religious experience as such but only its credal articulation.

To the imām Ca'far aš-Ṣādiq (d. 765) is ascribed a striking formulation which brings out the tendency to constitute Islam as the religion of the ‘mean’. La cabr wa{lā ta'fīl bal amr bain al-amrain: no compulsion and no delegation (of decision to man) but something in between. The dictum is quoted (with the addition of numerous passages from Persian poetry representing the same point of view) in Dahxudā, Amāl, p. 1343 (-1352). On the level of everyday morality this attitude is reflected in sayings such as that of al-Baihaqī (d. 1077): dar kāṛhā gāli̇ṭw kaorden na-suūda ast, “to go to extremes in one’s actions does not meet with praise”; Ta'risk, ed. Sa’īd Nafisī (Teheran 1319-32/1940-53), I, 18918-19.

Islam recognizes the rights of man; but it places greater emphasis on the rights of God on man; and the covenant in which Adam and the angels expressly acknowledged Allāh as their Lord (Koran 7 :171/172) is used to bridge the chasm between the two concepts of morality implied in the ideas that nothing could be known about right and wrong but for God’s willingness to instruct man in the positive law and that man is yet to be held responsible for a certain moral creativeness or at the very least, his spontaneous and consistent assent to a system of precepts whose rationale he is deemed unable to fathom. This covenant means the renunciation of the aspiration to organize the world under man, to make it fully man’s through the exercise of reason; in return, God will give guidance and eternal bliss. But the tension persists, for man is bound and God remains free. This is why the merely psychological description

remarked upon; usually, it has been overstressed. But it is worth noting that in Islam as well as in Calvin’s personal outlook the view of God and the style of contemporary rulership are in harmony. Lucien Fëbvre, Combats pour l’histoire (Paris 1953), pp. 227-28, explicitly connects Calvin’s concept of “le don totalement gratuit et inconditionnel que revêt (in his theology) l’octroi de la grâce aux élus” with the concepts of royal justice and grace as these were understood in France during the sixteenth century. It is, however, only fair to indicate the reservations which H. I. Marrou, De la connaissance historique (Paris 1955), p. 267, has felt it necessary to register with regard to Fëbvre’s suggestion of a causal connection between the theological and the political notion; he will admit a coordination in world view and style, but no more.
of man's actions is apt to take into account the element of intellectual conviction, or choice, which the will is called upon to confirm and extrapolate (cf. al-Ġazzālī as analyzed by M. Umaruddin in D. M. Donaldson, Studies in Muslim Ethics, London 1953, pp. 155-156), an analysis which may achieve a high degree of introspective subtlety while on the metaphysical plane man's claims will in general be subordinated and well-nigh suppressed in favor of the majestic amorality of the Creator of the Universe from Whom we are issued and to Whom we shall return.

In Muslim ethical theory, the key problems have therefore remained relatively unchanged from its first treatment by the Mu'tazilites to its reformulation by the modernist reformers. Is it necessary to postulate divine righteousness? And is it possible to do so without interfering with His majesty? Does human righteousness presuppose an independent moral judgment? Or will it suffice to accept the Command? The presuppositions of those problems can be stated in the form of another question: Is a thing good because God has designated it as such or has He designated it as such because it is good? And together with this problem there arises the epistemological crux: Is reason sound? that is to say, Can normativeness be defined in terms of conformity to it so that even the will of God will be subordinate to it? Or is it fallible, with its validity limited to the operations of the human mind as long as they do not touch the suprasensible of which an understanding may be attained only through God's willingness to dispense it? In the one view, reason suffices to acquire a correct knowledge of God; and since God's law must be based on that same reason there must be a law and it cannot be other than it is. In the orthodox view, however, God need not have given any law and if he had given another it would have been equally obligating—regardless of its positive content and its acceptability to human reason. Where to the Mu'tazilite the identity of reason is the principle tying together the realm of God and the world of man, to the orthodox divine and human reason are not necessarily of the same order and what safeguards the interaction of God and man is the Command with human reason confined to explication and application. Yet human reason is adequate for its purpose—to distinguish between reality and illusion and to comprehend the Creator within the limits set by Revelation itself. Fundamentally, the position of the pious modernist like Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) is the same. The dependence of Islam on rational proof of its doctrines (rather than on miracles), the role allowed reason in the interpretation of the Book, the part assigned reason in distinguishing between the harmful and the beneficial—they all are recognized and stressed. But the traditional restriction reemerges when religion is
invoked as an instrument of control against which the results reached by reason are to be checked. In this manner a rational science, a rational ethics are encouraged without any abrogation of the primary and over-riding validity of revelation (and, one cannot help adding, of whatever other verities will seem adequately guaranteed by tradition). (On Muhammad 'Abduh cf. for convenience Donaldson, Studies, pp. 250-252.)

It has become customary to oppose the Divine, Religious or Canon Law of the Šari‘a and the Secular Law of the Qānūn (and kindred developments) and to point to this opposition as to the method by which the Muslim societies have managed to adjust unalterable norm to the exigencies of the day and by which in administration, jurisprudence, social and economic relations, reason and custom could be secured their due and natural place in the organization of the community. This antithesis loses some of its rigor when it is realized that the Šari‘a is, more than anything else, a presentation of religious obligations (similarly already G. Bergsträsser in: Islamica 4/1931, 234); in this capacity, it lays claim to all, but actually structures only some areas of legislation (such as personal statute) or sections of such areas (as in the case of penal law). In actual fact, therefore, many aspects of social relations are left out, and those that are covered are treated not so much systematically as exemplarily with the understanding that cases not immediately decidable by analogy are to be committed to the ictihād, the effort or initiative of the representatives of the accepted legal rites or schools.

It remains true nevertheless that the rigidity of the legal tradition and the limitations inherent in purpose and source materials of the Šari‘a have compelled practically every Muslim government to supplement, or substitute for the Šari‘a; regulations of its own making. Insofar as these had to do with questions of judicial procedure the stipulation of the Šari‘a which permits the government to limit the jurisdiction of the religious judge assured the “legality” of “secular” rulings; where this legality may have seemed doubtful necessity supplied the required vindication. In any event, the power of the sovereign to create qawānīn and to enforce them was never contested in earnest.

It is, however, important to realize that by its own techniques the Šari‘a maintained a much higher degree of practicality than it is as a rule credited with. It is less the so-called hiyal, or legal devices, with which Šari‘i ordinances could be circumvented by procedures justifiable from the Šari‘a itself, to which allusion needs to be made in this context; it is rather the possibility allowed the government (but not solely the government) to select in a given case from among the pertinent rulings however divergent which any of the four “orthodox” rites had come up with.
And since those divergencies, *ixtilāfāt*, not infrequently will reflect divergent social conditions and divergent sociological aspirations, an element of pragmatic rationality was, as it were, re-injected in the official use of the Canonic Law. Its relatedness to contemporary life is, to us at least, somewhat obscured by the ṣarīʿa’s reluctance to argue on abstract principle. Different attitudes to the concept of property and the right of the state to restrict it will not express themselves in these or comparable terms but make themselves felt in variations of opinion on specific issues such as the leeway to be granted a property owner when he wishes to build on unused ground adjoining his own—will he or will he not be required to obtain the permission of the government before breaking ground? Likewise a fundamental question of economic policy such as the right of the government to fix prices is not taken up per se or as part and parcel of a social theory; but it is dealt with by granting or refusing the *muhtasib*, or market-inspector, the power to control prices—this last point, incidentally, is not treated in the handbooks of Canon Law but in the manuals composed to guide the *muhtasib*; it is, however, relevant in assessing the role of “reason” in the legal and social sphere insofar as opinions relating to this area of the community’s existence are apt to be based on the principle of *istislah*, the public interest, which is accepted in greater or smaller measure by most of the law schools and which is unmistakably one point at which human “reason” is permitted to impinge on traditional or systematic considerations that would normally be viewed as the determining factors of ṣarīʿa developments (for references cf. E. Ashtor-Strauss in: Rivista degli Studi Orientali 31/1956, 81-82, with literature p. 82, note 1, and especially the various studies of R. Brunschvig on Mālikī law and medieval Muslim urbanism).

Islam as the natural religion of man and reason as his most distinctive and most ennobling possession—only one word changed and the statement with all its pride would meet the aspirations of France (and most of the West) before the great revolution. And yet—no two spiritual movements could be farther apart than classical Islam and European Enlightenment. Islam uses reason (as our Middle Ages did) to find confirmation for (fractions of) an absolute truth by logical proof; the objective of thought is not the uncovering of causal connections between ever more accurately described and if need be experimentally produced phenomena but the establishment of the meaning of created things within God’s plan of the universe; constructivism or formalism, a naive satisfaction with interpretation both anthropomorphic and anthropocentric and what can hardly be called other than a rejoicing in human fallibility
and limitation as a confirmation of the Lord's unfathomable supremacy direct and confine the range allowed, or rather: claimed for our rational faculties.

By contrast, the reason of the Enlightenment is aggressive; it chafes at accepting any limitations in range and subject matter for its analyses; the dispelling of mystery is its peculiar task; truth held on the authority of tradition (and revelation tends to be considered nothing more than tradition) represents an especially irritating challenge to it; criticism is its primary function, the sweeping aside of time-honored errors its delight, the demonstration of the sovereignty of man its real objective. Between creation or nature and reason there exists something like a pre-established harmony—nature is so constituted as to yield its secrets to reason; in fact, what secrets there are, are such merely because reason has not as yet sufficiently been focussed on them. The world is man's not simply because man stands highest in the hierarchy of creatures and because God has adjusted the world to the requirements of his survival and rule but because it is within his power to comprehend it, to dominate it through his comprehension and by dint of reason to extend his mastery over it progressively.

In Islam, man's rank of which his reason is the supreme token, testifies to God's wisdom and benevolence; man's existence glorifies his Maker; in Enlightenment (and ever since) the glory is man's whatever be the tribute he will pay to the Creator's wisdom and kindness. The limitations of reason which at the end of the eighteenth century Kant compels his contemporaries to realize exclude man—if indeed they do exclude him—only from areas into which, in the last analysis, he no longer cares to penetrate; and the amenability of the cosmos to mathematical interpretation largely compensates for the untrammeled enjoyment of speculative advance. In fact, to discipline reason is to increase its effectiveness. So where Islam finds it possible to adjust humankind to a God-centered universe thanks to the reasonableness of the divine commands, the West of (and since) the Enlightenment with its primary interest in man and the exploitation of his faculties makes itself more and more at home in a world which responds to rational inquiry and yields to scientific control (cf. in this context the formulation of J. Huizinga, Das Problem der Renaissance; Renaissance und Realismus, Tübingen 1953, p. 54; and P. Hazard, La crise de la conscience européenne, 1680-1714, Paris 1935, pp. 121-22).

As civilizations, both Islam and the West are in a position to defend and make good their claims to universality as being 'made to man's measure'; but in Islam, concerned as it is above all with God and His
rights and intentions, the measure which God is believed to have set for mankind was accepted as a conclusive self-judgment; while we of the West incessantly revise our measure in the light of accomplishment and failure and envisage adjustment to the world which we are subjecting to ever more rapid and ever more thorough transformations, as a challenge to rationalize rather than a testimony to a reasoned order already in existence, and thus as a task rather than a fact.

The peculiar kind of curiositas (a word first coined by, or at any rate preserved in Cicero, *Ad Atticum* II, 12, 2) which has been one of the psychological conditions of occidental research became a recognized and self-conscious motivation of man's philosophical and moral quest in the first century A.D. H. J. Mette, *Curiositas*, in: Festschrift Bruno Snell, Munich 1956, pp. 227-235, has studied the use made of man's παθητικα — the Greek term corresponding to curiositas which in this meaning must be dated to the same period—in Lukios of Patrai and Apuleius on the one hand, the *Ashlepios* (ch. 14) and the so-called 'Address of Momos to Hermes', on the other. Philo of Alexandria (d. after A. D. 40), *De migratione Abrahami* (Περὶ ἀποστασίας), 216-218 (but cf. also the beginnings of 219 and 220), inspired by the διαβολή of Genesis 12:6, gives a masterly portrayal of that attitude in which we will readily recognize ourselves and to which certain Muslim figures such as the geographer al-Muqaddasi (wrote 985) would surely have experienced a similar response (cf. the Introduction to his *Aḥsan at-ḥaqāʾiq*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden 1906). This is the beginning of Philo's discourse: "Love of learning is by nature curious and inquisitive, not hesitating to bend its steps in all directions, prying into everything, reluctant to leave anything that exists unexplored, whether material or immaterial. It has an extraordinary appetite for all that there is to be seen and heard, and, not content with what it finds in its own country, it is bent on seeking what is in foreign parts and separated by great distances." (Trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, London and New York 1932; in vol. IV, p. 259, of the Loeb Classical Library ed. of Philo.)
In a world in which the intellect has become synonymous with reason and intuition with a “biological” sixth sense concerned with foretelling future events, it becomes difficult to understand what intellect and intuition, these two key faculties upon which knowledge is based, can mean in the context of Islamic thought. To understand the meaning of these terms in the traditional Islamic universe where the light of the One dominates all multiplicity and multiplicity is always seen in the light of Unity, it is necessary to examine the actual terminology employed in Islamic languages, particularly Arabic and Persian, to denote the concepts of intellect and intuition.

In modern western languages the fundamental distinction between intellect and reason is usually forgotten and the term intellect is used as the equivalent of reason. In Arabic and other Islamic languages a single term, *al-`aql*, is used to denote both reason and intellect, but the distinction between the two as well as their inter-relation and the dependence of reason upon the intellect is always kept in mind. *Al-`aql* in Arabic is related to the root *`ql* which means basically to bind. It is that faculty which binds man to God, to his Origin. By virtue of being endowed with *al-`aql*, man becomes man and shares in the attribute of knowledge, *al-`ilm*, which ultimately belongs to God alone. The possession of *al-`aql* is of such a positive nature that the Holy Quran refers over and over again to the central role of *al-`aql* and of intellection (**ta’aqqul** or **tafaqquh**) in man’s religious life and in his salvation. But *al-`aql* is also used as reason, intelligence, keenness of perception, foresight, common sense and many other concepts of a related order. Moreover, each school of Islamic thought has elaborated in great detail certain aspects of the the meaning of intellect as it pertains to its perspective and inner structure.

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1 See for example, “They also say: If we had only heard, and had understood (na’qilu) we would not have been of the inhabitants of the Blaze.” Surah The Kingdom (63), v.10 (Arberry translation). In this verse the refusal to understand or literally “intellect” is equated with the loss of paradise.

In many other verses various forms of the verb *fuqaha* are used with the same meaning as *`aqala*, for example,

“We have distinguished the signs for a people who understand (*ya`fghahūn*). “ Surah The Cattle (6), v. 98.
As far as the word intuition is concerned, such terms as *hads* and *firāsah* have been usually used. These terms imply a “participation” in a knowledge which is not simply rational but not opposed to the intellectual as the term is understood in its traditional sense. Another set of terms more prevalent in texts of philosophy, theology, and Sufism are *dhawq, ishrāq, mukāshafah, basīrah, nazar and badihah*. These terms are all related to the direct vision and participation in the knowledge of the truth in contrast to indirect knowledge upon which all ratiocination is based. This contrast is emphasized also in the usage of the term *al-‘ilm al-hudūrī* or “presential knowledge” as opposed to *al-ilm al-husūlī*, or “attained knowledge”, but these terms refer to the difference between intuition as a form of a knowledge based upon immediate experience and ratiocination as indirect knowledge based upon mental concepts. In no way, however, do all these terms, as used in traditional Islamic languages stand opposed to *al-‘aql*; rather, they serve as its complement in its profoundest sense. Islam has never seen dichotomy between intellect and intuition but has created a hierarchy of knowledge and methods of attaining knowledge according to which degrees of both intellect and intuition become harmonized in an order encompassing all the means available to man to know, from sensual knowledge to the “knowledge of the heart”.

To understand fully the relationship between intellect and intuition in Islam, it is necessary to turn to those Islamic intellectual perspectives which have brought to actualization various possibilities inherent in the Islamic revelation. They include, as far as the present discussion is concerned, the purely religious sciences such as Quranic and Shāfī‘ite studies, theology, various schools of philosophy and finally Sufism.

In the religious sciences the function of the intellect is seen only in light of its ability to elucidate the verities of revelation. It is revelation which is the basic means for the attainment of the truth, and it is also revelation which illuminates the intellect and enables it to function properly. This wedding between revelation and the intellect makes it in fact possible for the mind to “participate” in the truth by means of that “act” or “leap” which is usually called intuition and which is inseparable from the faith which makes knowledge of the truth possible.

Some of the more esoteric commentators of the Holy Quran have emphasized the complementary nature of revelation and intellect which in fact has been called particular or partial revelation (*al-wahy al-juz‘ī*), while objective revelation which causes a new religion to become established is called universal revelation (*al-wahy al-kullī*). Only through the objective and universal revelation do the virtualities of the intellect become actualized. It is only by submitting itself to objective revelation that this subjective revelation in man, which is the intellect, becomes fully itself, capable not only of analysis but also synthesis and unification. In its unifying function the intellect is salutary and is able to save the soul from all bondage of

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multiplicity and separateness. The instrument of revelation, the Archangel Gabriel, is also the Holy Spirit which illuminates the intellect and enables it to possess the faculty of intuition. In the light of revelation, the intellect functions not merely as reason but as intellectual intuition which, wed to faith, enables man to penetrate into the meaning of religion and more particularly God’s word as contained in the Holy Quran. Man must exercise his intelligence in order to understand God’s revelation, but in order to understand God’s revelation the intellect must be already illuminated by the light of faith and touched by the grace issuing from revelation.

As far as Islamic theology or Kalām is concerned, it is engaged more in the understanding of the will of God than reaching the universal dimensions of the intellect. This is especially true of the dominant school of Sunni theology founded by Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash’arī. The Ash’arite school is based on a voluntarism which reduces the function of the intellect to the purely human level and remains nearly oblivious to the aspect of the Divinity as objective Truth and Knowledge. For this school, truth is what God has willed and the intellect has no function outside the external tenets of the religion. Although the extreme form of voluntarism found in the earlier school of Ash’arism was somewhat modified by the later school (al-muta’akhkhirūn) of such men as al-Ghazzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Ash’arism has remained throughout its history as a school of theology in which the intellect is made subservient to the will of God and not considered in its function of returning man to the Deity and penetrating into the heart of tawḥīd.

In other schools of Kalām, whether it be Mu’tazilitism and Māturidism in the Sunni world or Twelve-Iman Shi‘ite theology, a greater role is given to reason in its interpretation of God’s will as manifested in His revelation without, however, leading to the type of position known as rationalism in the modern Occident. Nor do these schools of theology, envisage anymore than Ash’arism, the role of the universal function of the intellect which includes what is known as

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3 On the relation between faith and intellect or revelation and reason see F Schuon, Stations of Wisdom (trans GEH Palmer, London, 1976). “If ‘no man cometh unto the Father but by Me,’ this truth or this principle is equally applicable to the pure Intellect in ourselves: in the sapiential order—and it is only in this order that we may speak of intellect or intellectuality without making implacable reservations—it is essential to submit all the powers of the soul to the pure Spirit, which is identified, but in a supra formal and ontological manner, with the fundamental dogma of the Revelation and thereby with the Sophia Perennis” (F. Schuon, Dimensions of Islam, trans. by P. Townsend, London, 1970, P. 76). (Ed. note: The above-mentioned book is out of print, but readers can refer to the updated and re-translated chapter “Insights into the Muhammadan Phenomenon” in Form and Substance in the Religions by Schuon, World Wisdom, 2002.)


intuition as a means of attaining true knowledge. The function of Kalām has remained throughout Islamic history to find rational means to protect the citadel of faith (al-imān). It has not been to enable the intellect to penetrate into the inner courtyard of faith and become the ladder which leads to the very heart of the truth of religion. In fact it is not so much in theology but rather in religious philosophy and gnosis that we must seek for an explanation of the full meaning of the intellect and intuition and a complete methodology of knowledge in Islam.

In Islamic philosophy we can distinguish at least three schools which have dealt extensively with the methodology of knowledge and the full amplitude of the meaning of the intellect in its relation to intuition: Peripatetic (mashshā‘ī) philosophy, illuminationist (ishrāqī) theosophy and the “transcendent theosophy” of Sadr al-Dīn Shirāzī. Although the mashshā‘ī school in Islam drew most of its teachings from Aristotelianism and Neoplatonic sources, it is not a rationalistic school as this term is usually understood in Western philosophy. The mashshā‘ī school is based on a view of the intellect which is properly speaking metaphysical and not merely philosophical and distinguishes clearly between the reflection of the intellect upon the human mind which is reason and the intellect in itself which transcends the realm of the individual.

A complete treatment of the intellect and “a theory of knowledge” is to be found in the writings of the master of Muslim Peripatetics, Ibn Sīnā. Basing himself upon the treatises on the intellect (al-Risālah fi’l-‘aql) by al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā gave an extensive analysis of the meaning of the intellect in several of his works especially The Book of Healing (al-Shīfā’), The Book of Salvation (al-Najāt) and his last masterpiece The Book of Directives and Remarks

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7 Classical philosophy, before its decadence, cannot itself be reduced to profane philosophy and is not merely of human inspiration. Rather it is based on a wisdom of Divine origin. It is only the rationalism of modern thought that has reduced the whole of ancient philosophy to a “harmless” antecedent of modern philosophy and refuses to see in a Pythagoras or a Plato anything more than somewhat more intelligent professors of philosophy as one would find in any contemporary Western university. It must be remembered that the Muslims called Plato the “Divine Plato” (Aflātūn al-ilāhī). Concerning intellectual intuition as it functions in the context of traditional wisdom or the philosophia perennis and ratiocination in modern philosophy, F. Schuon writes, “Intellectual intuition communicates a priori the reality of the Absolute.

“Rationalistic thought infers the Absolute by starting from the relative; thus it does not proceed by intellectual intuition, though it does not inevitably exclude it.

“For philosophy (in the profane sense) arguments have an absolute value; for intellectual intuition their value is symbolical and provisional” (Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, trans, D. M. Matheson, London, 1953, p.106).

8 These treatises had a profound influence upon Western Scholasticism and were well known to the medieval masters such as St. Thomas and Duns Scotus.
(Kitāb al-ishrāt waʾl-tanbihāt). Basing himself upon the Alexandrian commentators of Aristotle such as Themistius and Alexander Aphrodisias and with full awareness of the Quranic doctrine of revelation, Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between the Active Intellect (al-ʿaql al-fāʿāl) which is universal and independent of the individual and the intellectual function within man. Each human being possesses intelligence in virtuality. This is called material or potential intelligence (biʾl-quwwah). As the human being grows in knowledge the first intelligible forms are placed in the soul from above and man attains to the level of the habitual intelligence (biʾl-malakah). As the intelligible becomes fully actualized in the mind, man reaches the level of actual intellect (biʾl fiʾl) and finally as this process is completed, the acquired intelligence (mustafād). Finally above these stages and states stands the Active Intellect (al-ʿaql al-faʿāl) which is Divine and which illuminates the mind through the act of knowledge. 9 According to Ibn Sīnā every act of cognition involves the illumination of the mind by the Active Intellect which bestows upon the mind the form whose knowledge is the knowledge of the subject in question. Although Ibn Sīnā denied the Platonic ideas, he stands certainly closer to the realists of the medieval West than to the nominalists. It is not accidental that the followers of St. Augustine were to rally around the teachings of Ibn Sīnā once his works were translated into Latin and that a school was developed which owed its origin to both St. Augustine and Ibn Sīnā.10

The mashshāʾī doctrine concerning the intellect and intuition can be summarized by saying that there are degrees of intellect which are attained as man advances in knowledge with the aid of the Active Intellect. As the intellect grows in strength and universality, it begins to acquire functions and powers which are identified with intuition rather than intellect in its analytical function connected with the act of ratiocination. The means of acquiring metaphysical knowledge is, according to Ibn Sīnā, intellectual intuition by which taʿaqqul should be translated rather than mere ratiocination. But by intuition here we mean not a sensual or biological power which leaps in the dark but a power which illuminates and removes the boundaries of reason and the limitations of individualistic existence.

In traditional Islamic sources the mashshāʾī school is usually called hikmah baḥthiyyah (rational philosophy or more precisely argumentative philosophy) in contrast to the ishrāqī school which is called hikmah dhawqiyyah (intuitive philosophy). Although mashshāʾī philosophy is by no means merely rationalistic as shown above, it is in the ishrāqī or illuminative school of wisdom founded by Shaykh al-ishrāq Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī that the intuitive aspect of the intellect is fully emphasized and a ladder described reaching from sensual


to principial, metaphysical knowledge. Suhrawardī, like such Western metaphysicians as St. Augustine and St. Thomas, emphasizes the principle of adequation or *adaequatio* (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*) according to which to each plane of reality there corresponds an instrument of knowledge adequate to the task of knowing that particular level of reality. But what characterizes and distinguishes *ishrāqī* epistemology is that according to this school every form of knowledge is the result of an illumination of the mind by the lights of the purely spiritual or intelligible world. Even the act of physical vision is possible because the soul of the beholder is illuminated by a light which in the very act of seeing embraces the object of vision. In the same way, the knowledge of a logical concept is made possible by the illumination of the mind at the moment when the very form of the logical concept in question is present in the mind.

As for higher forms of knowledge reaching into the empyrean of gnosis and metaphysics, they too are naturally the fruit of the light of the spiritual world shining upon the mind. In *ishrāqī* wisdom, therefore, there is no intellection without illumination and no true knowledge without the actual “tasting” (*dhawq*) of the object of that knowledge, that tasting which is none other than *sapientia* (whose Latin root *sapere* means literally to taste) or intuitive knowledge at its highest level of meaning.11

As for the third school, associated with Mullā Sadrā, the views of both the Peripatetics and Illuminationists are incorporated by him, along with the Sufī doctrine of the “knowledge of the heart”, into a vast methodology of knowledge in which all the diverse faculties of knowing are to be found in a hierarchy leading from the sensual to the spiritual.12 Each act of knowledge, according to Mullā Sadrā, involves the being of the knower and the hierarchy of the faculties of knowledge corresponds to the hierarchy of existence. Of particular interest is Mullā Sadrā’s insistence on the importance of the power of imagination (*takhayyul*) as an instrument of knowledge corresponding to the “world of imagination” (*‘ālam al-khayāl*) or *mundus imaginalis* which has an objective reality and stands between the physical and purely spiritual realms of existence.13 Corresponding to this world, man possesses an instrument of knowledge which is

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13 The impoverished modern vision of reality did not only banish the angels from the cosmos after Leibnitz, but also reduced the *mundus imaginalis* to pure whim and fancy with which the word “imagination” is identified today. Perhaps with H. Corbin, one should use the term “imaginal” to distinguish the traditional meaning of “imaginalis” from all that the word “imaginary” brings to mind.
neither sensual nor intellectual but which fills the domain in between. This power of creative imagination which is only perfected in the Universal Man (al-insān al-kāmil), is able to create forms in the imaginal world and know these forms ontologically. According to Mullā Sadrā, the very existence of these forms is the knowledge of them in the same way that according to Suhrawardī God’s knowledge of the world is the very reality of the world. In any case the harmony and balance between intellect and intuition is perfected by Mullā Sadrā through his recourse to this intermediate domain and the intermediate faculty of knowing this domain, the faculty which is none other than the power of “imagination” (takhayyul) residing in the soul and integrally related to the rational, intellectual and intuitive faculties of the soul.

The fullest meaning of the intellect and its universal function is to be found in the ma'rifah or gnosis, which lies at the heart of the Islamic revelation and which is crystalized in the esoteric dimension of Islam identified for the most part with Sufism. There are verses of the Holy Quran and hadiths of the Holy Prophet which allude to the heart as the seat of intelligence and knowledge. The heart is the instrument of true knowledge as its affliction is the cause of ignorance and forgetfulness. That is why the message of the revelation addresses the heart more than the mind as the following verses of the Holy Quran reveals:

O men, now there has come to you
an admonition from your Lord, and
a healing for what is in the breasts (namely the heart)
and a guidance, and a mercy to the believers.

Surah Jonah (10); v. 57 (Arberry translation).

In the same way, it is the knowledge gained by the heart which counts before the Divine. Again to quote the Holy Quran:

God will not take you to task for a slip
in your oaths; but He will take you to task
for what you hearts have earned; and God
is All-forgiving, All-clement.

Surah The Cow (2); v. 225 (Arberry translation).

Likewise, the knowledge of the heart, at least at some level, is considered as essential for salvation, for, those who refuse to identify themselves with the heart or centre of their living forfeit the possibility of entering into Paradise, which already resides at the centre of the heart, as the famous dictum of Christ “The Kingdom of God is within you” testifies. The Holy Quran asserts:

We have created for Gehenna many jinn and men;
They have hearts, but understand not with them (*lahum qulābīn lā yafqahūna bihā*).

Surah The Battlement (7), v. 179 (Arberry translation).

In the *Hadīth* literature there are also numerous references to the knowledge the heart, a knowledge which is principal and essential and identified with faith, as the following *hadīth* quoted by Bukhārī demonstrates:

Faith descended at the root of the hearts of men, then came down the Quran and (people) learned from the Quran and from the example (of the Prophet).\(^{14}\)

Also, that heart is considered praiseworthy which grasps for knowledge, for as the Holy Prophet has said, “Blessed is he who makes his heart grasping.”\(^{15}\) It could in fact be said that in the language of the Holy Quran and *Hadīth* the heart means essentially the seat of knowledge or the instrument for the attainment of knowledge. It is upon this foundation that the Sufis have developed the doctrine of “the knowledge of the heart” which has occupied so many of the great masters of Sufism.

The Sufis speak of the “eye of the heart” (*'ayn al-qalb* in Arabic and *chishm-i dil* in Persian) as the “third eye” which is able to gain a knowledge different from that gained by the physical eyes yet direct and immediate like physical vision.\(^{16}\) As the famous Persian poet Hātif states:

Open the ‘eye of the heart’ so that thou canst see the spirit and gain a vision of that which is invisible.

This knowledge which is identified with the heart is principal knowledge gained through an instrument which is identified with the heart or the centre of being of man rather than the mind which knows only indirectly and which is a projection of the heart. The heart is not simply identified with sentiments which are contrasted in modern philosophy with reason. Man does not possess only the faculty of reason and the sentiments or emotions, which are contrasted with reason. Rather, he is capable of an intellectual knowledge which transcends the dualism and dichotomy between reason and emotions, or the mind and the heart as they are usually understood. It is the loss of gnosis or truly intellectual knowledge in an operative and realized manner in the modern world that has caused the eclipse of the traditional conception of the “knowledge of the heart”, a knowledge which is at once intellectual and intuitive in the profoundest meaning of these terms.

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\(^{15}\) *Ibid*, p. 229.

To understand fully the intellectual knowledge identified with the heart, it is necessary to return to the distinction between “presential” (ḥudurī) and “attained” (husūlī) knowledge: All rational knowledge related to the mind is made possible through concepts which are “attained” by the mind. All mental knowledge is “attained” knowledge. Mentally and rationally man can only know fire or water through the concept of fire or water abstracted through the senses and made available by the various mental faculties for the analytical faculty of the mind identified with reason. But there is another type of knowledge, possible for all men, but in practice attained only by the few. It is a knowledge which is direct and immediate without the knowledge identified with the heart. The knowledge of the heart has the immediacy and directness of sensual knowledge but concerns the intelligible or spiritual world. When man gains knowledge of the perfume of a rose through direct experience of the olfactory faculty, he does not gain knowledge of the concept of the perfume of the rose but a direct knowledge of it. For most men this kind of knowledge is limited to the sensual world, but for the gnostic whose eye of his heart is opened through spiritual practice there is the possibility of a knowledge which has the directness of sensual experience but concerns the supernal realities. From the point of view of this “presential” knowledge, this supreme form of knowing in which ultimately the subject and object of knowledge are the same, the most concrete of all realities is the Supreme Principle. Everything else is relatively speaking an abstraction. To know in an ultimate sense is to know God through a knowledge which is both intellection and intuition in the highest meaning of these terms. It is to know the fire by being burned and consumed in it; it is to know water by being immersed in the ocean of Universal Existence.

In the Islamic perspective, therefore, one can speak of a hierarchy of knowledge ranging from the sensual, through the imaginal and the rational, to the intellectual which is also intuitive and identified with the heart. But just as the rational faculty of knowledge is not opposed to the sensual, the intellectual and intuitive are not opposed to the rational. Rather, the mind is a reflection of the heart, the centre of the microcosm. The Islamic doctrine of Unity (al-tawhīd) has been able to embrace all modes of knowing into complimentary and not contending stages of a hierarchy leading to that supreme form of knowledge, that gnosis of the purified heart which is ultimately none other than the unitive and unifying knowledge of the One and the most profound realization of Unity (al-tawhīd) which is the Alpha and Omega of the Islamic revelation.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

‘Do not think that the afflictions of the world leave Me indifferent. I love souls and I want to save them. To attain My end I use hardship, but it is through pure mercy. In many times of abundance, souls forget Me and are lost, whereas in distress they turn to Me and are saved.’

Sister Consolata.
Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Qūnawī Correspondence
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MYSTICISM VERSUS PHILOSOPHY IN EARLIER ISLAMIC HISTORY: THE AL-TUSI, AL-QUNAWI CORRESPONDENCE

MYSTICISM, PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

To say ‘mysticism versus philosophy’ in the context of Islamic civilization means something far different from what it has come to signify in the West, where many philosophers have looked upon mysticism as the abandonment of any attempt to reconcile religious data with intelligent thought. Certainly the Muslim mystics and philosophers sometimes display a certain mutual opposition and antagonism, but never does their relationship even approach incompatibility.

The debates and discussions between the two schools are concerned mainly with the limitations and shortcomings of their respective methods of acquiring knowledge. Thus Peripatetic philosophers1 such as Avicenna accept the possibility and even the reality of a direct, mystical apprehension of transcendent and supra-rational truths. What they question is more on the order of how one person can convey this experience to another, or how the latter can be certain of the validity of the former’s vision. For their part, the Sufis or Muslim mystics do not deny the validity of many of the philosophers’ findings. They merely hold that the philosophers cannot go beyond a certain point, and that therefore none of the philosophical discussions concerned with such subjects as metaphysics can carry any authority.

At the same time, many Sufis were familiar with philosophy, and many philosophers were also mystics, especially in the later periods of Islamic history. Avicenna, the greatest of the Peripatetics, wrote ‘visionary recitals’ and spoke of the special modes of knowledge open to mystics after long spiritual travail, but not accessible to the unilluminated intellect.2 The famous mathematician, philosopher and poet, ‘Umar Khayyām, divided the seekers after knowledge into four categories and placed the Sufis at the highest stage.3 And such Sufis as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī and Ibn al-‘Arabī were thoroughly familiar with Peripatetic philosophy and made use of its terminology to explain mystical ideas.

But the Sufis did not accept everything the philosophers said, nor vice

1 The Peripatetics or followers of Aristotle are the ‘philosophers’ (al-falāsifah) par excellence in Islamic civilization; throughout this article we will be referring to their particular school and for the most part will leave aside other figures who can also be called ‘philosophers’ in the traditional Islamic sense. See S. H. Nasr, ‘The Meaning and Role of “Philosophy” in Islam’, Studia Islamica, xxxvii (1973), 57–80.

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The very fact that we may speak of two independent schools of thought shows that the two groups offered different explanations of the nature of things. A good deal of critical interchange between the two schools took place, all of which, however, served to bring Sufism and philosophy closer together rather than to drive them farther apart. In general, the later we move in Islamic history – especially in Iran, where philosophy remained vigorously alive – the more interchange and harmony we find between the two perspectives.

The creative tension between philosophy and Sufism was augmented by their interplay with a third basic perspective in Islamic thought, that of scholastic theology or Kalâm. The theologians trusted neither the philosophers nor the Sufis and felt that their claims to have discovered the truth of things were invalid. In the minds of the theologians, knowledge of the truth could only come through a third method to which the other two groups paid insufficient attention. Again, the basic difference in perspective between the theologians and the other two groups comes down to the question of the method for acquiring knowledge and attaining truth.

To understand the interrelationships among these three basic perspectives in earlier Islamic thought, it may be useful to examine their differing views on this problem of the source of knowledge and truth. Each of the schools gives its own particular answer to the question, ‘What is the most reliable method for gaining knowledge concerning the nature of things and God?’

Before considering this problem, however, it should be emphasized that this relatively clear distinction among the three perspectives of philosophy, Sufism and theology becomes increasingly clouded with the passage of time. From the sixth century A.H. (twelfth century A.D.) onward, more and more figures appear who speak from the points of view of two or even all three schools, and who gradually begin to combine the perspectives. In later Islamic history, especially from the Safavid period onward in Iran, it is often impossible to classify a particular thinker as only a philosopher, or a theologian, or a Sufi. The perspective of a Mullâ Şadrâ or a Sabziwârî can best be referred to by other terms, such as ‘theosophy’ – in the etymological sense – (al-ḥikmat al-ilâhiyyah). For in fact, what such figures represent is an intellectual synthesis within which rational, philosophical speculation is combined with the mystical intuitions of the Sufis, the Koranic exegesis of the theologians, and a thorough familiarity with the Shi‘ite hadîth literature, which discusses the Divine Unity in technical terms peculiar to itself.¹

In general, the Peripatetic philosophers, such as Avicenna, al-Kindî, and al-Fârâbî, supported the premise that the ‘intellect’ (al-‘aql), unaided by revelation or mystical ‘unveiling’ (kashf) was a sufficient guide for man to understand the realities of things and to attain ultimate truth. They did maintain that the very act of acquiring knowledge entails a kind of illumination by the Active Intellect (al-‘aql al-faʿâl), but their emphasis was upon the rational knowledge that any human being could attain through the healthy functioning of his mind without any special divine aid or grace.

The Sufis, such as Bâyazîd, Rûmî and Ibn al-‘Arabî, held that the limited, human intellect alone was insufficient and misleading, and that man could not attain ultimate truth without a personal, intimate and direct knowledge resulting from the removal of some or all of the veils separating man from God. In their view, this knowledge is given by God himself to certain of his elect servants, and it must be based on the outward support of his revelation to man, i.e. the Koran. They called this knowledge by such names as ‘unveiling’ (kashf), ‘direct vision’ (shuhîd), ‘contemplation’ (mushâhadah) and ‘direct tasting’ (dhawq).

Finally the theologians, such as al-Ashʿarî, maintained that truth could only be found through the Koranic revelation, and that both intellect and unveiling tended to be misleading.

This scheme is vastly oversimplified, but can be a useful means to separate the main perspectives in earlier Islamic thought. Complications arise because the division is based upon the emphasis a particular school places upon a given mode of knowledge. To gain an accurate view of the situation, one must also take into account the importance each school gives to the other perspectives and the individual variations found from figure to figure. In practice, many members of each school made use of the other perspectives to differing degrees. It was pointed out above that the perspectives and tools of Sufism and Peripatetic philosophy became intermingled to different degrees in various figures. The same holds true for theology in its relationship with the other two perspectives. A theologian like al-Ghazzâlî was also a Sufi (although he became known in the West as a Peripatetic philosopher because of the Latin translation of his synopsis of the philosophers’ views, which he wrote in order to refute them). And one like Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî, however much he criticized the philosophers, made thorough use of their rational techniques.

Then again, from a certain point of view the position of the Sufis concerning revelation was almost identical to that of the theologians. For the Sufis also maintained that all knowledge must be judged according to the standard provided by the Koran and Hadîth. They constantly took pains to declare that their views were only clarifications of what is contained in the revelation and in no way conflicted with it. They held that any data received
through unveiling must be disregarded if it contradicts the text of the Koran. But at the same time, they felt that a true understanding of the Koran and Hadith could only come through unveiling. Without it, the views of the theologians remained pure opinion, or rational explanations of a sacred text of supra-human, and thus supra-rational, origin. So although the theologians and Sufis agreed in principle upon the primary importance of revelation, in practice many of their views diverged sharply.

The perspectives of Sufism and theology were similar in another important respect, i.e., in the fact that both laid claim to a knowledge concerned primarily with religion. And because of religion’s very nature, the two schools could not limit themselves to explaining Islam’s principles and teachings; they also had to stress the absolute importance of practising what they preached. The theologians held that man must believe in the Koran, then follow its directives. The Sufis said that before one can attain personal and direct understanding of Divine Truth through unveiling, he must ‘polish the mirror of the heart’, which meant both practising the Shari‘ah or exoteric Law and following the Tariqah or spiritual Way. As for the philosophers, they did not find it necessary to speak of practice in their purely philosophical expositions, although they often did in other works. Almost all of them believed in and practised Islam, but by and large this is not a necessary part of their perspective. One can read long philosophical and metaphysical tracts and remain unconcerned with the practical teachings of religion. Peripatetic philosophy did not demand that one follow the Law or the Way. Nevertheless, as developed by the Muslims – as well as by the Jewish and Christian philosophers – it did provide a view of reality perfectly harmonious with faith in God and the practice of religion.

‘INTELLECT’ IN THE THREE PERSPECTIVES

We can form some idea of the complexity of the interrelationships among these three perspectives through considering the different meanings contained in the one Arabic word ‘intellect’, ‘aql, and analyzing how each school may be said to derive its knowledge from a single source, which we might refer to as the ‘Intelect’ with a capital ‘I’.

The root meaning of ‘aql is ‘to tie’, ‘to bind’. Hence ‘intellect’ implies limitation and constriction. Knowledge acquired through it limits and defines the ineffable Truth, which ultimately, in its very Essence, remains Nondelimited (muflaq) and Unknown (majhul). In this sense, the word ‘aql can perhaps best be translated as ‘reason’, in order to indicate that it refers to a means of acquiring knowledge which is limited to the purely human

1 Al-Qânsâwî is extremely explicit about this point in his work Tahrijat al-mubtadi’ wa tadkhirat al-muntâshî, which I have translated in a forthcoming book on him.
plane and cannot go beyond it.\(^1\) When the Sufis employ the term, they usually do so to emphasize this limitative and constricting quality of the ordinary human faculty of knowledge.

But the word ‘aql is also employed in another sense, that is, to refer to the first creation of God, in keeping with the saying of the Prophet: ‘The first thing created by God was the Intellect’. In this sense the Intellect is identical with the ‘Greatest Spirit’ (al-rūḥ al-‘azām) and the ‘Supreme Pen’ (al-qalam al-‘a’lā).\(^2\) It possesses a full and direct knowledge of God and stands beyond any merely human comprehension, although the prophets and great saints are able to achieve some degree of identification with it. This identification is one of the causes of what the Sufis refer to as ‘unveiling’.

One can usually understand from the context to which of the two basic senses of the word ‘aql an author is referring. The Sufis in particular pay close attention to this distinction between the ‘reason’ – which we will translate as ‘intellect’ with a lower case ‘i’ as a reminder that only one word is employed in Arabic – and the ‘Intelect’. Sometimes they add the qualifiers ‘universal’ (kulī) and ‘particular’ (juz‘ī) to make the distinction completely clear. In the following verse, Rūmī employs one of these qualifiers in explaining why the Sufis avoid the term ‘aql to refer to a positive human faculty: ‘The particular intellect has disgraced the Intellect.’\(^3\) Here Rūmī is alluding to the fact that the philosophers, through upholding the authority of the intellect to support even their wrong opinions, have disgraced the Intellect to which the Sufis have access. So Sufis prefer such terms as ‘unveiling’ to prevent confusion between the two senses of the one term.

In another passage, Rūmī clarifies the relationship between the unaided human intellect and the Intellect from which Sufis receive their illumination. The unveiling of this (mystery) will not come from the meddlesome intellect: do service (to God) in order that it may become clear to you.

The philosopher is bound by things perceived by the intellect; the pure one (the Sufi) is he that rides like a prince upon the Intellect of intellect.

The Intellect of your intellect is the kernel; your intellect is the husk. The belly of animals is ever seeking husks.

He that seeks the kernel has a hundred loathings for the husk: in the eyes of the goodly, (only) the kernel is lawful, lawful.

When the husk, which is the intellect, offers a hundred demonstrations, how should the Universal Intellect ever take a step without certainty?

The intellect makes innumerable books completely black (with writing): the Intellect of intellect fills the horizons with the moon (of unveiling).\(^4\)

\(^1\) Certain of the ‘theosophers’ have pointed out another dimension of the symbolism of the word, to which I have not seen reference in the writings of the earlier figures: since the ‘aql ‘ties’ and ‘binds’, and since on the human plane it reflects the First Intellect, it can serve to tie and bind man to God. There are innumerable references to this positive function of the ‘aql throughout Islamic literature. To cite one significant early example, the sixth Shi‘ite Imam said, ‘The ‘aql is that through which man worships the All-Merciful and gains paradise’. See W. G. Chittick, A Shi‘ite Anthology (London, 1980), p. 55.

\(^2\) See my forthcoming article, ‘The Five Divine Presences: from al-Quinawī to al-Qaysarī’.


\(^4\) Ibid. iii, 2526–31.
According to the teachings of Islam and other traditions man is a ‘microcosm’. Everything contained in the created world in the mode of ‘particularized deployment’ (tafṣīl), in all the amplitude of the world’s time and space and in all the different levels of its existence (marātib wujūdihī), is contained within the existence of individual man, but in the mode of ‘summated unity’ (ijmāl).¹ In the Islamic scheme man’s intellect corresponds microcosmically to the macrocosmic Intellect, God’s first creation.

Looking at the implications of the root meaning of the word ‘aql, we can see why its two senses are equally appropriate. It is employed in the microcosmic sense because man’s intellect delimits and defines man’s perception of reality, thus giving it a logical and comprehensible coherence. In the macrocosmic sense, the word ‘aql is employed because the theophany (tajallī) or outward manifestation (zuhūr) of God’s Being which is called the ‘world’ (al-‘alam: ‘everything other than God’) is different from God and incomparable to him by the very fact that it is his manifestation, and not he himself. So the Intellect, God’s first creation, or Being’s first outward manifestation, represents a delimitation and restriction of God’s Nondelimited and Nonrestricted Being.

One of the Sufis explains the macrocosmic function of the Intellect in the following terms. It should be noted that he refers to the fact that, according to the Prophet himself, the Intellect is identified with the Supreme Pen, which ‘writes’ all the details of God’s creation upon the ‘Guarded Tablet’ (al-lawh al-mahfūz) before the creatures become manifest in the physical world. Literally the word ‘aql signifies tying, binding and restricting. So it demands ‘delimitation’ (taqyṣīd). But... God, who is not delimited by any limitation — not even by that limitation which is the nondelimitation opposed to delimitation¹ — contradicts ‘aql, the reality of which is binding and restricting. So this restriction and limitation becomes manifest first in the First Intellect, which ‘bound’ (‘aqala) the light of the Nondelimited Theophany through its own special, delimiting preparedness. So God placed the Intellect in its place to make manifest this mystery, i.e. the mystery of limitation. Hence the reality of the Intellect is the delimitation of the Nondelimited Light. God said to it ‘Write!’ In other words, ‘Delimit and collect My knowledge of My creation until the Day of Resurrection!’³

² This is a point to which Sufis such as Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Qūnawī often refer. By ‘God’ they mean God in the highest sense, the Godhead, or in their own terminology, the ‘Essence’ (al-dhat) or ‘Sheer Being’ (al-taqwīd al-mahd). If we say that God is ‘Nondelimited’, but do not qualify the statement as the author has done here, this means that he cannot be delimited in the usual sense. In other words, we are saying that Sheer and Nondelimited Being cannot manifest itself as the delimited existence which is called the ‘world’; i.e. that there can be no creation. But this is absurd. So to say that God is Nondelimited in the sense the author means here signifies that he is not even delimited by nondelimitation, for he manifests himself in theophany precisely through delimitation. In himself he transcends the duality implied by the two terms. For a discussion of the doctrine of the ‘Oneness of Being’ upon which this teaching is based, see W. C. Chittick, ‘Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being’, International Philosophical Quarterly, forthcoming.
Sufis, philosophers and theologians all acknowledged the possibility for man to attain various stations of spiritual perfection. By the nature of their perspective, the Sufis were much more explicit as to exactly what this possibility entailed, for it was their primary concern. But many philosophers, such as Avicenna, also discussed it. They held that man could attain some degree of inward identification with the macrocosmic prototype of man's intellect, a prototype which they often referred to as the 'Active Intellect'. And theologians like al-Ghazzālī referred to the possibilities of direct spiritual knowledge possessed by man.

But when Sufis discuss unveiling, they are not always referring to man's inward identification with the Intellect. According to them, the prophets and saints are manifestations of the 'Perfect Man', i.e. the Logos, who is the intermediary between God and creation, more highly exalted than even the First Intellect. In his inmost reality the Sufi may undergo an unveiling which results from his union with God himself and which thus precedes any form of creation. This is another reason the Sufis avoid the term 'aql to refer to unveiling. Instead, they call the locus of unveiling the 'Heart' (al-qalb), which is not restricted in any sense. For according to the words of God related by the Prophet, 'My heaven embraces Me not, nor My earth, but the Heart of My believing, gentle and meek servant does embrace Me.'

In short, the Sufis agree with the philosophers that man's intellect may be the source of sound knowledge, but they hold that this knowledge will be limited and indirect as long as man is not illuminated by the Intellect or by God himself. The philosophers can have no guarantee that they will attain such illumination. If they refuse to enter the Way of the Sufis, they can never attain it. Hence, in the words of Rūmī, The leg of those who employ rational arguments is of wood: a wooden leg is very infirm.

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1 See for example the ninth section (namāt) of his al-Ishdrāt wa-l-tanbihāt, on the 'Spiritual Stations of the Gnostics' (maqāmāt al-dhīfah).
2 See S. H. Nasr, 'Intelect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective', forthcoming.
4 Of course in European languages it is still valid to speak of the highest form of unveiling as deriving from the 'intellect', since this conforms to the terminology used by many figures in Christianity. But if one were to use this term to refer to what Sufis such as al-Qīnāwī are speaking about, one must remember that it is not the translation of the word 'aql, but rather of such expressions as 'Specific Face' (al-wajh al-khāṣ: the Face of God turned specifically towards a given individual without any intermediary, ultimately identifiable with that individual's 'immutable entity', al-'ayn al-thābit, within God's knowledge 'prior' to creation). But since such Christian mystics as Eckhardt speak of something 'uncreated and uncreatable' at the inmost core of man's soul, and identify that something with the intellect, one would be justified in using the term to explain the Sufi concept. Eckhardt also refers to God as 'pure intellect', whereas no Muslim thinker would ever refer to God as 'aql in any sense (see for example Eckhardt's, Defence, ix, 8; viii, 6).
5 Mathnawī, 1, 2128.
For their part the philosophers were wary of the Sufis' claims to inspired knowledge. Although they accepted the fundamental identity of the intellect and the Intellect, they felt that there should be no shortcuts to expressing the truth. The laws of logic and rational discourse should be observed so that the workings of the Intellect may be clearly explained on the discursive level and others may be able to understand. In no sense were they 'rationalists' in the modern sense, since they ascribed to the traditional cosmology, in which man's intellect is a potential source of knowledge above what can be attained through merely rationalistic argumentation.

* * *

Since the theologians felt that the only sure guide to truth was revelation, they criticized both the philosophers and the Sufis for making unwarranted claims of having fathomed the reality of things. But of course they could only understand the Koran through their minds, so they had no choice but to have recourse to the 'intellect' and to employ logical argumentation in their writings. Some of them also became Sufis, thus making use of unveiling to understand revelation.

In addition, viewed from the point of view of Islamic cosmology, 'revelation' is intimately connected to the Intellect. It represents a specific and providential crystallization of the truths known by the Intellect for the sake of a given people and historical period. The interrelationship between 'aql and revelation is succinctly expressed in a saying attributed to one of the Shi'iite Imams: 'The 'aql is a messenger (rasūl, i.e. prophet) from the inward; and the messenger is an 'aql from the outward.'

* * *

By now it should be clear that the three schools of theology, philosophy and Sufism all tended to emphasize a particular mode of attaining knowledge, which we have referred to as revelation, the intellect and unveiling. But numerous figures claimed access to two or even all three of these authorities. What ultimately determined to which school a person belonged was the overall emphasis of his writings. And many figures can be classified under two or even all three labels, depending upon our point of view.

Throughout Islamic history these three perspectives have been much more complementary than exclusive. This is illustrated to the fullest degree in the syntheses carried out by such figures as Mulla Ṣadrā. But long before his time, many thinkers were aware of this complementarity, especially when they themselves studied all three schools.

Nevertheless this could not be a complementarity among equals, since the three sources of knowledge, by definition, do not pertain to the same plane. In the religious universe accepted more or less by all three schools, the
intellect pertained to the microcosm; unveiling was an influx of the macrocosmic Intellect onto the individual, microcosmic plane, or a participation of the microcosm in certain dimensions of the macrocosm; and revelation represented an outward and concrete manifestation of God's uncreated Word delivered to humanity through the intermediary of Gabriel, who is often identified with the Intellect.

The hierarchical nature of revelation, unveiling and intellect is summarized in a particularly simple manner by al-Qūnawi in one of his Persian works. Although the philosophers and theologians might view the situation somewhat differently – in particular with reference to the conclusions al-Qūnawi wants to draw from his exposition – they would have difficulty rejecting his scheme in principle.

Man possesses stages, and in each stage there are specific perceptions, so that the perceptions of the subsequent stage are absent from the preceding stage. For example, the unborn child has specific perceptions, and in relation to its perception, the suckling infant's perceptions are 'unseen' (ghayb). So the stage of the suckling infant is beyond that of the unborn child. In the same way, the stage of the child who can differentiate (between right and wrong) in relation to the suckling infant is the same as the stage of the infant in relation to the unborn. Likewise, the stage of the person who controls his intellect is beyond that of the child who can only differentiate, the stage of sanctity (where unveiling takes place) is beyond that of the intellect, the stage of prophecy is beyond that of sanctity, 'And over every man of knowledge is one who knows' (Koran XII, 76).

It is impossible for the unborn child to perceive any of the objects of perception of the child, for it is imprisoned within the constricting limits of the womb and has not yet reached the open space of this world. And so it is in the other cases as well: whoever resides in a determined stage of man is incapable of grasping the objects of perception of the stage beyond his own... The farthest limits of the men of intellect are the beginnings of the saints, and the farthest limits of the saints are the beginnings of the prophets.1

In his Arabic works addressed to al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawi uses much more technical and philosophical language, but his message is essentially the same.

**AL-QŪNAWI AND AL-ṬŪSĪ**

Few scholars have attempted to clarify the interplay between various intellectual perspectives which led to Mullā Ṣadrā's synthesis. But it is clear that the gradual conciliation between the Peripatetic philosophers, claiming the preeminence of the intellect, and the Sufis, holding the superiority of unveiling, plays a central role in this development.

The epitome of Peripatetic thinkers and the archetypal exponent of the intellect in Islam is of course Abū 'Ali ibn Sīnā, or Avicenna (d. 428/1037). Although the attacks of al-Ghazzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī eclipsed his

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importance for some years, in the seventh/thirteenth century the philosophical works of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) revived Avicenna’s influence. As a result the study of Avicenna, especially as seen through al-Ṭūsī’s eyes in his commentary on Avicenna’s al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīḥāt, became a mainstay of intellectual life wherever philosophy was cultivated in the Islamic world. As a result the study of Avicenna, especially as seen through al-Ṭūsī’s eyes in his commentary on Avicenna’s al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīḥāt, became a mainstay of intellectual life wherever philosophy was cultivated in the Islamic world.1

Avicenna, then, may be viewed as a symbol for the ‘Pole of the Intellect’ in Islamic civilization, while Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī is his most influential follower.1

If we want to name a ‘Pole of Unveiling’ to stand opposite Avicenna, we have a choice of several figures, such as Bāyazīd, Rūmī or Ibn al-‘Arabī. In the present context I would like to choose the last of these three, since he was an ‘intellectual’ who was nevertheless opposed to the preeminence of the intellect. Other Sufis maintained the superiority of unveiling largely by criticizing the intellect’s shortcomings. But Ibn al-‘Arabī seems to be attempting to overwhelm the intellect by the sheer plethora of rational and supra-rational teachings he received through unveiling. He shows that wherever the intellect makes claims to attain knowledge, unveiling can claim to know much more. Yet he attempts to describe the nature of the cosmos and the reality of the soul in a language less purely symbolic, and much more ‘rational’, than that of the earlier Sufis. He avoids the aphoristic style of so many of his predecessors and in fact goes to the other extreme by elaborating his ideas in great detail. He presents complicated metaphysical and cosmological schemes making use of Peripatetic, theological, Koranic, astrological, alchemical, numerical and other terminology and data. He seems to be trying to exhaust the possible means of expressing Sufi teachings by making use of every vehicle at his disposal. And always there is an implicit appeal to the intellect, even though he disclaims its authority.

So Ibn al-‘Arabī may be considered the ‘Pole of Unveiling’ in the sense that his incredibly voluminous writings3 assert in kaleidoscopic variety and under the guise of numerous kinds of symbols, images and rational demonstrations that unveiling is superior to the intellect not only for attaining man’s spiritual well-being, but also for realizing the full potential of his rational and mental faculties.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most important disciple and follower is Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), a much neglected figure whose writings determine


2 Others may prefer to call Averroes Avicenna’s most influential follower, but that is only true in the West. In the Islamic world itself, Averroes was practically unknown and unread. One can say that this is because Averroes extended Avicenna’s teachings even further in the direction of emphasizing the superiority of the intellect and therefore in effect drew him further away from the perspectives of revelation and unveiling. But al-Ṭūsī moved Avicenna toward these two dimensions of Islam and therefore helped to make him a ‘better Muslim’ and more attractive to the great majority of intellectuals, who believed in the validity of the Koranic revelation.

the way in which Ibn al-'Arabî will be interpreted by succeeding generations.\textsuperscript{1} But if Ibn al-'Arabî's works are characterized by interminable discussions and profuse outpourings of inspired intuitions which often follow one another with little apparent rhyme or reason, al-Qûnawî's works are marked by balanced, measured, sober and epitomized demonstrations almost at the opposite extreme from those of his master. Were it not for the fact that al-Qûnawî defends his master's theses from first to last, in particular on the question of the superiority of unveiling over the intellect, one would be tempted to call him the model of a rational and reasonable philosopher.

Al-Qûnawî, the spokesman for Ibn al-'Arabî, and al-Ṭûsî, the reviver of Avicenna, died within a year of each other. While al-Qûnawî busied himself teaching the hadîth literature and training spiritual disciples in Konya, al-Ṭûsî assisted in directing the affairs of state under the conquering Mongol emperor Hûlâgû and somehow continued to find time to write, teach and carry out experiments at his observatory in Marâghah. Al-Qûnawî was the perfect embodiment of a sober, intellectual Sufi; while al-Ṭûsî was the model of a rational, systematic philosopher, as well as a theologian, mathematician, astronomer and himself not uninformed about the mysteries of the Sufis.\textsuperscript{2}

In the very personalities of these two figures we already see the beginnings of a rapprochement between Sufism and Peripatetic philosophy. Al-Qûnawî's eminently reasonable mode of exposition often makes his style resemble that of a philosopher more than that of a Sufi. And al-Ṭûsî's immersion in Shi'ite theology and the practice of religion, as well as his thorough familiarity with Sufi teachings, make him incline naturally toward a more spiritual and less purely rational interpretation of the reality of things. Or we can say that he is naturally drawn toward that dimension of Avicenna's personality represented by his esoteric teachings in such works as \textit{Māntiq al-mashriqīyyīn} or the last chapters of \textit{al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt}.\textsuperscript{3}

Thus it does not surprise us to see the correspondence between al-Ṭûsî and al-Qûnawî as surpassingly cordial and mutually sympathetic. Both thinkers feel that the distance between the respective positions of the Peripatetics and the Sufis is not as great as it might seem and that a careful discussion of ideas and terminology will show great similarities. However, this is not to say that each does not maintain his distance. Al-Qûnawî addresses al-Ṭûsî as the foremost \textit{philosopher} of the age, and al-Ṭûsî accepts this role in his answers, since he does not go outside of the Peripatetic position. And by the end of the correspondence we can still sense a wide chasm separating the two schools, centering, as al-Qûnawî so often emphasizes, upon the question of the validity of the knowledge acquired by the human intellect.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} See W. C. Chittick, 'The Last Will and Testament of Ibn al-'Arabi's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author', \textit{Sophia Perennis}, iv, 1 (Spring 1978), 43–58.

\textsuperscript{2} This is obvious from his letter to al-Qûnawî (work 4) as well as such works as \textit{Awwâf al-asrārīf}, a book on Sufi ethics which he wrote to complement his \textit{Nasīrīn Ethics}.

\textsuperscript{3} See Nasr, \textit{Three Muslim Sages}, chapter 1; also H. Corbin, \textit{Avicenna and the Visionary Recital}.

\textsuperscript{4}
In order to give the reader an idea of the contents of the correspondence, I will summarize briefly each of seven works involved. The correspondence is divided into three parts. (A) A Persian letter from al-Qūnawī, accompanied by two Arabic treatises, one of which includes a number of questions. (B) An answering Persian letter from al-Ṭūsī, along with an Arabic treatise responding to the questions. (C) A second Persian letter from al-Qūnawī, followed by an Arabic treatise commenting upon al-Ṭūsī’s answers. If these works were to be printed, al-Qūnawī’s first treatise with questions would occupy about 60 pages, al-Ṭūsī’s answers would take up 30 pages, and al-Qūnawī’s final remarks 35. The letters would take up 3 to 10 pages each.

**Part A**

1. **Al-Qūnawī’s first letter**
   
   After the usual formalized titles and salutations, al-Qūnawī notes that al-Ṭūsī’s fame has spread throughout the world and that for a long time he has desired to meet him. Since destiny has prevented this, the next best thing is to open a correspondence. But such an exchange should be blessed by the fruits of al-Ṭūsī’s knowledge. So al-Qūnawī encloses a treatise which he had written long ago concerning the ‘Outcome of the Conclusions of Thought’ (ḥāṣīl-i natā’ij-i ʿafkār), to which is attached a number of questions which are the result of discussions held with friends. He hopes that al-Ṭūsī will study them and send his own views.

2. **The first treatise**
   
   This work, entitled ‘The Treatise Exposing the Outcome of Thought, the Reason for the Disparity of the Religions and the Mystery of Guidance to the Noblest, Straightest Path’ (al-Risālah al-mufṣīlah ‘an muntahā ʿal-ʿaṣfār wa sabab ikhtilāf ʿal-umam wa-l-mūḍīlah sīr ʿal-iḥtīlāfū ila-tārīq al-ṭarīq al-tamām), discusses primarily the inability of the intellect to gain knowledge of the realities of things as they are in themselves (ḥaqqīq al-ʿaṣma kama hiya). Al-Qūnawī divides knowledge into two kinds, that which can be attained independently through the intellect with the help of the perceptual faculties, and that which cannot be so attained, such as knowledge of God’s Essence, his names and attributes, his acts and the manner in which he bestows existence upon them, the levels of existence and the manner in which they are arranged, etc. He then explains the necessity for the prophets and the
saints, i.e. those to whom God has given knowledge of the above things. He clarifies the relationship of this class of men with the other two classes, the believers and unbelievers. He divides the two latter groups into a number of subgroups, and shows how each is delimited and defined by the share it receives from God’s effusion (fayd) of existence and knowledge. Finally he discusses in great detail the weakness of the intellect and its inability to grasp the truth. Much of this final section is taken from the beginning of al-Qūnawi's *magnum opus*, a commentary on the opening chapter of the Koran.¹

In introducing the questions, al-Qūnawi remarks that they represent problems for which years before he had had trouble finding solutions. After presenting each question, he mentions most of the answers given by the Peripatetic philosophers and poses objections to each of them in turn. Then he usually summarizes his own views, which are fine philosophical statements of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings. The space occupied by al-Qūnawi's questions is in fact more than that taken up by al-Ṭūsī's answers.

First question: Do you accept that the being (wuju'd) of the Necessary Being (wājib al-wujud) is extraneous (zā'id) to its reality (ḥaqiqah), or do you hold that its being is identical with its quiddity (māhiyyah) and that it possesses no reality beyond being?

Second question: Are the possible quiddities (al-māhiyyāt al-mumkinah) 'made' (maj'ul) or 'unmade' (ghayr maj'ul)? In either case, if we consider them only in respect of the fact that they are quiddities, are they ontological things (umūr wujūdīyyah) – in the sense that they possess some kind of being – or are they things pertaining to nonexistence (umūr 'adamiyyah)?

Third question: If we consider ‘all-pervading, shared being’ (al-wujūd al-'āmm al-mushtarak) only in respect of its being, is it one of the possible-existents (al-mumkināt) or not? And if it is a possible-existent, does it possess a reality beyond the fact that it is being or not?

Fourth question: ‘Nothing issues from the One but One’. From this axiom very important problems arise, such as the problem of the supernal intellects (al-'uqiul), the cause of their arrangement, and the cause of the manyness (al-kathrah) which issues forth from the First Intellect, which is viewed as a oneness (wahdah). Here also we have the problem of God's Knowledge becoming attached to its objects in terms of universals and the denial of its attachment to particulars.

A comprehensive question which comprises a number of questions: What is the reality of the human soul (al-nafs al-insāniyyah)? What proof demonstrates its existence? What is the proof of its disengagement (tajarrud, i.e. from the world and the body), the eternity of its subsistence, and the claim that through the perfection which it realizes in this world it has no need for any planes following this one? What can be clarified and explained concerning

¹ *Tafsīr al-fātihah*, also called *Bāz al-hayān fi tafsīrumm al-Qur'ān*, the only one of al-Qūnawi's Arabic works to have a modern edition. See the list of his works in my article, 'The Last Will and Testament'.

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the way the soul governs the body? Does any proof exist to demonstrate the impossibility of its being able to govern numerous bodies and outward forms at a single moment, or the impossibility of certain souls attaining such a station through a perfection acquired as a result of knowledge and works in the present plane? Do you maintain that the soul's existence comes after the bodily constitution and that it becomes defined in keeping with the constitution, or that the soul was existent and differentiated before the body? In either case, did it possess knowledge of everything it now knows, but forgot it because of its attachment to the body? Or was it empty of every knowledge and attribute? Or did it know universals but not particulars?

A question comprising a number of questions: What proof can demonstrate that the human species cannot become extinct in the world? Is it not possible for it to become extinct not through the properties of celestial bodies, but through certain divine things known by God? What is the proof of the infinitude of the celestial powers (al-quwā al-falakiyyah) and the fact that they do not undergo change and corruption? What proof do you possess that the celestial bodies are empty of the properties and characteristics of nature?

Question: Since the soul cannot break its attachment to the body or to the properties of nature during life, how can it experience spiritual pains and joys? Likewise, what is the nature of the joys attributed to God?

Question: What is the reality of the effusion which issues from God?

Among the individual questions which can neither be proven nor disproven are the following:

The question of the regression of an infinite, existent series of causes and effects to an ultimate limit.

The relations between existents are infinite in man's eyes, but in relation to God's knowledge they must be finite. So how can the infinite derive from the finite?

Substance (jawhar) is not nullified by the nullification of one of its qualities, but if heat is nullified from fire, the fire is nullified.

Neither matter (māddah) nor form (ṣūrah) can be divided according to the view of the intellect. So how is it that when form becomes incarnated within matter and the two produce a body, then they may be divided?

3. 'Expectoration of an Ailing Breast and Gift of One who is Thankful' (Naftat al-masdur wa tuhfat al-shakūr)

This work does not form an integral part of the correspondence. It consists of a long prayer (about 30 pages) in which al-Qūnawi, as he writes at the beginning of the treatise, 'discourses with the Lord in the form of the state which comprehends the two stations of Majesty and Beauty'. He makes clear in his second letter (work 6) that the work was sent to al-Ṭūsī without his knowledge by one of his disciples, and that it was not meant to accompany his letter and first treatise.
4. *Al-Ṭūṣī's letter*

Al-Ṭūṣī warmly thanks al-Qūnawī for opening the correspondence, for he himself had long desired to meet al-Qūnawī and had even decided to write to him, but here as in other areas, al-Qūnawī has displayed his precedence over others. Al-Ṭūṣī praises al-Qūnawī and his spiritual attainments in glowing language, which one might expect from one of al-Qūnawī’s spiritual disciples, but which one is surprised to see coming from the greatest philosopher and one of the most powerful political figures of the age. Al-Ṭūṣī thanks al-Qūnawī for sending the treatise and questions, and he apologizes if the answers he has enclosed are not satisfactory. Then he records his impression of al-Qūnawī’s second treatise (3), illustrating his profound knowledge of Sufism. His remarks are slightly critical, and he finds it necessary to observe that al-Qūnawī has obviously written the work for beginners and intermediate adepts and that it does not represent al-Qūnawī’s own spiritual attainments.

5. *Al-Ṭūṣī’s answers*

Al-Ṭūṣī begins by praising the first half of al-Qūnawī’s work. He says, ‘I have made it a means for my true desires and an instrument for my hopes of certainty.’ Then he proceeds to answer each of al-Qūnawī’s questions. Since it is beyond the scope of the present paper to detail these answers – especially since the questions have been summarized far more than is necessary for clarity – I can only allude to a few salient points in al-Ṭūṣī’s work.

In discussing the reality of being, al-Ṭūṣī attempts to avoid the pitfalls enumerated by al-Qūnawī by having recourse to the concept of ‘gradation’ (tashkīk), the fact that being, like light, becomes related to different realities in different degrees. In each case we can still speak of ‘being’, but its strength differs. In the same way light is light whether it appears in the sun, in a lamp or in a glowing ember. The concept of gradation becomes a mainstay of Mulla Ṣadrā’s philosophy, although the members of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s school do not discuss it, and, judging from al-Qūnawī’s last treatise, they do not consider it a serious argument. Also in his first answer al-Ṭūṣī comments upon al-Qūnawī’s quotations from Avicenna, claiming that al-Qūnawī has misinterpreted him and that Avicenna does not want to say that man cannot attain knowledge of the realities of things through his intellect.

In replying to the second question, al-Ṭūṣī expresses his surprise at the position al-Qūnawī had delineated as his own. He remarks that it resembles the views of the Muʿtazilites. As a result of al-Ṭūṣī’s objections, al-Qūnawī devotes a significant portion of his final treatise to clarifying his position on the quiddities (which Ibn al-‘Arabi and his followers usually refer to as the ‘immutable entities’, al-aʾyān al-thābitah) and explaining why it differs from that of the Muʿtazilites.
In answering the fourth question, al-Tusi displays his scientific predilections, since he uses a mathematical style and example to explain the manner in which the many issue from the One without contradicting the axiom, ‘None issues from the One but One’. He also rejects the common notion that the Peripatetics deny God’s knowledge of the particulars, and demonstrates that their position demands that he know all things.

Part C

6. Al-Qinawi’s second letter

After thanking al-Tusi for his answers and praising him for the manner in which he has clarified the Peripatetic position, al-Qinawi reviews his motives for having begun the correspondence. In the first place he had wanted to ‘open the door of friendship’. And in the second, ‘Concerning certain basic problems I had hoped to combine the conclusions derived from logical proofs and the fruits of unveiling and direct vision.’

Then al-Qinawi apologizes that he had not been well when he prepared the first treatise. And he had sent it in haste because a mutual friend was departing upon a journey during which he would be seeing al-Tusi. Moreover, it seems the copyist had made a number of mistakes, but al-Qinawi had not been able to see the work again because of the hurry. So certain questions and problems were incompletely explained, a fact which became clear from al-Tusi’s answers. In short, al-Qinawi states that in order to clarify these points, he has written an introduction to his second treatise which completes his original discussion. Then he has remarked upon a few of al-Tusi’s answers.

Finally al-Qinawi turns to the treatise which had been sent by mistake and explains how this had come about. But since al-Tusi has read it and commented upon it, al-Qinawi feels it necessary to clarify his motive in writing it. This explanation occupies the second half of the letter.

7. Al-Qinawi’s final treatise

Al-Qinawi opens this work, called the ‘Treatise Giving Guidance’ (al-Risala al-hadiyya), with a discussion of technical terms. He points out that the possibilities of expression provided by language are limited in relation to the possibilities of conception open to the mind, not to speak of the realities perceived by unveiling or those known by God. Because of these limitations, one school often employs the same term as another while meaning something quite different. This is why one might imagine that the Sufis of Ibn al-Arabi’s school, referred to by al-Qinawi as the ‘School of Verification’ or ‘of the Verifiers’ (madhhab al-tahqiq, mashrab al-muhaqqiqin), share certain ideas with such sects as the Mu’tazilites, whereas this is far from the truth. So before all else it is necessary to clarify the position of the ‘Verifiers’ and to differentiate it from that of other schools. ‘Hence their beliefs and goal will
become plain, and that area in which they share certain ideas with the People of Theoretical Intellect (i.e. the philosophers) ... and the area in which they differ from them and from other groups will be clarified.' Later on in the treatise, al-Qūnawī summarizes the relationship between the Verifiers' position and that of both the philosophers and the theologians: 'The Verifiers agree with the philosophers concerning those things which the theoretical intellect is able to grasp independently at its own level. Then they differ from them in other perceptions and knowledge beyond the stage of thought and its delimiting properties. But as for the theologians in their various schools, the Verifiers only agree with them in rare instances and on minor points. '1

In order to clarify the position of Verification, al-Qūnawī enters into a long discussion upon the nature of God, the relation of his Knowledge to his Essence and to the world, and the nature of the Divine Unity. These passages call to mind al-Qūnawī's most difficult and technical works, such as al-Nuṣūṣ and parts of Miftāḥ al-ghayb and al-Nafiaḥat al-ilāyiyah,2 and offer valuable insights into the ideas discussed there. His attempts here to explain concepts based upon unveiling in a language acceptable to philosophers who maintain the supremacy of the intellect makes this section one of al-Qūnawī's clearest presentations of the quintessence of Sufi metaphysical speculation.

During this discussion al-Qūnawī returns to the problem of man's inability to know the realities of things through his intellect. He reaffirms that Avicenna did indeed believe that man could not know them, and he quotes a long passage from Avicenna's al-Ta'līqāt to prove his point.3 He even suggests that al-Ṭūsī's copy of al-Ta'līqāt must have been left incomplete by the copyist, or else he never could have interpreted Avicenna as he does.

In continuing his long general discussion, al-Qūnawī elaborates upon many of the key points in the teachings of the Verifiers in technical, philosophical language, including for example a succinct explanation of the role of the Perfect Man (al-insān al-kāmil) in creation and a discussion of the degrees of human perfection and knowledge.

Finally he turns to al-Ṭūsī's answers and makes brief remarks concerning many of them. He usually finds al-Ṭūsī's answers open to discussion and presents various objections which could be made to each of them, both from a philosophical and a mystical point of view. In the question on the soul he refers to al-Ṭūsī's discussion of this problem in his commentary upon Avicenna's al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt.

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1 As was pointed out above, the Sufis feel that the theologians reach their conclusions by abusing the intellect and ignoring unveiling, and thus by misunderstanding the revelation. For a criticism of the theologians in the spirit that al-Qūnawī has in mind, see F. Schuon, Islam and the Perennial Philosophy (London, 1976), chapter 7.

2 See my article, 'The Last Will and Testament'.

3 This important work, only recently published in the original Arabic and long unknown to Western scholarship, contains Avicenna's 'Explanatory Remarks' (al-ta'līqāt) concerning certain difficult aspects of his philosophy, and includes expositions of his own views as opposed to the official Peripatetic position. See the edition by 'A. Badawi (Cairo, 1973).
At the end al-Qānawī apologizes for objecting to several of al-Ṭūsī’s answers, but, he says, if he had remained quiet some people might imagine that he was unaware of the objections which could be made to al-Ṭūsī’s replies.

Thus ends the correspondence between a great philosopher and a great ‘Verifier’. Such a short summary cannot begin to do justice to the complexity and subtlety of the discussions. But at least it can serve to call the reader’s attention to the exchange of ideas which was taking place between two schools of thought as early as the seventh/thirteenth century, an exchange which was to increase steadily until the perspectives of the two schools became integrated into the synthesis brought about by Mullā Ṣadrā more than 300 years later.¹

¹ I do not wish to imply that either Sufi speculation per se, or Peripatetic philosophy as such, disappeared. Both, in particular the former, remained as independent schools of thought. But the main stream of intellectual activity in Iran and many of the other eastern areas of Islam came to be dominated by Mullā Ṣadrā’s theosophy.
Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shīʿī Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey

Hossein Modarressi


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RATIONALISM AND TRADITIONALISM IN SHÌ'I JURISPRUDENCE: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

I. The sources of Shi‘i law.

As is elaborated in the works on Shi‘i usûl al-fiqh, the sources of Shi‘i law are the Qur`ân, Tradition, consensus of the Shi‘i jurists (ijmâ‘) and reason (‘aql). (1)

The Qur`ân, in its apparent literal sense, has shaped the spirit and foundation of Shi‘i law.

The Tradition, i.e. the statements, deeds and tacit consent of the Prophet or the Imâms, must be handed down by reliable narrators. In respect to this reliability, the doctrinal views of the transmitters are considered irrelevant. A tradition handed down by a reliable non-Shi‘i is viewed as sound and acceptable just as one transmitted by a veracious Shi‘i.

Ijmâ‘, i.e. the unanimity of the views of all Shi‘i jurists on a certain legal question, is not a source on its own but it can become a means through which the opinions of the Imâms may be discovered. This function of ijmâ‘ has been explained

(1) It should be noted that these are the sources of the predominant Uṣûl school of Shi‘i law. The Akhbârî school resorted only to Tradition. The earliest legal work in which the four sources above are mentioned with the same order is Ibn Idris al-Hilli, al-Sardîr (Qum, 1390q), p. 3. The early Shi‘i usûl works did not usually mention reason as a source of law. See further Muḥammad Riḍâ al-Muẓaffar, Uṣûl al-fiqh ( Najaf, 1967), II, p. 122.
in various ways. \(^1\) The most popular among these in contemporary Shi‘i law holds that since *ijmā‘* is the unanimity of the views of ‘all’ Shi‘i scholars, it naturally includes the views of those scholars who lived in the period quite close to the period of the Imams. Many of these were close companions of the Imams and quite knowledgeable of their opinions. The consensus of these very early jurists, most of whom were absolute followers of the Imāms, normally demonstrates the view of the Imams.

By ‘reason’ as a source \(^2\) for Shi‘i law are meant categorical judgments drawn from both pure and practical reason. A clear instance is the judgment of practical reason that justice is good and injustice is evil. \(^3\) In Shi‘i *uṣūl al-fiqh* there is a principle which states that whatever is ordered by reason, is also ordered by religion (*kull mā ḥakam bih al-‘aql ḥakam bih al-shar‘*). In accordance with this principle, which is known as the ‘rule of correlation’ (*qâ‘idat al-mulâzama*), religious rules may be inferred from the sole verdict of reason. \(^4\) The correlation between the obligatoriness of an act and the obligatoriness of its prerequisites (*muqaddamat al-wâjib*), or between prescribing something and prohibiting its opposite (*mas‘alat al-didd*), or, the impossibility of combining command and prohibition in a single case from a single standpoint (*ijtimā‘ amr wa‘l-nahy*), are all rational precepts in the methodology of Shi‘i

\(^1\) See al-Mu‘taṣir, II, p. 107.

\(^2\) As will be explained later reason, in Shi‘i jurisprudence, is also employed as the means for thinking, in which sense it simply means the rational argument.


\(^4\) Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr maintains that ‘reason’ is a potential rather than an acutal source for Shi‘i law. He says that although according to the methodology of Shi‘i law reason can, on its own, discover an injunction and guide one toward a certain religious precept, this has never been actualized in practice and all religious commands which can be discovered through categorical verdicts derived from abstract thought (pure reason) are to be found in the Qur‘ān and Tradition (Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *al-Fatāwā al-wādīẖa* (Beirut, 1978), I, p. 98.
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law and sources in the juridical efforts to discover legal rules, which are based on pure reason.

The inference of legal precept from these four sources, which are in some cases contradictory, is done through a kind of logical reasoning which in Islamic terminology is called ijtihād. According to Shi'i teachings, it is always possible for scholars to practise this kind of rational argument in Islamic law, while Sunnis restrict it to some scholars of the early centuries of Islam. In confronting any legal problem, every Shi'i jurist must personally investigate those legal sources to take his own decision upon it. Imitation of the opinion of a mujtahid, however great he is, by another mujtahid in legal matters is unlawful. (1)

The above mentioned mental exertion for discovery of legal norms follow particular rules which are explained by a special branch of scholarship known as uṣūl al- fiqh. This discipline is a collection of general rules and regulations on how to derive positive precepts from the sources. Some of these rules and principles have been borrowed from other disciplines like logic, philosophy, theology and philology.

II. Main works on Shi'i uṣūl al- fiqh.

In the early periods of Islam, Shi'i scholars wrote treatises on some topics of uṣūl al- fiqh, which are mentioned in the sources. (1) But the oldest extant work in this context of Shi'i scholars is al-Tadhkira bi-uṣūl al- fiqh by al-Shaykh al-Muṣṭafīd, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al- Nū'mān al- Baghdādī

(1) All above-mentioned principles are according to Uṣūlī school of Shi'i law. The Akhbarīs rejected ijtihād and prohibited the practice of rational argument in law. There are some objections to the practice of ijtihād in the traditions from the Imāms and in early Shi'i works, too. Most of these, however, refer to the Sunnī version of ijtihād which includes qiyās and istilāḥān.

(d. 413/1022), a summary of which is included by al-Karâjakî (d. 449/1057-8) in his book *Kanz al-fawâ'id*. (1)

Next, there is a relatively voluminous work on this subject by al-Sharîf al-Murtaḍâ, ‘Alî b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mûsawî (d. 436/1044), entitled *al-Dhari'a ilâ usûl al-sharî'a*. (2) The book of Shaykh al-Ṭâ'îfa, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭusî (d. 460/1067), *Uddat al-usûl* (3) is the most famous work on *usûl al-fiqh* of early periods. It was a text-book in Shi‘i centers of learning for a long time. Another rather old source is the relevant chapter of *al-Ghunya* by Ibn Zuhra al-Ḥalabî (d. 585/1189-90). (4) K. al-Masâdîr fi *usûl al-fiqh* by Sadîd al-Dîn Maḥmûd al-Ḥimmaṣî, the Shi‘i theologian and scholar of the second half of the 6th/12th century is not extant, (5) but some paragraphs of it are quoted in Ibn Idrîs’s *al-Sarâ’îr*. (6) Next, the works of al-Muḥaqiq Ja’far b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥillî (d. 676/1277) such as *Ma’ârij al-wusûl*, and then those of al-‘Allâmâ Ḥasan b. Yûsuf b. al-Muṭḥâhar al-Ḥillî (d. 726/1325) such as *Tahdhib al-usûl*, *Mabâdi’ al-wusûl* and *Nihâyat al-wusûl* contributed to the evolution of this discipline.

Following this age, many commentaries (*sharḥ*) and annotations (*ḥâshiya*) appeared on the works of al-‘Allâmâ, some of which are listed in Āghâ Buzurg’s *al-Dhari’a*. (7) Two of the most famous of these are the commentaries known as al-Ḍiyâ’î and al-ʿAmîdî (8) which had a notable influence on the develop-

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(2) Edited in Tehran, 1346/8 sh(1967/9) in two volumes. Al-Murtaḍâ had written independent treatises on almost all the topics of *usûl al-fiqh* (see his introduction to *al-Dhari’a*, I, p. 2). He also discussed the *usûl* topic of akhbâr al-ḍhâd in his *al-Dhakhtra*, formally a work of kalâm theology (see al-Ṭusî, *Uddat al-usûl* (Tehran, 1314q), pp. 34-7).

(3) Edited in Tehran, 1314q and in Bombay, 1318q.


(5) Āghâ Buzurg al-Ṭibrânî, *al-Dhari’a ilâ ʿaṣâfîf al-Shî’a* (Najaf and Tehran, 1353-98q), XXI, p. 95.


(7) Āghâ Buzurg, VI, pp. 54-5; XIII, pp. 165-70; XIV, pp. 53-4.

ment of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Al-Shāhīd al-Awwal, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Makkī al-ʿĀmilī (d. 786/1384) assembled these two commentaries, together with some useful notes by himself, in a volume entitled *Jāmiʿ al-bayn*. (1)

Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1011/1602) paved the way for concentrated discussions on *uṣūl al-fiqh* by composing a systematic and well-arranged text as an introduction to his legal work *Maʿālim al-dīn*. Thereafter, numerous commentaries and annotations were composed on this text, which has been a text-book in Shiʿī centers of learning since the 11th/17th century.

During the 11th/17th century, the most significant *uṣūlī* views were put forward by Sulṭān al-ʿUlamāʾ, Ḥusayn b. Raḥf al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Marʿashi al-Māzandarānī (d. 1064/1653-4), one of the authors of the commentaries to *Maʿālim*. *Zubda* by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621) and *Wāshiya* by ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Tūnī (d. 1071/1660-1) are among the best known *uṣūlī* text of this century.

In the 12th/18th century, the Akhābarī school which repudiated the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, became predominant and inhibited its further development. It was, however, revived with the appearance of a prominent scholar in the last third of the same century, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Akmal al-Bihbahānī, known as al-Wāḥīd (d. 1205/1791), who strove vigorously to combat the influence of Akhbarism and to propagate *uṣūl al-fiqh*. His students also devoted themselves to the same cause. Works such as *Qawānīn* by Abūʾl-Qāsim b. Ḥasan al-Gilānī, known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Qummī (d. 1231/1816), *Fuṣūl* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Raḥím al-İṣfahānī (d. 1250-4/1834-9), *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* by Muḥammad Taqī b. Muḥammad Raḥím al-İṣfahānī (d. 1248/1833), *Mafātīḥ* by Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Karbalāʿī al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī, known as al-Muḥāhid (d. 1242/1827) and *Dawābīṭ* by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥam-

b. Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Aʿraj al-Ḥusaynī. These two brothers were the nephews of al-ʿAllāma (Ibn al-Muṭahhar), and both lived in the middle of the 8th/14th century.

(1) Āghā Buzurg, V, pp. 43-4.
mad Bâqir al-Qazwînî (d. 1262/1846), all of which were written by the pupils and followers of al-Bihbahânî’s school, were instrumental in the progress and the spread of Usûl doctrine.

Al-Shaykh Murtaḍâ al-Anšârî, the great scholar and legal theoretician (d. 1281/1864), systematically revised and reconstructed the methodology of Shi‘i law, and extended the horizons and imensions of this discipline. The collection of his treatises or usûl al-fiqh, entitled al-Rasad‘îl or Farâ‘id al-usûl is still used as a text-book in traditional academies of Shi‘i law.

In the school of al-Shaykh al-Anšârî which has continued up to the present date, the principles of usûl al-fiqh have been continuously subjected to scrupulous and minute examination by his disciples and followers. As a result of the emergence of great scholars such as Muḥammad Kâẓîm al-Khurâsânî (d. 1329/1911) author of Kifâyat al-usûl, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Nâ‘înî (d. 1355/1936), Diyā’ al-Dîn al-‘Arâqî (d. 1361/1948) author of Maqâlât al-usûl, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahânî al-Kumpânî (d. 1361/1947) author of Nihâyat al-dirâya, and through their incisive intellectual efforts, the methodology of Shi‘i law is now the most elaborate in Islamic scholarship, and is still subject to discussions and open to further development, changes and perfection.

III. Conflict between the two tendencies in Shi‘i jurisprudence.

It can be clearly seen from religious traditions that Shi‘i Imâms had persistently urged their followers to reason and use their minds. In the case of discussions on Kalâm theology they praised and encouraged Shi‘i theologians of their times. (1) In the case of legal problems, the Imâms stated explicitly that their own duties lay in explaining general rules and principles;

whereas inferences in details and minor precepts for actual cases were left to the learned followers of the Imâms. (1) The Imâms sometimes also explained in some points whenever faced by questions from their followers that the correct replies to their questions could be grasped and derived from the general Islamic legal principles. (2) On some occasions, the Imâms themselves followed what they advised as the correct method of reasoning and thus instructed their followers on the proper procedure for inference of legal precepts. (3)

Many of the Imâms’ companions, who were the first generation of the Shi‘î jurists, were, at the same time, eminent kalâm theologians (4) and held significant opinions on both legal and theological subjects, some of which have been quoted in the sources. Many other Shi‘îs who gathered around the Imâms restricted themselves to the transmission of traditions and refrained from theological debates. They did not look favourably upon the Shi‘î theologians. (6) The theologians who were appreciated and favoured by the Imâms, strongly resented the reproaches directed against them by the traditionalists, and the Imâms consoled the accused (6) by saying that they should tolerate and act moderately towards their adversaries since the latter’s capacity for understanding subtle points and minute nuances was extremely limited. (7)

Some of the traditionalists


(4) See Iqâbl, Khânîdân-i Nawbakhîtî (Tehran, 1345sh), pp. 75-84.


(7) Ibid., p. 488.
of Qum too squabbled with theologians, (1) fabricated traditions in condemnation of the latter and attributed them to the authority of the Imāms, (2) and wrote books in this vein. (3) On the other hand, the Imāms recommended their followers to refer to theologians and read their books. (4) They even encouraged the people of Qum to honour and respect Shi’i theologians ‘in spite of the fact that the traditionalists of their town were hostile to them’. (5)

As mentioned already, the inference of legal precepts in Shi’i law is fundamentally based on logical analysis and reasoning within the framework of Qur’ānic texts and Tradition. Rational argument is accepted on the basis of Aristotelian deduction, which brings certainty according to the principles of that logical system. The kind of analogical reasoning which is entitled qiyās in Islamic jurisprudence was rejected by the Shi’a from the time it came into Islamic law, in the 2nd/8th century, (6) because it leads only to a probable cause for a precept, not to the certain one. Some cases of qiyās in which the real cause of a precept is found are accepted in Shi’i law. (7) In the first centuries, the traditionalists who were opposed to any kind of rational argument held that this mode of arriving at categorical judgments amounted to qiyās and was therefore unlawful. (8) Some later scholars called it permissible qiyās, (9) while in fact


(2) Al-Kashshāl, p. 497. For examples of these traditions see the same source, pp. 491-6, 540-4; al-Barqī, *K. al-Riḍāl*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1342 AH), p. 35; al-Bazanṭūl, p. 478.


(5) Al-Kashshāl, p. 489.


(9) Ibn al-Muṭahhar, *Ajwibat al-maṣlīl al-Muḥannāṭiya* (MS 1474, Central
this mode of analysis bears no connection with the Sunnî concept of *qiyâs*. (1) It seems that in the religious mentality of the Shi'îa of the first centuries, all kinds of rational arguments were considered a kind of *qiyâs*. (2) This was perhaps caused by some outward or terminological similarities. Then, traditionalists believed that the injunctions found in Shi'î Tradition which forbade the practice of *qiyâs* were also applicable to any other mode of rational analysis.

These traditions also forbid practising independent judgment, which is called *ra'y* in Islamic legal terminology. In the legal usage of the early periods, the term *ijtihâd* was used (3) in the sense of personal judgments including *ra'y*. (4) This explains why Shi'îs refrained from the use of the term *ijtihâd* until the 6th/12th century. (5) It also explains the objections raised in Shi'î theological works toward *ijtihâd*, (6) and the refutation of its legitimacy in works written by Shi'î theologians like the Nawbakhts, (7) 'Abd Allâh b. 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Zubayrî, (8) and Abu'l-Qâsim 'Alî b. Aḥmad al-Kûfî. (9) All these were against *ijtihâd* in the above sense. Otherwise *ijtihâd*, as a

(1) Ibn al-Muţahhar, *loc. cit.*; al-Suyûtî, fol. 3a; al-Waḥîdî al-Bihbahânî, fol. 85b.
(4) See further the article *idjîthâd* in *EI*, 2nd edition, III, p. 1026.
(7) Iqûtâl, pp. 94, 117, 118, 120.
(8) Al-Nâjîshî, p. 163.
rational mode of reasoning, was quite an acceptable phenomenon among many Shi'is from the 2nd/8th century onwards, and from late 4th/10th century it emerged as the only method by which legal subjects were approached. (1) These analytical and rational methods of Shi'i scholars of the early centuries of Islam appeared to amount to ra'y and qiyaş in the eyes of strict traditionalists who objected to the rational analytical modes of reasoning in law. (2)

In some traditions, it is reported that some companions of the Imams practised qiyaş on occasions when instructions over a particular problem were not explicitly and clearly given in the Qur'an and Tradition, (3) and that some of them were practising the method of ra'y. (4) Some of the most knowledgeable companions of the Imams whose opinions and judgments are cited in legal sources, have been accused of following the practice of qiyaş. (5) It is almost certain that they were supporters of the analytical mode of reasoning and not of the Sunni concept of qiyaş. Their judgments, many of which have been collected by Asad Allâh al-Kâzîmî (6) confirm this point.

It is evident from what has so far been said that in the period of the presence of the Imâms, two legal tendencies existed in the

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(1) This is according to the predominant Uşûl school of Shi`i law. The Akhîrîs rejected the validity of all kinds of rational argument in law, as noted before.

(2) Books such as al-Ra'dd `alâ man ra'dd âdhâr al-Rasûl wa it'tamad `alâ `a`lî `a`alî al-`uğîl by Hîlîb b. Ibrâhîm b. Abî `l-Fâth al-Madâni (al-Najâshî, p. 344) are written with the same understanding.


(6) See his Kashf al-qînî, e.g., pp. 82-3, 198, 244.
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Shi‘i community. One of them adhered to an analytical, rational approach toward legal problems within the framework of the general principles of the Qur’ân and Tradition. The other was a traditionalist approach which relied on transmitting traditions without any further inferential derivation of the law. (1)

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After the period of the Imâms (ended 260/874), the traditionalist school gradually gained control over the whole Shi‘i intellectual community, and totally suppressed the rational theological and legal tendencies which were based on reasoning. The school of Qum, which in those days was the most prominent religious center of the Shi‘is was completely dominated by this current and the Qummi scholars were all traditionalists (2) objecting to any kind of reasoning and analytical thought in the Shi‘i community. The overwhelming majority of Shi‘i jurists during this period and up to the late 4th/10th century were adherents of this school of thought. (3) Like their predecessors in the time of the Imâms, they devoted their efforts to collecting, recording and preserving the traditions from the Imâms. They, too, were not sympathetic to rational arguments in religious matters, and condemned even those efforts which applied rational argument to religious questions in order to strengthen the Shi‘i points of view. (4) This school resembled in its outlook the Sunni school of “the traditionists”, in which Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal rejected kalâm even when used in defence of Islam. (5)

(1) See also Khumaynî, Risâlia fi ‘l-ijtihād wa ‘l-taqlîd (Qum, 1385q), pp. 125-8.
In their legal approach, there were two groups of traditionalists who differed among themselves. One only accepted traditions related by transmitters whose reliability had been thoroughly examined, and recognized and implemented those principles of *üşûl al-fiqh* which were mentioned in the traditions from the Imâms. (1) The other group followed traditions without compromise and completely ignored the principles of *üşûl al-fiqh* and the rules by which a tradition could be examined. They completely ignored the procedures of debate, reasoning and recognized modes of discourse. (2) The extreme tendencies of these Shiʿī traditionalists were comparable to the tendency of Ḥashwiyya in Sunnism which was the most extreme and inflexible Sunnī traditionalist school. (3) However, in the works of Shiʿī theologians of the 4th-6th/10th-12th centuries, terms such as ḥashwiyya (4) and muqallida (5) together with the terms aṣḥāb al-hadith (6) and akhbâriyya (7) were applied to all


the adherents of the traditionalist tendency, even the more moderate group. (1)

At the same time when the traditionalists dominated Shi‘i academical circles, there existed a very few supporters of the rational tendency in the Shi‘i school of thought who, in their turn, differed among themselves. Some, like Ibn Aḥḥāf ‘Aqīl Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-‘Umãnī al-Ḥadhhdhâ (early 4th/10th century), rejected the validity of the traditions for law. (2) Others, like Ibn al-Junayd Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Kāṭib al-Iskâfī (mid 4th/10th century) (3) and Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan b. Mūsâ al-Nawbakhtī (early 4th/10th century) (4) recognized the traditions as valid legal sources. It is already well-known that much disagreement existed among the Mu‘tazīlī theologians of the time, too, about matters such as the validity of the traditions, (5) qiyâs and the like.

In the last decades of the 4th/10th and early 5th/11th centuries, the school of traditionalists was swept away by the teachings of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and his disciple al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍâ through their numerous polemical works and harsh criticisms of the principles of traditionalists, and their skillful emphasis on some unpopular theological opinions of the latter. (6) Al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍâ managed to revive the rational school of Shi‘i law. Aspects of this severe controversy are recorded in some of the sources (7) in which the traditionalists are referred to as the akhbârîyya and the rationalists as mu‘tazila or kalâmîyya. (8) Al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍâ too, speak of the approach

Mawdāqīf (Constantinople, 1286 q.), p. 629; Fakhr al-Râzî, al-Maḥṣūl (quoted in al-Kāẓîmî, p. 203).

(1) For more details about the methodology and beliefs of the adherents of the traditionalist school, see the works mentioned above by al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍâ.

(2) Al-Tustarî, Qâmûs al-rijāl (Tehran, 1379 q.), III, p. 198.

(3) See al-Mufīd, al-Mas’dîl al-Saraniyya, p. 223.

(4) Al-Najâshî, p. 50.


(6) See my An Introduction to Shi‘i Law (forthcoming).

(7) E.g. al-Shahrastānî, p. 178.

of *mutakallimūn* and *muḥaqiqūn* as against that of the “traditionists.” *(1)* In later Shi‘ī sources, the adherents of this rationalist school are referred to by the term *usuliyya*. *(2)*

The approach of the rationalists relied firmly on general Qur‘ānic principles and on widely transmitted (*mulawātir*) traditions, and excluded those traditions which did not provide certainty (*āḥād*). Instead of the latter, they conformed to those legal views which were accepted and continually practiced among Shi‘īs (*ijmā‘ār*). *(3)* The process of inferring precepts from the appropriate sources was carried out through rational analysis, the procedures and rules of conduct of which were familiar to the theologicans because of the latters’ daily involvement with difficult theological debate.

Around the middle of the 5th/11th century, Shaykh al-Ṭā‘īfa established a more moderate legal school by combining methods of rationalists with that of the traditionalists. He maintained the validity of the traditions as a source of law while preserving the analytical and rational method of law. This remained characteristic of Shi‘ī law up to the present time.

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After the decline of the traditionalists school in the early 5th/11th century, a small number of its adherents survived, here and there, in the later period, *(4)* but they were not active and were, therefore, largely ignored by others. It was not until the beginning of the 11th/17th century that their school was revived by Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7) through his book *al-Fawā‘id al-Madaniyya*.


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The suitable ground for revival of the traditionalist school had gradually been provided since early 10th/16th century. It has been said that Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsâ‘ī, a Shi‘ī theologian with sufī tendencies of early 10th/16th century, was a follower of the traditionalist school. (1) In the second half of the same century, Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī, shaykh al-Islām of the Safavid court (d. 984/1576) criticized the legal method of Shi‘ī jurists and blamed them for being imitators of the “ancients”. (2) ‘Abd al-Nabī b. Sa‘d al-Jazā‘īrī, a slightly later jurist, criticized the legal approaches of the Uṣūlī school in his al-Iqlīsād fi sharḥ al-Irshād (3) (written in 1015/1606-7). A šādī (the chief religious dignitary) of the Safavid court in the first half of the 11th/17th century is quoted as having said that no Shi‘ī mujtahid remained in Iran or the Arab world in his time. (4) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī, known as al-Muqaddasīs, the religious leader of the Shi‘ī community in his time and a prominent jurist (d. 993/1585), never hesitated to reject the opinions of all previous Shi‘ī jurists wherever they excluded traditions on the basis of a rational argument. (5) His students like Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī, author of Madārik al-ahkām (d. 1009/1600) followed the same line. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥusayn al-Tustarī, a prominent jurisconsult of early 11th/17th century (d. 1021/1612) made a great contribution to the revival of ḥadīth literature. (6) Subjects such as the validity or invalidity of the traditions as a source of law had again become points of debate among the jurists of early 11th/17th century. (7) The value of logic and philosophy in Islamic scholarship had already come under ques-

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(1) Al-Nārī, III, p. 361.
(2) See his Risāla ft ḥukm al-ḥusr wa‘l-bawārīt wa sahīm al-Imdām (MS 1836/12, Majlis Library, Tehran), p. 217; Tis‘ masad‘īl (MS 1805/53, the same library), p. 256; Risāla ft taḥqīq ba‘d al-masad‘īl al-fiqhīyya (MS 5960/3, the same library), pp. 123-124.
(3) MS 5886/2, Majlis Library, Tehran, pp. 18-136.
(5) See his Majma‘ al-fad‘īda wa ‘l-burhān (Tehran, 1272q), passim.
(7) See Ibid., IV, p. 238.
Elements such as these contributed enormously to the appearance of a new traditionalist school and its rapid development and predominance.

The new traditionalist school, which was now called by its other old name, Akhbârî, was, like its predecessor, opposed to the rational, analytical approaches to the law and adhered strictly to the outward, literal meanings of the traditions. In the above-mentioned work, Amîn al-Astarâbâdî argued against rational analysis and reasoning as a means of discovering legal norms, and utterly dismissed the principles of usûl al-fiqh which had been evolved in order to define the rational method. This approach basically resembled the more radical wing of the early traditionalists which considered all traditions transmitted from the Imâms as authentic. (2)

The focus in Amîn al-Astarâbâdî’s argument was on the invalidity and peccability of the Aristotelian logic which had been the basis for the Shi‘î jurists in their legal reasonings. The main difference between the two Shi‘î legal tendencies of Usûlî and Akhbârî was the validity or invalidity of reason in connection with religious matters, although many other points of disagreement, mostly of the same type, existed at the same time. (3)

The Akhbârî school found its way to Iraq in the fourth decade of the 11th/17th century and was followed by most of the jurists of Najaf and other Shi‘î centers of learning in Mesopotamia. (4) In Iran the majority of the jurists of the provinces in the second half of the same century supported this

(3) See al-Jazâ’îrî, Manba‘ al-ḥayât (MS 2761/4, Majlis Library, Tehran), pp. 275-8; al-Samâhî, Munyat al-mumârîstn (MS 1916/27, the same library), pp. 375-9 (also quoted in al-Khwânsârî, I, pp. 127-30); Shûhînî, al-Dhakhtra al-bâqîqa (MS 1916/29, the same library), pp. 381-382; Shubbar, Buqyga‘ al-‘âdîbîn (MS 3972, the same library), the whole work.
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tendency. (1) The religious academy of Isfahān, which was the largest center of Shi‘ī learning, was dominated by the Usūlis, although the first Majlisī, Muḥammad Taqī b. Maqṣūd ‘Alī (d. 1070/1659-60) inclined to Akhbarism, (2) and his son Muḥammad Bāqir, Majlisī II (d. 1110/1699) supported a method between Akhbarism and Usūlīsm. (3) Zayn al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Sulaymān b. Darwīsh b. Ḥātim al-Qadāmī al Bahramī (d. 1064/1653-4) took Akhbarism from Iran to Bahrain. (4) During this century, the animosity between Akhbarīs and Usūlīs had not yet become strong. Sharper opposition between them, however, began to appear from the last decades of the same century. (5)

The Akhbarī tendency gained supremacy in all Shi‘ī centers of learning in the following century, and held Shi‘ī law in its grasp for several decades until the second half of that century, when it again declined in the face of Usūlī resurgence. Bahrain was the stronghold of this school during this period and has remained so up to the present, after the demise of Akhbarism in Iran and Iraq.

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In the second half of the 12th/18th century an outstanding jurist with a genius for rational argument and analysis succeeded in dismantling the influence of the Akhbarī school and to oust it totally from the scene. This scholar was, as noted before, al-Wahīd al-Bihbahānī who established a new rational school in Shi‘ī law.

(3) See his Risāla dar sayr wa sulāk (MS 880, Mar‘ashī Library, Qum), fol. 53a. See also his Zād al-ma‘ād (Iṣfahān, 1311q), pp. 557-8 (also quoted in al-Bahramī, al-Ḥaddīq al-nādira [Najaf, 1377q-], XII, p. 268.
Conditions for such a change were, to some extent, facilitated by some Akhbârî scholars in mid 12th/18th century. Scholars such as Şadr al-Dîn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Bâqir al-Hamadânî (d. after 1151/1738-9) in his Sharḥ al-Wâfiya and Yûṣuf b. Ahmad al-Baḥrânî (d. 1186/1772) in introduction to his al-Ḥadâʾiq al-naḍîra, accepted some arguments of the Uṣûlîs, rejected some extreme Akhbârî approaches and followed a more moderate line. Through severe continuous mental efforts, al-Bihbahânî managed to reestablish the authority of reason and rational argument in law and to revive the Uṣûlî or rationalist school of Shi‘î jurisprudence. In the following century, the reconstruction of Shi‘î jurisprudence by al-Shaykh al-Anṣârî resulted in a radical change in the whole system of Shi‘î law. Many new elements from Islamic logic and philosophy were introduced to the jurisprudence. The characteristics of this new rational school are to be explained on another occasion.

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REVELATION AND REASON: A DYNAMIC TENSION IN ISLAMIC ARBITRAMENT

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After delivering a Carlson Lecture at the University of Minnesota in 1994, Hannan Ashrawi was asked by an audience member if a newly formed, independent State of Palestine would adopt the Shari'a (Islamic law) as the law of the land. The question reveals a deep seated fear in the American mind about Islamic justice. Because Islamic concepts of law and justice have developed from a very different worldview, they seem incomprehensible to us. We don't understand why Muslims argue about theology when talking about legal cases that appear in the news.

The Islamic community is organized as a theocracy, where God is the ruler of the community. In such a community, there is very little doubt that God is the ultimate authority in all things, including questions of law. There might, however, be considerable doubt about how the human members of the community respond to, make use of, and/or interpret God's intentions. Islam is no exception to this rule. Throughout its history, groups of people have answered questions about God and the community in different ways.

In a 1987 article, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” William Shepard describes Islam as a “typology of ideological orientations.” He identifies four main ideological types in Islam: secularism, Islamic modernism, radical Islamism, traditionalism, and neo-traditionalism, the modern manifestations of ideological conflicts within the Islamic community since the beginning. Each of the ideological types identified by Shepard takes a different approach to major questions which confront the organization of the Islamic community.

One major question faced by the Islamic community is who has the power of arbitrament, that is, who decides human issues in a theocracy? Does all judgment belong to God as revealed through the Prophet? Or do human beings also have arbitrament, through applied reason? Recent events in Pakistan suggest this is

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an ongoing question for Muslims. Americans can gain understanding of the answers to this question by reviewing the work of twentieth century historians of Islam on the development of Islamic law.

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD: THE EARLY KHALIFAS AND THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY

According to M. Jamil Hanifi in law, classical Islamic theory is the revealed will of God. "[It is] a divinely ordained system preceding and preceded by the Muslim state, controlling and controlled by Muslim society." Most scholars apparently agree with Duncan B. Macdonald's description of the practice of decision-making used by Mohammed. In Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory, Macdonald describes the four elements in Muslim jurisprudence during the life of Mohammed as: that which was revealed to Mohammed by God; Arab custom; Jewish law; and the personality of Mohammed himself. By including Arab custom and Jewish law, we can understand what Hanifi means in saying that law is a divinely ordained system preceding the Muslim state and preceded by the Muslim state. In its earliest form - during the life of the Prophet - it was a synthesis of elements, some old and some new.

The Muslim community developed in a part of the world which had long been organized under a system that regulated human conduct. The laws of Madinah were already a synthesis of Jewish and Arabic concepts. The laws of Mecca, a city of commerce, were especially sophisticated in concepts of trade and fairness. The decisions made by the Prophet Mohammed leave little doubt that he knew the legal structures of Madinah and Mecca.

However, as Hanifi describes it, The supreme innovation introduced by Islam into the social structure of Arabia was the establishment of a novel political authority possessing legislative power - the Qur'anic command "obey God and His Prophet."4

During the life of the Prophet Mohammed the question who has arbitrament was easily answered: God and His Prophet. The

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community was small enough that one individual could serve as judge for all of its members. The question who has the power of arbitrament became much more compelling after the death of the Prophet Mohammed.

If one defines law as that which was revealed through the Prophet Mohammed, then in principle there would be no more legislation and law would be fixed. However, the difficulty comes in the legal practice of the community. Several historians describe Mohammed as sitting at the edge of his yard attending to a long line of community members seeking arbitration. If they were used to having decisions made by Mohammed, then who would they look to for decision-making upon Mohammed’s death? If it did take two years after the death of Mohammed for the Qur’an to be gathered together from its fragmentary state as Macdonald suggests, then how were decisions actually made in the early Islamic community?

On the death of Mohammed, the umma (community) elected Abu Bakr as Khalifa (Caliph) successor of the Prophet of God. H.A.R. Gibb, in Law in the Middle East, describes that act as the umma’s first and most decisive exercise of ijmā’, (consensus of the community).

This step . . . brought the historical process into constitutional theory: The action . . . had to be reconciled with and justified by the principles of the sharī‘a [Islamic law] . . . . It focused the constitutional theory of the jurists upon the person of the Khalifa-imām (Caliph).5

The doctrine of the umma can be termed the root of all Islamic political concepts. The umma consists of all those individuals who are connected to one another by religious ties, and all individuals in the umma are equal in their relationship to God. God is the head of the umma, and the source of legislation. The state exists to enforce the law, which is seen as the expression of God’s will. The state is subordinate to the Qur’an, and there is little basis for criticism and dissent. Thus law, as the revealed will of God, is not tied in with the evolution of society and culture. The law, according to M. Jamil Hanifi,

... represented the eternally valid ideal toward which a society must aspire. ... Inherent in Islamic law ... is a distinction between the ideal doctrine and the actual practice ... . The standards of the religious law and the demands of political expediency often have not coincided ... .

It is the role of the imam (leader) to translate law from the sphere of theory into practical application. The Khalifa is established as the vice regent of God, and is given the duty of judging, or applying the Shari'a righteously between men. The authority of the imam then is derived from God. The election of Abu Bakr as Khalifa was carried out through the consensus of the umma. By that action the community participated, to a limited degree, in arbitrament. Because the Khalifa was chosen not by God as Mohammed was, but by the community, a human element is included as a source of decision-making in Islamic legal practice both through, and because of, the exercise of human reason.

The Khalifa as judge did not rest his decisions on common sense alone. His source also included the Qur'an, the common law of Madinah (with its synthesis of Jewish and pre-Muslim Arab law), and the decisions of the Prophet as recalled by his companions. During the lifetime of Mohammed, companions kept records of the Prophet's decisions in judgment. These records, and written transcriptions of the Prophet's words in stories, table-talk, and sermons were used in legal decision-making and were the basis of the hadith (traditions).

The hadith themselves were originally passed on orally, perhaps because of the difficulty of reproducing a thought exactly in a written language without diacritical points. Because hadith were transmitted orally, they came to consist of two elements: the text of what was written by a companion, and the succession of who told it to whom to document of its originality.

The early Khalifas essentially continued the practice of Mohammed to act as a hakam (arbitrator) for the community. The role of hakam derived from Arab (both Bedouin and sedentary) custom. In situations of conflict where negotiation failed to provide resolution, a hakam was chosen from the tribe for his or her qualities of knowledge and integrity. Before Islam, a hakam might also have been chosen for his or her supernatural powers (a sooth-
sayer). It was, then, a natural progression after the birth of Islam for community members to go to Mohammed for the same purpose as a hakam. The Prophet based his legislating on an intention - not to create a legal system - but to teach men how to act. Joseph Schacht suggests:

... had religious and ethical standards been comprehensively applied to all aspects of human behavior, and had they been consistently followed in practice, there would have been no room and no need for a legal system. ...  

At the time the Umayyad Caliphate was founded there simply was no systematic Islamic legal institution. Duncan Macdonald describes the Umayyads as "simple heathens in all but name, and [they] belonged and recognized that they belonged, not to Islam but to the Jâhiliya." Much of their remaining architecture (exclusive of the Qubbat al-Sakhra and the mosques at Kufa, Jerusalem and Damascus) demonstrates their intentional self-comparison with rulers of non-Islamic territories. This proclivity is especially noticeable in the palace at 'Anjar and in the bath at Khirbat al-Mafjar.

While the Umayyads apparently did not act as supreme religious arbitrators, they did legislate law during the first century of Islam. They also commonly adopted legal and administrative institutions of conquered territories, including Roman provincial, Sassanian, Talmudic and canon law of eastern Churches. The Umayyad governors appointed Islamic judges (Qâdis) supplanting the Arab hakam with the Islamic qâdi. These early qâdis followed the earlier hakam custom of judging according to their own discretion, and thus instituted ra'y (sound opinion) as a basis of judgment. Macdonald described ra'y as "an opinion that was thoughtful, weighed and reasonable as opposed to a hasty dictate of ill-regulated passion."  

In Conflicts and Tensions in Islamic Jurisprudence, Noel Coulson describes the first 150 years of Islam in jurisprudence, roughly coinciding with the period of the first four Khalifas and the rule of the Umayyads, as,

characterized by an almost untrammeled freedom of juristic reasoning in the solution of problems not specifically regulated by

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10. Id at 86.
Such rules of law as the Qur'an and the Sunna established were regarded simply as ad hoc modifications of the existing customary law. This existing law remained the accepted standard of conduct unless it was expressly superseded in some particular by the dictates of divine revelation.11

Such freedom of juristic reasoning may have arisen because the prophet left no comprehensive code of law, because the Umayyads established the government so soon after the Prophet's death and were themselves motivated by elements other than religious purity, and because the Umayyad period was one of fairly rapid expansion. Camp cities, such as al-Basra and al-Kufa, were built to hold conquered lands and were some distance from the religious center of Madinah. Jurists in this early period in Kufa, Basra and Syria as well as Madinah and Mecca based their decisions on what came to be known as the living tradition of the school. In other words, sources for decisions in those locations became the Qur'an; known practices of the Prophet; Arab custom and the practice of law in pre-Muslim Mecca and Madinah; and the continuous chain of decisions made by local jurists.

Schacht describes the chain of decisions made by these ancient schools of law as having both a retrospective and contemporaneous aspect:

Retrospectively, it appears as sunna or practice or as well established precedent ... it comes to mean normative sunna .... The consensus of the scholars, representing the common denominator of doctrine achieved in each generation, expresses the contemporaneous aspect of the living tradition of each school.12

The situation under the Umayyads was tolerated for a long period of time, even though there were many Muslims who believed that all law must be derived from the revealed will of God. There was also a general belief that Muslims should support an existing Islamic government. In conflict with that general support, many believed was a feeling that if the government strays from the fundamentals, then it should be put right. According to W. Montgomery Watt:

Modern scholars accept the idea of development whereas the medieval Muslim scholars found this idea abhorrent. As is well known the Arabic word for “heresy” is bid’a, of which the pri-

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mary meaning is "innovation." The dislike of change and novelty is deeply rooted in the Arab soul, and goes back to pre-Islamic times when the accepted ideal was to follow exactly the time-honored practice of the tribe or clan. In accordance with this attitude medieval scholars avoided all suggestion of development in Islamic doctrine, and presented instead the image of a monolithic body of doctrine, which was accepted through the centuries by the great mass of Muslims, and from which a few sectarians at various times had deviated.¹³

Whether Watt is correct in his analysis of an Arab preference for unity of doctrine, or of the motivations for such preference, historically the umma was in fact split by dissension and factionalism. Such factionalism was not restricted to Sunni vs Shī'a and the debate over descent of authority. Watt identifies three categories of groups which might be described as dissenting from the Islamic mainstream. The first category was groups of rebels against the government who based their rebellion on theological principles. This category included Kharijite groups such as the Azraqites; followers of Nafi ibn Azraq; and various Shī'ite groups. The second category included groups and individuals whom the Umayyad rulers suspected of subversive activity, but who were punished before they could engage in open rebellion. The third category included large numbers of men who discussed religious questions with one another: as noted later, their discussions ultimately identified by "schools" consisting of individuals who held one or more views in common.

Islamic scholars are familiar with the term "the 73 sects of Islam." This term is derived from a traditional story (fiqh) in which Mohammed reminds the community that the People of the Book before them had divided into seventy-two sects. In reality, Mohammed says there were seventy-three, of which seventy-two would go to hell, and only one which would go to Paradise. Whatever the actual number of sects, it is clear that there were many groups of Muslims who held a multiplicity of conflicting beliefs, some of which included the issue of revelation vs reason in legal arbitrament.

George F. Hourani divides the history of Islam into three periods: the formative, the classical, and the modern.\textsuperscript{14} We have so far looked at the place of reason in the formative period. Hourani identifies the transition from the formative period to the classical period at the end of the second century A. H.. He describes the transition as follows:

The Traditions were informally canonized in the great collections of Bukhari, Kulini and others; the schools of shari'a law were well established; the twelfth and last Shi'ite imam disappeared; the Sunni caliphate was reduced to governing little more than Iraq; the Greek sciences and philosophy had been introduced into learned circles; the visual arts and literature were settling into steady patterns, not without constant change; the economic order was a kind of feudalism, and government almost everywhere was in the hands of secular sultans and amirs.\textsuperscript{15}

In mentioning Bukhari and other collectors of hadiths, Hourani makes a clear distinction between "traditionists" and "traditionalists." He calls the collectors of hadiths traditionists; and those scholars who derive the Islamic sciences of law and theology entirely from the sources of the Qur'an and hadith he calls traditionalists. Other scholars are not so careful to make this distinction, and many reference the movement of those scholars who deny rationalism and the use of human reason in law as the "traditionist movement." Hourani's clearer language assists our purpose in this essay.

The movement of the traditionalists arose around the middle of the second century A.H. in religious and ethical opposition to the ancient schools of law, their freedom of juristic reasoning (use of ra'y), and the reliance on the living tradition of the schools of law in decision-making. The traditionalists believed that the formal hadith superseded the living tradition (or the local continuity of decisions), and they wanted all decisions to be based on the Qur'an or the hadith, because they considered them to be more reliable than the opinions of men.

The [traditionalists] refused to go one inch beyond the statements in the Qur'an and hadith and to draw conclusions from


\textsuperscript{15} Id.
them: they refused to reason and to argue. This refusal to ask why and how is called balkafa.  

Some scholars (Macdonald, Coulson and others) accuse the traditionalists of using human reason themselves, both in arguing against its use, and in forging hadīth which would provide the same basis for a decision as would the use of reason in a given situation. According to Schacht,

The [traditionalists] didn’t accept traditions of the companions but only of the Prophet himself (they claimed eyewitness authority even though they produced [the Tradition] in the second century A.H.). They report the Prophet as saying, ‘Sayings attributed to me which agree with the Qur’ān go back to me, whether I actually said them or not.’  

**THE LITERARY PERIOD OF LAW: TRANSITION INTO CLASSICAL ISLAM**

The literary period in Islamic law similarly begins in the middle of the second century A.H. Macdonald suggests that books dealing with law in general appeared before any collections of hadīth, and that such books were encouraged by the state for the good of the public. The first collection of hadīth was the *Muwatta* of Malik ibn Anas (d. A.H. 179). The *Muwatta* of Malik ibn Anas was intended to create a system of law based on the hadīth.

It is impossible to know exactly how many hadīth existed, which were considered sound, and which were viewed with skepticism. For example, Macdonald describes the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (a collection of hadīth) as containing about thirty thousand. Noel Coulson claims the same collection contained more than eighty thousand hadīth. It is generally accepted that existent hadīth did number in the high thousands, but many of these were disputed as unverifiable.

Perhaps the most respected of all the collections of hadīth is the *Sahīh* (sound) al-Bukhari (d. A.H. 257). His *sahīh* is a *musnad* (the arranged, classified). It is arranged in chapters according to their subject matter and is intended to provide the basis for an organized system of jurisprudence.

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17. Schacht in Khadduri and Liebesny, *Law in the Middle East* at 46 (cited in note 5).
Bukhari was a strong opponent of speculative law, and attempted to create a usable reference work for traditionalist jurisprudence. He was very critical of the mass of hadith and strenuously tested them for authenticity. He rejected all but approximately seven thousand as forgeries. Bukhari was not alone in rejecting many hadith, the Sahih of Muslim (d. A.H. 261) was very similar to that of Bukhari, though not as juristic. His motivation was also to purify the existing hadith of forgerly.

There were numerous collections of hadith produced at this time of transition to the classical period. Macdonald suggests that only six were widely accepted as canonical: the Musannaf of Bukhari and of Muslim; and the four Sunan (which deal almost entirely with legal tradition) Ibn Maja (d. A. H. 303), Abu Da’ud as-Sijistani (d. A. H. 275), al-Tirmidhi (d. A. H. 279) and al-Nasa’i (d. A. H. 303).

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOLS OF LAW

In addition to written collections of hadith, the early classical period also saw the solidification of the major schools of law, each with a different approach to the issue of revelation vs reason in legal decision making, and varying degrees of hypothetical speculation in each school’s development and teaching techniques.

Many problems discussed in the traditional textbooks of Islamic law, did not arise as an actual case but as a hypothetical one . . . Islamic law in its developed form is a jurists’ rather than a judges’ law. It was expressed in textbooks as the doctrine of the jurists, not in law reports containing the decisions of the judiciary . . . . Consequently the problems which exercised the minds of the jurists were problems of pure law.18

These schools were formed by groups of jurists who shared common ideas and they derived their names from a founder-scholar. The two oldest schools are the Hanafis and the Mālikis, both developed out of particular geographical locations. The Hanafis developed out of followers of Abu Hanifa at Kufa, and the Mālikis out of followers of Mālik ibn Anas at Madinah. According to Schacht:

The accepted doctrine of the Madanese school, which Mālik aimed to set forth, was itself to a great extent founded on the

individual reasoning of the school's representatives. In combining extensive use of reasoning with dependence on the living tradition, Mālik seems typical of the Madanese.\textsuperscript{19}

For Schacht, Mālik was a working judge who used living tradition copiously and ra'y less often. Schacht believes the school developed out of a recognition of the actual legal practice of Madinah society. Thus it developed the concept of agreement (ijmā' and considered the consensus of Mecca and Madinah to be decisive.

On the other hand, Schacht describes Abu Hanifa as an academic whose school of law was not based on experience of actual cases. Schacht says Hanifa "seems to have played the part of a theoretical systematizer who achieved considerable progress in technical legal thought."\textsuperscript{20} He describes Hanifa's system of law as using opinion and analogy of written statute as chief instruments of decision-making. According to Noel Coulson, Hanifa made little use of hadīth, but used the Qur'an extensively. His work was crafted into a finished code by two students: Qādī Abu Yusaf (d. A. H. 182) and Mohammed ibn al-Hasan (d. A.H. 189).

Coulson credits the Hanafis with development of the concept of istihan (juristic preference) where the jurist may consider it better to follow a different course than that required by a fixed code. Though both Hanafis and the Mālikis used and developed the concept of ijmā' in applications of law which appeared to be based on principles of freedom and flexibility; it might not represent as much flexibility as modern scholars would like it to. Coulson argues:

The function of ijmā' is in fact limited to the ratification of the status quo at the time of its formation; from this stage onwards it becomes a purely prohibitive and exclusive principle. Once formed, the ijmā' was infallible; to contradict it was heresy, and the possibility of its repeal by a similar ijmā' of a later generation, though admitted in theory, was thus highly unlikely in practice . . . . As the acknowledged sphere of the ijmā' in this broad sense spread, the use of independent judgment or ijtihād, which had been progressively restricted during the formative period by the emergence of such principles as the authority of Traditions and the strict regulation of methods of reasoning, eventually disappeared altogether. Ijmā' had thus set the final seal upon the process of increasing rigidity in the law.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Schacht in Khadduri and Liebesny, \textit{Law in the Middle East} at 51 (cited in note 5).
\textsuperscript{20} Id at 52.
\textsuperscript{21} Noel J. Coulson, \textit{A History of Islamic Law} 80 (Edinburgh U Press, 1964).
Toward the end of the second century A.H., conflict intensified between those who thought a system based strictly on the Qur'an and Traditions was inadequate and those who thought men were not wise enough to apply their own reason to the divinely instituted law. Three additional schools of law developed out of this conflict: those of al-Shâfi‘i (d. A.H. 204), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. A.H. 241), and Da‘ud al-Zâhirî (d. A.H. 270).

Al-Shâfi‘i had great reverence for tradition and considered the Qur'an and hadîth of equal authority. Much of his work focused on reconciling contradictory hadîth. He rejected ra‘y, believing that reason could not be applied independently of the divine will. Indeed, he held that the role of human reason must be subordinate to the Qur'an and hadîth. He did accept the concept of ijmâ‘, and where consensus of the scholars was contradictory, he looked instead to the consensus of all Muslims.

Al-Shâfi‘i believed that human reason was necessary in providing legal rules for new cases, or situations not specifically regulated by the Qur'an and Traditions. Such cases were to be decided by analogy (qîyās), or by applying principles used in divine revelation to decide similar cases.

Al-Shâfi‘i's legal theory had established a compromise between the dictates of the divine will and the use of human reason in law. But his hopes that such mediation would resolve existing conflicts and introduce uniformity into jurisprudence were frustrated . . . . Those who were prepared to accept the precise terms of Shâfi‘i’s doctrine on the role of Traditions were a minority and thus, despite the consistent repudiation of this possibility by Shâfi‘i himself, the Shâfi‘i school of law was born. It represented the middle position between those whose attitude towards Traditions was more reserved and those whose enthusiastic support of them was carried to extremes.22

The Hanbalite school and the Zâhirî school were both based on rejection of human reason in any form as a source of legal decision-making. Initially the Hanbali school adopted an intolerant and polemical position with regard to the Shâfi‘i, Hanafi, and Mâlikî schools, and rejected the method of juristic reasoning by analogy. Although the Hanbalites went further than any other school of law in attempting to integrate the twin strands of law and morality in the Shâri‘a, they adhered rigidly to the terms of the

22. Id at 70-71.
hadith and were regarded by the other schools as collectors of hadith rather than real lawyers.

The Hanbalites consistently maintained that any consensus was inadmissible after that of the generation of the Prophet’s companions. In spite of their persecution of scholars from other schools of law, they were never as strong in numbers of adherents as the Hanafi, Maliki or Shafi'i schools; and they never succeeded in gaining territorial dominion until the Wahhabi movement in eighteenth century (C.E.) Arabia.

These four schools have come to be known as the orthodox schools of Sunni law. Though there were periods of serious conflict and outright persecution, they eventually grew to exist fairly peacefully with each other. Indeed, the architectural form of the madrasa (colleges designed for the teaching of the schools of Sunni law) was a cruciform, i.e., a square central court flanked by four halls (liwâns). The four liwâns were used by each of the four schools of law. Such peaceful cohabitation is indicative of a basic principle of toleration of diversity in the umma. Not only do the four schools now exist together relatively peacefully, but all four are considered equally valid. Though movement from one school to another is not encouraged, it can be done with no repercussions. This situation has frequently been used to illustrate a basic unity within Sunni law.

The Zâhiri school of law, the only school which took its name from a legal theory, was founded by Da’ud ibn Kalaf (d. A. H. 270). He was himself trained as a Shafi’ite, but found the school not to be traditional enough for him. He reacted strongly to what he saw, not as compromise between conflicting positions, but as almost hidden increase in the use of reasoning. He expounded the belief that law should be based only upon the literal and evident (zâhir) meaning of the texts of the Qur’an and the hadith.

The Zâhiri school rejected both the exercise of personal opinion (ra’y) and the use of analogical reasoning as contrary to religion. This school considered the consensus of the companions of the Prophet as the only legally valid form of consensus. They rejected any form of living tradition, or any decision based on those of earlier jurists. The Zâhiri school never ranked as an orthodox school of Sunni law, though it existed for centuries as a minority voice.
A superficial glance at the major schools of law would leave the impression that the subject of revelation vs reason in Islamic law is neat and tidy. The Hanafis and the Mālikis take the reason side; the Hanbalis and the Zāhiris take the revelation side; and the Shāfi‘ī is take a middle position of compromise between the other two positions. But that would indeed be a superficial reading of what in reality was a very complex situation, and only considers the four to five major schools of law out of many existing and overlapping groups of thinkers.

THE MU‘TAZILITE AND ASH‘ARITE SCHOOLS OF LAW IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

G.F. Hourani looks at two additional groups, and finds their two theories opposed to each other in a debate about the nature of values, one of the most important debates “in Islamic intellectual circles in the early Abbasid period.”

One [of these theories simplified a little] was that of the Mu‘tazilah, that values such as justice and goodness have a real existence, independent of anyone’s will, even God’s . . . . The other theory was that of Ash‘āri and his like, that all values are determined by the will of God, who decides what shall be just and so forth . . . . Following a struggle between the two doctrines, that of Ash‘āri finally prevailed in most learned circles of medieval Sunnite Islam, a result which had far-reaching consequences in law and other spheres of Islamic civilization.

Hourani’s description of Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite schools as opposed theories may be true in terms of particulars of belief, but it is not necessarily true in comparison of their methods of argument. Both groups rely on extensive use of reason in their presentations.

The Mu‘tazilite school has been called the first systematic school of theology in Islam. It was founded by two men, Wāsīl ibn ‘Ata (d. 748 C.E.) and Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 761 C.E.). Wāsīl ibn ‘Ata was a student of Ḥasan al-Basri. He seceded from al-Basri circles and he and his followers were known as Mu‘tazilites from that time on. The Mu‘tazilah were proponents of rationalism, that is, they took stated principles from the Qur‘ān and deduced their logical consequences. They held that the values of human and di-

24. Id.
vine actions exist and are knowable by natural human reason without the aid of revelation. According to von Grunebaum:

Where to the Mu'tazilite the identity of reason is the principle tying together the realm of God and the world of man; to the orthodox, divine and human reason are not necessarily of the same order and what safeguards the interaction of God and man is the Command with human reason confined to explication and application.25

Put in other words by Hourani:

The Mu'tazilite theory of ethical knowledge claimed (a) that any rational person can know some judgments of good and evil as true necessarily ('ala d-darūra) or “immediately”, by intellectual intuition: e.g., “irreligion (kufr) is evil”; and (b) that other true judgments can be inferred from these primary ones through rational study (bi n-nazar al-'aql).26

This debate was important for Islamic jurists in determining which sources for legal decision making were legitimate. If specific actions are right or wrong for man in themselves, and knowable to man through natural reason, then sources for legal decision making such as Arab custom, Byzantine and Sassanid law, and precedents of earlier jurists are legitimate in that they illustrate the known value of a given act. If specific actions are right or wrong for man only because they are commands or prohibitions of God, then the only legitimate sources for legal decision making are the Qur'an and hadith, the only sources of the revelation of God's will.

R. M. Frank puts it quite succinctly:

In order to maintain the integrity of man's autonomy as a moral agent, the Mu'tazila assume that he is endowed with a native capacity to discover and know what is good and what is evil in the realm of human activity.27

The Mu'tazilite school was also known for its emphasis on the unity of God (the only point in its philosophy which was shared by orthodox Sunni Islam). It soundly rejected polytheism and the Christian Trinity. A major point of conflict with orthodox Sunni Islam was its position on the createdness of the Qur'an.

27. R. M. Frank, Several Fundamental Assumptions of the Basra School of the Mu’tazila, 33 Studia Islamica 5, 7 (1971).
The Muʿtazila upheld the createdness of God’s Word (Qurʾan) as opposed to the orthodox view that God’s speech was to be considered eternal, having no beginning and continuing without interruption. Consequently, [for the orthodox] his revelation did not originate in time, owing to a specific act of creation, but has been in existence from all eternity.28

The history of the Muʿtazila is by no means one of peaceful cohabitation with the orthodox. There were periods of persecution and counter-persecution, depending primarily on who was in the favor of the rulers at any given time. It did manage to survive for centuries in intellectual circles and most scholars agree that its final downfall was a result of conflict on the createdness of the Qurʾan. Sources of Muʿtazilite philosophy, which seems so far removed from the orthodox, have been carefully analyzed, and most scholars agree that sources include both Christian and Greek philosophical thinkers. Grunebaum credits the Muʿtazilah with forcing a measure of the Greek approach into orthodox thought.

Al-Ash’ari was born in Basra and studied under Jubba I (d. 915 C.E.), the foremost Muʿtazilite theologian of the Basra school. The doctrine of Ash’ari has been called thoroughly traditionalist by many. Schacht says:

Ash’ari first of all followed the doctrine of the Muʿtazila, then he became converted to traditionalism, but continued to use the speculative method of the Muʿtazila to defend traditionalist doctrine; in this way he arrived at an intermediate position, and this position was maintained by his school.29

In spite of the similarities in Muʿtazila and Ash’ari as described by Schacht, there were many differences between the schools. George Makdisi raises some serious questions about Ash’ari’s work and his position as a rationalist. He questions Ash’arite propagandists’ presentation of Ash’ari as a traditionalist who uses kalam (dialectics), basing his argument on the questionable authenticity of Istihsan al-khaud as a work by Ash’ari:

For between reason and kalam there was a difference. It was all the difference between Muslim traditionalism and Muslim rationalism. The traditionalists made use of reason in order to understand what they considered as the legitimate sources of theology: scripture and tradition. What they could not under-

stand they left as it stood in the sources; they did not make use of reason to interpret the sources metaphorically. On the other hand, the rationalists advocated the use of reason on scripture and tradition; and all that they deemed to contradict the dictates of reason they interpreted metaphorically in order to bring it into harmony with reason.  

In spite of this controversy, it is accepted by most scholars that Ash'ari was a traditionalist who used reason in defense of orthodoxy. The ways in which the Ash'arite school was clearly different from the Mu'tazila include: the Ash'arites' belief that the Qur'an is uncreated; their adoption of the Hanbalite manner of dealing with the anthropomorphic qualities of God (they exist, but man cannot know in what sense); a more literal interpretation of the Qur'an; their doctrine of predestination; and their belief that God "creates" the acts of people, rather than the Mu'tazilite idea that people create their own acts.

The Ash'arites faced many struggles in finding acceptance within Sunni Islam, both in their early formative period and again in the eleventh century (C.E.).

The great struggle which began in the 11th century was not between Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites, nor even between Ash'arites and Hanbalites; it was a struggle of rationalist Ash'arism against the overwhelming traditionalist forces of all Sunnite schools of law.  

What emerges from this brief look at the historical dynamics in the issue of revelation vs reason in Islamic legal arbitrament is a clear motivation for modern western study of historic Islamic ideology. Many of the struggles currently going on in Islamic countries reflect historic tensions in the Islamic Community. Malaysia and Pakistan are but the most obvious examples of ongoing conflict between the modernist reformed approach and the classical tradition in Islamic law. As M. Jamil Hanifi says:

According to the classical tradition, law is imposed from above and postulates the eternally valid standards to which the structure of state and society must conform. In the modernist or reformed approach, law is shaped by society; its function is to answer constantly arising social problems. . . . The clash, therefore, between the allegedly rigid dictates of the traditional law

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and the demands of modern society poses for Islam a fundamental problem of principle. If the law is to retain its form as the expression of the divine command, if indeed it is to remain Islamic law, reforms cannot be justified on the ground of cultural necessity per se; they must find their juristic basis and support in principles which are Islamic in the sense that they are endorsed, expressed or implied, by the divine will. . . . Here it is, then, that the connection between modern legal activities and the results of the researches of Western orientalists becomes readily apparent. . . . Modernism is a movement towards an historical interpretation of the divine revelation.32

Human reason has been a part of Islamic decision making in law since the beginning. It was used by Mohammed, and was used in the development of those sources which he accepted and applied in practice. Human reason was also used in legal decision-making by the early Islamic community as it struggled to maintain itself upon the death of the Prophet. It has been a vital thread throughout Islamic history in the application of law, but not without considerable debate and conflict. The debate continues today as the Islamic community now struggles with issues of modernism.

The question, "who has arbitrament," is not as easily answered now, as it was during the life of the Prophet Mohammed. While it may be possible for all Muslims today to answer, "God has arbitrament," it by no means is unanimous that man does also. The dynamic tension which has existed throughout Islamic history between various answers to this question continues today, and will very likely continue into the future.

The Qur'an and Hadith as source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Viewed from the point of view of the Western intellectual tradition, Islamic philosophy appears as simply Graeco-Alexandrian philosophy in Arabic dress, a philosophy whose sole role was to transmit certain important elements of the heritage of antiquity to the medieval West. If seen, however, from its own perspective and in the light of the whole of the Islamic philosophical tradition which has had a twelve-century-long continuous history and is still alive today, it becomes abundantly clear that Islamic philosophy, like everything else Islamic, is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith. Islamic philosophy is Islamic not only by virtue of the fact that it was cultivated in the Islamic world and by Muslims but because it derives its principles, inspiration and many of the questions with which it has been concerned from the sources of Islamic revelation despite the claims of its opponents to the contrary.

All Islamic philosophers from al-Kindi to those of our own day such as 'Allamah Tabatabai have lived and breathed in a universe dominated by the reality of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam. Nearly all of them have lived according to Islamic Law or the Shari'ah and have prayed in the direction of Makkah every day of their adult life. The most famous among them, such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), were conscious in asserting their active attachment to Islam and reacted strongly to any attacks against their faith without their being simply fideists. Ibn Sina would go to a mosque and pray when confronted with a difficult Problem,' and Ibn Rushd was the chief qadi or judge of Cordova (Spanish Cordoba) which means that he was himself the embodiment of the authority of Islamic Law even if he were to be seen later by many in Europe as the arch-rationalist and the very symbol of the rebellion of reason against faith. The very presence of the Qur'an and the advent of its revelation was to transform radically the universe in which and about which Islamic philosophers were to philosophize, leading to a specific kind of philosophy which can be justly called "prophetic philosophy".

The very reality of the Qur'an, and the revelation which made it accessible to a human community, had to be central to the concerns of anyone who sought to philosophize in the Islamic world and led to a type of philosophy in which a revealed book is accepted as the supreme source of knowledge not only of religious law but of the very nature of existence and beyond existence of the very source of existence. The prophetic consciousness which is the recipient of revelation (al-wahy) had to remain of the utmost significance for those who sought to know the nature of things. How were the ordinary human means of knowing related to such an extraordinary manner of knowing? How was human reason related to that intellect which is illuminated by the light of revelation? To understand the pertinence of such issues, it is enough to cast even a cursory glance at the works of the Islamic philosophers who almost unanimously accepted revelation as a source of ultimate knowledge. Such questions as the hermeneutics of the Sacred Text and theories of the intellect which usually include the reality of prophetic consciousness remain, therefore, central to over a millennium of Islamic philosophical thought.
One might say that the reality of the Islamic revelation and participation in this reality transformed the very instrument of philosophizing in the Islamic world. The theoretical intellect (al-aql al-no arif) of the Islamic philosophers is no longer that of Aristotle although his very terminology is translated into Arabic. The theoretical intellect, which is the epistemological instrument of all philosophical activity, is Islamicized in a subtle way that is not always detectable through only the analysis of the technical vocabulary involved. The Islamicized understanding of the intellect, however, becomes evident when one reads the discussion of the meaning of aql or intellect in a major philosopher such as Mulla Sadra when he is commenting upon certain verses of the Qur'an containing this term or upon the section on aql from the collection of Shiite Hadith of al-Kulayni entitled Usul al-kafi. The subtle change that took place from the Greek idea of the "intellect" (noun) to the Islamic view of the intellect (al-aql) can also be seen much earlier in the works of even the Islamic Peripatetics such as Ibn Sina where the Active Intellect (al-aql al fa dl) is equated with the Holy Spirit (al-ruh al-qudus).

As is well known to students of the Islamic tradition, according to certain hadith and also the oral tradition which has been transmitted over the centuries, the Qur'an and all aspects of the Islamic tradition which are rooted in it have both an outward (dhir) and an inward (batin) dimension. Moreover, certain verses of the Qur'an themselves allude to the inner and symbolic significance of the revealed Book and its message. As for the Hadith, a body of this collection relates directly to the inner or esoteric dimension of the Islamic revelation and certain sayings of the Prophet refer directly to the esoteric levels of meaning of the Qur'an.

Islamic philosophy is related to both the external dimension of the Qur'anic revelation or the Shari'ah and the inner truth or Hagigah which is the heart of all that is Islamic. Many of the doctors of the Divine Law or Shariah have stood opposed to Islamic philosophy while others have accepted it. In fact some of the outstanding Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Rushd, Mir Damad and Shah Walullah of Delhi have also been authorities in the domain of the Sacred Law. The Shari'ah has, however, provided mostly the social and human conditions for the philosophical activity of the Islamic philosophers. It is to the Hagigah that one has to turn for the inspiration and source of knowledge for Islamic philosophy.

The very term al-hagigah is of the greatest significance for the understanding of the relation between Islamic philosophy and the sources of the Islamic revelation. Al-baqiqah means both truth and reality. It is related to God Himself, one of whose names is al-Haqq or the Truth, and is that whose discovery is the goal of all Islamic philosophy. At the same time al-baqiqah constitutes the inner reality of the Qur'an and can be reached through a hermeneutic penetration of the meaning of the Sacred Text. Throughout history, many an Islamic philosopher has identified faisafah or hikmah, the two main terms used with somewhat different meaning for Islamic philosophy, with the Hagigah lying at the heart of the Qur'an. Much of Islamic philosophy is in fact a hermeneutic unveiling of the two grand books of revelation, the Qur'an and the cosmos, and in the Islamic intellectual universe Islamic philosophy belongs, despite some differences, to the same family as that of ma'rifah or gnosis which issues directly from the inner teachings of Islam and which became crystallized in both Sufism and certain dimensions of Shi'ism. Without this affinity there would not have been a Suhrawardi or Mulla Sadra in Persia or an Ibn Sab'in in Andalusia.

Philosophers living as far apart as Nasir-i Khusraw (fifth/eleventh century) and Mulla Sadra (tenth/sixteenth century) have identified faisafah or hikmah explicitly with the Uagigah lying at the heart of the Qur'an whose comprehension implies the spiritual hermeneutics (ta wil) of the Sacred Text. The thirteenth/nineteenth-century Persian philosopher Jafar Kashifi goes even further and identifies the various methods for the interpretation of the Qur'an with the different schools of philosophy, correlating tafsir (the literal interpretation of the Qur'an) with the Peripatetic (mashshid,) school, to wil (its symbolic interpretation) with the stoic (riwagi), and taqsim (in-depth comprehension
of the Sacred Text) with the Illuminationist (ishraqs). For the main tradition of Islamic philosophy, especially as it developed in later centuries, philosophical activity was inseparable from interiorization of oneself and penetration into the inner meaning of the Qur'an and Hadith which those philosophers who were of a Shiite bent considered to be made possible through the power issuing from the cycle of initiation (da'irat al-walayah) that follows the closing of the cycle of prophecy (dd'irat al-nubuwwah) with the death of the Prophet of Islam.

The close nexus between the Qur'an and Hadith, on the other hand, and Islamic philosophy, on the other, is to be seen in the understanding of the history of philosophy. The Muslims identified Hermes, whose personality they elaborated into the "three Hermes", also well known to the West from Islamic sources, with Idris or Enoch, the ancient prophet who belongs to the chain of prophecy confirmed by the Qur'an and Hadith. And they considered Idris as the origin of philosophy, bestowing upon him the title of Abu'I-I;Iukama' (the father of philosophers). Like Philo and certain later Greek philosophers before them and also many Renaissance philosophers in Europe, Muslims considered prophecy to be the origin of philosophy, confirming in an Islamic form the dictum of Oriental Neoplatonism that "Plato was Moses in Attic Greek". The famous Arabic saying "philosophy issues from the niche of prophecy" (yanba`u'l-hikmah min mishkdt al-nubuwwah) has echoed through the annals of Islamic history and indicates clearly how Islamic philosophers themselves envisaged the relation between philosophy and revelation.

It must be remembered that al-Hakim (the Wise, from the same root as hikmah) is a Name of God and also one of the names of the Qur'an. More specifically many Islamic philosophers consider Chapter 31 of the Qur'an, entitled Lugman, after the Prophet known proverbially as a hakim, to have been revealed to exalt the value of hikmah, which Islamic philosophers identify with true philosophy.

This chapter begins with the symbolic letters alif, lam, mim followed immediately by the verse, "These are revelations of the wise scripture [al-kitab al-hakim]" (Pickthall translation), mentioning directly the term hakim. Then in verse 12 of the same chapter it is revealed, "And verily We gave Lugman wisdom [al-hikmah], saying: Give thanks unto Allah; and whosoever giveth thanks, he giveth thanks for [the good of] his soul. And whosoever refuseth --Lo! Allah is Absolute, Owner of Praise." Clearly in this verse the gift of hikmah is considered a blessing for which one should be grateful, and this truth is further confirmed by the famous verse, "He giveth wisdom [hikmah] unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good" (2: 269).

There are certain Hadith which point to God having offered prophecy and philosophy or hikmah, and Lugman chose hikmah which must not be confused simply with medicine or other branches of traditional hikmah but refers to pure philosophy itself dealing with God and the ultimate causes of things. These traditional authorities also point to such Qur'anic verses as "And He will teach him the Book [al-kitab] and Wisdom [al-hikmah]" (3: 48) and "Behold that which I have given you of the Book and Wisdom" (3: 81): there are several where kitab and hikmah are mentioned together. They believe that this conjunction confirms the fact that what God has revealed through revelation He had also made available through hikmah, which is reached through aql, itself a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic reality which is the instrument of revelation.

On the basis of this doctrine later Islamic philosophers such as Mulla Sadra developed an elaborate doctrine of the intellect in its relation to the prophetic intellect and the descent of the Divine Word, or the Qur'an, basing themselves to some extent on earlier theories going back to Ibn Sina and other Muslim Peripatetics. All of this indicates how closely traditional Islamic philosophy identified itself with revelation in general and the Qur'an in particular.

Islamic philosophers meditated upon the content of the Qur'an as a whole as well as on particular verses. It was the verses of a polysemic nature or those with "unclear outward meaning"
to which they paid special attention. Also certain well-known verses were cited or commented upon more often than others, such as the "Light Verse" (ayat al-nur) (24: 35) commented upon already by Ibn Sina in his Ishârât and also by many later figures. Mulla Sadra was in fact to devote one of the most important philosophical commentaries ever written upon the Qur'an, entitled Tafsîr ayat al-nur, to this verse. 10

Western studies of Islamic philosophy, which have usually regarded it as simply an extension of Greek philosophy, have for this very reason neglected for the most part the commentaries of Islamic philosophers upon the Quran, whereas philosophical commentaries occupy an important category along with the juridical, philological, theological (kalam) and Sufi commentaries. The first major Islamic philosopher to have written Qur'anic commentaries is Ibn Sina, many of whose commentaries have survived. 11 Later Suhrawardi was to comment upon diverse passages of the Sacred Text, as were a number of later philosophers such as Ibn Turkah al-Isfahani.

The most important philosophical commentaries upon the Qur'an were, however, written by Mulla Sadra, whose Asrar al-ayat and Mafatih alghayb 12 are among the most imposing edifices of the Islamic intellectual tradition, although hardly studied in the West until now. Mulla Sadra also devoted one of his major works to commenting upon the Usîl al-kafi of Kulyâni, one of the major Shi'ite texts of Hadîth containing the sayings of the Prophet as well as the Imams. These works taken together constitute the most imposing philosophical commentaries upon the Qur'an and Hadîth in Islamic history, but such works are far from having terminated with him. The most extensive Qur'anic commentary written during the past decades, al Mizdán, was from the pen of Allamah Tâbâbâi, who was the reviver of the teaching of Islamic philosophy in Qom in Persia after the Second World War and a leading Islamic philosopher of this century whose philosophical works are now gradually becoming known to the outside world.

Certain Qur'anic themes have dominated Islamic philosophy throughout its long history and especially during the later period when this philosophy becomes a veritable theosophy in the original and not deviant meaning of the term, theosophia corresponding exactly to the Arabic term al-bikmat al-ilbihiyah (or bikmat-i ilahi in Persian). The first and foremost is of course the unity of the Divine Principle and ultimately Reality as such or al-tawhid which lies at the heart of the Islamic message. The Islamic philosophers were all muwahhid or followers of tawhid and saw authentic philosophy in this light. They called Pythagoras and Plato, who had confirmed the unity of the Ultimate Principle, muwahhid while showing singular lack of interest in later forms of Greek and Roman philosophy which were sceptical or agnostic.

How Islamic philosophers interpreted the doctrine of Unity lies at the heart of Islamic philosophy. There continued to exist a tension between the Qur'anic description of Unity and what the Muslims had learned from Greek sources, a tension which was turned into a synthesis of the highest intellectual order by such later philosophers as Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. 14 But in all treatments of this subject from al-Kindi to Mulla Ali Zuruzi and Hajj Mulla Hadi Sabziwâr during the thirteenth/nineteenth century and even later, the Qur'anic doctrine of Unity, so central to Islam, has remained dominant and in a sense has determined the agenda of the Islamic philosophers.

Complementing the Qur'anic doctrine of Unity is the explicit assertion in the Qur'an that Allah bestows being and it is this act which instantiates all that exists, as one finds for example in the verse, "But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that he saith unto it: Be! and it is (kun fa-yakun)" (36:81). The concern of Islamic philosophers with ontology is directly related to the Qur'anic doctrine, as is the very terminology of Islamic philosophy in this domain where it understands by wujûd more the verb or act of existence (esto) than the noun or state of existence (esse). If Ibn Sina has been called first and foremost a "philosopher of being", 15 and he developed the
ontology which came to dominate much of medieval philosophy, this is not because he was simply thinking of Aristotelian theses in Arabic and Persian, but because of the Qur'anic doctrine of the One in relation to the act of existence. It was as a result of meditation upon the Qur'an in conjunction with Greek thought that Islamic philosophers developed the doctrine of Pure Being which stands above the chain of being and is discontinuous with it, while certain other philosophers such as a number of Isma'ilis considered God to be beyond Being and identified His act or the Qur'anic \textit{kun} with Being, which is then considered as the principle of the universe.

It is also the Qur'anic doctrine of the creating God and \textit{creatio ex nihilo}, with all the different levels of meaning which \textit{nibilo} possesses,"' that led Islamic philosophers to distinguish sharply between God as Pure Being and the existence of the universe, destroying that "block without fissure" which constituted Aristotelian ontology. In Islam the universe is always contingent (mumkin al-wujud) while God is necessary (wajib al-wujud), to use the well-known distinction of Ibn Sina. No Islamic philosopher has ever posited an existential continuity between the existence of creatures and the Being of God, and this radical revolution in the understanding of Aristotelian ontology has its source in the Islamic doctrine of God and creation as asserted in the Qur'an and \textit{Hadith}. Moreover, this influence is paramount not only in the case of those who asserted the doctrine of \textit{creatio ex nihilo} in its ordinary theological sense, but also for those such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina who were in favour of the theory of emanation but who none the less never negated the fundamental distinction between the \textit{wujud} (existence) of the world and that of God.

As for the whole question of "newness" or "eternity" of the world, or \textit{buduth} and \textit{qidam}, which has occupied Islamic thinkers for the past twelve centuries and which is related to the question of the contingency of the world vis-à-vis the Divine Principle, it is inconceivable without the teachings of the Qur'an and \textit{Hadith}. It is of course a fact that before the rise of Islam Christian theologians and philosophers such as John Philoponus had written on this issue and that Muslims had known some of these writings, especially the treatise of Philoponus against the thesis of the eternity of the world. But had it not been for the Qur'anic teachings concerning creation, such Christian writings would have played an altogether different role in Islamic thought. Muslims were interested in the arguments of a Philoponus precisely because of their own concern with the question of \textit{buduth} and \textit{qidam}, created by the tension between the teachings of the Qur'an and the \textit{Hadith}, on the one hand, and the Greek notion of the non-temporal relation between the world and its Divine Origin, on the other.

Another issue of great concern to Islamic philosophers from al-Kindi to Mulla Sadra, and those who followed him, is God's knowledge of the world. The major Islamic philosophers, such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Ibn Rushd and Mulla Sadra, have presented different views on the subject while, as with the question of \textit{buduth} and \textit{qidam}, they have been constantly criticized and attacked by the \textit{mutakallimun}, especially over the question of God's knowledge of particulars. Now, such an issue entered Islamic philosophy directly from the Qur'anic emphasis upon Divine Omniscience that placed the issue of God's knowledge of the world at the centre of the concern of Islamic philosophers and caused Islamic philosophy, like its Jewish and Christian counterparts, to develop extensive philosophical theories totally absent from the philosophical perspective of Graeco-Alexandrian antiquity. In this context the Islamic doctrine of "divine science" (\textit{al-ilm al-laduni}) is of central significance for both \textit{falsafab} and theoretical Sufism or \textit{alma'rugfab}.  

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This issue is also closely allied to the philosophical significance of revelation (al-wahy) itself. Earlier Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina sought to develop a theory by drawing to some extent, but not exclusively, on Greek theories of the intellect and the faculties of the soul. Later Islamic philosophers continued their concern for this issue and sought to explain in a philosophical manner the possibility of the descent of the truth and access to the truth by knowledge based on certitude but derived from sources other than the senses, reason and even the inner intellect. They, however, pointed to the correspondence between the inner intellect and that objective manifestation of the Universal Intellect or Logos which is revelation. While still using certain concepts of Greek origin, the later Islamic philosophers such as Mulla Sadra drew heavily from the Qur'an and Hadith on this issue.

Turning to the field of cosmology, again one can detect the constant presence of Qur'anic themes and certain Hadith. It is enough to meditate upon the commentaries made upon the "Light Verse" and "Throne Verse" and the use of such explicitly Qur'anic symbols and images as the Throne (al-arch), the Pedestal (al-kursi), the light of the heavens and earth (nur al-samdwat wa'l-ard), the niche (misbkat) and so many other Qur'anic terms to realize the significance of the Qur'an and Hadith in the formulation of cosmology as dealt with in the Islamic philosophical tradition. Nor must one forget the cosmological significance of the nocturnal ascent of the Prophet (al-mi'raj) which so many Islamic philosophers have treated directly, starting with Ibn Sina. This central episode in the life of the Prophet, with its numerous levels of meaning, was not only of great interest to the Sufis but also drew the attention of numerous philosophers to its description as contained in certain verses of the Qur'an and Hadith. Some philosophers also turned their attention to other episodes with a cosmological significance in the life of the Prophet such as the "cleaving of the moon" (shaggiq al-qamar) about which the ninth/fifteenth-century Persian philosopher Ibn Turkah Isfahani wrote a separate treatise.

In no branch of Islamic philosophy, however, is the influence of the Qur'an and Hadith more evident than in eschatology, the very understanding of which in the Abrahamic universe was alien to the philosophical world of antiquity. Such concepts as divine intervention to mark the end of history, bodily resurrection, the various eschatological events, the Final Judgment, and the posthumous states as understood by Islam or for that matter Christianity were alien to ancient philosophy whereas they are described explicitly in the Qur'an and Hadith as well as of course in the Bible and other Jewish and Christian religious sources.

The Islamic philosophers were fully aware of these crucial ideas in their philosophizing, but the earlier ones were unable to provide philosophical proofs for Islamic doctrines which many confessed to accept on the basis of faith but could not demonstrate within the context of Peripatetic philosophy. We see such a situation in the case of Ibn Sina who in several works, including the Shifa, confesses that he cannot prove bodily resurrection but accepts it on faith. This question was in fact one of the three main points, along with the acceptance of qidam and the inability of the philosophers to demonstrate God's knowledge of particulars, for which al-Ghazzali took Ibn Sina to task and accused him of kuft or infidelity. It remained for Mulla Sadra several centuries later to demonstrate the reality of bodily resurrection through the principles of the "transcendent theosophy" (al-hikmat al-muta'diyah) and to take both Ibn Sina and al-Ghazzali to task for the inadequacy of their treatment of the subject. The most extensive philosophical treatment of eschatology (al-ma'ad) in all its dimensions is in fact to be found in the Asfdr of Mulla Sadra.

It is sufficient to examine this work or his other treatises on the subject such as his al-Mabda' wa l ma'ad or al-Hikmat al arshiyah to realize the complete reliance of the author upon the Qur'an and Hadith. His development of the philosophical meaning of ma'ad is in reality basically a hermeneutics of Islamic religious sources, primary among them the Qur'an and Hadith. Nor is this fact true only of Mulla Sadra. One can see the same relation between philosophy and the Islamic
revelation in the writings of Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashini, Shah Waliullah of Delhi, Mulla Abd Allah Zunuzi, Hajji Mulla Hath Sabziwari and many later Islamic philosophers writing on various aspects of \( \text{al-ma`ad} \). Again, although as far as the question of eschatology is concerned, the reliance on the Qur'an and \text{Hadith} is greater during the later period, as is to be seen already in Ibn Sina who dealt with it in both his encyclopedic works and in individual treatises dealing directly with the subject, such as his own \text{al-Mahda' wa'l-ma`ad}. It is noteworthy in this context that he entitled one of his most famous treatises on eschatology \text{al-Risalat al-adhawiyyah}, drawing from the Islamic religious term for the Day of Judgment.

In meditating upon the history of Islamic philosophy in its relation to the Islamic revelation, one detects a movement toward ever closer association of philosophy with the Qur'an and \text{Hadith}. Ibn Sina, although drawing so many themes from Qur'anic sources, hardly ever quoted the Qur'an directly in their philosophical works. By the time we come to Suhrawardi in the sixth/twelfth century, there are present within his purely philosophical works citations of the Qur'an and \text{Hadith}. Four centuries later the Safavid philosophers wrote philosophical works in the form of commentaries on the text of the Qur'an or on certain of the \text{Hadith}. This trend continued in later centuries not only in Persia but also in India and the Ottoman world including Iraq.

As far as Persia is concerned, as philosophy became integrated into the Shi`ite intellectual world from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, the sayings of the Shi`ite Imams began to play an ever greater role, complementing the Prophetic \text{Hadith}. This is especially true of the sayings of Imams Muhammad al-Ba`ir, Jafar al-Sadiq and Musa al-Kazim, whose sayings are at the origin of many of the issues discussed by later Islamic philosophers. It is sufficient to study the monumental but uncompleted \text{Sharh Usfd alkafi} of Mulla Sadra to realize the philosophical fecundity of many of the sayings of the Imams and their role in later philosophical meditation and deliberation.

The Qur'an and \text{Hadith}, along with the sayings of the Imams, which are in a sense the extension of \text{Hadith} in the Shi`ite world, have provided over the centuries the framework and matrix for Islamic philosophy and created the intellectual and social climate within which Islamic philosophers have philosophized. Moreover, they have presented a knowledge of the origin, the nature of things, humanity and its final ends and history upon which the Islamic philosophers have meditated and from which they have drawn over the ages. They have also provided a language of discourse which Islamic philosophers have shared with the rest of the Islamic community. Without the Qur'anic revelation, there would of course have been no Islamic civilization, but it is important to realize that there would also have been no Islamic philosophy. Philosophical activity in the Islamic world is not simply a regurgitation of GraecoAlexandrian philosophy in Arabic, as claimed by many Western scholars along with some of their Islamic followers, a philosophy which grew despite the presence of the Qur'an and \text{Hadith}. On the contrary, Islamic philosophy is what it is precisely because it flowered in a universe whose contours are determined by the Qur'anic revelation.

As asserted at the beginning of this chapter, Islamic philosophy is essentially "prophetic philosophy" based on the hermeneutics of a Sacred Text which is the result of a revelation that is inalienably linked to the microcosmic intellect and which alone is able to actualize the dormant possibilities of the intellect within us. Islamic philosophy, as understood from within that tradition, is also an unveiling of the inner meaning of the Sacred Text, a means of access to that \text{Hagigah} which lies hidden within the inner dimension of the Qur'an. Islamic philosophy deals with the One or Pure Being, and universal existence and all the grades of the universal hierarchy. It deals with man and his entelechy, with the cosmos and the final return of all things to God. This interpretation of existence is none other than
penetration into the inner meaning of the Qur'an which "is" existence itself, the Book whose meditation provides the key for the understanding of those objective and subjective orders of existence with which the Islamic philosopher has been concerned over the ages.

A deeper study of Islamic philosophy over its twelve-hundred-year history will reveal the role of the Qur'an and Hadith in the formulation, exposition and problematics of this major philosophical tradition. In the same way that all of the Islamic philosophers from al-Kindi onwards knew the Qur'an and Hadith and lived with them, Islamic philosophy has manifested over the centuries its inner link with the revealed sources of Islam, a link which has become even more manifest as the centuries have unfolded, for Islamic philosophy is essentially a philosophical hermeneutics of the Sacred Text while making use of the rich philosophical heritage of antiquity. That is why, far from being a transitory and foreign phase in the history of Islamic thought, Islamic philosophy has remained over the centuries and to this day one of the major intellectual perspectives in Islamic civilization with its roots sunk deeply, like everything else Islamic, in the Qur'an and Hadith.

NOTES

1 Within the Islamic world itself scholars of kalam and certain others who have opposed Islamic philosophy over the ages have claimed that it was merely Greek philosophy to which they opposed philosophy or wisdom derived from faith (al-bikmat al-ayunanyyah versus al-bikmat al-indiiyyah). Some contemporary Muslim scholars, writing in English, oppose Muslim to Islamic, considering Muslim to mean whatever is practised or created by Muslims and Islamic that which is derived directly from the Islamic revelation. Many such scholars, who hail mostly from Pakistan and India, insist on calling Islamic philosophy Muslim philosophy, as can be seen in the title of the well-known work edited by M. M. Sharif, A History of Muslim Philosophy. If one looks more deeply into the nature of Islamic philosophy from the traditional Islamic point of view and takes into consideration its whole history, however, one will see that this philosophy is at once Muslim and Islamic according to the above-given definitions of these terms.

2 When accused on a certain occasion of infidelity, Ibn Sina responded in a famous Persian quatrain: "It is not so easy and trifling to call me a heretic; 1 No faith in religion is firmer than mine. / I am a unique person in the whole world and if I am a heretic; I Then there is not a single Muslim anywhere in the world." Trans. by S. H. Barani in his "Ibn Sina and Alberuni", in Avicenna Commemoration Volume (Calcutta, 1956): 8 (with certain modifications by S. H. Nasr).

3. This term was first used by H. Corbin and myself and appears in Corbin, with the collaboration of S. H. Nasr and H. Yahya, Histoire de la philosophie islamique (Paris, 1964).

4 We say "almost" because there are one or two figures such as Muhammad ibn Zakariyya' al-Razi who rejected the necessity of prophecy. Even in his case, however, there is a rejection of the necessity of revelation in order to gain ultimate knowledge and not the negation of the existence of revelation. See Corbin, op. cit.: 26ff.

5. The term riwag used by later Islamic philosophers must not, however, be confused with the Roman Stoics, although it means literally stoic (riwaq in Arabic coming from Pahlavi and meaning stoa). Corbin, op. cit.: 24.


9 See for example the introduction by one of the leading contemporary traditional philosophers of Persia, Abul-Hasan Sha'rani, to Sabziwari, Azrdr al-bikam (Tehran, 1960): 3.

10 Edited with introduction and Persian translation by M. Khwajawi (Tehran, 1983).

11 The writings of H. Corbin are a notable exception.


13 This monumental work has been edited in Arabic and also translated into Persian by M. Khwajawi who has printed all of Mulla Sadra's Qur'anic commentaries in recent years. It is interesting to note that the
Persian translation entitled *Tarjuma yi mafanj al-ghayb* (Tehran, 1979) includes a long study on the rise of philosophy and its various schools by Ayatullah Abidi Shahriri, who discusses the rapport between Islamic philosophy and the Qur’an in the context of traditional Islamic thought.

14 See I. Netton, *Allah Transcendent* (London, 1989), which deals with this tension but mixes his account with certain categories of modern European philosophy not suitable for the subject.


17 This has been treated more amply in Chapter 16 below on Ibn Sina. See also Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany, 1993), chapter 12.


19 The criticisms by al-Ghazzali and Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi of this issue, as that of *huduth* and *qidam*, are well known and are treated below. Less is known, however, of the criticism of other theologians who kept criticizing the philosophers for their denial of the possibility of God knowing particulars rather than just universals.

20 See F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam, Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London, 1958), where some of these theories are described and analysed clearly, but with an over-emphasis on the Greek factor and downplaying of the role of the Islamic view of revelation itself.


24 The late Allamah Tabataba‘i, one of the leading traditional philosophers of contemporary Persia, once made a study of the number of philosophical problems dealt with by early and later Islamic philosophers. He once told us that, according to his study, there were over two hundred philosophical issues treated by the early Islamic philosophers and over six hundred by Mulla Sadra and his followers. Although he admitted that this approach was somewhat excessively quantitative, it was an indication of the extent of expansion of the fields of interest of Islamic philosophy, an expansion which he attributed almost completely to the influence of the metaphysical and philosophical utterances of the Shi‘ite Imams which became of ever greater concern to many Islamic philosophers, both Shi‘ite and Sunni, from the time of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi onwards.

25 The Qur’an and *Hadith* have also influenced directly and deeply the formation of the Islamic philosophical vocabulary in Arabic, an issue with which we have not been able to deal in this chapter.
Can the Islamic Intellectual Heritage be Recovered?

William C. Chittick

By "the Islamic intellectual heritage" I mean the ways of thinking about God, the world, and the human being established by the Qur’ān and the Prophet and elaborated upon by generations of practicing Muslims. I use the term "intellectual" to translate the word ‘aqlī, and by it I want to distinguish this heritage from another, closely related heritage that also has theoretical and intellectual dimensions. This second heritage is the "transmitted" (naqlī) heritage.

Transmitted knowledge is learned by "imitation" (taqlīd), that is, by following the authority of those who possess it. This sort of knowledge includes Qur’ān recitation, Hadith, Arabic grammar, and jurisprudence. It is impossible to be a Muslim without taqlīd, because one cannot discover the Qur’ān or the practices of the Shariah by oneself. Just as language is learned by imitation, so also the Qur’ān and Islamic practice are learned by imitating those who know them. Those who have assumed the responsibility of preserving this transmitted heritage are known as its "knowers," that is, its ulama.

In transmitted knowledge, it is not proper to ask "why." If one does ask why, the answer is that the Qur’ān says what it says, or that grammar determines the rules of proper speech. In contrast, the only way to learn intellectual knowledge is to understand it. One cannot learn it by accepting it on the basis of authority. Intellectual knowledge includes mathematics, logic, philosophy, and much of theology. In learning, "why" is the most basic and important of questions. If one does not understand why, then one will be following someone else's authority. It makes no sense to accept that $2 + 2 = 4$ on the basis of a report, no matter how trustworthy the source may be. Either you understand it, or you do not. The goal here is not taqlīd, but taṣqīq, which can be translated as "verification" or "realization."

In the transmitted sciences, people must follow mujtahids, whether the mujtahids be alive (as in Shi‘ism) or dead (as in Sunnism). In other words, one follows a mujtahid because the only way to learn the transmitted sciences is from those who already know them. But one cannot follow a mujtahid in matters of faith, because faith pertains to one’s own understanding of God, the prophets, the scriptures, and the Last Day. A Muslim cannot say, "I have faith in God because my mujtahid told me to have faith." Someone who said this would be saying that if the mujtahid told
him not to believe in God, he would not. In other words, he would be saying that his faith is empty words.

Although in theory we can distinguish between the transmitted and intellectual sciences, in practice the two have always been closely interrelated, and the transmitted sciences have been the foundation upon which the intellectual sciences are built. One cannot speak properly without grammar, and one cannot understand things Islamically without the Qur’ān and the Hadith. However, the fact that people may have an excellent knowledge of the transmitted sciences does not mean that they know anything at all about the intellectual sciences. Nor does the ability to recite the opinions of the great Muslims on matters of faith prove that the reciter has any understanding of what he is saying.

Both the transmitted and the intellectual sciences are essential to the survival of any religion—not only Islam—and both are gradually being lost. By and large, however, the transmitted sciences have been preserved better than the intellectual sciences, and the reason is obvious. Anyone can learn Qur’ān and Hadith, but very few people can truly understand what God and the Prophet are talking about. One can only understand in one’s own measure. One cannot understand mathematics (or any of the other intellectual sciences) without both native ability and training. One may have a great aptitude for mathematics, but without long years of study, one will never get very far. And mathematics deals with issues that are relatively near at hand, even in the most sophisticated of its modern forms. What about theology, which deals with the deepest issues of reality, the furthest from our everyday experience?

It is important to stress that no religion can survive, much less flourish, without a living intellectual tradition. In order to verify this—because this statement should not be accepted on the basis of taqīd—we can ask the questions, What was the intellectual tradition for? What function did it play in Islamic society? What was its goal? To ask these questions is the same as asking, "Why should Muslims think?" The basic answer is that Muslims should think because they must think, because they are thinking beings. They have no choice but to think, because God gave them minds and intelligence when He created them. Not only that, but God has commanded them to think and to employ their intelligence in numerous Qur’ānic verses.

No doubt, this does not mean that God requires all Muslims to enter into the sophisticated sort of study and reflection that went on in the intellectual tradition, because it is obvious that not everyone has the proper sort of talents, capacities,
and circumstances to do so. Nevertheless, all Muslims have the moral and religious obligated to use their minds correctly—if they have minds. As the Qurʾān puts it, \textit{lā yukallifu Allāhu nafsan illā wusʾahā}, "God does not burden any soul save to its capacity." When people's capacity includes thinking, God has given them the burden of thinking correctly. But He does not tell them what to think, because then He would be making taqlīd incumbent in intellectual matters. If many of the Ulama have forbidden taqlīd in matters of usūl, it is because God Himself forbids it. He has given people minds, and they cannot use their minds correctly if they simply accept dogma or opinions on the basis of authority. To think properly a person must actually think, which is to say that conclusions must be reached through one's own intellectual struggle, not someone else's. Any teacher of an intellectual science—like mathematics or philosophy—knows this perfectly well.

It is true that many if not most people are unreflective and would never even ask why they should think about things. They simply go about their daily routine and imagine that they understand their own situation. In any case, they suppose, God wants nothing more from them than observing the Shariah. But this is no argument for those who have the ability to stop and think. Anyone who has the capacity and talent to reflect upon God, the universe, and the human soul must do so. Not to do so is to betray one's God-given nature and to disobey God's commandments.

Since some Muslims have no choice but to think, learning how to think correctly must be an important area of Muslim effort. But what defines "correct" thinking? How do we tell the difference between right thinking and wrong thinking? Does the fact that people have no choice but to think mean that they are free to think anything they want? The Islamic answer to this sort of question has always been that the way people think is far from indifferent. Some modes of thinking are encouraged by the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, some are discouraged. Islamically, it is incumbent upon those who think to employ their minds in ways that coincide with the goals of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah. In other words, the goal of the Islamic intellectual tradition must coincide with the goal of Islam, or else it is not Islamic intellectuality.

So, what is the goal of Islam? In general terms, Islam's goal is to bring people back to God. However, everyone is going back to God in any case, so the issue is not going back, but how one goes back. Through the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, God guides people back to Him in a manner that will ensure their everlasting happiness. If they want to follow a "straight path" (ṣirāṭ mustaqīm), one that will lead to happiness and not to misery, they need to employ their minds, awareness, and thinking in ways that are harmonious with God Himself, who is the only true
Reality. If they follow illusion and unreality, they will be following a crooked path and most likely will not end up in a pleasant place when they go back.

The history of Islamic intellectuality is embodied in the various forms that Muslims have adopted over time in attempting to think rightly and correctly. The intellectual tradition was robust and lively, so disagreements were common. Nevertheless, in all the different schools of thought that have appeared over Islamic history, one principle has been agreed upon by everyone. This principle is the fact that God is one and that He is the only source of truth and reality. He is the origin of all things, and all things return to Him. This principle, as everyone knows, is called *tawīl*, "asserting the unity of God." To think Islamistly is to recognize God’s unity and to draw the proper consequences from His unity. Differences of opinion arise concerning the proper consequences, not in the fact that God is one.

The consequences that people draw from *tawīl* depend largely on their understanding of "God." Typically, Muslims have sought to understand God by meditating upon the implications of God’s names and attributes as expressed in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah. The conclusions reached in these meditations have everything to do with how God is understood. If He is understood primarily as a Lawgiver, people will draw conclusions having to do with the proper observance of the *Sharī‘ah*. If He is understood primarily as wrathful, they will conclude that they must avoid His wrath. If He is understood primarily as merciful, they will think that they must seek out His mercy. If He is understood primarily as beautiful, they will know that they must love Him. God, of course, has "ninety-nine names"—at least—and every name throws different light on what exactly God is, what exactly He is not, and how exactly people should understand Him and relate to Him. Naturally, thoughtful Muslims have always understood God in many ways, and they have drawn diverse conclusions on the basis of each way of understanding. This diversity of understanding in the midst of *tawīl* is prefigured in the Prophet’s prayer, "O God, I seek refuge in Your mercy from Your wrath, I seek refuge in Your good pleasure from Your displeasure, I seek refuge in You from You."

**Obstacles to Recovery**

My title indicates that I think the Islamic intellectual heritage has largely been lost in modern times. This is a vast topic, and I cannot begin to offer proofs for my assertion, but I think it is obvious to most Muslims who have some awareness of their own history. What I can do here is to offer a few suggestions as to the
obstacles that stand in the way of recovery. For present purposes, I want to deal with two basic sorts of obstacles, though there are other sorts as well. First are intellectual forces that originally came from outside. They are intimately connected with the types of thinking that grew up in Western Europe and America and have come to dominate in the modern world. However, they have long since become an internal problem, because most Muslims have either actively and eagerly adopted them as their own, or they been molded by them without being aware of the fact. Given that these intellectual forces have now been internalized, they have given rise to a second group of obstacles, which are modern attitudes and social forces within the Islamic community that prevent recovery.

In suggesting the nature of the first category of obstacles, we can begin with a basic question: Is it possible nowadays to think Islamically? Or, Is it possible to be a "Muslim intellectual" in the modern world? By this, I do not mean an intellectual who is by religious affiliation a follower of Islam, but rather an individual who thinks Islamically about the three basic dimensions of Islam—practice, faith, and sincerity—while living in the midst of modernity.

I have no doubt that there are tens of thousands of Muslim intellectuals in the ordinary sense of the word—that is, Muslim writers, professors, doctors, lawyers, and scientists who are concerned with intellectual issues. But I have serious doubts as to whether any more than a tiny fraction of such people are "Muslim intellectuals" in the sense in which I mean the term. Yes, there are many thoughtful and intellectually sophisticated people who were born as followers of Islam and who may indeed practice it carefully. But do they think Islamically? Is it possible to be both a scientist in the modern sense and a Muslim who understands the universe and the human soul as the Qurʾān and the Sunnah explain them? Is it possible to be a sociologist and at the same time to think in terms of tawṣīd?

It appears to me, as an outside observer, that the thinking of most Muslim intellectuals is not determined by Islamic principles and Islamic understanding, but by habits of mind learned unconsciously in grammar school and high school and then confirmed and solidified by university training. Such people may act like Muslims, but they think like doctors, engineers, sociologists, and political scientists.

It is naive to imagine that one can learn how to think Islamically simply by attending lectures once a week or by reading a few books written by contemporary Muslim leaders, or by studying the Qurʾān, or by saying one’s prayers and having "firm faith." In the traditional Islamic world, the great thinkers and intellectuals
spent their whole lives searching for knowledge and deepening their understanding. The Islamic intellectual heritage is extraordinarily rich. Hundreds of thousands of books were written, and in modern times the majority of even the important books are not available, because they have never been printed. Those that have been printed are rarely read by Muslim intellectuals, and those few that have been translated from Arabic and Persian into English and other modern languages have, by and large, been badly translated, so little guidance will be found in the translations.

I do not mean to suggest that it would be necessary to read all the great books of the intellectual tradition in their original languages in order to think Islamically. If modern-day Muslims could read one of these important books, even in translation, and understand it, their thinking would be deeply effected. However, the only way to understand such books is to prepare oneself for understanding, and that demands dedication, study, and training. This cannot be done on the basis of a modern university education, unless, perhaps, one has devoted it to the Islamic tradition (I say "perhaps" because many Muslims and non-Muslims with Ph-D in Islamic Studies cannot read and understand the great books of the intellectual heritage).

Given that modern schooling is rooted in topics and modes of thought that are not harmonious with traditional Islamic learning, it is profoundly difficult today for any thinking and practicing Muslim to harmonize the domain of intellectuality with the domain of faith and practice. One cannot study for many years and then be untouched by what one has studied. There is no escape from picking up mental habits from the types of thinking that one devotes one’s life to. It is most likely, and almost, but not quite inevitable, for modern intellectuals with religious faith to have compartmentalized minds — I will not go so far as to say "split personalities," but that is common enough. One compartment of the mind will encompass the professional, intellectual domain, and the other the domain of personal piety and practice. Although individuals may rationalize the relationship between the two domains, they necessarily do so in terms of the world view that is determined by the rational side of the mind, which is the professional, modern side. The world view established by the Qur’ān and passed down by generations of Muslims will be closed to such people, and hence they will draw their rational categories and their ways of thinking from their professional training and the ever-shifting Zeitgeist that is embodied in contemporary intellectual trends and popularized through television and other forms of mass indoctrination.

Many Muslim scientists tell us that modern science helps them see the wonders of God’s creation, and this is certainly an argument for preferring the natural sciences
over the social sciences. But is it necessary to study physics or bio–chemistry to see the signs of God in all His creatures? The Qurʾān keeps on telling Muslims, "Will you not reflect, will you not ponder, will you not think?" About what? About the "signs" (āyāt) of God, which are found, as over two hundred Qurʾānic verses remind us, in everything. In short, one does not need to be a great scientist, or any scientist at all, to understand that the world tells us about the majesty of its Creator. Any fool knows this. This is what the Prophet called the "religion of old women" (dīn al-ʿajāʾīz), and no one needs any intellectual training to understand it. It is simply necessary to look at the world, and it becomes obvious to "those with minds" (ulu ʿl-albāb).

It is true that a basic understanding of the signs of God may provide sufficient knowledge for salvation. After all, the Prophet said, *aktharu ahl al-jannati bulhun*, "Most of the people of paradise are fools." However, the foolishness that leads to paradise demands foolishness concerning the affairs of this world, and that is very difficult to come by nowadays. It is certainly not found among Muslim intellectuals. They are already far too clever, and this explains why they are such good doctors and engineers. In other words, they have already employed and developed their minds, so they have no choice but to be intellectuals. Inescapably, their intelligence has been shaped and formed by their education, their disciplines, and the media.

**The Gods of Modernity**

The information and habits of mind that are imparted by modernity are not congruent with Islamic learning. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate this concisely is to reflect on the characteristics of modernity—by which I mean the thinking and norms of the "global culture" in which we live today. It should be obvious that whatever characterizes modernity, it is not *tawṣīd*, the first principle of Islamic thinking. Rather, it is fair to say that modernity is characterized by the opposite of *tawṣīd*. One could call this *shirk* or "associating others with God." But for most Muslims, the word *shirk* is too emotionally charged to be of much help in the discussion. Moreover, they have lost touch with what it really means, because they are unacquainted with the Islamic intellectual tradition, where *tawṣīd* and *shirk* are analyzed and explained. So let me call the characteristic trait of modernity "*takthīr,"* which is the literal opposite of *tawṣīd*. *Tawṣīd* means to make things one, and, in the religious context, it means "asserting that God is one." *Takthīr* mean to make things many, and in this context I understand it to mean "asserting that the gods are many."
Modern times and modern thought lack a single center, a single orientation, a single goal, any single purpose at all. Modernity has no common principle or guideline. In other words, there is no single "god"—since a god is what gives meaning and orientation to life. A god is what you serve. The modern world serves many, many gods. Through an ever-intensifying process of takthīr, the gods have been multiplied beyond count, and people worship whatever god appeals to them, usually several at once.

The truth of my assertion becomes obvious if we compare the intellectual history of the West and Islamic civilization. Up until recent times, Islamic thought was characterized by a tendency toward unity, harmony, integration, and synthesis. The great Muslim thinkers were masters of many disciplines, but they looked upon all of them as branches of a single tree, the tree of tawāṣīd. There was never any contradiction between studying astronomy and zoology, or physics and ethics, or mathematics and law, or mysticism and logic. Everything was governed by the same principles, because everything fell under God’s all-encompassing reality.

The history of Western thought is characterized by the opposite tendency. Although there was a great deal of unitarian thinking in the medieval period, from the Middle Ages onward there has been constantly increasing dispersion and multiplicity. "Renaissance men" could know a great deal about all the sciences and at the same time have a unifying vision. But nowadays, everyone is an expert in some tiny field of specialization, and "information" increases exponentially. The result is mutual incomprehension and universal disharmony. It is impossible to establish any unity of knowledge, and no real communication takes place among the specialists in different disciplines, or even among specialists in different subfields of the same discipline. In short, people in the modern world have no unifying principles, and the result is an ever-increasing multiplicity of goals and desires, an ever-intensifying chaos.

Despite the chaos, everyone has gods that he or she worships. No one can survive in an absolute vacuum, with no goal, no significance, no meaning, no orientation. The gods people worship are those points of reference that give meaning and context to their lives. The difference between traditional objects of worship and modern objects of worship is that in modernity, it is almost impossible to subordinate all the minor gods to a supreme god, and when this is done, the supreme god is generally one that has been manufactured by ideologies. It is certainly not the God of tawāṣīd, who negates the reality of all other gods. However, it may well be a blatant imitation of the God of tawāṣīd, especially when religion enters into the domain of politics.
The gods in the world of takthīr are legion. To mention the more important ones would be to list the defining myths and ideologies of modern times—evolution, progress, science, medicine, nationalism, socialism, democracy, Marxism, freedom, equality. But perhaps the most dangerous of the gods are those that are the most difficult to recognize for what they are, because we in the modern world take them for granted and look upon them much as we look upon the air that we breathe. Let me list the most common of these gods by their seemingly innocuous names: basic need, care, communication, consumption, development, education, energy, exchange, factor, future, growth, identity, information, living standard, management, model, modernization, planning, production, progress, project, raw material, relationship, resource, role, service, sexuality, solution, system, welfare, work. These are some, but not all, of the ninety-nine most beautiful gods of modernity, and reciting their names is the dhikr of modern man.

Anyone who wants an analysis and explanation of the nature of these gods should refer to the book Plastic Words by the German linguist, Uwe Poerksen. The subtitle is more instructive as to what the book is all about: The Tyranny of a Modular Language. Poerksen explains how the modern use of language—a use that achieved dominance after the Second World War—has resulted in the production of a group of words that have turned into the most destructive tyrants the world has ever seen. He does not call them "gods," because he is linguist and has no apparent interest in theology. Nevertheless, he does give them the label "tyrant," and this is a good translation for the Qur’anic divine name, al-jabbār. When this name is applied to God, it means that God has absolute controlling power over creation. "Tyranny" becomes a bad thing when it is ascribed to creatures, because it indicates that they have usurped God’s power and authority. In the case of the plastic words, the usurpation has taken place at the hands of certain words that are used to shape discussion of societal goals.

As Poerksen points out, these tyrannical words have at least thirty common characteristics. The most important of these is that they have no definition, though they do have an aura of goodness and beneficence about them. In linguistic terms, this is to say that such words have no "denotation," but they do have many "connotations." There is no such thing as "care" or "welfare" or "standard of living," but these words suggest many good things to most people. They are abstract terms that seem to be scientific, so they carry an aura of authority in a world in which science is one of the most important of the supreme gods.

Each of these words turns something indefinable into a limitless ideal. By making the ideal limitless, the word awakens unlimited needs in people, and once these
needs are awakened, they appear to be self-evident. The Qur’ān says that God is the rich, and that people are the poor toward God. In other words, people have no real need except toward God. But nowadays, people feel need toward meaningless concepts, and they think that they must have them. These empty idols have become the objects of people’s devotion and worship.

The plastic words give great power to those who speak on their behalf. Anyone who uses these words—care, communication, consumption, information, development—gains prestige, because he speaks for god and truth, and this forces other people to keep silent. After all, we think, only a complete idiot would object to care and development. Everyone must follow those whose only concern is to care for us and to help us develop.

The mujtahids who speak for these mini-gods are, of course, the "experts." Each of the plastic words sets up an ideal and encourages us to think that only the experts can achieve it, so we must entrust our lives to them. We must follow the authority of the scientific mujtahids, who lay down shariahs for our health, our welfare, and our education. People treat the pronouncements of the experts as fatwās. If the experts reach consensus (ijmā’) that we must destroy a village as a sacrificial offering to the god "development," we have no choice but to follow their authority. The mujtahids know best.

Each of the plastic words makes other words appear backwards and out-of-date. We can be proud of worshipping these gods, and all of our friends and colleagues will consider us quite enlightened for reciting the proper dhikrs and du’ā’s. Those who still take the old God seriously can cover up this embarrassing fact by worshipping the new gods along with Him. And obviously, many people who continue to claim to worship the old-fashioned God twist His teachings so that He also seems to be telling us to serve "care, communication, consumption, identity, information, living standard, management, resource . . ." — the dhikr is well enough known.

Because the plastic gods have no denotations, all those who believe in them are able to understand them in terms of the connotations that appeal to them and then convince themselves that they are serving the basic need that is stated in the very name of the god, because, after all, it is a self-evident need. We are poor toward it and we must serve it. It is obvious to everyone that these gods are worthy of devotion. Religious people will have no trouble giving a religious color to these tyrants. In the name of the plastic gods, people of good will join together to
transform the world, with no understanding that they are serving man-made idols, idols that, as the Qurʾān puts it, "your own hands have wrought."

The topic of false gods is vast, especially nowadays, when more false gods exist than were ever found in the past. The Qurʾān tells us that every prophet came with the message of tawṣīd, and that God sent a prophet to every community. Every community of the past had its own version of tawṣīd, even if people sometimes fell into shirk because of ignorance and forgetfulness. But in modern society, there are nothing but the gods of takthīr, and these gods, by definition, leave no room for tawṣīd.

Understanding the nature of false gods has always been central to the intellectual sciences, but this cannot be the concern of the transmitted sciences. One cannot accept that "There is no god but God" simply on the basis of taqlīd. The statement must be understood for people to have true faith in it, even if their understanding is far from perfect. Hence most of the Islamic intellectual tradition has been concerned with clarifying and explaining the objects of faith. What is it that Muslims have faith in? How are they to understand these objects? Why should they have faith in them?

The first of the Islamic objects of faith is God, then angels, prophets, the Last Day, and the "measuring out, the good of it and the evil of it" (al-qadrī khayrihī wa sharrihī). In discussing God and the other objects of faith, it is important to explain not only they are, but also what they are not. When people do not know what God is and when they do not know that it is easy to fall into the habit of worshipping false gods, then they will have no protection against the takthīr of the modern world, the multiplicity of gods that modern ways of thinking demand that they serve.

What is striking about contemporary Islam’s encounter with modernity is that Muslims lack the intellectual preparation to deal with the situation. Muslim intellectuals—with a few honorable exceptions—do not question the legitimacy of the modern gods. Rather, they debate about the best way to serve the new tyrants. In other words, they think that Islamic society must be modified and adapted to follow the standards set by modernity, standards that are built on the basis of takthīr. This is to say that innumerable modern-day Muslims are forever looking for the best ways to adapt Islam to shirk.

Many Muslims today recognize that the West has paid too high a price for modernization and secularization. They see that various social crises have arisen in
all modernized societies, and they understand that these crises are somehow connected with the loss of the religious traditions and the devaluation of ethical and moral guidelines. But many of these same people tell us that Islam is different. Islam can adopt the technology and the know-how—the "progress," the "development," the "expertise"—while preserving Islam’s moral and spiritual strength and thereby avoiding the social disintegration of the West. In other words, they think, Muslims can forget َتَوْجِيدَ, embark on a course of َتاَكْتِهِرَ, and suffer no negative consequences.

The fact that so many people think this way and do not recognize the absurdity of their position shows that they have lost the vision of َتَوْجِيدَ that used to give life to Islamic thinking. They cannot see that everything is interrelated, and they fail to understand that the worship of false gods necessarily entails the dissolution of every sort of order—the corruption not only of individuals and society, but also of the natural world. In other words, when people refuse to serve God as He has asked them to serve Him, they cannot fulfill the functions for which He has created them. The net result is that our world becomes ever more chaotic. A significant Qur’anic verse here is this: "Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea because of what the hands of people have earned" (30: 41). When people follow the gods of َتاَكْتِهِرَ, corruption can only increase, and it will end up by destroying the natural world just as it is destroying society. "Corruption" (فَسَادٍ), after all, is defined as the lack of "wholesomeness" (ِزِالَةُ), and wholesomeness is wholeness, health, balance, harmony, coherence, order, integration, and unity, all of which are established through َتَوْجِيدَ or "making things one."

**Attitudinal Obstacles**

The second sort of obstacle preventing the recovery of the intellectual heritage can be discerned on the societal level in the attitudes and habits of mind that have been adopted by modern-day Muslims. These result from the loss of intellectual independence and have become embodied in the institutions and structures of contemporary society. I will not attempt to go into details. Instead let me suggest that these obstacles become manifest in various currents that are not difficult to see, such as the politicization of the community, monolithic interpretations of Islamic teachings, and blind acceptance of the teachings of contemporary Muslim leaders (in other words ُتَأْقِلَدَ where there should be ُتَأْقِيقُ). Perhaps the broadest and most pernicious of these obstacles, however, is the general attitude that one might call "anti-traditionalism."
Although Islam, like other religions, is built on tradition—the sum total of the transmitted and intellectual heritages—many Muslims see no contradiction between believing in the gods of modernity and accepting the authority of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. In order to do this, however, they need to ignore thirteen hundred years of Islamic intellectual history and pretend that no one needs the help of the great thinkers of the past to understand and interpret the Qur’ān and the Sunnah.

We need to keep in mind that if there is any universally accepted dogma in the modern world, it is the rejection of tradition. The great prophets of modernity—Descartes, Rousseau, Marx, Freud—followed a variety of gods, but they all agreed that the old gods were no longer of any use. In the Islamic view, God’s prophets share tawāḍū’. In contrast, the modern prophets share the rejection of tawāḍū’ and the assertion of takthīr. One can only reject God’s unity by inventing other gods to replace Him.

In traditional Islamic terms, God is qadīm," ancient" or "eternal." God has always been and always will be. In modernity, the gods are new. To stay new, they have to be changed or modified frequently. The new is always to be preferred over the old, which is "outmoded" and "backwards." Science is always making new discoveries, and technology is constantly offering new inventions that all of us quickly think we need. Anything that is not in the process of renewal is thought to be dead.

One name for this god of newness is "originality." He rules by ordaining new styles and models, and his priests are found everywhere, especially in the domains of advertising and mass indoctrination. Thus we have the fashion mujtahids who tell women what to wear and who change their fatwās every year. Originality’s priests also exercise authority in the world of art. Or take the modern university, where many professors adopt the latest intellectual styles as soon as they arrive on the scene. In much of the modern university, as in women’s fashion, Paris rules.

The greatest danger of anti-traditionalism for modern Muslims is that they have accepted this god—like so many others—without giving any thought to what they are doing. Hence they think that for thirteen hundred years, Muslims had nothing to say. They want to retain their Muslim identity, but they imagine that in order to do this, it is sufficient to keep their allegiance to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, blithely ignoring the great interpreters of the tradition over the centuries.

If people think they no longer need the grand interpreters, this seems to be because they believe in the gods of progress, science, and development. They tell us that
today we know so much more about the world than those people of olden times, because we have science. People who think this way usually know nothing about science except what they are taught by the media, and they certainly know nothing about the Islamic intellectual tradition. They are blind obedientialists on the intellectual level, even though taqlīd is absurd in such matters. What is worse, this is a selective taqlīd. They will only accept the intellectual authority of the "scientists" and the "experts," not that of the great Muslim thinkers of the past. If Einstein said it, it must be true, but if Ghazzālī or Mullā kadrā said it, it is "unscientific"—which is to say that it is false.

If such people really knew something about the intellectual roots and bases of science and theology, they would know that science has nothing to say to theology, but theology has plenty to say to science. The reason for this is that theology is rooted in tawāṣīd, and hence it can look down from above and discern the interconnectedness of all things. But science is rooted in takthār, so it is stuck to the level of multiplicity—the lowest domain of reality—and it can only dissect this multiplicity and rearrange it endlessly. Even when it is able to gain a certain overview of interconnections, it does this without being able to explain how it can do so or what the ultimate significance of these interconnections may be. By its own premises, science is banned from the invisible domains—what the Qurʾān calls ghayb. If it has nothing to say about angels and spirits, which are sometimes called the "relative ghayb," it has even less to say about God, the "absolute ghayb."

In contrast, the Islamic intellectual tradition is rooted in knowledge of God, and thereby it also acquires various modalities of knowing His creation. These are rooted in absolute truth and in certainty, unlike modern disciplines, which are cut off from the Absolute. Only this sort of traditional knowledge can re-establish human connections with the divine.

Finally, let me suggest that the most basic problem of modern Islam is that Muslims suffer from what has traditionally been called "compound ignorance," jahl murakkab. "Ignorance" is not to know. "Compound ignorance" is not to know that you do not know. Too many Muslims do not know what the Islamic tradition is, they do not know how to think Islamically, and they do not know that they do not know. The first step in curing ignorance is to recognize that one does not know. Once people recognize their own ignorance, they can go off in "search of knowledge" (alab al-ʿilm)—which, as everyone knows, "is incumbent on every Muslim," and indeed, one would think, on every human being. No recovery of the intellectual tradition is possible until individuals take this step for themselves. The tradition will never be recovered through taqlīd or by community action, only by the dedication of individuals, through their own, personal taṣqīq. Governments and
committees cannot begin to solve the problem, because they start from the wrong end. Understanding cannot be imposed or legislated, it can only grow up from the heart.

The Prophet said, "Wisdom is the believer’s lost camel. Wherever he finds it, he recognizes it." People today do not know what wisdom is, and still less do they know that it belongs to them by right. Until they recognize this, they will never know that their camel has been lost. They will think that in any case, camels are no longer of any use, since cars, airplanes, and computers will take them wherever they want to go. It is a tragedy when people have no idea that the only way to cross the desert of modernity without danger is by the camel of wisdom.
Wilferd MADELUNG

TO SEE ALL THINGS THROUGH THE SIGHT OF GOD: NAṢĪR AL-DĪN AL-ṬŪSĪ’S ATTITUDE TO SUFISM

Sufism and its promise of providing a path to ultimate spiritual truth increasingly demanded Ṭūsī’s thoughtful attention during the last two decades of his life after his break with the Nizārī Ismā‘īli community. Ṭūsī now gained wide recognition as the foremost philosopher of the school of Avicenna throughout the Muslim world. His position of trust with the new Mongol rulers enabled him to exert a major influence on the reconstruction of cultural and intellectual life in the eastern Muslim provinces after the ravages wrought by the conquest. Under the non-Muslim conquerors, the Sunnī legal scholars lost their privileged position as community leaders and ultimate judges of religious and intellectual life. Ṭūsī promoted the interests of scholars of philosophy and the non-religious sciences, who so far had depended on the private patronage of the few rulers favourably disposed to them. He provided for them generously from the revenue of the religious endowments, preferring them over both kalām theologians and fuqahā’.

Sufism equally benefited from the disestablishment of the Sunnī ‘ulamā’. The popular Sufi orders, already thriving before the Mongol conquest, could now develop freely, trying to fill the gap left by the decline of the force of local social integration exercised by the schools of religious law.

The philosophical correspondence between Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnāwī and Ṭūsī, recently published in a critical edition, must be understood in the context of these developments. Qūnāwī, step-son and disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabī, became the chief interpreter of his teacher’s thought, expounding and disseminating his new speculative mysticism, while also presenting it in a more philosophical mold. The motivation of the two correspondents is easily obscured by the cover of exceeding politeness and sometimes self-effacing deference with which they, following the etiquette of the time, addressed each other.

In opening his correspondence with Ṭūsī, Qūnāwī hoped to establish the superiority of his own insight into the essence of God, His attributes, and the universe, gained by mystical experience, over the merely rational understanding

1. G. Schubert, Anmerkungen: Der mystisch-philosophische Briefwechsel zwischen Ṣadr ud-Dīn-i Qūnāwī und Naṣīr ud-Dīn-i Ṭūsī, Beirut, 1995. The contents of the correspondence have been discussed, with the focus on Qūnāwī’s teaching, by W. C. Chittick, ‘Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnāwī Correspondence’, in Religious Studies XVII, 1981, pp. 87-104.
of the philosophers. He addressed Tūsī courteously as the "King of the Sages of the Age" and assured him that he, Qūnawi, had for some time been longing to establish ties with him in order to benefit from his excellence and from the fruits of his learning. He was now sending him a treatise written by him a long time ago, together with a number of difficult questions he had discussed with some friends for Tūsī to comment upon.

The theme of the treatise, called al-Risāla al-Mufšiha, was the intrinsic weakness of the human intellect and its inability to attain certain truth. Qūnawi first divided knowledge of all things into two classes. The first class comprised those things man could not independently perceive either by his senses or by mental speculation, such as the essence of God, the reality of His names and attributes, as well as the reality of His acts and of all existents in their state of abstraction.

If the discerning among God's people then looked at the sciences of man, they found them to consist of mere conjecture and fantasies, even though some of them were stronger than others, while none of them rested on a firm foundation. Men in fact were unable to agree on anything except most mathematical and geometrical questions, because the proofs in these were based on palpable sense perception (hissiyya). Since that science, however, did not go beyond quantities and measures, men were not content with stopping at it, but aspired to gain knowledge of the most noble objects and of the reality of things as they were in themselves. Such knowledge could be attained by men only after total devotion to the knowledge of God, to the exclusion of all other knowledge, in order to know Him as He knows Himself. For the true knowledge of any other thing, whatever it might be, was dependent on this knowledge, since it was an effusion and gift of God received by men without their having to make any effort of their own in acquiring it.

God wished to perfect the level of knowledge of the second class so that man could reach perfection by recognizing the reality of things as they were in themselves and as they were individuated in the knowledge of God. He therefore chose in every age from mankind an elite, who were at times called prophets and at times perfect saints (awliyā' kāmilūn, kummal), and acquainted them with whatever He wished of the reality of His attributes, the treasures of His generosity, and the mysteries of the rules of His necessary existence. Then He ordered them to awaken the mass of the people to this knowledge of the second class and to summon them to their Lord, informing them of the path leading to Him and to their happiness with wisdom and good exhortation. He supported them through miracles, compelling proofs, incisive souls, and trenchant swords.

Qūnawi then described the different reactions of the people addressed by the prophets and perfect saints. There were those who rejected them and denied their message, either refusing knowledge itself, or remaining refractory while knowing some of the truth, or staying in a state of perplexity, unable to
conciliate between the truth revealed to them and what had been familiar to their minds. There were those who accepted their message unconditionally, whether they knew the truth or not. Qūnawī classed them in four groups. The first class simply accepted the outward meaning of the message without interpreting it, while keeping their minds from plunging into anything they would consider remote or refuse to accept. They were the literalists (ẓāhiriyya), who confined themselves to the formal acts of worship and external ascetic practice.

The second class faithfully believed in the full message. Whatever was in concord with their reflection and comprehensible to them, they recognized and understood. Whatever they were unable to comprehend independently, they believed in good faith in accordance with the intent of God transmitted by His perfect envoys, without rigidly holding on to the literal meaning. This was the state of the pious ancestors (ṣalaf), who were free of the defects of corporealism, anthropomorphism, deviant interpretation, and mixing the belief of faith with the stains of conjectures and fruitless analogies.

The third class accepted whatever their speculation and faculties could comprehend and engaged in interpretation (ta’wīl) of everything else, repudiating the literal meaning of the divine message. The harm done by this practice was greater than its benefit because of the interpreter’s liability to err and the lack of any verifiable principle on which it could rest. Even where the interpreter might strike the truth, it could not constitute certain knowledge for him, but was mere accident. This was the situation of the kalām theologians. Qūnawī made clear that he considered them far below the investigators of the truth (muḥaqiqūn) of the people of God and ‘the people of pure speculation and balance’ (ahl al-nāṣr al-ṣīr wa‘l-mīzān), meaning the philosophers, though these latter were also unable to reach the truth.

The highest class began, like the pious ancestors, with a simple faith in the divine revelation conveyed by the prophets and the perfect saints. They were, however, endowed with noble souls and lofty aspirations which disdained mere imitation (taqlīd) and refused to be content with the small portion of the truth which satisfied others. Rather they sought to attain the level of knowledge of the prophets, especially since there was nothing in the revelation to indicate that this was restricted. As they began to investigate, they realized their own deficiency in comprehension and the deficiency of the other groups. They transcended the ranks of these and reached the status of people of pure rational speculation, only to discover that weakness prevented them, too, from gaining insight into the truth. Qūnawī added that he himself belonged to this fourth group.

The remainder of the treatise was devoted to further demonstration that rational investigation could not lead to any certain knowledge. Men were essentially conditioned by individual comprehension, aspirations, beliefs and temperament, which directed their minds and views, producing confusion and
disagreement as to what was sound and false. Just as they were unable to agree on any judgment of certain knowledge, they also could not agree on any method leading to it. Their syllogistic proof, even if it could be accepted as sound, was of such limited application as to be useless.

Qūnawī referred to Avicenna, the master and paragon of those who believed in rational investigation, who in the end had come to confess that mankind is unable to recognize the reality of all things (ḥaqāʾiq al-ashyāʾ), being confined to the perception of their properties, concomitants and accidents. Qūnawī left open the question of whether Avicenna reached this insight, which contrasted with his early discussions, by his faculty of rational speculation or by mystical experience (dḥawq) at which he hinted in some passages of his discourse. Qūnawī then explained this inability of mankind by the fact that things in their state of abstraction, as they were present in the divine knowledge, were singular and simple. As such they could be perceived only by what is singular and simple. On his own, man could recognize only the attributes and concomitants of things in so far as they correspond to his own attributes, properties and concomitants. Knowledge of the reality of things was possible only through seeing with the sight of God, as the mystic reached the final stage on his path, since God manifested Himself by His unindividuated presence in the reality of individuated things. Qūnawī quoted here a line of poetry of his shaykh, the most perfect Imam: ‘I do not perceive of any thing its reality; how could I perceive it when You are in it?’

In their inability to provide certain proof for any of their beliefs, although they unshakably held on to them, the rational investigators did not differ from the mystics who affirmed that knowledge was a gift of God, not acquired by intellectual demonstration, and who were equally unshakable in trusting their mystical experience. The difference was, Qūnawī contended, that the mystics were all in concord in their faith, whereas the rationalists were all in disagreement, except when some of them failed to recognize the defects in the premises of their proofs. Of the two ways to obtain sound knowledge, that of proof by rational investigation and deduction and that of direct mystical vision by seeking proximity to God and following the prophets and their perfect heirs, only the second one could lead to certain truth, when the wanderer on the path was rewarded by unveiling and revelation of the divine.

Qūnawī introduced his appended questions to Tūsī by explaining that he had been unable to solve them at the beginning of his studies, either because of a shortcoming in his comprehension or because of experts’ contradictory statements which were marred by doubts and ambiguities. When he had despaired of learning the desired solution from the people of investigation and turned to God in self-denial and confession of his want, God drew him near to Himself in His providence. God intimated to him the knowledge of all that he had found insoluble and much that had never crossed his mind but was now realized and witnessed in mystical experience, after he had passed beyond the
stages of investigation and discourse. Qūnawī thus was hinting that he had
transcended the fourth class of believers and had joined the perfect saints who
were privy to ultimate truths. Then he suggested that Tūsī might be able to
provide the appropriate rational proofs for these questions and thus bring about a
reconciliation of the two ways, the evidential and the visionary, the rational and
the divine.

Tūsī thus was put on guard that his correspondent, in submitting these
questions to him, was not looking for any new knowledge, for he had already
received all certain truths by mystical revelation, nor was he even proposing an
exchange of views. Rather he was, in addressing the outstanding philosopher of
the time, seeking a platform to expose to the elite the superiority of Sufi
mystical inspiration over the rational thought of philosophers. At best Tūsī could
attempt to match Qūnawī’s mystical insights with rational proofs for them. But
how could he be expected to succeed when he himself lacked these insights,
and any rational proofs were, as Qūnawī had demonstrated, inevitably flawed?

Tūsī faced a serious challenge. Should he respond by questioning, step by
step, Qūnawī’s competence and adequacy in the discipline of philosophy, as he
had done in the case of al-Shahrastānī, who, like Qūnawī, claimed to have
drunk from the cup of prophetic revelation and had challenged Avicenna to an
intellectual wrestling match?2 Tūsī decided rather to accept the part assigned to
him in Qūnawī’s scenario, describing himself humbly as ‘the neophyte eager to
learn’ (al-murid al-mustafīd) in relation to ‘the Spokesman of the Merciful’
(tarjumān al-Rahmān). He was aware that the incredulous disciple may be the
bane of the self-satisfied shaykh. He returned Qūnawī’s compliment, assuring
him that he, too, had long wished to meet him and, as this was impossible, had
intended to write him in order to open the path of learning from him. Qūnawī,
however, had preceded him, hereby also demonstrating his superior virtues.

Tūsī then acknowledged the receipt of two precious and incomparable
books from Qūnawī. One was the Mufṣīha, containing a number of prodigious
questions which Qūnawī suggested the neophyte eager to learn might comment
upon out of his trivial baggage of learning. Although the weak servant
considered himself incompetent to do so, since he would only be carrying coals
to Newcastle, compliance with the suggestion was incumbent upon him. The
other treatise, entitled Rashh al-bal, contained transcendent thoughts that
present themselves on the path of the mystic and esoteric intuitions from each of
his stations in the garb of prayers, spiritual conversations and allusive
incantations. When the eager neophyte scooped from that unfathomable sea and
partook of that unequalled benefit, he realized that the purpose was to guide
neophytes and to prod beginners into awareness of the novelities arising during

2. See “Aḥ-Šahrastānīs Streitschrift gegen Avicenna und ihre Widerlegung durch Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-
Tūsī”, in Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft, ed. A. Dietrich, Göttingen,
1976, p. 252.
esoteric states and to inform them about the attractions and scares, the
temptation and apprehension that occur on the path of the mystic. This was not,
however, the situation of the neophyte eager to learn. Adroitly shifting the edge
of his point, the neophyte, with a confession of his impertinence (gustākhī),
addressed the master:

‘Your rank is too high to occupy yourself with spiritual conversation and
prayer! For every one who is at that stage, his god is in reality his own whim; he
worships God and prays to Him merely to seek nearness to Him, and does all this
as a means to obtaining his own desire, while he is still the prisoner of passion,
endeavouring to gain repose and ward off pain. On occasions fear befalls him, at
others hope diverts him; at times of trial he seeks refuge in endurance, at times of
bounty he seeks an increase by thanks. But when he rises from that stage to the
rank of contentment (ridā) and surrender (taslīm), he finds repose from all that. No
longer does he need to strive for any requirement or the aversion of any danger.
There remains no need for prayer, for he does not demand anything, nor for
spiritual conversation, for the Partner is never absent from him. Rather he looks at
all created things with the eye of contentment and finds in himself satisfaction
with all events. That is the greatest gate of God.’

Ṭūsī then briefly mentioned even higher stations of the mystic until he
reached the stage of pure self-extinction, when the path and traveller ended and
arrival and arriver came to naught. The master, he was certain, was not content
in himself with any of these stages, but had risen to a rank beyond which was
no other rank. However, as long as he remained formally in the fetters of this
world, such meanings and statements kept flowing from his tongue and pouring
forth unto his adherents without him intending them to do so, but rather in
consequence of his wish to guide seekers and perfect the deficient. Ṭūsī
apologized profusely for his breach of etiquette in drawing the master’s attention
to this matter.

Qūnāwī grasped the hint. In his reply he indirectly apologized for the
treatise having been sent to Ṭūsī; he assured him that this was done by their
intermediary, Tāj al-Dīn al-Kāshi, at the request of a friend, without Qūnāwī’s
knowledge. He then defended the contents of the treatise and justified his
writing of it while insisting that he had indeed experienced what is far above
the mystic’s station of contentment and above any other station. He sensed that
his correspondent was perhaps not so unfamiliar with the mystic path as he had
presumed and as the latter suggested by describing himself as the neophyte
eager to learn.

Ṭūsī commented only briefly on the Mufṣiḥa, describing it as containing
innumerable questions of the highest order and benefits in every discipline.
Since full understanding of them and providing rational proof for every issue was
beyond his capacity, he would merely use it as a tool in his search for the truth
and as a means in aiming for certitude. In answering one of Qūnāwī’s questions,
Tūsī, however, referred to the latter’s quotation of Avicenna’s statement that recognition of the reality of things was beyond the capacity of mankind. He pointed out that by ‘things’ Avicenna had meant the individuated existents called their natures, the definition of which eluded the intellect. Avicenna did not mean the reality of intelligibles, which were indeed subject to certain rational knowledge.

In his reply, the “guiding treatise” (hādiya), Qūnawī defended himself, suggesting that Tūsī had misunderstood both Avicenna and himself. He restated that Avicenna, in agreement with the mystical truth seekers, had admitted that the realities of all things, their eternal forms in the knowledge of God, could not be known by the human intellect. Avicenna had not meant by this just the physical properties of the mixtures and natures to which Tūsī referred in his answer. Qūnawī’s defense missed the point made by his correspondent. Tūsī did not assert that the human mind is able to recognize the true forms of things as they are in reality. He stressed that philosophers, unlike the Muʿtazila, viewed the reality of God as being unknowable to man. By ‘intelligibles of the human mind’ he meant, as the examples given by him show, concepts such as affirmation and negation, body, numbers and geometrical figures. Tūsī’s observation was meant to refute Qūnawī’s contention that the human intellect was unable to provide certainty because man’s knowledge inevitably relied on sense perception and that even mathematics was widely accepted as truthful merely because it was generally confirmed by the senses.

Tūsī’s answers to Qūnawī’s questions were to the point and differed little from his discussion of their subject in his other philosophical writings. Only occasionally did he make remarks which throw light on his reaction to Qūnawī’s approach. Qūnawī had stated that the sound mystical experience of the people of the truth required that the beginning of all their knowledge be the knowledge of God, a knowledge which they could reach only through God, not by their faculties and minds. Once they knew God through God, they would also come to know themselves through Him and everything God wished to disclose to them, either immediately or gradually. God was indeed present in every individuated thing, whether it was perceptible to the mind or to the senses, without Himself being individuated, mixed with it, similar to it, or remote from it. Tūsī commented that this passage was a discourse of the utmost beauty and perfection which could be appreciated only by those who turn their faces to God in order to partake of the outpouring of His unveiling. He expressed the wish that God might make him one of His friends (awliya') who attained that rank. Again his remark indicated that he understood more of the mystic path than the ordinary neophyte, though he, in contrast to his correspondent, modestly denied having reached the highest rank.

In his second question, Qūnawī had affirmed that according to sound mystical experience quiddities are not made (ma'ādil) and have a kind of eternal existence in so far as they are eternally and unchangeably individuated in the
knowledge of God. Ţūsī observed that this view was close to the doctrine of the ‘affirmers’ of the Mu'tazila who upheld the stability (thubūt) of quiddities in their state of non-existence, distinguishing between stability and existence. He added pointedly that the master perhaps meant something different which the neophyte eager to learn did not understand. The Mu’tazili doctrine of the stability of things before their existence had long been branded by their opponents, Ash’aris and others, as one of their major heresies since it implied the eternity of the world. It was based, just as Qūnawi’s view was, on the thesis that things are knowable before their external existence and eternally known by God. In his letter of reply Qūnawi thus vainly tried to distance himself from the doctrine of the Mu’tazila, asserting that according to them quiddities were free from both mental and individuated existence. The charge was manifestly false. The distinction of the philosophers between existence in the mind and existence in the external world was not yet known to the “affirmers”, but their definition for “thing” (shay’), knowable (ma’lūm), clearly implied that its stability in non-existence derived from its presence in the eternal knowledge of God. In the end Qūnawi merely protested that the mystical truth seekers pay attention only to the views of the philosophers, but not to those of the Mu’tazila and other kalām theologians. Thus they only rarely agreed with the latter in regard to a few questions.

The fourth question dealt with the famous principle of the philosophers that from the One could issue only a single one, commonly identified as the First Intellect. Qūnawi argued that they had no proof for this claim. Ţūsī cautiously proposed that he would explain their discourse as he understood it. If this agreed with the reality of the matter, it was good. If not, it would not be surprising that his foot should slip in such straits, for the feet of many rational thinkers had also slipped here. He then brushed aside Qūnawi’s lengthy discussion, which, relying on mystical experience, had suggested that it was universal existence common to all things that issued from God immediately to all quiddities, not through any chain of beings. All this, Ţūsī remarked, was based on a different discipline, other than the one with which they were dealing. Most of it was dependent on mystical experience and unveiling. In his reply Qūnawi, presumably convinced that he had won the argument, did not comment further on the question.

In answer to Qūnawi’s question as to whether the human soul comes into being at the time of the mixture of physical tempers or is pre-existent before the body, Ţūsī upheld the view of Aristotle and his followers that the soul is produced in time together with its specific body. The Ancients, however, narrated tales and stories of the early philosophers which implied the eternity of souls and pointed to their admission of metempsychosis and divestiture of the soul from the body. He, Ţūsī, did not recognize any proof or basis for their doctrine. Ţūsī added that there were passages in the scriptures of the prophets which agreed with some of those philosophers views, but these were open to
metaphorical interpretation. The issue was not a revelational (*sam‘ī*) one so that it would be licit to rely on their literal statements (*nusūṣ*). Tūsī’s discussion made clear that in all rational matters even the inspired words of the prophets must be subject to the judgment of the intellect.

Tūsī’s letter provided Qūnawī, as he saw it, with the platform which he wanted in order to proclaim the superiority of mystical knowledge over rational philosophy. In his reply he rejected some of Tūsī’s critical observations and ignored others. He thanked Tūsī for his elucidations, praying that God might reward him

‘with the highest truthful knowledge with which the souls of the Perfect are adorned, those brought close to God, who drink from the pure spring of al-Tasnim, not from the Salsabil of thought and the Kāfūr which are mixed with the characteristics of tempered faculties, the norms of the intermediaries, and the fetters of contingency.’

Again he left no room for doubt that he himself belonged to the few elect of the Perfect. He apologized for some shortcomings and flaws in his previous letter. Their cause was that he had been ill at the time. In contrast to his introduction to the first letter, he now intimated that it was Tūsī’s disciple Tāj al-Din who had urged him to open the exchange of views. Since the messenger had been in a hurry to depart, Qūnawī was unable to comment fully on the questions. Moreover, the unexperienced copyist, being in a hurry, introduced slips and corruptions into the text and failed to submit it to him for revision. He, Qūnawī, now wanted to explain further the doctrine of the truth seekers and also to remove the confusion between it and the doctrine the upholders of beliefs, such as the kalam theologians, that had arisen because of their joint use of a few expressions. It was not his aim to contradict Tūsī.

At the end of his lengthy exposition, which contained no further questions, Qūnawī apologized that etiquette required him to be satisfied with Tūsī’s useful lessons. However, had he not responded Tūsī may have thought that he had neglected to reply. He therefore presented these hints, wishing to continue the partnership and to seek further lessons from the master. Wherever he had maintained silence or made no comment, it was for two reasons. Either the investigation would have required excessive explanation leading to prolixity and annoyance, or he, the humble servant, was looking for completion and confirmation of the master’s brief, because he was obliged to await the arrival of the opinion that would not need further clarification.

3. *Annäherungen*, Arab. text, p. 131. Tasnim, Salsabil and Kāfūr (camphor) are the Qur’anic names of springs and drinks of the blessed in Paradise.

Ṭūsī decided not to answer the letter. He realized that any clarification, questioning advice, or critical remarks he might still offer would be lost on someone convinced that God had revealed to him all the secrets of the universe and on his followers who believed his claim. For his own part, he doubted, in spite of his persistent readiness to learn, that he might gain useful insights by prolonging the correspondence.

His response to the challenge of Qūnawī came later in his Persian treatise on the mystic path, Āwṣāf al-ashrāf. He did not refer to Qūnawī in it, but mentioned that he composed it at the request of his patron, the vizier Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Juwaynī. The treatise, however, distinctly offered an elaboration of the brief sketch of the mystical path found in his letter to Qūnawī. It describes a traditional, almost old-fashioned Sufism of states along which the mystic ascends to union and extinction of the self in God. Ṭūsī presented it explicitly as a form of ethics, in parallel with the philosophical ethics presented in his Akhlāq-i Nāširī. As such it was a practical, not a theoretical discipline. Nowhere does he mention that the mystic traveller needs a guide or master, a need invariably stressed in the Sufi orders of his time. As in his letter to Qūnawī, contentment and surrender rank high among the states of the mystics who have reached the aim (ahl-i āwṣāl), surpassed only by the states of tawḥīd, ittihād, and waḥdat signifying union. Union (ittihād), he stressed, did not mean, as some people lacking insight imagined, that the servant becomes one with God; rather he becomes seeing through God’s self-revelation and he sees nothing but Him. As seer, seen, and seeing vanish, everything becomes one. Seeing the unity of God in all things was the ultimate experience of the mystic.

In embracing traditional, ethical and practical Sufism, Ṭūsī distanced himself from the modern, speculative and theoretical Sufism of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his school. The perfection (kamāl) ultimately reached by the mystic was in his view moral, not perfection of knowledge. The visionary experience of God’s unity in all things entailed a profound change of perspective in the mystic, not an increase in the store of his knowledge. The problems of the intellect could be solved only by sound reason, not by mystical intuition. Whereas sound reason

5. The editor of the correspondence suggests that Ṭūsī perhaps never received Qūnawī’s second letter (Annäherungen, p. 13). This seems quite unlikely since, even if the original had been lost, he would certainly have been provided with a copy.

6. The edition by N. Mayel Heravi, Meshhed, 1361sh/1982, is used here. The Āwṣāf al-ashrāf was composed after 661/1262-3, the year of al-Juwaynī’s appointment by Hūlagū, that is during the last decade of Ṭūsī’s life. It was not written during his stay with the Ismāʿīlīs and was not Ismāʿīlī in outlook as suggested by H. Dabashi (‘Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and the Ismāʿīlīs’, in Medieval Ismāʿīl History and Thought, ed. F. Daftary, Cambridge, 1996, p. 232). If Āwṣāf al-ashrāf had been written before Ṭūsī’s correspondence with Qūnawī, it would almost certainly have been referred to there.

led to certain knowledge based on objective and cogent proof, mystical intuition could at best provide subjective belief which still required verification by the intellect to become objective. The persistent attempts of the Sufi theorists to discredit the competence of the human intellect were, as he saw it, motivated by their hope of protecting their subjective certainty from critical assessment. Ṭūsī was aware that the mystics, contrary to Qūnawi’s assertion, were divided in their beliefs as widely as the rational investigators. For centuries, the majority of Sufis had upheld Ash’arī theology, while others had inclined to a more traditionalist creed. In the early days, there had even been a Sufi group among the Mu’tazila. Now Qūnawi repudiated all these confessional doctrines and suggested that true mystical investigators should build their theology on the non-confessional metaphysics of the philosophers. Yet this endeavour, Ṭūsī realized, could not succeed unless the mystics unconditionally accepted the sole authority of the intellect in rational questions: Sufi illumination could not provide a short-cut to rational knowledge.
Keynote Address at ‘Intellectual Traditions in Islam’ Seminar
Aziz Esmail*
University of Cambridge
August 14, 1994

Abstract

One of the major features of the transformation of Islam into one of the great civilisations of the world was its vigorous intellectual and literary life which found expression in diverse schools of thought and communities of interpretation. To generate discussion on the nature and significance of this development, The Institute of Ismaili Studies organised a one-week seminar in the summer of 1994, attended by leading scholars and specialists in Islamic studies from around the world. In his Keynote Address for the seminar, Aziz Esmail reflected on the concepts and implications of the terms ‘intellectual life,’ ‘tradition’ and ‘Islam’.

Keywords

Islam, intellect, intellectual life, tradition, history, education, modernity, Qur’an, monotheism, fundamentalism, ideologies, religion, religious studies, reason, Enlightenment.

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Probing The ‘Intellect’

This particular seminar in Cambridge is being held at a time in history — I mean the history not just of the Muslim world but of mankind as a whole — at which each of the concepts that are reflected in its title are in question. Take, first of all, the concept of ‘intellectual life’. A great question mark looms over the very concepts of ‘the intellectual’ and ‘intellectual life’ today. What is the place of the intellectual in society? Is he an ideologue — a proponent or supporter of the prevailing or dominant thought, or is his role that of a critic? Is it a role which calls one to question the assumptions of the age? Are the corridors of power the proper place for an intellectual? Is that the place where he should take up his lodgings? Or does he belong, like the prophets of the Old Testament, beyond the walls of the city, where he calls out from the wilderness, from outside the dominant, prevailing powers and forms of thought?

There is an old saying, which you might remember, that a prophet is never honoured in his own country. In that saying, there is a statement about the distance of intellectual thought from the centre. But if this is so, if the role of the critic is to interrogate, to challenge what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, to open new horizons, new possibilities of thinking and feeling, of being and acting, how is one, then, to understand the responsibility of the intellectual to society? These are questions about the place of the intellectual in culture and in society. There are similar questions which concern the mind of the individual. What is the place of the life of the mind within the personality? What is its relationship to feeling? What is its relationship to character? What is its relationship to faith? What role does intellectual life have in the development of personal identity and character? What relation does it have to the ordinary joys, affections and sorrows of life, to friendship and love, and not least, to one’s relationship with God? What place does it have in the individual’s participation in society? To what extent does intellectual consciousness, which is often a critical consciousness, enable such participation, and to what extent does it impede it? And how exactly does the individual relate to the society through his intellectual activities?

Questioning ‘Tradition’

These are questions, then, to do with the intellect. Now take the second concept that is present in the title: that, namely, of ‘tradition’. What traditions is one to cherish or to uphold in a world in which an individual is exposed, as is the case nowadays, not to one group of traditions but to a multitude of them? The world of today is characterised by a pluralism of traditions. Numerous traditions criss-cross, overlap and jostle one another. Furthermore, modern electronic media and communications have made diverse traditions of the world uniquely, immediately and instantaneously available at various parts of the globe. How might one maintain anchorage in particular historical traditions in such circumstances? Which thread among these traditions relates to which one, such that the threads might somehow constitute a fabric that one can call one’s own? And where, therefore, is one to find a sense of belonging, or what is called ‘authenticity’ or ‘identity’...
(words about which I have a series of other questions)? These are some of the vexing and uncertain issues that surround the very concept of tradition. Beyond them there lies a more fundamental question. And that question, which is a contemporary one, is not only about which traditions to call one’s own, but about the likelihood of any traditions surviving at all in a world which is changing rapidly under one’s very eyes. In a sense, one might ask: what is the future of the past? What future does the past have in a world which is changing so fast — a world saturated with the instantaneous culture of global communication? What role does history have here? And if there is no past, if the past has no future, what is one to think about the present and the future?

**Subjective Time**

Now, let me clarify what I mean by this. I am not talking about public or objective time here, but what we might call subjective time. For objectively, there is always a yesterday, a today and a tomorrow. There is the time of the clock; but there is also, in the life of a society, what we might call historical time — the mode of time in which one is related to, and bears a kinship with, one’s ancestors and with the inheritance of an age, a legacy which one carries forward into the future. And this is true not only of society, but also of the individual, because the individual has a life history. The importance of life history, not so much in the public, observable form, but in its subjective mode, becomes especially pronounced at certain critical junctures in life, for instance, old age as well as youth. Where old age is blessed with wisdom, one looks back at the course of one’s life as the only course that it could have taken, with the feeling that it was as it ought to have been. One finds a new relationship with one’s parents, free of the wish that they should have been different. More generally, one might cherish, at this stage, the sense of a connection with bygone ages, a kinship with history and with distant forefathers which is at the same time a relationship that is to come. For the passing generation gives its lifeblood, part of its soul, to the generation which is yet to come. In this way one closes, as it were, the circle of life history.

Youth is another stage in the life history where the same negotiation, a very difficult, delicate negotiation, between what has gone on in one’s life and what is to come, occurs. And what is particularly important at such a time is the relationship of the individual life history to the traditions that are outside it — in a word, to culture. The young man’s or woman’s relationship to traditions is one of either dependence or defiance. Youth has two opposite yearnings: a yearning to be told what to do and a yearning to tell whoever tells him what to do, to get lost. You will notice that I am using slightly milder language than may be heard in practice. What, however constitutes dependency? What is involved here are not only issues to do with family. They also appertain to the whole question of education, of schooling and the place of the school, as an institution, in society.
Models of Education

There are two models of the school, located at opposite ends of a spectrum. One is that of a military camp; the other is a playing field. The school which is based on the model of a military camp is the sort of school to which most of us gathered here probably went. This is not unlike the model of the public school in England, although the public school has its own grim kind of playfulness. This particular model of education treats with the utmost seriousness the maxim that the child is the father of the man. What it proposes is that the child must be more adult than the adult himself, that he must bend before the objective imperatives of learning. He must learn to make of his life a sustained devotion to duty, a consistent obedience to objective rules. The other type of school, which is the contrary model of education, takes seriously, perhaps too seriously, the adage that ‘all work and no play make Jack a dull boy’. Modern liberal theories of education carry this maxim very far indeed, to the point where what it really means is ‘all play and no work make Jack a smart boy’. Its central premise is that discipline is something to be avoided at all costs. Now, this is the trend of education which shuns traditions altogether so as to give the child the privilege, as it claims, of ‘finding himself,’ of creating his own knowledge, of forming his own opinions, in the absence of external discipline or constraint. We in our time have been so conditioned, so accustomed to notice the defects of the formal model of education, now widely considered ‘oppressive,’ that we are as yet little aware of the grave deficiencies of that model which places all its emphasis on the self rather than on society. It should become obvious, when we ponder on this problem, that education is only a microcosm of the culture of the society at large. The model of education I am criticising leads to what I might call the tyranny of self-absorption. And one often finds among people who come from that particular regime of education a longing, a yearning for a system that will tell them what the world is like, what their place in the world is, and what one is supposed to do in the world.

The Longing For An Objective Order

In a nutshell, this longing is a quest for objectivity: that is to say, for a relationship to an objective order. Now, an objective order is accessible, especially for the young man or woman, through two channels. One is work, the other is culture. Work — a profession or occupation — gives one a firm relationship to a world of ideas, skills and tools. It is significant that throughout history, a majority of men and women have always found their identity in work, whether in hunting animals, in tilling the soil, in raising children, in making machines work, or in all those sundry occupations of an economic, political or organisational kind that enable these other kinds of work to proceed. They have always left to a minority, to higher institutions as it were, the task of complementing the satisfactions to be got out of basic, physical work. Thus, for most of history, political work was left in the hands of rulers; religious life was left in the hands of priests, rabbis and ‘ulama; and culture was entrusted to poets, artists, writers, philosophers and scientists.
In the modern world this relationship has altered. It altered about three centuries ago with the Industrial Revolution when the unit of work shifted from the family home, the farm and the shop to the factory. Traditionally, the shop was a family-orientated affair. It was in a way an extension of the community. But the factory is not an extension of the community, and modern work has proceeded from this point onwards on a separate track from activities in a family, and in a community. Thus, it is very common nowadays to hear people say, ‘I find my social satisfaction outside work and not in work itself.’ Accordingly, the types of self-expression available in each sector of life differ widely among themselves. This development has many sources, all of which are characteristic of modern history. They include the automatisation and rationalisation of work which went hand in hand with the rise of modern commerce and industry. The twin consequences of this was a differentiation of society into distinct sectors, and a corresponding differentiation of the individual personality into a multiplicity of roles.

As a result of these historical changes, the ethos of modern work is strictly apart from opportunities for self-expression now available in the secular Western world only in the cinema, the concert hall, the theatre, or else in pubs or cafés. But these institutions too — institutions like the theatre and the concert hall — are less communal than was true in the past. One may recall, for instance, the fact that chamber music was largely played in homes and not in concert halls; or that the opera was an event where people came to meet and talk. If you look at copies of The Times in England for example, from the last century, you will occasionally find in them complaints about opera singing which was so noisy as to make it impossible for the audience to talk to one another, and so enjoy themselves. Today, however all such activities have become markedly impersonal, rather than communal.

**Education and the Inroads of Modernity**

In the Third World, two tendencies or trends may be found. On the one side, there is a greater prevalence of forms of art and recreation which are communal or social. There are, for instance, the rousing and rumbustious forms of music like qawwali performances, which are fundamentally communal, and where the social, the spiritual and the artistic seem to go together. Another religiopolitical form of self-expression is nowadays to be found in activities centred on the mosque, religious schools or madrasas, and theological colleges. Some of these institutions are taking over a large amount of the functions of culture and communal solidarity in Muslim societies. This is a phenomenon which demands some explanation.

One of the reasons for this trend has to do with the inroads of modernity, which causes the alienation provoking the search, in turn, for social forms embodying what are seen as moral spiritual values. There is also, of course, the problem of education. In the West at least there is a wide availability of opportunities not only for education but for education to be followed by work — opportunities, in other words, for the acquisition of skills and a chance to exercise those skills. When education is denied altogether, or having been acquired appears irrelevant or fruitless, when one is denied what competence one has and...
the sense of belonging that comes when that competence is exercised, then there is an
enormous sense of anomie and moral vacuum among the young people affected by this
trend. I think what is happening in the Islamic world is but a variant of what is happening
in the Third World at large, in African and Asian countries, though not necessarily as
much, perhaps, in the Far East.

The Rise of Totalistic Ideologies

One of the problems of modern history has been the rise of totalistic ideologies. In the
Muslim world, the only major ideology which for a time seemed to be capable of
mobilising the society, and in particular its youth, was nationalism, which was usually
combined with a degree of real or ostensible socialism. These ideologies were seldom
successful in ensuring social justice and solidarity, and hence were succeeded by a period
of gathering disillusionment. There is, therefore, a hiatus in these societies: a hiatus in
meaning, a crisis of meaning. It has often been said that the rise of ‘fundamentalism,’ or
what is called ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ in these countries is best explained by politics.
But beneath the political problem, there lies the cultural problem. One must, therefore,
look at culture, and not just at the political issue in order to understand the matter fully.
For regardless of whether an ideology is religious or secular, it is intended to relate the
self to society and to a picture of the cosmos at large. Ideologies represent the human
need for a unifying doctrine — something that will tell people, firstly, what the world is
like; secondly, what man’s place in the world is; and thirdly, what the principles
governing human actions or conduct in the world are to be. Ideology is thus a total
phenomenon. It answers several of those great questions that Kant asked about the order
of things, such as ‘What is man?’, ‘What is my place in the world?’, and above all, ‘What
shall I do?’ This last question, it will be noticed, is that of ethics.

Within ideologies, there is a distinction to be made between what the psychoanalyst Eric
H. Erikson once called, respectively, ‘totalism’ and ‘wholeness’. ‘Wholeness’ may be
defined, negatively, as an absence of disconnection or fragmentation. It represents a sense
that one is connected to the universe; that one is connected to fellow human beings; and
that within oneself, the various parts are interconnected, giving a unity to the personality.
‘Totalism’, which in some respects is preferable to the term ‘fundamentalism’, denotes a
unifying system of thought which spells out everything, dictates everything, and makes,
moreover, a very sharp distinction between its own world and other worlds, between what
is deemed to belong inside and to lie outside its own sphere. Totalism insists that what
belongs outside must not be let in, and what belongs to itself must not, at any cost, be left
out. This rigid separation of the inside and the outside is a dichotomy found in all	otalising ideologies. It is present in the West’s image of Islam as antithetical to
everything for which Western civilisation stands, and it is equally present in the absolutist
definition of Islam, which opposes itself entirely to the culture of modernity.

It is important to realise that this totalistic definition of Islam is a modern one. Although it
invokes history, it is not itself based in history. Historically, Islamic thought, or Islamic
culture, was a composite phenomenon. It was a product of many cultural influences, a river into which many a tributary flowed. It had a certain central unity, some central integrity, which is very difficult to define. For instance, when we look at art across the Islamic world, it has a sufficient commonality, and a sufficient distinctiveness, to justify our calling it Islamic. Yet the diversity is considerable, and the influences from all the corners of the globe are also quite extensive.

**The Idea of Tradition**

Before going further, I would like to add several points of clarification. Often enough, when people say that they are looking for a Judaic answer to the problems of the world today, or a Christian answer, or an Islamic solution, what they seem to be saying is that they wish the tradition in question to continue. But there is every difference in the world between tradition and the desire for tradition, between what I call ‘tradition’ and ‘traditionalism’.

The idea of tradition is not a child of tradition. The idea of tradition, which is traditionalism, is born, so to speak, out of wedlock. It emerges from a divorce between ideals and the society in which those ideals are supposed to reign. It is the product of a divorce between past and present. In fact, traditional societies are the one kind of society which are singularly free from the idea of tradition. In the Islamic world, for instance, there is considerable talk, which has been going on now for an odd fifty years or so, about the Muslim ‘tradition’, the Muslim ‘heritage’, and so on. These are peculiarly modern preoccupations, however. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has a lucid image to describe something analogous to what I am speaking of here. A hammer in the hands of an artisan is a very different thing from a hammer in the hands of a repair man. In the hands of the artisan, when the hammer is in working order, it is almost an extension of his body. It is part of him and it is part of the workshop, hence a part of the economy of which that workshop is in turn a part. The moment the hammer breaks, when it no longer works ‘naturally,’ it becomes an object of scrutiny. It is separated from its function, and when one now looks at the hammer, one looks at it as an object, as a tool, whereas the artisan was probably using it almost unconsciously when it was working. If the economy runs into a problem and the workshop encounters difficulties, it becomes an object of attention, whereas formerly it was not. In the same way, tradition becomes an object of anxiety, nostalgia and attention when it ceases to work, not when it is actually at work. Therefore, it is not in traditional societies that one gets the idea of tradition. It is not in traditional societies that you get the attitude of mind or the cast of mind that I have here called traditionalism.

The measure of a traditional age lies in the amount of life that it is able to take for granted; and the amount, by contrast, that it cannot take for granted, or is no longer able to take for granted. In the distance that separates these two kinds of society lies the distance between the world which was once dominated by Athens, Jerusalem or Mecca, and the world dominated by Washington, Tokyo, by post-imperial London and Paris, and by all those cities in the rest of the world which are satellites of these metropolises. And even when societies which revolve around the modern cities seek to recapture the spiritual dominion of
Jerusalem or Mecca, what they display, in so doing, is not their closeness or proximity to those ancient cities, but rather their nostalgic distance from them.

Let me move on now to some very general observations. I began by saying that each of the concepts that we have in the title of this seminar is not a topic but a question: that the life of intellect is a question, that the idea of a tradition is a question, indeed the idea of Islam itself raises a question. What is meant by Islam, and what is the relationship of the past and present in Islam? One of the functions of the seminar is to define these questions more sharply, because in these matters more than half the battle is accomplished by asking the right kinds of questions. Let us remember that for nearly the first four centuries of Muslim history, the nature of Islam was contested between different interpretations which had not yet hardened into fixed and compartmentalised positions. The notion that Islam had spelled out literal answers to every question to be encountered in history, and that the only impending task was to put it into practice, to effect it, is a misconception. What actually happened in history was, first of all, the fact of the tremendous expansion of Arab rule over large parts of the world, in historical terms an astonishingly brief spell of time. That rule raised all kinds of questions about governance, about ideas and values, about law and the organisation of society. It also provoked considerable variation and dissent. From the beginning, there was a great divide over the question of authority, as to how the Islamic dominions were to be legitimately governed in a spiritual and temporal sense (the distinction between these two realms was not really made till much later). There is, I think, increasing evidence to show that the Shi‘i viewpoint on this issue, which located authority in the ahl al-bayt, the Prophet Muhammad’s family, began very early, notwithstanding the orthodox Sunni view as well as the view of Western Islamicists who had greater access to Sunni than to Shi‘i sources, and whose view was correspondingly shaped. So there was a period of ferment and formation, and that is why one may appropriately call this period, to which I have assigned a loose and necessarily arbitrary date, the formative age of Islam.

From the historical vantage point where we now stand, all the societies that originated from the Mediterranean region — I refer to all societies and not just Muslim societies, leaving out the great civilisations of India and China which have a very different history — appear to share a triple heritage. One is the heritage of a monotheistic faith, which believes in revelation inscribed in a scripture. Hence the term ‘societies of the book,’ used by Mohammed Arkoun. The second mainspring of their culture is Graeco-Roman. Ancient Greek culture was not, of course, monotheistic. It was based on poetry and philosophy, on ritual and, of course, the theatre. The third major heritage of the modern world is that of the Enlightenment which took place in Europe in the 18th century, with the preceding events of the Reformation and the Renaissance. We must not forget the very close kinship in this context between the Judaic, Christian and Islamic societies. All of them are founded on a concept of revelation; all trace the foundation of their meaning back to the written word, even in Christianity, in which the Logos, the Word of God, is not a book, but the person of Jesus. But one only learns of Jesus through the Gospels,
which then is the word that gives access to the figure of Jesus. In the case of Islam, of course, the primacy of the Word is wholly central.

**Textualising the Universe**

It is relevant, in this connection, to make a few general observations on the Qur’an. On the one hand, the Qur’an is a historical response to a historical problem. The tendency to read the Qur’an solely as a transcendent text tends to leave out the fact that it was a response to real historical events of the time. Yet, in answering the dilemmas of immediate history, contemporary history, what the Qur’an does is to place its response in a larger, a grander statement of the condition of man in the universe. In this sense, the Qur’an is an immensely integrating text. It integrates, gathers together all meanings under the aegis of the concept of the One God. The concept of the unity of God gathers together all the meanings that would otherwise be scattered. That is the way in which the Qur’an addressed the issues of the day, and the issues that pertain to the human condition at large. If we simply look at the very notion of what the Qur’an calls signs, the *ayat*, the context in which one is familiar with that term is in the designation of the verses of the text. But the same term is used in the Qur’an for the phenomena of nature. Again, the Qur’an treats history, the fate that befell former nations, as ‘signs’ of divine providence. It thus effects what I might call a textualisation of the universe. It shows the entire universe as a text, of which the Qur’an is the central, shining paradigm. It converts the signs and marks of existence into a map. It integrates diverse facets of the world as we experience it — as the Prophet Muhammad’s contemporaries experienced it — into a unitive, all-encompassing meaning.

Another topic which I would like to comment on very briefly in this connection is that of symbolic language. The specific point I have in mind is that there is a certain difference between symbolic religious language on the one hand, and ideological religious language on the other. There is a certain distinction to be made between spiritual religion and ideological religion, between symbolic faith — which keeps everything open, which fosters a plurality of meanings, because symbolic meaning cannot be tied down in a dogma or a formula — and a system of closed meanings. So, this contrast between the openness of the symbolic mode and the closure of ideological religion is something which, I think, is well-worth keeping in mind. One can talk about this in the context of the other faiths as well, but here I am confining my remarks to Islam.

**Graeco-Roman Heritage**

The second component of the triple heritage was that of Greek philosophy, which contributed a specific discipline of reason. In speaking of reason, one must remember that the Qur’an itself represents a rationalisation at work, because it combats myth. Owing to its symbolic language, there is in the Qur’an the notion of the supernatural, of supernatural beings like angels, jinns, and so on. But it is nonetheless quite parsimonious about the concept of miracles. The Qur’an mentions the Quraysh as demanding a miracle
to be sent down from God as a proof of the prophethood of Muhammad. However, it resolutely repudiates the expectation of such a miracle, and refers instead to the signs of God in the natural universe and in human history. There is thus a certain distancing from magic and miracle, and a rationalisation which corresponds to the transformation of social structure brought about by the preaching of the Prophet. In Greek culture, philosophy emerged with Plato and Aristotle as the preferred pathway to truth. The ideal of reason had the same pre-eminence in ancient Greek society that God-fearing piety has in the monotheistic faiths. For that reason, when in the first few centuries following the Prophet’s death, Muslim intellectuals came into contact with the philosophical tradition initiated by the Greeks, they were forced to wrestle with the differences between, on the one hand, the traditions of monotheistic faiths, which were embodied in the shari’a and based on the authority of scripture, and on the other hand, what the Greeks had said about reason as the gateway to truth. And what is most interesting about the efforts of the few, but towering, intellectual giants in all the three faiths, beginning with the Islamic domain, who studied philosophy, was the nature of the reconciliation that they tried to achieve between them. This reconciliation involved something which has not been emphasised sufficiently, what I would call political theology: the theology of life in a community or society. What philosophers like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd were emphasising was the unity of truth. Given this unity, the paths of reason on the one hand, and of tradition, based on authority and revelation, had to be both distinguished and related.

The intellectual path in the thinking of these philosophers, who clearly echoed Plato in this respect, is one that only an elite with the requisite intellectual aptitude can pursue. For the masses the same truth needs to be couched in terms of imagination — figurative language, parables, metaphors, symbols, stories, narratives. Furthermore, in this view, the Prophet is uniquely gifted not only at perceiving the truth, but in being able to relate it to the masses — in other words, in being able to couch it in the language of creative imagination, which is the only language that can mobilise people and recruit them into the service of the order of the body politic, while ensuring their own well-being and happiness. To this end, the philosophers disapproved of any attempts to expose the masses to philosophy. For they thought that this was something that would create havoc — undigested reason among people who cannot master it would cause them to lose their faith and attachment to traditions, without giving them the comforts or solace of the way of reason. That was one particular response to the issue of the relationship between philosophy and the traditions of monotheistic faiths.

‘Reason’ and The Enlightenment

The third major development in history relevant to this question is that of the Enlightenment. Here, reason came to mean something quite distinct. To an extent, the Enlightenment harked back to the classical philosophical heritage. But the operative model was that of modern science. The science of Newton provided the model for all human knowledge and all human activity. The philosophers of the 18th century associated religion in Europe, among other things, with the corruption of the clergy and the power of
the Roman Catholic Church. The reaction to what was seen as the history of religious oppression and obscurantism came from several quarters. There was the intellectual revolution of the Enlightenment, but earlier on there had been the Reformation launched by Martin Luther. It was, I think, one of the most important events in human history when Luther translated the Bible into the vernacular. For it gave to the ordinary man access to the scripture which had previously been monopolised by the clergy. Finally, the rise of the nation state was also crucial in all these developments, because the nation state broke the unity of Christendom, just as in the present century the abolition of the Sunni khilafa in 1924 by Kemal Atatürk and the formation of the Arab states with the retreat of the British and French powers in areas of the Middle East, also had a great influence on the way that Islam is understood today.

**Coming To Terms with ‘Intellectual Life’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Tradition’**

All these three traditions — that is, the traditions of monotheistic faith, Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment — have come under explicit or implicit pressure and questioning in the contemporary world. There are many reasons for this. Here I will confine myself to alluding only to a few of them. One is the fact that in the modern world the very awareness of a plurality of cultures makes it very difficult for any one culture to believe in itself to the exclusion of others. It poses the danger, or to put it more mildly, the challenge, of relativism. Relativism says that all doctrines, all ideas and values can be explained by reference to time and place. But if all ideas and values are to be thus explained, one’s confidence in upholding a single culture or tradition is seriously dented. It is this dilemma which is partly reflected in the controversy currently raging in England, for instance, over whether schools ought to teach world religions in a neutral tone, that is, without advocating any normative religious positions. Is then the function of religious education to provide facts or is it to inculcate belief? There are those who will say that to inculcate belief in a young child is a form of indoctrination. There are those, by contrast, who will insist that the neutral way of teaching religion, that is, of imparting only facts about religion, is anything but religious education.

Another central issue of our times concerns the relation of the individual to society. In the late modern West, the dominant model, which is the model of the market, dictates attitudes towards culture. Culture, in this way of thinking, becomes a supermarket of ideas, values and doctrines, where one chooses according to taste, not according to objective essence — where the desire of the individual is the final arbiter of choice. Thus, if I choose to live a particular life, it is not because I am justified in believing in the objective rightness or suitability of that particular option, but because I so desire it. For freedom goes hand in hand with desire, and it is one’s desire which eventually dictates what is right and what is wrong. Now this model presupposes a different conception of selfhood than the models which it has displaced. And although at one level it may be felt as liberating, it also harbours a potential for moral crisis. For, when morality is predicated on choice, that means there is nothing else but choice to dictate what the morality of the age shall be. A society based on this notion is more in the nature of an association than a
Gestalt, a whole bigger than the sum of the parts. In earlier cultures, community came first and individuals second; individuals drew their lifeblood, as it were, from society. But in the contemporary world, society is seen as the product of individual decisions to band together, to come together in random groups, and that in itself constitutes one of the major cultural and intellectual dilemmas of the present age.

In answering, or in at least asking these questions, in exploring these issues, which represent the need of the hour in the world today, the monotheistic faiths have a great role to play. But this role will be effective only under certain conditions. One of these conditions is the growing need for a genuine mutual appreciation between the faiths which share a common origin, what we call the Abrahamic faiths. Attention to this common heritage, the Abrahamic heritage, which is a source of shared issues and problems, is especially important for Muslims who live as minorities in the Western world. The second condition is that to engage with the contemporary world means to take it seriously, which means to understand it, not to dismiss it. The theological rhetoric which says that the modern world is the antithesis of what the Islamic tradition teaches us — in other words, the rhetoric which sets Islam and the modern world as separate, opposing blocs — is a maladaptive rhetoric. Engagement does not mean surrender; for criticism too is a form of engagement.

One of the great mistakes that Protestant Christianity and Protestant Christian theology made in recent history was to take on board virtually all the concepts of the modern age. When the age passes, so do its concepts. If Protestant theology becomes too strongly wedded to the modern concept of modernity, it will find itself left behind, because it will have succumbed to the drift, the fashion, of a particular age. It will have abdicated the critical distance, which is the gift of prophecy, from the world in which it operates. How Islamic theology may engage with the modern world without becoming a prisoner of the modern understanding of modernity is one of the major challenges facing Islamic thought today. How it will meet this challenge is anybody’s guess at the moment. It is something that still awaits the verdict of history.
Knowledge as the Unity of the Intellect and the Object of Intellection in Islamic Philosophy: A Historical Survey from Plato to Mulla Sadra

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By Ibrahim Kalin

I. Problem Stated

The kind of relationship that one can establish between the knowing subject and the object known is one of the cardinal issues of epistemology and has given rise to a number of positions within Greek and Islamic philosophy. Of these, the doctrine that has come to be known as the unity of the subject who intelleccts and the object of intellecction (ittihad al-'aqil wa'l-ma'qul) underlies a deep and persistent current in Islamic philosophy. Sadr al-Din Shirazi (980/1572-1050/1640), known as Mulla Sadra, is without doubt the most ardent exponent of this doctrine with his extensive analyses and glosses in addition to a separate treatise devoted to the subject. With Sadra, the idea of knowledge as a unity of the intellect and the object of intellecction becomes the hallmark of all post-Sadrean epistemology. This view was a logical outcome of Sadra's bold attempt to cast the whole story of knowledge (al-'ilm) in terms of being (al-wujud) and its modes, an attempt whose formulation given by Sadra has tremendous implications for epistemological thinking in the post-Avicennan Islamic philosophy.

In his magnum opus Asfar, Sadra, after quoting Farabi's celebrated treatise on the intellect with some variations, gives a summary genealogy of this idea and traces it back to the famous Theology of Aristotle (uthulujiyyah Aristu), hence describing it as an implicit, if not explicitly admitted, part of the Peripatetic school. Sadra repeatedly refers to the failure of earlier philosopher, especially that of Ibn Sina and his close disciples, in refuting this view, and expresses his bewilderment as to how they denied it as mere poetry and imagination.

In this treatise [i.e., Farabi's Risalah fi'l-'aqil], there are parts that clearly point to the unity of the intellect with the intelligibles and to the possibility of man's becoming a simple active intellect in whom all the intelligibles are united. In addition to the clear writings of this teacher [Farabi], there is also the book Uthulujiyyah attributed to the first teacher Aristotle and what the headmaster [Ibn Sina] narrates from some of the students of this great philosopher. [By this], I mean Porphyry who wrote a book on the intellect and the intelligibles, which has a section on the unity of the intellect with the intelligibles and its union with the active intellect. There is also a book on this very subject by Alexander of Aphrodisias whom the master [Ibn Sina] describes as a virtuous and knowledgeable philosopher among the ancients. In spite of all these [works], they, in a surprising way, permitted the denial of this sublime matter and the [level of] exaggeration with which those who did not examine the matter carefully rejected it like the later philosopher and
Ibn Sina and those who came after him did until our own day. Anyone who has not reached this state [of knowledge and understanding] should follow the will that Ibn Sina states at the end of the *Isharat*.

Insofar as the relation between the knowing subject and the object known is concerned, we may detect, according to Sadra's classification, three major theories of knowledge, which are strictly of philosophical nature in Islamic thought. The first view is the relational theory of knowledge (*idafah*) that construes knowledge as a relation arising between the subject and the object. Defended chiefly by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and a host of later theologians (*muta'akhkhirun*), the notion of knowledge as a relation between the mind and objects hinges upon a number of premises. The most fundamental premise of this view is its construal of the domain of objects/facts as bereft of intrinsic intelligibility. Since the knowledge of objects arises as a relation in the mind, the objects that exist in the extra-mental sphere do not possess a cognitive content prior to their intellection by the mind. This makes knowledge a property of the knower -- a position that underlies much of modern epistemology. From the point of view of the subject, to say that intellection (*ta'aqqul*) obtains only as a relation between the subject and the object is equal to positing a subject without ideas and concepts, a subject whose possibility is denied even by Ibn Sina's famous 'suspended man' (*al-insan al-muta'alliq*). When taken to its logical extreme, as some critiques of it like Sadra do, knowledge as a relation presents a number of grave difficulties, which we have to leave for another discussion.

The second view of knowledge is the representational theory of knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-irtisami* or *al-‘ilm al-husuli al-irtisami*). The Peripatetic philosophers were the privileged patrons of this view as they were content with focusing on representation (*rasm, irtisam*) as the most important and potent form of knowledge. Similar to Wittgenstein's picture theory of language minus his strict atomism, the theory of knowledge as representation underlies the epistemological orthodoxy of classical philosophy and is again based on a number of ontological and cosmological postulates. Said briefly, this view states that knowledge is a true representation of the external world in the mind if and when there is a veritable correspondence (*tatabuq*) between the extra-mental object and its mental picture. Thus 'mirroring', to use a Rortian language, becomes the proper abode and method of all knowledge. It is the impressions that we gather from the external world that give us a picture of the world, whose truth value is judged by the correspondence obtained between the mental impressions and the physical world. Defined as such, knowledge as representation and/or impression presupposes the existence of objects prior to the knowing subject. It is obvious that this theory of knowledge would face a number

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of difficulties especially in cases where the reality and impression are given as a single unity such as in the case of self-knowledge and God's knowledge of things.  

The third view of knowledge which was proposed, we may assume, as a response to the first two is called knowledge by presence or presental knowledge (al-'ilm al-huduri). Developed and defended primarily by the illuminationist (al-ishraqiyun) philosophers, the concept of knowledge as presence (hudur) undercuts the very foundations of the representational theory of knowledge and casts the whole story of knowledge in terms of being (wujud) and its modes (anha' al-wujud). Although Suhrawardi, the founder of the school of illumination (ishraq), was an essentialist in his ontology and did not consider being (wujud) any more than a general term abstracted by the mind, the posterity turned away from his essentialist ontology (asalat al-mahiyyah) while retaining the metaphysics of light that he had espoused. Thus, Suhrawardi's life-long preoccupation with self-knowledge and his rigorous definition of all knowledge as light and presence came to represent the biggest challenge ever faced by the representational theory of knowledge both in Islamic and Western philosophy.

All of this brings us to Mulla Sadra, who has given the most extensive account of knowledge as the unity of the intellect and the object of intellection in Islamic philosophy. It was Sadra's grand synthesis that put knowledge as presence and the unity of the intellect and the object of intellection, which is a corollary of the first view, at the center of all epistemology in the post-Sadrean era of Islamic philosophy. Sadra's epistemology of being revolves around the fundamental idea that knowledge is predicated upon the essential unity (ittihad) that obtains between the intellect or the knower ('aqil) and the object of intellection or the known (ma'qul). Hence the title of Sadra's celebrated treatise 'ittihad al-'aqil wa'l-ma'qul', a title which defines, both historically and philosophically, much of the post-Sadrean epistemology in Islamic philosophy.

More often than not, Sadra proudly declares this view to be one of the crown achievements of his philosophy, which he calls 'transcendent wisdom' (al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah), an achievement which as great a mind as even Ibn Sina was not able to foresee. Putting the language of triumphalism aside, Sadra is aware of the fact that the kind of unity that he envisages in the process of knowing runs against the common sense epistemology which is based on the binary opposition of the subject and the object. Furthermore, there is an unremitting opposition to it by the Peripatetics, especially by Ibn

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3[3] Sadr, in addition to being a philosopher in his own right, was a master historian of philosophy. The preceding account is gathered from his detailed analyses in the Asfar. See, inter alia, Asfar, Vol. 3, Part I, pp. 284-291, 318-321 and 344-5.


5[5] This view has a number of formulations, one of which is ittihad al-'ilm, al-'alim wa'l-ma'lum. It is applied to perception in general under the name ittihad al-mudrik wa'l-mudrak.
Sina who did not hesitate to call it 'sheer sophistry and poetry'. Although Sadra firmly believed that the Peripatetic position on this particular question was never decided and that Ibn Sina and others implicitly accepted it, he always warned against simplistic attempts to grasp the true meaning of the union which he advocates. It is for this reason that he always states a number of aforisms and even prayers after giving his full account of the subject. Sadra's main concern, me may infer, is to show the philosophical subtlety of the argument by insisting that the ultimate grasp of the matter thrives on a metaphysical vision or insight, which is hoped to take us beyond the minimalist oppositions of common sense epistemology, and which he calls 'essential witness' (shuhud 'ayni). Keeping this point in mind, Sadra's reading of the history of philosophy, both Islamic and Greek, to which he owes on this particular issue more than we may expect, displays a remarkable attempt of reconstruction and synthesis. At any rate, Sadra was aware of the long and surprisingly persistent history of this idea in both Greek and Islamic traditions. In what follows, we will try to give a historical analysis of the subject, hoping that this background will contribute to our understanding of the problem as it is addressed by Mulla Sadra.

II. The Greek Background

It is customary to turn to Plotinus and the neo-Platonists for the full exposition of the idea that knowledge comes about as a union between the intellect and the object of intellection. Indeed, Plotinus gives a considerable space to its analysis in the Enneads which has remained to this day the locus classicus in Greek on the subject. We also know that this idea was both hailed and criticized as the hallmark of neo-Platonism. Even though the poor Plotinus never enjoyed the celebrity of Aristotle because parts of his Enneads (IV, V and VI) were translated into Arabic as the Kitab Uthulujiyya Aristotalis and his name aflutin or aflutinus and nickname al-shayk al-yunani is a rarity in classical Arabic sources, his disciple and biographer Porphyry (furfirius in Arabic) was credited (or discredited) for envisaging an essential unity between nous, noon and noeton, namely the intellect, the process of intellection and the object of intellection. Prior to Plotinus' bold exposition and defense of the subject, however, there is a trajectory of development we have to pursue, which will ultimately bring us back to Plotinus himself.

Plato's Dialogues do not present a full-fledged defense or discussion of the problem. Nevertheless there are certain passages which we may take as pointing to the direction taken by Plotinus and other Platonists. In the Phaedo, Socrates, when giving his argument about the immortality of the soul only minutes before drinking the poison in his cell, refers to a relationship of homoios between the ousia and the psuche (77 a). The human soul, which is the intelligible principle in man, shares with the essence or archetypal reality of things something fundamental, which makes it superior to the perishable body.

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7[7] Uthulujiyya has been edited and published by Abdurrahman Badawi in his Plotinus apud Arabes/Aflutin 'ind al-'Arab (Cairo, 1955) with some other neo-Platonist fragments. His introduction (pp. 1-66) provides a well-informed discussion of the reception of the so-called pseudo-Aristotle in Islamic philosophy.
'Yes, Socrates, I am convinced that … the existence of the soul before birth cannot be separated from the existence of the essence of which you speak. For there is nothing which to my mind is so patent as that beauty, goodness, and the other notions of which you were just now speaking, have a most real and absolute existence' (*Phaedo*, 76 d-77 a).

Furthermore, the soul (*nous*) is akin to the intelligible world in such a way that it faces no difficulty in uniting with the *ousia* of things. The Platonic philosopher attains happiness in this world only by becoming one with the intelligible world.

'…the true lover of knowledge is always striving after being -- that is his true nature; he will not rest in the multiplicity of individuals … until he have attained the knowledge of the true nature of every essence by a sympathetic and kindred power in the soul, and by that power drawing near (*pleiēsiasas*) and mingling (*migeis*) and becoming incorporate with very being (*to ointi ontos*), having begotten mind and truth, he will have knowledge…' (*The Republic*, VI, 490 b-c).

This is not to suggest that there is an absolute unity between the soul and the Forms. It is, however, true to say that the soul, being immortal, simple, and indivisible, belongs to the Divine order (80 a-b).

This makes the soul share something of the Divine, on the basis of which man is innately capable of knowing.\textsuperscript{8}\textsuperscript{8} The isomorphic unity between the possessor of knowledge and what it knows is, of course, a Greek idea as old as the pre-Socratics, and Aristotle gives a well-informed account of it in the *De Anima* (404 b) and cites the *Timaeus* as one of its primary sources among the Greeks.\textsuperscript{9}\textsuperscript{9} The idea that 'only the like can know the like' (*homoio to homoion*) underlines the essential unity between man and what can be known, suggesting that the intellect and what it knows cannot be of two separate orders of reality. On the contrary, they belong to the realm of the intelligible, a realm in which the intellect, intellection and what is intellected constitute a unity without fissure. This turns all knowledge into the exclusive property of the intelligible world because the intellect knows to the extent to which it participates in the reality of the intelligible. In other words, the homogeneity of the intellect with the intelligible renders knowledge possible, and every act of true knowledge becomes a way of sharing in the intelligible world.\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{10}

In a surprising way, Aristotle, despite his professed language of immanence against Plato's transcendentalism, speaks of a unity between *noetos* and *noeta*, viz., the objects of thought and the soul or the mind (*De Anima*, 430 a). This somewhat enigmatic part of the *De Anima*, whose few lines have captured the attention of the neo-Platonists as well as

\textsuperscript{8}\textsuperscript{8} In fact the philosopher derives his 'divine happiness' from the peculiar relationship he has with the Divine order: 'And the philosopher holding converse with the divine order, becomes orderly and divine, as far as the nature of man allows…' *The Republic*, VI, 500 c.

\textsuperscript{9}\textsuperscript{9} A full exposition of this isomorphism is given in the *Timaeus* 35.

\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{10} For an analysis of the subject in Plato, Plotinus and Proclus, see Jean Pepin, 'Elements pour une histoire de la relation entre l'intelligence et l'intelligible chez Platon et dans le neoplatonisme', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 146 (1956), pp. 39-64.
the Peripatetics for a long time and led to the writing of a number of commentaries, depicts immaterial substances as displaying an isomorphic unity between *episteme* and *episteton*, namely the process of thinking and being thought. This unity is reached when the potential intellect becomes actual by thinking the intelligible substance. Aristotle's text reads as follows:

'We have stated ... that the intellect, prior to thinking, is in a certain way potentially the intelligible objects but is none of them actually; and it should [be regarded potentially] as [being] in a tablet which has no actual writing. This is indeed the case with the intellect. Moreover the intellect itself is intelligible like the [other] intelligible objects. For in the case of objects without matter, that which thinks and that which is being thought are the same, for theoretical knowledge and its knowable object are the same' (*De Anima*, 429 b-430 a).\(^\text{11}\)[11]

Aristotle's version of this problem is obviously imbedded in a number of postulates that he puts forward concerning the Divine intellect and the self-intelligibility of the intellect, a fundamental issue into which we cannot enter here.\(^\text{12}\)[12] In addition to the *De Anima*, Aristotle makes a similar point in the *Metaphysics*, which combines in a sense the so-called distinction between the psychological and cosmological intellects.

'If thinking and being thought of are different, in respect of which does goodness belong to thought? For to be an act of thinking and to be an object of thought are not the same thing. We answer that in some cases the knowledge is the object. In the productive sciences it is the substance or essence of the object, matter omitted, and in the theoretical sciences the definition or the act of thinking is the object. Since, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, the divine thought and its objects will be the same, i.e., the thinking will be one with the object of its thought' (*Metaphysics*, XII, 1074b-1075a).\(^\text{13}\)[13]

These lines of Aristotle were interpreted by the posterity to prove the self-subsistence of the Divine Intellect that contains the principles of intellection in its own essence. Furthermore, the idea of the intellect as having the principle of intellection in itself was a corollary of the hylomorphic epistemology of the Peripatetics. Since knowledge, in the Peripatetic perspective, is based on abstracting the intelligible form of things from their material garment, the farther removed a thing is from matter, the closer it is to the intelligible realm. This explains Aristotle's insistence that the immaterial intelligible substances are both intelligible and the subject of their intellection. As Ibn Sina would later say, every intelligible form (*al-surah al-ma'qulah*) contains its principle of


\(^{12}\)[12] Themistius pays a particular attention to this part of *De Anima* in his Paraphrase. See *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect, the De Intellectu Attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius' Paraphrase of Aristotle's De Anima 3.4-8*, Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Notes by Frederic M. Schroeder and Robert B. Todd, (Toronto, 1990), pp. 81-93. See also the Arabic translation of Themistius' commentary on the De Anima, *The Arabic Version of Themistius' 'De Anima'* , edited by M. C. Lyons, (Norfolk, 1973), Section VI, p. 169 ff.

intellection and intelligibility in itself and becomes purely actual and realized when detached, namely abstracted from its material matrix.\(^{14}\)

The Peripatetic principles that we just summarized, as formulated by Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, were incorporated by the Muslim Peripatetics and applied to God's knowledge in order to address the question of Divine intellection. Whether what the posterity made out of those few lines coincided with what Aristotle meant is something we can not decide here. It is, however, certain that the later readers and commentators of Aristotle interpreted him as saying that the unity between the intellect and the object of its intellection is a sine qua non of all veritable knowledge in things without matter, i.e., the intelligible substances. The numerous references to Aristotle in the Sadrean corpus, whether from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Uthulujiyah* or from the translations of the *De Anima*\(^{15}\), give weight to the view that Aristotle's scant remarks on this particular problem were read through the eyes of Alexander of Aphrodisias, whom Farabi calls the 'exegete'.\(^{16}\)

The *De Intellectu*, attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, is one of the key Greek texts under whose light the later commentators, neo-Platonists and Muslim philosophers read and commented upon Aristotle. In this regard, Alexander's short work, which reads more like a restatement than a commentary, is one of those key texts that have paved the way for the neo-Platonic reconstruction of Aristotle. Although we know little about the life and career of Alexander, we are informed by Porphyry that he was respected and read as an authority in the seminar of Plotinus.\(^{17}\) After all, Alexander as *Alexander mysticus* is considered to be the source of *Aristoteles mysticus*.\(^{18}\) The *De Intellectu* was translated into Arabic in the school of Hunayn ibn Ishaq as early as the 9th century and enjoyed a considerable prestige among the Muslim philosophers who used and commented upon it.\(^{19}\) One major exception is perhaps Averroes who accused the Peripatetics of his day of being 'Alexandrist' in their interpretation of the Stagirite.\(^{20}\) Nevertheless Sadra, for

\(^{14}\) *The intelligible form of every quiddity is detached from matter and its attachments… the intelligible form exists in the external-natural world but it exists as mixed (mukhalitah) with things other than itself, not as purely detached.* Ibn Sina, *al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ad*, ed. by Abdullah Nurani, (Tehran, 1363), pp. 6-8.


\(^{16}\) *Al-mufassir*, which is the word used by Farabi, is the Arabic translation of Alexander's Greek title 'ho exegetes'. See his *Mabadi' ara' ahl al-madinat al-fadielah*, translated by Richard Walzer as *On the Perfect State* (Chicago, 1998), p. 54.


\(^{19}\) See the introduction by F. M. Shroeder and R. B. Todd, pp. 2-3.

instance, quotes the full text of the *De Intellectu* in his *Asfar* with some minor variations and omissions.\footnote{See *Asfar*, Vol. 3, Part I, pp. 428-433. The authority of Alexander as to how to read Aristotle was without question so much so that the first chapter of Sadra's treatise called *ittihad al-'aqil wa'l-ma'qul* has the subtitle 'On the degrees of theoretical intellect according to the account given by Alexander of Aphrodisias' (*fi darajat al-'aql al-nazari muwafiqan lima zakarahu iskender al-afridusi*). This treatise, which I am currently translating into English, is edited and published by Hamid Naji Isfahani in *Majmua-yi rasail-i falsafi-yi sadru'l-mut'alihin*, pp. 63-103. The aforementioned subtitle is on p. 65.}

The *De Intellectu* is the source of a number of key issues in the Aristotelian tradition. Among them, the notion of the unity of the intellect with the object of its intellection is of particular importance for our purposes here. Sadra refers to it, without actually mentioning its title, as one of the primary sources of this idea and admonishes Ibn Sina and his students for failing to appreciate Alexander's remarks about the problem. At any rate, the application of this idea to the nature of Divine knowledge was a momentous event in philosophical theology in that the epistemology of the Divine, if we may use such a term, was now linked inextricably to the ontology of the Divine: the act of the Divine at the level of knowledge results in the ontological production of what it 'knows' -- a process in which the principles and objects of intellection and the intellect itself are given all at once as a single unity. Considering Alexander's influence on Plotinus as well as the Muslim philosophers, his work is without doubt an integral part of the history of this idea and deserves more attention than we can do here.\footnote{P. Moraux's *Alexandre d'Aphrodise: exegete de la noetique d'Aristote* (Paris, 1942) remains to this day the best account of Alexander of Aphrodisias and his place in the Aristotelian tradition. For Ibn Sina's use of Alexander as the primary channel of reading the Aristotelian corpus, see the section on the soul in his *Kitab al-Najat*, translated by Fazlur Rahman as *Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitab al-Najat, Book II, Chapter VI*, with Historico-philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo Edition, (London, 1952).}

In Plotinus, we find a rigorous and very elaborate statement of the idea that the Intellectual principle is at once the means, process and object of intellection. Two important outcomes of this claim can be stated as follows. First of all, this view serves as a strong assertion of the independence and completeness of the intellect at the level of the Divine. The intellect as the logos does not depend on things for its act of intellection. Rather, its intellection is primary and by presence, viz., its ontological presence and transparency by itself to itself, which is the first condition of all knowledge by presence. This is the root of Plotinus' controversial doctrine 'that the intellectual beings are not outside the Intellectual-Principle (*hoti ouch exo tou nou ta noeta*)' (*The Enneads*, Fifth Ennead, V, 1). For Plotinus, the Ideas are the thoughts of the Intellect. One may rightly invoke the danger of solipsism here as Plotinus himself was presented with this criticism during his lifetime.\footnote{See, A. H. Armstrong, 'The Background of the Doctrine 'that the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect'' in *Les Sources de Plotin*, (Vandoeuvres-Geneve, 1957), p. 393-413.} We may also remember that Plato himself had to face a similar difficulty concerning the ontological status of the *eide*: do they exist before the Demiurgic Intellect which then thinks them as ontologically separate realities or do they...
exist as ontological and cosmological productions of the intellect? In any case, Plotinus' response would be his realist ontology of the ideas and the Intellect, 24\[24\] which asserts that 'the eide are truth, they are real 'being', they exist in themselves'. This, however, is a huge subject in itself to which we cannot justice within the confines of this study.

The second aspect of this view, which became the sine qua non of Sadra's epistemology also, can be called the constitutive theory of the intellect. If the intellect and the intelligible reality of things belong to the same ontological realm, then the intellect can no longer be conceived as a mere instrument of thinking or judgment. The instrumentalist theory of the intellect, or reason for that matter, construes reason as a means of connecting 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact'. By contrast, Plotinus regards all these elements as one single unity, included within the realm of the Intellectual-Principle. Said differently, the intellect, when fully actual, is not and cannot be different in its essence from what it produces and what it operates on. As Plotinus states in the fifth Ennead:

'Now a principle whose wisdom is not borrowed must derive from itself any intellection it may make; and anything it may possess within itself it can hold only from itself: it follows that, intellective by its own resource and upon its own content, it is itself the very things on which its intellection acts. For supposing its essence to be separable from its intellection and the objects of its intellection to be not-itself, then its essence would be unintellectual; and it would be intellectual not actually but potentially. The intellection and its object must then be inseparable -- however the habit induced by our conditions may tempt us to distinguish, there too, the thinker from the thought' (The Enneads, V, 9, 5).

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If this is so, then the representational theory of knowledge cannot be the main, let alone only, form of knowledge. Knowledge as representation or impression is based on the existence of objects prior to the intellect. But in things whose intelligible reality is entailed in and identical with the intellect, representation, as Sadra would later claim, can only be a second-order concept, and the idea of presence (hudur) as the basis of knowledge gains prominence. This implies that we know things knowable by appropriating their intelligible form/realty.

When applied to Divine knowledge, this notion establishes an ineluctable relationship between being and knowledge because what we call being comes about as a result of the Divine intellection: 'it is clear that, being Intellect, it really thinks the real beings and establishes them in existence. It is, then, the real beings.'26\[26\] Moreover, since the intellect itself is intelligible and object of its own intellection, everything that it creates, be it in the form of ontological production or conceptual schemes, cannot be devoid of cognitive content. The intrinsic intelligibility and thus value of being, regardless of a thinking subject, goes back to this bold assertion of Plotinus, and it was taken up by the


\[26\] The Enneads, V. 9. 5, translation by J. P. Kenney, Mystical Monotheism, p. 113.
posterity wholeheartedly as a blessing of neo-Platonism. A corollary of this view is what is called 'axiarchism', namely the view that the world is grounded in value because it is generated by an Intellectual and self-intelligible principle which grants it an intrinsic value and significance. The same point can be made from the point of view of the ontology of potentiality and actuality, a theme so central to the entire Aristotelian system from physics and metaphysics to cosmology and epistemology. According to this scheme, the creative principle is a fully actualized being with no potentiality. Since actuality signifies perfection and potentiality, conversely, imperfection and deficiency, the fully actual and perfect being imparts upon the world its meaning, intelligibility and value. As Kenney points out, perfection implies ontological production, which is an effect to be understood in valuational terms.

III. The Islamic Philosophy

The Muslim Peripatetics, especially Farabi and Ibn Sina, took an ambivalent position on the idea of knowledge as the unity of the intellect and the object of intellection. Farabi talks about this principle only in relation to Divine intellect and its form of intellection. Ibn Sina follows more or less the same path, at least in his al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ad, but adamantly opposes it in the Shifa' and al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat when talking about it in relation to human knowledge. Sadra notices Ibn Sina's somewhat ambiguous position on the subject and admonishes him, as we have said before, for failing to appreciate its true meaning. Sadra, however, is not alone in approaching the Avicennan position as somewhat obscure as there is an interesting debate among the modern scholars of Ibn Sina as to how to interpret his remarks on the subject.

In al-madinat al-fadilah, Farabi gives a clear definition of the problem:

Because the First is not in matter and has itself no matter in any way whatsoever, it is in its substabce actual intellect; for what prevents the form from being intellect and from actually thinking (intelligizing) is the matter in which a thing exists. And when a thing exists without being in need of matter, that very thing will in its substance be actual intellect; and that is the status of the First. It is, then, actual intellect ('aql bi'l-fil'). The First is also intelligible (ma'qul) through its substance (…) It is intelligible by virtue of its being intellect; for the One whose identity (ipseitas) is intellect is intelligible by the One whose identity is intellect. In order to be intelligible, the First is in no need of another essence outside itself which would think it but it itself thinks its own essence. (…)

…The essence which is thought is the essence which thinks, and so it is intellect by virtue of its being intelligized. Thus it is intellect and intelligized and thinking, all this being one essence and one indivisible substance -- whereas man, for instance, is

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27[27] Or Platonism for that matter because the so-called distinction between Platonism and neo-Platonism on this particular issue is inconsequential.
28[28] For an interesting exposition of this view, whose roots in Islamic philosophy would require a separate study, see John Leslie, Value and Existence, (New Jersey, 1979).
30[30] The words Farabi uses are 'aql, ma'qul and 'aqil.
intelligible, but what is intelligible in his case is not actually intelligized but potentially intelligible; he becomes subsequently actually intelligized after the intellect has thought him... We think, but not because our substance is intellect; we think with an intellect which is not what constitutes our substance; but the First is different; the intellect, the thinker and the intelligible (and intelligized) have in this one meaning and are one essence and one indivisible substance.

I have quoted this somewhat long text by Farabi to show the importance of this discussion in his theology and cosmology. The basic Aristotelian principle that things without matter are both intellect and intellecting underlies Farabi's analysis here, which was incorporated by both Ibn Sina and Sadra. The same idea is used profusely in Farabi's Risalah fi'l-'aql which Sadra quotes, as we have mentioned before, in his Asfar with some omissions. Unlike Ibn Sina, however, Farabi does not indulge in any kind polemic against Porphyry who is discredited by Ibn Sina as claiming that the soul, when it is actual, becomes identical with the object of its intellection (ma'qul).

As we have indicated before, Ibn Sina takes a hostile position towards the idea that we have been pursuing so far. Both the Shifa' and the Isharat deny any kind of union between the soul or the intellect and the object of intellection. In the Shifa', he makes his famous aphorism against Porphyry:

'How shall the soul, then, become forms of things? The man who has misguided people most in this regard is the one who has composed the Isagogy for them... True, the forms of things come to inhere in the soul and decorates it and the soul is like a place for them, thanks to the material intellect. If the soul became the form of an actual existent, then, since the form itself, being actuality, cannot accept anything else (i.e. any other form)...it follows necessarily that the soul cannot accept any other form.'

Ibn Sina makes a similar point in the Isharat whose text reads as follows:

'A group of people who [claim to] pass on [the teachings of Aristotle] thought that the intellecting substance, when intellecting an intelligible form, becomes [identical with] it. Suppose that the intellecting substance thinks A. According to their claim, it becomes identical with A, viz., the object of intellection (al-ma'qul). In this case, is it in the same state as if it did not think A? Or perhaps this [i.e., intellection] did not take place. If it is like before [i.e., before its intellection], then it does not make any difference whether it intellecled it or not...

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31[31] According to the Arabic text, this part should be ‘...after the intellect intelleced it [the intelligible form].'
There was a man among them known as Porphyry who has written a book on the intellect and the intelligibles, which is praised by the Peripatetics. All of it is gibberish. And they know very well that they do not understand it neither does Porphyry himself.

Learn this well: to claim that something becomes something else not by way of transformation from one state to another, nor by way of conjoining with something else so that a third thing may come out of it, but in such a way that a single object becomes another single object, is poetical nonsense with no meaning.  

As we can see from these texts, Ibn Sina does not make any distinction between Divine and human knowledge and categorically rejects the idea, which he attributes to Porphyry. In spite of this radical rejection, Ibn Sina affirms this unity in *al-Mabda’ wa’l-ma’ad* when discussing the intellection of the Divine. The sixth chapter of this book has the following title: 'Concerning that the Necessary Being intellects by itself and is the intellect by itself, and the explanation that every form which is not attached to matter is like this, and that the intellect, the subject of intellection (*al-‘aqil*) and the object of intellection (*al-ma’qul*) are one and the same thing.' The discrepancy between the two positions of Ibn Sina was noticed by both Suhrawardi and Sadra in their *Talwihat* and *Asfar* respectively. Interestingly enough, this has also led to a live debate among the contemporary scholars of Ibn Sina, whose texts can equally be taken to lend support to both interpretations.

As Sadra points out, Ibn Sina's drastic refutation of Porphyry on this particular matter is largely due to his aversion towards any kind of unity or union (*ittihad*) between two things. For Ibn Sina, who was operating within the framework of Aristotelian physics and cosmology, the unity between any two things means the termination of these two elements and the emergence of a new element. Or, it simply means 'ontic union', which he considers to be marred by a number of fallacies. To ensure this position, Ibn Sina makes a bold distinction between 'unity' (*ittihad*) and conjoining or conjunction (*ittisal*), a distinction that runs through the entire Avicennan corpus. When speaking of the relation between the human soul and the active intellect, for instance, the word used by Ibn Sina to describe this relation is 'united' rather than 'conjoined'.

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37[37] Shihaboddin Yahya Suhrawardi, *Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques*, edited by Henry Corbin, (Teheran-Paris, 1976), Tome I, p. 69. After discussing the possibility of the unity of the soul with what it know and its rejection by Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi has the following to say on this ongoing debate: ‘Ibn Sina, the greatest of all the later philosophers, narrated this view from Porphyry and dishonored him in a way that suits the nobility of neither of them. In spite of this, he clearly claimed the unity of the soul with the intelligible form in *al-Mabda’ wa’l-ma’ad* and some of his other books. Then he finally realized the fallacy of this view.’ *Ibid*.
Ibn Sina is always the same: *ittisal*. Being aware of this subtle point made by Ibn Sina, Sadra responds by giving a long discourse on the three meanings of unity (*ittihad*) in philosophy and physics, and invokes his celebrated teachings of the substantial movement (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*) and the gradation of being (*tashkik al-wujud*). We do not have space here to enter into the analysis of this subject. Nevertheless, Sadra explicitly states that it was, among others, the ignorance of these two teachings of Sadra that has led Ibn Sina and the Peripatetics to the denial of any kind of unity between two or more things.\(^{41}\)

After the Peripatetics, perhaps the most important name in this long-debated issue is Suhrawardi whose ideas on self-knowledge and knowledge as a form of light had a direct impact on Sadra's epistemology. Sadra’s language of light that he employs in conjunction with his epistemology is derived mostly from Suhrawardi’s *ishraqi* doctrines, and the idea of knowledge by presence (*al-‘ilm al-huduri*) underlies much of his notion of the unity of the intellect with the object of intellection. Having said that, we have to remind ourselves that on the question of the unity of two things in strictly physical terms, Suhrawardi’s position was the same as that of Ibn Sina. The *Talwihat* clearly rejects the idea as physically impossible, providing a counter-argument similar to the one given by Ibn Sina.

Some people have thought that when the perceiver perceives something, he becomes [identical with] it. Some other people have thought that the soul perceives things through its union (*ittihad*) with the Active Intellect. You have learnt from the previous arguments that two things do not become one thing except through conjoining (*imtizaj*), conjunction (*ittisal*) or synthesis by whole (*tarkib majmu‘i*). This is one of the qualities of [physical] bodies. When we say that A became B, does A remain the same and then we have B, thus both of them becoming multiple entities? Or is it rather that A is destroyed and B did not come into being, in which case there is no unity (*ittihad*) between the two? … When the soul thinks of A, does it remain the same as it was before [it thought of it]? If so, then there is no union or the establishment [of a new being]. Or, perhaps the soul is destroyed and something else comes into being, in which case again there is no unity [obtained between the soul and its object of intellection].\(^{42}\)

In spite of this objection which was, according to Sadra’s interpretation, a necessary result of the Aristotelian physics and cosmology within which both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi operated, the idea of presence (*hudur*) and luminosity (*nuraniyyah*) as the basis of intelligibility continued to play a central role in Sadra’s defense of the unity of the soul with its object of intellection. Considering the fundamental differences between the Peripatetic and Sadrean physics, it is not difficult to see how Sadra was able to overcome the problems posed by Aristotelian natural philosophy while incorporating the Suhrawardian metaphysics of light on the one hand, and the primacy of self-knowledge

\(^{41}\) Sadra, *R. ittihad al-‘aqil wa-l-ma‘qul*, pp. 20-22. The quote Sadra makes from the *Isharat* appears in V. 3, p. 295. Here, Sadra mentions specifically two aspects of this philosophy: the principality of being (*asalat al-wujud*) and the continuously changing structure of physical bodies, which is a result of the gradation and intensification (*tashhid*) of being.

and consciousness on the other.\footnote{On the importance of self-knowledge and consciousness in Suhrawardi insofar as our discussion is concerned, see Hossein Ziai, \textit{Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardi’s Hikmar al-Ishraq} (Atlant, 1990), pp. 143-154.} Furthermore, the \textit{ishraqi} doctrines of light and knowledge provided Sadra with an arsenal of arguments to refute the Peripatetic concept of knowledge as abstraction (\textit{tajrid}) and representation.

The pre-Sadrean adventure of this idea does not end with Suhrawardi. There are numerous references to and, in some cases, hints at the unity of the subject and object of intellection in the works of Ibn al-Arabi, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi\footnote{Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi in his \textit{al-Nafakhat al-ilahiyyah} defines true knowledge as an absolute unity between the subject and object of knowledge: ‘Know that obtaining the knowledge of something as it is and through the perfection of its knowledge hinges upon the union with that which is known. And [real] union with something is based on the disappearance of all [those qualities] that distinguish the knower from the known. In [the world of] existence, there is a Real Divine element (\textit{amr}) between a thing and others, that necessitates the participation (\textit{al-ishtirak}) [of all things in one single reality] without differentiation. And there are other things that distinguish this particular thing from what is other than itself. This is one [of the doctrines] in which there is no doubt according to the school of those who affirm the truth (\textit{mashrab al-tahqiq}). \textit{Al-nafakhat al-ilahiyyah}, ed. by Muhammad Khwajawi, (Tehran, 1375/1417), p. 32.}\footnote{For Maimonides see \textit{The Guide for the Perplexed}, Part 1, sec. 68 translated by M. Friedlander (New York, 1956, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition), pp. 100-102 where he states that the \textit{intellectus}, \textit{intelligens} and \textit{intelligibile} are one and the same in God and in fact in every intellect in actus. Accordingly, the intelligible form of a tree is the intellect in actus. For Muhy al-Din al-‘Ajami al-Isfahani, see \textit{Epitre sur l’unite et la trinite, traitte sur l’intellect, fragment sur l’aame}, edited and translated by M. Allard and G. Troupeau, (Beyrouth, 1962), pp. 53-61 where al-Isfahani uses the idea of the unity of the \textit{al-‘aql}, \textit{al-‘aql} and \textit{al-ma‘qu} as one of the philosophical proofs of the Christian trinity.}, Dawud al-Qaysari, Abu’l-Hasan al-Amiri and others. Within the confines of this essay, we have to postpone to another study the examination of these figures and the role they played in Sadra’s rigorous defense of the subject. Before closing this discussion, however, we have to mention the fact that this idea had an interesting history at the hands of some Jewish and Christian philosophers writing in Arabic such as Moses Maimonides and Muhy al-Din al-Isfahani (11\textsuperscript{th} or 12\textsuperscript{th} century).\footnote{For Maimonides see \textit{The Guide for the Perplexed}, Part 1, sec. 68 translated by M. Friedlander (New York, 1956, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition), pp. 100-102 where he states that the \textit{intellectus}, \textit{intelligens} and \textit{intelligibile} are one and the same in God and in fact in every intellect in actus. Accordingly, the intelligible form of a tree is the intellect in actus. For Muhy al-Din al-‘Ajami al-Isfahani, see \textit{Epitre sur l’unite et la trinite, traitte sur l’intellect, fragment sur l’aame}, edited and translated by M. Allard and G. Troupeau, (Beyrouth, 1962), pp. 53-61 where al-Isfahani uses the idea of the unity of the \textit{al-‘aql}, \textit{al-‘aql} and \textit{al-ma‘qu} as one of the philosophical proofs of the Christian trinity.} We cannot say that all of these philosophers had a ‘common agenda’ in defending or commenting upon this idea, this being particularly true in the case of al-Isfahani. It shows, however, the extent of the remarkably persistent history of this idea, which we tried to analyze in the present essay.

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Reason and Reasoning in Ibn Hazm of Cordova (d. 1064)
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Reason and Reasoning in Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova (d. 1064)

In viewing Ibn Ḥazm’s huge and diverse literary production, we are not certain how we ought to classify him, using the standard categories. He is a Koran expert, a traditionist, a theologian, a historian, and above all, a polemicist. But should we ask any cultivated Western reader, he would answer our question by saying that Ibn Ḥazm is a psychologist since he is the author of the Dove’s Necklace – a treatise on love and its symptoms – which has been translated into many modern languages and made widely known. (1) We arrive at a very different view when we pay attention to the main concern of many of Ibn Ḥazm’s writings, and especially of his trilogy that consists of the Fīṣal fī l-miḥāl wa-l-ahwā’ wa-n-nihāl (2), Al-Ḥikām li-uṣūl al-ahkām, (3) and Al-Muḥallā bi-l-āthār fī sharḥ al-mujallā bi-l-ikhtisār. (4) All three works deal with religious and juridical subjects in the purest Islamic way and reveal to us Ibn Ḥazm’s vital concern for the theory and practice of Islam as the true revealed religion.

Whereas the Muḥallā deals with jurisprudence, the Fīṣal and the Ḥikām are theoretical works that will help us to understand the fundamentals of his doctrine. Ibn Ḥazm wrote the Ḥikām after the Fīṣal, both works complementing each other. In the Fīṣal, Ibn Ḥazm establishes Islam as the only true religion and shows the inconsistency of other religions as well as the sects that deviate from orthodoxy, which he identifies with his own Zāhiriite school. In fact, for a sound, complete knowledge of Islam he recommends us to start by reading his logical handbook, Taqrīb li-hudud al-mantiq, (5) to follow with the part of the Fīṣal

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devoted to the *haqāʾiq*, the true doctrine about God, His unity, His message and His messenger, and to end with the *Iḥkām*.

1. Scriptural text versus reasoning?

There are two themes that run through Ibn Hazm’s writings: the necessity for demonstrative proofs and the conviction that Zāhirism is the only school that truly represents Islam. The Zāhirite school was founded by Abdulla Sulaimān Daʾwūd Ibn Khalaf (815/8-884), whom J. Schacht described as “an extreme representative of the tendency hostile to human reasoning.” Thus, at first sight there is an apparent contradiction between Ibn Hazm’s double adherence to Zāhirism and to logical reasoning. I want to face this issue by focussing on what Zāhirism means for Ibn Hazm and on the dimensions that reason reaches in his system.

According to Ibn Hazm, whenever God commands something, He gives us the power to achieve it, and thus God has endowed men with different capacities and powers so that men can achieve the aims which He has set for them. If God imposes on us such an intellectual duty as logical reasoning, He does it because He has bestowed on us the reason or intelligence (ʿaql) needed to comply with this duty. Ibn Ḥazm quotes the Koranic phrase: “God enjoins justice, kindness and charity,” and says that men are endowed with various capacities in order to fulfill this command. Among these capacities is reason which Ibn Ḥazm describes here:

> Reason obliges the discerning soul to make justice prevail and to choose that which the sound mind indicates, and to have beliefs which are knowledge and to express them with the tongue and with the movements of the body which are actions. The soul accordingly strengthens the capacity that is reason so that reason has the power to resist being moved away from the truth, and to reject that towards what ignorance and passions lead.

The Koranic command to use our intelligence obviously intends to use it as a guide for our actions and religious beliefs. In fact, Ibn Hazm affirms that the whole purpose of the *Iḥkām* is to overcome the doctrinal divisions among Muslims and establish one faith. Reasoning plays a decisive role in his struggle for a unitarian doctrine which identifies with true science. Ibn Ḥazm gives us also details how reason reaches scientific knowledge (ʿilm):

(8) *Iḥkām*, p. 61: 23. Ibn Hazm uses the term ʿaql to designate an effective power, which in a proper sense only God possesses.
(10) *Iḥkām*, p. 6: 13-16, my translation. In similar terms, *Fisal*, vol. 5, p. 125: 23, defines reason as the capacity (qawwāl) that the soul possesses to differentiate things according to their essences.

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There is no way to scientific knowledge but by these two directions: the one is what intuitive knowledge by the mind and immediate perception by the senses cause us [to know], the other is the premises that go back to intuitive knowledge and direct perception. (12)

Ibn Hazm sets up a theory of knowledge at the bottom of which intuitive knowledge and immediate sense perception lie. He does not explain in this passage what constitutes intuitive knowledge but it is no doubt related to what he stated in an early passage of the Iḥkām when commenting on how we know that reasoning is rightly carried out. He raised there the question of how we know that knowledge resulting from argumentation is true and gave following answer:

We realize that what the intelligence causes us to know is right in an immediate and instantaneous way. There is no delay between the first moment of our understanding and our knowledge. As soon as we understand it, we know that the whole is bigger than the part, and that every individual is different from each other, and that the same thing cannot stand and sit at the same time. (13)

Upon this layer of primary knowledge there is a second one of premises, and in a third place, a layer of complex reasoning that makes us certain of the Islamic dogmas: God’s unity and uniqueness, Muḥammad’s mission and the Koran’s authenticity. God has decided that we obtain this knowledge through argumentation (muḥājjja), by means of conclusive arguments (ḥujjā qāṭi‘a). (14)

In the Koran Ibn Hazm finds the command to employ logical reasoning when it encourages friendly discussion as a mean to conversion. (15) He even affirms that God does not want us to accept any conclusion unless based on a demonstrative proof (būrḥān). (16) At the beginning of the Iḥkām Ibn Hazm defines būrḥān as “any sentence or sentences showing a true judgment passed on something”, (17) but his words need further explanation. In its original form būrḥān should be identified with the Aristotelian apódeixis (demonstration) as it is taught in Ibn Hazm’s Taqrīb. (18) According to Aristotle, apódeixis is “a syllogism which produces scientific knowledge”

(12) Iḥkām, p. 59: 16-17.
(14) Iḥkām, pp. 20-23.
(15) Iḥkām, p. 20: 2-4: “Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner. Your Lord best knows those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided” (Koran 16: 125).
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(An. Post. 71 b 17) and the premisses of such syllogism must be “true, primary, immediate, better known than, prior to, and causative to the conclusion” (71 b 21-22).

However, Ibn Ḥazm does not stick to the original meaning of apódeixis. We can better understand what burhân is for him if we listen to Ibn Ḥazm when refuting qiyās, “analogy”, which usually means syllogism in philosophical texts. For Ibn Ḥazm, qiyās is “to pass a judgment on something about which there is no text, based on its similarity (shibh) to something else [in a text]”.(19) The Koran, for instance, forbids eating pork meat (6: 145), but how is it with its fat? All legal schools except Zāhirism agree that, by analogy, pork fat is also forbidden, but Ibn Ḥazm shows that there is no analogy between the fat and the meat of any animal.(20) Fat belongs to a sort (jins) different from meat, but these people do not know what genus, species and differences are.(21) Ibn Ḥazm consequently sustains that true knowledge must derive from the nature of beings, and not from accidental aspects. Since similarity can be merely an accidental feature that two objects share, reasoning by analogy can lead not only to different results according to each school but even to contradictory conclusions. Thus, for Ibn Ḥazm analogy is mostly a negative form of knowledge, and he is ready to accept it only if there is no contradiction to the conclusion, because analogy produces a judgment about something, for which there is no text, on the basis of a judgment about something, for which there is scriptural text.(22)

Ibn Ḥazm disclaims the use of analogy in religious matters, arguing the falsity of this way of proceeding in the final part of the Ihkām.(23) He interprets the Koran so as to find its rejection there too.(24) On the rejection of analogy Ibn Ḥazm agrees with Zāhirism and opposes the three main schools of theology: Shāfī’ism and the majority of Mālikism, and Ḥanafism.(25) He goes so far as to consider qiyās as a forbidden innovation, by arguing that the Companions of the Prophet were of one view in regard to all kinds of subjects and yet had no need for analogy to decide which view was better than another. The use of analogy “was improperly introduced in the second century of Islam, spread over and yet gained the upperhand in the third century.”(26) After the Greek sophists, Ibn Ḥazm does not know of anybody whose judgements are more false than the followers of analogy. They do not use reason; they claim that if a thing A is forbidden or permitted by Islamic law, another thing B, despite being of a different kind

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(20) Ihkām, p. 966. Zāhirism claims that it is forbidden only because of universal consensus (ijmā’)
(21) Ihkām, p. 1032.
(22) Ihkām, p. 1006: 22-23.
(23) Chapter 38, pp. 929-1109, and to a large extent chapter 39, pp. 1110-1170.
(25) See Ihkām, pp. 920: 4 - 921: 1, or 1044: 19 - 26, for various kinds of qiyās these schools admit.
(nawē), is forbidden or permitted too because of some similarity they believe to see with A. If grains of wheat (burr) are declared unlawful, for instance, by analogy acorns are too. (27)

Should they use reason, they would refrain from any analogical judgement. Ibn Hazm raises the question: What is the difference between the pig and the ram? No one, but God declared the pig illicit, and the ram, licit. (28) Therefore God cannot urge upon us to consider analogy, and compel reason to know what it cannot know. Ibn Hazm ends his plea against analogy with these words: “Analogy is an error, is a sin, is a heresy, and nobody is allowed to make use of it for religious judgements.” (29)

To know more about burhān we may know look at the Muhallā, because Ibn Hazm always calls burhān the argument with which he underpins each of his assertions there, and draw an instance from this book. The first chapter of the Muhallā begins with the duty of shahāda, the public confession of Muslim faith: There is no other divinity than God, and Muhammad is His messenger. The proofs Ibn Hazm submits come from the Muhammadan traditions (hadīth) and among them is one going back to Abū Huraira, who heard Muhammad say:

I have received the command to fight against the people until they testify that there is no other divinity than God and until they believe in me and in that which I have brought to them. (30)

The argument is not syllogistic, and the command to fight contradicts the passage we saw above, where Muhammad preached friendly disputation (Koran 16: 92) and nevertheless, Ibn Hazm considers it to be burhān. In fact, he is ready to accept a wide range of arguments except for those employed by the rival schools of jurisprudence, and based on analogy, which he unveils as completely useless. Therefore he justifies his adherence to Zāhirism precisely because it is the only school that uses reason, ‘aql in the right manner, and procures accordingly true knowledge, ‘ilm. (31) For Ibn Ḥazm only Zāhirism complies with the basic rules of thought; it does not admit a judgment about the same thing that is different for two different people or in two different times, and he gives an astounding explanation:
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The foundation of our school is that reading the Koran literally and the sound traditions\(^{(32)}\) is the truth; we are certain to be right on this. In every assertion that we encounter, we take the literal reading of the Koran and of the sound traditions. Whoever opposes us, is wrong.\(^{(33)}\)

In addition to the Koran and to the authenticated traditions Ibn Ḥazm accepts consensus (\(ijmā\)), as a source of Islamic law although he restricts its use very narrowly, following Abū Sulaimān Dā’wūd Ibn Khalaf, who did not accept consensus other than of the Companions of the Prophet.\(^{(34)}\) This is for Ibn Ḥazm the only right \(ijmā\), and it, moreover, has to be supported by a textual basis:

We assert: There is no consensus but on the text, and the text is the words of Muhammad, which are reported, well kept and available, or on his actions, which are also reported, or his sanctioning (\(iqrā\)), since Muhammad sanctioned what he knew and did not deny, and this is a situation reported and well kept too.\(^{(35)}\)

Apart from the text, Ibn Ḥazm does not admit any other source of theological knowledge. He rejects not only analogy but also authoritative teaching (\(taqlīd\))\(^{(36)}\) – frequently practiced by the Mālikites – or the individual effort in interpretation (\(ijtihād\))\(^{(37)}\) – defended by the Kalām theologians. All these are rejected because they lead to opposite views concerning one and the same subject.

Up to now, we have seen what Ibn Ḥazm understands by \(burhān\), mainly through its opposition to \(qiyyās\). Frequently it is a suitable quotation of the Koranic text, but it includes also logical arguments. We have seen to what Zāhirism means for him. For him there must not be any contradiction between the Koranic sentences and the formal use of reasoning, either in the understanding of them or in the application of them. It means that Ibn Ḥazm praises reason but also empties it of any capacity to decree on its own what is morally permitted or forbidden:

He who pretends that reason declares actions licit or illicit, or that reason causes necessary effects – because all divine actions existing in this world, religious or natural, are revealed by God in human reason – he does the same as the one who denies reason any capacity of causation.\(^{(38)}\)

\(^{(32)}\) A hadith is the saying ascribed to the Prophet and it is sound, if the links of the transmission chain are flawless.

\(^{(33)}\) \(Iḥkām\), p. 656: 22-24.

\(^{(34)}\) \(Iḥkām\), p. 509: 4.

\(^{(35)}\) \(Iḥkām\), p. 501: 4-7.

\(^{(36)}\) All authoritative teaching is forbidden, in all branches of the law, \(Iḥkām\), p. 861: 14.

\(^{(37)}\) Ibn Ḥazm does not see any need for \(ijtihād\) since the sentences of the religious law are clearly known, \(Iḥkām\), p. 1156: 6-11.

\(^{(38)}\) \(Iḥkām\), p. 27: 5-8.
Both extremes are erroneous. Ibn Hazm grants reason a restricted power both to know and to act. The capacity of reason does not reach as far as to know why the pig is illicit and the goat is licit, why the midday ritual prayer is of four rak'ā (39) and the prayer at sunset is of three, why Muslims have to wash the head and not the neck for the cultic ablution, etc. (40) In the face of these limitations we should raise the question whether reason has the power not only to apply the text but also to prove its authenticity.

2. Reason as the foundation of knowledge

Throughout the preceding pages, Ibn Hazm has been leading us towards a system that I would summarize as follows: We recognize the truth of the Koran and the authenticated traditions as a text. The text contains a creed and a set of rules for action. Those human actions that are contemplate by these rules, are morally qualified, bad or good, and those actions which are not contemplated by the them are to be considered as licit. The only justification for these rules lies in the afterlife: reward and punishment will first take place then.

Nevertheless, these tenets need to be sustained by rational arguments, by first proving that the Koran is God’s revealed word, and that Muhammad is His messenger, otherwise we risk falling actually into a contradiction. George Hourani pointed out that Ibn Hazm upheld reason for this purpose, namely to justify revelation itself, since Ibn Ḥazm was, well aware that to make revelation the first source of all religious knowledge is self-defeating, because it leaves nothing but a circular argument on which to base the authenticity of revelation itself. (41)

Nevertheless Hourani interpreted Ibn Ḥazm as restricting the priority of reason to what he called «the primary terms of value, such as good, evil and obligatory.» (42) They are the ethical equivalents of those universal principles of knowledge we learned above (p. 4). Ibn Ḥazm no doubt would accept the priority of these universal concepts but he would not limit the power of reason to them alone, otherwise he would not have written the Fiṣal to prove that Islam is the true religion and to refute Judaism and Christianity. There, towards its end, (43) Ibn Ḥazm rejects the “equivalence” of the arguments in favor of one religion or the other by attacking those who maintained that

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(39) Bending of the torso followed by two prostrations in Muslim prayer ritual
(40) İḥkâm, p. 27: 14-25.
(42) “Reason and Revelation”, pp. 144-145.
(43) Fiṣal, vol. 5, pp. 119-136, “Treatise against who asserted the equivalence of the proofs”.

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there is no way to know which religion is the true one. He concludes the
discussion stating:

That the world is temporally created, that it has one Creator who is
eternal, that prophecy is true, that the prophecy of Muhammad is genuine, we
know that all this is true only by means of demonstrative proofs (burhān)
based on the senses and on the necessity of reason. (44)

In the context of Ibn Hazm’s criticism of analogy, A. Turki faced the
question how Ibn Hazm explained the truth of our knowledge. (45) Turki, as
R. Arnaldez before, (46) answered the question by saying that for Ibn Hazm
the truth is self-evident and that reason grasps its obviousness intuitively.
Ibn Hazm would embrace such a theory of certainty, which Al-Ghazālī will
later sustain, but we saw above that he applied this criterion of evidence only
to primary notions, to general principles. Therefore argumentation based on
proofs is needed to found revelation. Although the starting premises are
evident, the long way to the conclusion has to be paved with proofs.

To know is to prove. In the Ihkām, Ibn Hazm talks about signs God has
put in this world to be used as pieces of evidence to build up demonstrations,
and invokes again the Koran for God’s command to “employ the proofs
dalil) of reason and the senses.” (47) Because of the command we do not
incur in a circular argument: we may abstract the command, and the proofs
are still valid.

Consequently Ibn Hazm sketches a rational demonstration of God’s
existence, based on the nature of human language. No human being can exist
without language; language is «united words» and union or composition is
the action of an agent. Every action takes place within time, in which it
begins. Thus the union or composition of words must have a beginning.
Since man cannot exist without language, he himself must have a beginning,
and therefore he is temporally created. Ibn Hazm switches now to another
premise: Whoever is temporally created (muhdath) has a creator different
from him. Man has received the knowledge of this fact from his Creator
because man has no science or knowledge without God teaching him. (48)

And if we turn to the Muhallā, we find a better developed argument. Ibn
Hazm attempts to prove that God is the creator of the universe using a
burhān which I would summarize as follow: We cannot imagine the world

(44) Fisal, vol. 5, p. 136: 4-6. Correct sense perception and “necessity of reason” are the two pillars of
his theory of knowledge. “Necessity of reason” is found in general principles, for instance, that the whole is
bigger than the part (See above, p. 4).
(45) “Argument d’autorité, preuve rationnelle et absence de preuves dans la méthodologie juridique
(46) « La raison et l’identification de la vérité selon Ibn Hazm de Cordoue », in Mélanges L. Massignon,
(47) Ihkām, p. 60: 13-17.
(48) Ihkām, p. 28: 11 – 29: 9, the context is the discussion about the origin of the human language.
without time. Time is defined as "extension" (madda) and as such it is a measure or numbering which increases because of "its passing away and its duration." That which increases must have a beginning and an end.

If time necessarily has a beginning, and if the world cannot be untied from time, and time has a beginning, that which does not precede what has a beginning, has a beginning too. (46)

The world therefore has a beginning, and if so, then it is temporally created (muhdath) and what is temporally created needs a creator. We may dispute the flow of the argument but there is no doubt that Ibn Hazm employs a logical reasoning sustained by general premises. As for the Fisal, Ibn Hazm having criticized the materialists, produces five arguments in favor of the temporal creation of the world. (50) They are well known and may will be spared an analysis here. (51)

But the key question is how this kind of reasoning extends to the specific tenets of Islam: How does Ibn Hazm prove the authenticity of the Koran and the genuineness of Muhammad’s prophethood? His answer in the Iḥkām is quite short:

If we are asked: How do you know that the Koran is true? We must answer: On the basis of right premises to which reason and the senses attest. (52)

We are not allowed to go back to revelation to look for the truth of the premises, Ibn Hazm reminds us; we would thus fall into a circular argument. Now we have to look for the argument proving the genuineness of the Koran, but maybe the Iḥkām is not the place to look for it, but the Fisal. Ibn Hazm refers us to the Fisal in a passage of the Iḥkām. (53) Reading the Fisal results in considering miracles as the decisive argument in proving the divine nature of the Koran. (54)

Muhammad quenched the thirst of his army in Tabîk and Ḥudaibiya with water flowing out of a cup he held between his fingers. Muhammad fed his army at the battle of the "Trench" and at Jâbir’s home. Muhammad threw a handful of sand against the enemy tribe of Hawâzin and blinded them all. But the most impressive and convincing miracle is the Koran’s uniqueness, and all Muslims agree upon this dogma. Although Muhammad challenged his contemporaries to

compose something similar to the Koran, they did not do so because they were aware of their lack of divine inspiration and the capacity needed to do it. Moreover, since Muhammad’s time no one has been able to write anything like the Koran and consequently the Book is an enduring miracle.\(^{(55)}\)

The Muḥallā also deals with the issue of Muhammad’s prophecy. That he is God’s messenger is proved (burḥān) by the fact that he brought the Koran which has arrived to us on a flawless sequence of transmission, called upon his adversaries to produce a similar work and they all failed.\(^{(56)}\)

Ibn Hazm does not question the authenticity of the afore mentioned miracles since the chain of transmitters is “sound,” and regarding the uniqueness of Koran, he does not ponder any explanation other than that of its miraculous nature. To prove additional tenets of Islam Ibn Hazm resorts to the scriptural text, i.e. the Koran or the traditions.

To sum up: the only way to avoid circularity in the argumentation is that reason not only organizes the contents of our knowledge by means of general rules and principles, but also intervenes in the elaboration of the very content. Ibn Hazm was well aware of the necessity to prove the genuineness of revelation and he advanced several arguments. Those aiming to prove the temporal creation of the world fall within the borders of reason and basically adjust to the rules of reasoning, but those aiming to prove the authenticity of the Koran and of Islamic revelation lack, however, demonstrative power belonging instead to a kind of rhetorical, persuasive discourse.

3. The foundation of moral values

But Ibn Hazm did not see the shortcomings of his arguments concerning the miraculous nature of revelation; maybe the stream of the polemics was so strong and rapid that he was dragged on in the midst of the many arguments that fill all his works, and he did not stop to think over possible weaknesses. But let us grant him the firmness of his premises and advance to the second stage of his system, namely, the moral qualification of human actions. If we raise the classic question, “what makes an action good or evil,” Ibn Hazm answers that there is no objective good or evil. Good and evil are what God declares good or evil, respectively.\(^{(57)}\)

Who is a believer or an unbeliever is again a matter solely of divine decision. Ibn Hazm admonishes us that unbelief (kufr) is evil because God has made it evil and that unbelief consists only of what God has made it; by contrast, faith consists only of what God has made it.\(^{(58)}\) He gives us the

\(^{(55)}\) See also Fīṣal, vol. 3, pp. 15-22.
\(^{(56)}\) Muḥallā, vol. 1, p. 8, 1-10.
instance of wine drinking. Before God revealed to us its prohibition, it was licit and it has become unlawful only because God has qualified it as such. (9)

Virtue consists, therefore, of the exact compliance with God's revealed commands, and vice of disobedience to them. Virtuous behavior as God expects it from us is nothing but observance of what He has commanded or to what He has urged upon us. (60) The Koran expresses God's will and God's power, and the believer must obey it to be virtuous. (61) According to Ibn Ḥazm there are no objective foundations for virtue or vice, which are both decreed by God, and human reason cannot know by itself what is evil or good, as the Muʿtazilites maintained. For them God can do only «what is rationally good» (62) insofar good has an objective existence.

Whether obedience to God gives man true happiness in his mortal life does not really concern Ibn Ḥazm throughout his works, for man is going to be rewarded with true happiness or punished with continuous suffering in the afterlife. Ibn Ḥazm goes into detail with the matter of the afterlife, and especially, with the suffering of the unbelievers. We may, however, find a quotation condensing his views:

Every deceased must be first tested and questioned; then he will live in joy or sadness until the day of resurrection, when he will receive his reward, and be sent to paradise or to the fire. (63)

Resurrected human beings, paradise, and the fire have physical reality, and are not allegorical. Ibn Ḥazm follows eschatological traditions and places paradise in the sixth heaven (64) Thus, the pain unbelievers are going to suffer is a real, physical pain caused by an everlasting fire. (65)

Certainly this set of quite simple arguments expounds Ibn Ḥazm's true beliefs and his essential doctrine. Nevertheless, we want to look for other options and ask whether there is a role in it that philosophy is allowed to play. And so we read how, in the Fīṣal, Ibn Ḥazm defines philosophy as ethics:

The sense of philosophy is ... improvement of the soul by means of practicing the virtues and following good conduct in this life, which will lead us to well-being in the afterlife; [philosophy also consists of] good

(60) Ḩkām, p. 7: 1-3.
(61) Ḩkām, p. 497: 13-15: "You should know that the believers do not have other path than the obedience, id'ā, of the Koran and of the rules firmly established by the Messenger."
(62) Fīṣal, vol. 3, p. 100: 5-6. Ibn Ḥazm opposes also to the Muʿtazilite distinction between God's potency, which is always good, and the human potency, which is good or bad and is added to the divine in our actions, see Fīṣal, vol. 3, p. 111: 12-14.
(64) Fīṣal, vol. 4, p. 82: 6-14.
administration of the house and of the subjects and these are the very aims of the revealed religious law. There is no disagreement on them between philosophers and theologians. (66)

However according to him the philosophers assign philosophy the capacity to distinguish between vices and virtues by employing demonstrative proofs that separate truth from error. (67) In the following sentences, Ibn Hazm redefines philosophy as “nothing more than improvement of the world” in two dimensions. In its internal dimension, philosophy is the soul’s abiding by laws (sharā‘ī) that keep men away (zājirā) from wrongdoing and, in its external dimension, philosophy is the defense of the city against its enemies and, according to Ibn Hazm, the philosophers add to it healing the bodies by means of medicine. (68)

Ibn Hazm describes these prohibitory laws and gives instances such as the prohibition against murder, engaging in unlawful sexual relations, and damaging someone else’s property. If these prohibitions were violated, “the world and the sciences would be destroyed.” (69) Ibn Hazm however does not accept this answer as final and concluding a legitimate inductive research. Traditional philosophy can admit it, because it sees the universe and the human society ruled by rational laws, that if violated, damage and even destroy them. The Divinity has created the world according to rational principles that men can know by themselves and to which they have to conform their actions. Ibn Hazm, however, moves the center of attraction toward the lawgiver: There are laws, the question is who has given them, and as we can expect, his answer will be that only God can promulgate them.

Besides this answer, Ibn Hazm contemplates that of his adversaries. Our helpless adversaries – he says – may object that these kinds of laws have been laid down (mawdū‘a) by some wise men in order to motivate common people toward a virtuous life. (70) These wise men threaten uneducated people as though they were children but are only using lies to achieve a good purpose. Ibn Hazm deploys several arguments trying to show the inconsistency of considering religious laws as rules laid down by wise men for the welfare of the common people. (71) His attacks are launched on the presumption that human convention equals falsity, and that therefore all these rules would be lies. (72) Ibn Hazm may
guess that his arguments are rather weak and resorts again to revelation, denying human reason the capacity to declare a prohibition or a command and says again, “There is nothing good but what God makes good (hassana), and nothing evil but what God makes evil (qabbaha).”

From his point of view, if rules are laid down by men, there is no reason to follow one rule and not the other. Rules that are not dictated by God do not have the authority that requires to obey to them. Ibn Hazm has a very definite aim in mind: there can be only one true law, the shari‘a, among the various laws and he does not make any distinction between laws of general character or respect for man’s life – or particular – number of prayers. Why can there not be more than one law? His answer reads: One thing and its contrary cannot be forbidden and permitted at the same time for the same individual. The only valid law, of course, is a law coming from God, and that this law is the Islamic shari‘a appears clear to Ibn Hazm after the proofs he has produced in favor of Islam.

In spite of Ibn Hazm’s polemics against a philosophical foundation of morality, he does not rebuke philosophy absolutely. Philosophy is ethics and its moral recommendations are often in agreement with religious commands. The most apparent proof for this compatibility is his own book, Risāla fī mudāwāt an-nufūs wa-tahdīb al-akhlaq wa-z-zuhd fī r-radhā‘īl, which he wrote in his late years in the seclusion of his farm at Montija, Huelva.

4. Philosophic ethics

Abū ‘Alī [Ibn] Miskawaih (d. 1030) had composed a book with a similar title – Tahdīb al-akhlaq wa-taqhīr al-a‘rāq – whose influence on Ibn Hazm is obvious. Miskawaih knew the ethical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and organized his book in chapters dealing with various moral subjects such as the essence of happiness or the different virtues and

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(73) Fisal, vol. 1, p. 96: 3-4.
(76) It may be added that Ibn Hazm also derides those who pretend that man can discover the true religion by knowing which religion has the right prohibitions and commands because no prohibition or command is justified by reason (Fisal, vol. 1, p. 98: 1-2).
(77) Epistle on the remedies of the soul and on the correction of the character and on turning away from the vices. First edition Cairo, 1908. Spanish translation by M. Asin Palacios, Los caracteres y la conducta. Madrid, 1916.
Ed. by Nada Tomiche as Al-akhlaq wa-s-siyar, followed by her own French translation: Epître morale, Beirut, 1961.
Quotations follow the English translation by M. AbuLaylah, In Pursuit of Virtue, London 1990, and are according to chapter and aphorism, common to most editions.
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vices. By contrast, Ibn Ḥazm’s *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* contains a series of 331 reflections or aphorisms, gathered in chapters which do not correspond to specific matters, such as virtues, conduct, etc. In one of them we find his definition of happiness as follows:

I have tried to find one goal which everyone would agree is excellent and worthy of being striven after. I have found one only: to be free from anxiety (*tard al-hamm*).

Dispelling anxiety is a goal upon which all nations agree, from the time when the Almighty created the world until the day when this world will pass away. (80)

To be free of anxiety, to get rid of worries, is what all men have been longing for since God created this world. There seems to be, however, ages of turmoil and uncertainty when this longing is more alive. This was no doubt the age of the *fitna*, the dismembering of the Cordovan caliphate, which Ibn Ḥazm had experienced.

Ten centuries before Ibn Ḥazm, another Cordovan, who lived in Rome had expressed similar views. L.A. Seneca (d. 65 AD) attained the rank of an imperial senator and was the preceptor of Nero, who later ordered him to commit suicide, as Suetonius reported. His life was not free of sorrow at all and he devoted an entire treatise to the subject of the soul’s happiness, *De animae beatitudine*, where he states:

But what you desire is something great and supreme and very close to being a god: to be undisturbed. This abiding stability of mind the Greeks call *euthymia* “well-being of the soul” on which there is an excellent treatise by Democritus; I call it tranquility. (81)

Another Stoic philosopher, Epictetus (d. 125-130 AD), compared to Seneca, had a very different personal situation since he was a slave; his master was one of the officers of Nero’s guard. (82) But for Epictetus, too, tranquillity, freedom from perturbation, is something worth striving for and he urges us to make a desperate effort to attain tranquillity of mind, freedom and magnanimity. (83)

(80) Akhldq, I.5.
(82) The great of Rome reckoned among their numerous slaves Grammarians, Poets, Rhetoricians, and Philosophers; slavery was not synonym with hardship.
REASON AND REASONING IN IBN HAZM OF CORDOVA (D. 1064)

There is only one way to happiness ...: the rule is not to look toward things that are beyond the power of our will, to think that nothing is our own, to give up all things to the Divinity, to Fortune. (84)

Ibn Ḥazm's definition of happiness echoes the Stoic concept of it as freedom from perturbation, and he may even have known the Stoics since he mentions that all nations “from the time when the Almighty created the world until the day when this world will pass away” shared this view.

Ibn Ḥazm and the Stoics basically agree upon the way to attain tranquillity too: happiness (eúdoia) is the product of virtue. (85) Ibn Ḥazm observes the strenuous efforts men make to attain freedom from perturbation although each may follow a different way. Some people chase after riches to dispel the fear of poverty, others chase after pleasures to dispel the anxiety of missing them, others chase after knowledge to dispel the anxiety of being ignorant ... None of these actions will free man from anxiety. Only actions performed “with an eye on eternity” contribute to dispel anxiety and, as a conclusion:

You should therefore understand that there is only one objective to strive for, it is to dispel anxiety; and only one path leads to this, and that is the service of the most high God. (86)

Ibn Ḥazm’s idea of virtue is different from that of the Stoics because of its Islamic content and in two basic aspects: God decrees which ‘amal is a good deed and God bestows on us the power to do it. According to the Stoics, man possesses [right] natural reason and knows what is good or evil. When Epictetus inquires about the essence of the good, he is convinced that where the nature of the Divine lies, there lies the nature of good; he finds it in “intelligence, knowledge, and right reason.” (87) And for Seneca, as for the other Stoics, virtue, good, and wisdom are intertwined as well, (88) although the question about good and evil cannot be fully answered without taking will into account. (89)

Regarding his definition of virtue, it remains for us to look into the main aspect of virtue, i.e., man’s behavior. Ibn Ḥazm estates:

Virtue is the mean between the extreme of excess and the extreme of defect. These two extremes are to be blamed; and virtue is to be praised,

(86) Ḥadīq 1.8. Asín Palacios’ text writes al-‘amal il-i-dhira so that he translates “la obra buena útil para la vida futura”.
(87) Epictetus, Discourse, II.8.3: nóis, episthēmē, lógos orthós.
(89) V.g. in Epictetus, Discourse, I.19.1; II.16.1; IV.2.; IV.9.
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except when it is a question of intelligence, and then there can be no excess. (90)

This definition echoes Aristotle’s definition in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where vices are considered as the extremes. Now, the Stoics had a different idea of what vices are, since for them vices are diseases of the soul caused by passions. Passions are blameworthy movements of the soul that, when they become strong and lasting, cause disease. (91) Virtue requires the containment of passions and virtuous practices are necessary to cure the disease. Moderation, and frugality are continuously advised by the Stoics. (92)

The Stoic view that virtue means containment of passion appears incidentally in the second chapter of Ibn Hazm’s *Akhlaq*, where he quotes the Koran:

Allāh says: Anyone who fears the majesty of God, and controls himself against passion, he shall have Paradise for his refuge (78: 40). These words encapsulate all virtue: to control oneself against passion means in fact to turn away from one’s natural tendency toward anger and lust, things which are both under the dictates of passion. (93)

The distinction between anger and appetite is an old one, and Plato had already spoken of the two forces within the mortal kind of soul in man; (94) we should remember that Arabic works of ethics are a rich amalgam of influences, Pre-Islamic, Iranian, Greek, etc., either direct or indirect.

The main part of Ibn Hazm’s treatise on ethics deals with the correction of character or natural dispositions that might otherwise become vices. The guideline for such correction is the Platonic division of four cardinal virtues, which are the foundation of all the others: justice (‘adl), insight (fahm), courage (najda) and generosity (jād); (95) the last one, generosity, replaces the Platonic virtue of temperance or moderation. (96) The cultivation and growth of virtues implies the rooting out of their opposite vices, an aspect to which Ibn Hazm attaches great importance. (97) Ibn Hazm was especially concerned by two vices of the soul: anger (ghaddab) and pride (‘ujb). He was a hard polemicist, no wonder that he had a strong natural disposition for contesting and his very recognition of this inclination is to his credit. (98)

(90) Akhlaq, IX.295.
(93) Akhlaq wa-s-siyar. II 25. Man ... nahā an-nafs ‘an il-hawā is the Koranic expression.
(94) Timaeus, 69 C - 71 D.
(95) Akhlaq, VII.195.
(96) Sophrosyén. For Plato’s division, see *Republic* IV.6-10, 428 B - 434 C.
(97) For an analysis of virtues and vices according to Ibn Hazm, see my article “Ibn Hazm y el estoicismo representado por Séneca”, en *Revista del Instituto Egiptio de Estudios Islámicos*, 37 (1995), pp. 91-95.
(98) Akhlaq, IV.97.
The most noxious vice for him is 'ujb. Let us remember that the Stoics were often accused of arrogance (oïësis) and Epictetus(99) and Seneca blamed those philosophers who behaved in an arrogant way. Seneca's treatise De beneficiis contain many observations admonishing against pride; we must be humble when receiving benefits as well as when giving them because pride would spoil the effect of our action:

Oh, Pride, the bane of great fortune and its highest folly! How glad we are to receive nothing from thee! How thou dost turn every sort of benefit into injury! How ill all thy acts become thee!(100)

Ibn Ḥazm outdoes Seneca in blaming pride. He compares 'ujb with a tree trunk out of which different kinds of pride grow as branches;(101) he observes how arrogantly people behave,(102) and expresses his amazement at the fact that pride can exist for no good reason and that pride abounds among those "who have not a iota of knowledge, fortune, reputation or courage."(103) Ibn Ḥazm attaches great importance to correcting pride; and we may wish to know why pride is for him a vice to be rebuked so strongly. Through long enquiry into human nature, Ibn Ḥazm believes he has come to the conclusion that not only riches and material goods are given to us, by God but intelligence and moral qualities as well:

You have no merit from your own virtues; they are only gifts from the Almighty, which, if He had granted them to another, would have made him just like you, and you will realize that, left to your own devices, you would collapse and die.(104)

Consequently Ibn Ḥazm's ethics as presented in Al-akhlāq wa-s-sīyār does not show an alternative version of his moral teaching as presented in his main works. Philosophical ethics is neither a sufficient nor complete science. First of all, Ibn Ḥazm does not agree that science and knowledge are equal to virtue, although he concedes that "knowledge has a part in every virtue and ignorance has a part in every vice." By personal experience he corroborates, on the one hand, that some common people surpass educated people regarding their morals «but this is very rare.» On the other hand, people who know the messages of the prophets and the sayings of the philosophers surpass the most wicked and «this is very common». (105)

(99) Manual, ch. XIII, XXII, XXIV, XLVI, XLIX.
(100) Seneca, De beneficiis, II.13.
(101) Akhīdq, IX.262.
(102) Ibn Ḥazm has detailed observations, for instance, of the man who always refrains from laughing and moves slowly in a display of self-conceit, although "such a fault is not very serious" (Akhīdq, IX.263).
(103) Akhīdq, IX.265.
(104) Akhīdq, IX. 247: they are just minah Allāh, gifts of God.
(105) Akhīdq, IX.54-55.
5. Reason, freedom and will

Concerning the human knowledge of the revelation, Ibn Hazm insisted that whenever God commands something, He gives man the power to achieve it. Concerning moral life he explains it by saying that God not only helps man to act in a virtuous way but gives him the necessary power. In a passage of the Akhīdq, divine intervention appears in the form of a natural disposition that God stamps (taba‘a) in our souls:

The best grace that God can give His servant is to endow him with justice and a love of justice, with truth and a love of truth above all else.... There is no strength and power except in God the Almighty. (106)

Ibn Hazm’s interpretation risks falling into predeterminism, but he is deeply familiar with the issue, which he discusses at length in the Fiṣal (107). To summarize his view, which he presents as the orthodox one, we may say that he posits in the individual two kinds of effective capacity to act (istiṭā‘a). The first istiṭā‘a is freedom of action in as much as man is healthy and endowed with all the members of his body and there are no external hindrances; this capacity precedes the action. For the second, God creates in man a power simultaneous with action; this innovated power helps or deserts him:

The real capacity to act consists in the integrity of the limbs together with the absence of hindrances – both aspects preceding the action – and in another power coming from God – this aspect exists simultaneously with the action. When they are joined, the action takes place. God is the one who makes anything happen. (108)

By means of this explanation Ibn Hazm is convinced he preserves man’s responsibility for his salvation or perdition. He does not hesitate to quote the Mu‘tazilites as sharing his view in as much as they consider istiṭā‘a God’s action, but he does not accept their view that all istiṭā‘a is always anterior to the action. (109) Together with the Mu‘tazilites Ibn Hazm stresses that, without the power (qāwa) God gives man, he cannot do either the good or the evil. Moreover this doctrine harmonizes with Ibn Hazm’s frequent assertion that, whenever God commands man to do anything, He gives him the capacity to perform it. It is true that in other passages Ibn Hazm may sound predestinarian, but these pages of the Fiṣal should leave no doubt about his true convictions.

(106) Akhīdq, IV.113.
Nevertheless we should not be mislead and think that his defence of human responsibility implies a defence of philosophy, which on the contrary is pushed to the side. Ibn Hazm denies philosophy the necessary power to reform the soul, since only God and not man has the power and the real possibility of implementing man’s moral duties. For this purpose we may approach Ibn Hazm’s views as stated also in his essay Risālat at-tawqīf ‘alā shārī‘ an-najāt bi-khīṭār at-ṭarīq (10) and see how he answers his friend’s inquiry about the usefulness (manfa‘a) of the ancient sciences and that of the revelation of the prophets.

The ancient sciences, which include philosophy, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, astrology, and medicine are very useful, but their effectiveness is limited to this world and they bring little reward. (11) By contrast, revelation is beneficial for the refinement of character, to avoid wrongdoing in this world, and for the salvation of the soul; revelation has, therefore, an everlasting benefit. Philosophy, in spite of its diminished value, shares with revelation the task of the refinement of character; but Ibn Ḥazm deprives philosophy of the capacity to achieve the task on its own first because it cannot define its aim properly, that is, it cannot know the essence of a virtuous nature, and second, because

It is absolutely impossible for philosophy to correct character without prophecy since the created being has not the power to cause necessary effects. (12)

Only God is the real cause of the effects we believe to be ours. This is not a valid argument, the Muslim philosophers could object, since they maintain that God does not act immediately and directly in all events but through causes immanent to the world. And even if we accept that only God can be an effective cause, it does not mean that He is not going to assist man in the actions recommended by the philosophers. Ibn Hazm has shifted again the issue to the level of revelation, imposing a system based solely on the scriptural text.

Throughout the writings of Ibn Hazm and through the lines of this article, reason (‘aql) and reasoning (ḥujja, burḥān, dalīl) are omnipresent, but reason is never autonomous and does not develop freely, it always serves


(12) Ibn Ḥazm blames the philosophers for not being able to have one common doctrine: The followers of reason [the intelligences] disagree upon the correction of these characters, because the man whose irascible faculty prevails does not hold the same view as the man whose concupiscible faculty prevails, and both do not hold the same view as the man whose rational faculty prevails (Tawfiq, alā shārī‘, an-najāt, 1st ed. p. 47: 6-9; 2nd ed. p. 134: 10-12).

revelation. By logical necessity, "necessity of reason", man has an immediate knowledge of universal principles and he has to use them for a correct reading of the sacred text. Besides reason gives man the necessary instruments for his argumentation, and the most valuable of them is the apodeictic syllogism of the Aristotelian logic, burhân in its original meaning. Many arguments, however, are carried on in a dialectical way and are not as flawless as he thinks to be. In most of the cases, reasoning is an invocation of the adequate Koranic text, so that proving its authenticity becomes the main task assigned to reason.

Therefore, the keystone of his system is his justification of revelation by means of reason. Ibn Hazm is convinced that he succeeds in reasoning about the genuineness of the Koranic revelation, but it would be generous to qualify his reasoning not more than an attempt.

Endnote

In the course of the foregoing words (§. 4) on Ibn Hazm's philosophic ethics, I compared his views with those of Seneca and Epictetus, two main representatives of Roman stoicism. The presence of Stoic thought in Islamic philosophy and thought in general is a long accepted phenomenon, but the manner in which the influence occurred remains a matter of discussion. D. Gutas has given us the latest status of the question in his article "Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic," (114) where he points out the necessity of providing concrete evidence for the transmission of Stoic doctrines, something I have not done in this paper.

Nevertheless, there are some indications as to how Ibn Hazm could have been influenced by Stoic moral thought; one of these is the work of Miskawaih who knew Galen's Arabic summaries. (115) Christianity could have been a channel of information too: As important as Neoplatonism is for Christian dogmatic thought, Stoicism is important for its moral thought. (116) Ibn Hazm had a deep and solid knowledge of Christianity, as well as Judaism, as the chapters of the Fīsāl against Christianity make clear. (117)

This is easy to understand if we take into consideration that Ibn Hazm was likely the grandson of a convert. Although he claimed to be a descendent of Yazid the Persian, (118) who had been a servant of Yazid, the brother of the caliph Mu'awiyah (661-680), his origin is not clear, and the


(117) The subject has been recently studied by M. AbuLayla in his doctoral dissertation: The Muslim view of Christianity with Special Reference to the Work of Ibn Hazm, Exeter University 1994.


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Andalusian historian Abū Marwān Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 1009) affirms that Ibn Ḥazm’s grandfather Khalaf was a Mozarab of Montija, near Niebla in the gharb al-Andalus. Ibn Ḥazm could easily have absorbed Stoic influence through the Latin tradition of the Mozarab church, a circumstance that does not exclude his reception of Stoic moral ideas transmitted by written Arabic literature.

JOSEP PUIG MONTADA

(119) Quoted, for instance by Yaqūt (d. 1229) in *Muḥam al-udābā‘*. Ed. I. ‘Abbās, vol. 4 (Beirut, 1993), n° 720, p. 1656.
The relationship between intellect and religion has been an essentially harmonious one in the context of Islam. Despite various disputes over the place of the intellect in relation to religion, one does not observe the two elements being pitted in opposition to each other in any radical or extreme manner. This is to be contrasted with the philosophical situation that has prevailed in the West since the 18th century Enlightenment movement. Religion is deemed antithetical, in large part, to the free operation of the intelligence, as a result of the secularisation of thought and culture in western society. In this essay, the author addresses this theme in relation to the criticisms being voiced by intellectuals within the West itself; and by reference to the perspectives of certain Muslim philosophers, for whom there was no contradiction between intellect and religion.

Keywords
Intellect, religion, secularisation, philosophy, Enlightenment, religious studies, faith, philosophy, symbolism, science, intellectual history, history, Christianity, Islam, Roman Catholicism, Isaac Newton, Galileo, Copernicus, Meister Eckhart.

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I’m talking about attitudes in our culture, in our political culture, in our legal culture and in our popular culture; attitudes that suggest that religion is somehow something that is not important ... something that you should leave behind when you come into serious public debate or into the workplace; something that you should be willing to split off from yourself if you want to be taken seriously.


Theorising the Role of Religion in Contemporary Society

In his best-selling book, Stephen Carter, Professor of Law at Yale University, laments the crystallisation in America of a culture within which religion is no longer intellectually respectable. He is of course not unique in this. There are, and always have been, intellectuals in the West who oppose the secularisation of thought and society, and who have criticised the processes by which materialism and worldliness have become the new forms of cultural tyranny; but what is important to note is that now, there are voices from within the bastions of the intellectual establishment in the West that are calling for a re-evaluation of some of the central assumptions that underlie modern Western society, and, in particular, the principles and the proper scope or limits of secularism. That is, questions are being asked about how far secularism should go, and whether it might not be time to de-secularise some domains. This de-secularisation can also be called a re-sacralisation; or, as John Keane, Professor of Politics at the University of Westminster in London and one of the key theoreticians on civil society says, a ‘return to the sacred’.

Carter refers to several factors that he feels are responsible for undermining the intellectual and cultural credibility of religion. Let us mention here the three most important ones: the ‘myth’ that religious people are pre-Enlightenment oddities, irrational and childish; the ‘myth’ that religious faith leads to political sedition; and the assumption that religion must be irrelevant because it is inaccessible to modern science.

Taking the idea of political sedition first, it is clear that many fear that the authority of the state in the modern West is threatened by any religion that wishes to impose itself in the domain of politics. This understandable fear stems from the particular experience of the West. The principle of the separation between Church and State — the basis of secular political doctrine — arose as a political necessity in a historical context dominated by religious wars and religious persecution. Carter and others like him would not wish to see this aspect of secularism reversed; the question for them is of not allowing political pragmatism to extend to the secularisation of thought and culture, to the eclipse of faith as an element in identity, both personal and social.
The Roots of the Antagonism Between Religion and Science

As for the assumption that religious people are ‘pre-Enlightenment oddities’, one needs to appreciate why it was that the Enlightenment was so opposed, not so much to religion per se, but to the monolithic power of institutionalised religion, the Church and its dogmas. In the bourgeois salons of 18th century Paris, the Roman Catholic Church was seen as more fit to burn witches and heretics than to guide souls to salvation!

The vitriolic arguments of Voltaire, Diderot and other thinkers against religion can only be understood in the light of the third of the factors noted above: the assumption that religion is necessarily opposed to reason and to science. How and why did this assumption take root? This is an extremely complex issue and resists any unilateral explanation. Nonetheless, there are certain key events that help shed light on the underlying chains of historical causation, on determinative intellectual and cultural tendencies, that is, on the zeitgeist that produces the event in question. One such event constitutes a particularly important watershed in the process by which this assumption becomes quasi-axiomatic for the Western mind: the trial of the Italian astronomer Galileo (d. 1642).

Science as a Distinct Worldview

Galileo’s confirmation through empirical observation of the Copernican theory that the earth orbits the sun was rejected by the Church not on scientific but theological grounds. This notion was heretical, he was informed, because it contradicted the words of the Bible. In his defence he pleaded that ‘the Bible tells us how to go to Heaven, not how the heavens go’. But the sentence of the Inquisition was unyielding: he was ‘vehemently suspected of heresy’, that is, ‘of having believed the doctrine which is false and contrary to the sacred and divine Scripture, that the sun is the centre of the world and does not move from east to west and that the earth moves, and is not the centre of the world’. He was told that the penalties of holding this belief would not be applied if he were ready to ‘abjure, curse and detest before us’ the error and heresy of the heliocentric theory.

So Galileo was duly forced to renounce the ‘heresy’ that he knew was in fact an indubitable empirical reality. This enforced mea culpa — as absurd as it was insincere — rebounded against the Roman Catholic Church, delivering indeed a fatal blow to the dogmatic authority of the Christian faith, a blow from which it is still reeling to this day. From Galileo’s time onwards, religion and reason came to be seen, increasingly, as two incompatible ways of looking at the world. The ensuing scientific revolution of the 18th century, personified above all by the great English scientist, Issac Newton (d. 1727), was seen by significant parts of the intelligentsia as the result of natural reason liberating itself from the shackles of a religion that was at once unnatural and unreasonable. It is difficult for us today to sense the excitement generated by this revolution. The poet Alexander Pope (d. 1744) expressed well the spirit of the age in his famous Essay on Man, published in 1733. First, as regards the intolerance of dogmatic Christianity, he wrote:

... Please see copyright restrictions on page 1
For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight.
He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.

Second, as regards the wonders of science and the discovery of nature’s hitherto hidden laws, he declared with some hyperbole:

God said: Let Newton be, and all was light.

Secularism and Secularisation

Now, it is important to understand not only that secularism as a political doctrine arose as a result of a Church that had overreached itself politically, socially and institutionally, and which needed to be put back in its place, as it were; it is also necessary to see the relationship between the de-sacralisation or reduction of religion itself, on the one hand, and the secularisation of thought and culture, on the other. As Henry Corbin points out, the Copernican revolution in cosmology presupposed a Copernican revolution in theology. The heavens above were no longer seen as symbols of man’s quest for enlightenment: the revolving planets were henceforth lifeless objects marking time, no longer moving images of eternity. One can thus appreciate the secularisation of the cosmos — the view of nature as so many empirical facts out there to be analysed and exploited to man’s advantage, rather than as symbols and signs to be contemplated and interiorised — one can see this secularisation as an expression of a preceding secularisation of religion itself, that is, as the concomitant of a diminution of spiritual perception, of mystical penetration, of esoteric profundity, in short, the erosion by purely horizontal modes of thought of the dimension of depth in religion.

One can better understand this linkage between spiritual reductionism within religion and secularisation of intellectual culture within society at large by taking a glance at one of the most profound representatives of the esoteric tradition in Christianity, Meister Eckhart. This great German mystic of the 14th century fell foul of the authorities of his day, being accused of ‘coming close’ to heresy. Here we have a foreshadowing of the trial of Galileo that came two centuries later. Despite the vast difference of perspective between the mystic and the scientist, the destiny of these two individuals had one characteristic in common: they both confronted a Church that had become hardened, ideological, dogmatic; a Church that, most importantly, had become insensitive to symbolism. The ecclesiastical authorities could not move away from the literal words of the Bible: for them the creation story in Genesis was not only divine revelation, it was also scientific fact. Galileo’s ‘discoveries’ simply had to be false, the strength of this assumption being in direct proportion to the inability to interpret scripture spiritually. To borrow a term from the Islamic lexicon, the Church had lost its sense of ta’wil.
Secularism as a Reaction to the Roman Catholic Church

Thus, secularism came to dominate the currents of philosophy and thought in general in the West, largely as a reaction to a particular kind of religion and religious authority; that is, to a Church that was fatally compromised by its own worldliness; a Church which became a virtual state itself, with its own hierarchy and vested interests; a Church which indulged in Inquisitions and persecutions of the most abhorrent kind; a Church that, following the Reformation, was implicated in a series of crippling religious wars and sectarian strife; and, perhaps most importantly of all from the point of view of intellectual history, a Church in which dogmatic theology had marginalized the ethical, spiritual and esoteric perspectives of the Christian faith, and was thus vulnerable, to its core, by scientific discoveries. These, I would argue, are the principal factors responsible for making religion appear antithetical to reason, and which gave rise to the radical anti-Christian tendencies of the Enlightenment, which, in turn, was a central foundation of secular culture and philosophy in Western thought, within which the intellect and religion seem to have taken divergent and contradictory paths.

The Roman Catholic Church has, of course, changed a great deal in the modern era and to its credit, recognised the errors of the past conducted in its name. The Muslims of today have much to learn from this process. The story of the rise of secular culture in the West can also alert Muslims to the dangers inherent in the manifold attempts to ‘revive’ or ‘reform’ Islam today. Despite being ostensibly opposed to ‘Western secularism’, many revivalist movements fall prey to ‘secular’ orientations themselves, and this in two key respects. Firstly, efforts that are concentrated exclusively on power relations, on the state itself, or simply on the social expression of religion in the public space, can be seen as so many ‘secular’ tendencies that carry the spiritual content of religion into the alien realm of political agitation. Secondly, the deliberate marginalisation or downgrading of symbolism, of mystical penetration, of spiritual depth which so often accompanies the use of religion as a political weapon, is likewise a form of secularisation, constituting a mirror-image of a key feature of the process by which the Western world succumbed to the polarization between faith and intellect.

In other words, the challenge for Muslims today who aspire to revive their faith, is to perceive the deepest aspects of the religion with the most elevated part of the intellect. The opposite of this is to focus on the most superficial aspects of the religion with the most rudimentary part of the intellect which translates into a fixation on the outward forms of the religion by the rational faculty alone, aided by passionate, if not inflamed, sentiment. On the other hand, there is a solidarity between the inward (bātin) aspect of religion and the innermost aspect of the intellect, that is, spiritual intuition which is capable of grasping ultimate realities, and fashioning this world in accordance with those realities, in the clear and indubitable knowledge that no outward social ‘reform’ will succeed without the spiritual and moral ‘reform’ of individual souls, beginning with one’s own.

Truly God changeth not the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own souls.
(The Qur‘an, 13:11)
"Ketav ha-Da'at" or "Sefer ha-Sekhel we-ha-Muskalot": The Medieval Hebrew Translations of Al-Farabi's "Risalah fi'l-aql." A Study in Text History and in the Evolution of Medieval Hebrew Philosophical Terminology
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KETAV HA-DA'AT OR SEFER HA-SEKHEL WE-HA-MUSKALOT: THE MEDIEVAL HEBREW TRANSLATIONS OF AL-FARABI'S RISĀLAH FĪ'L-'AQAL. A STUDY IN TEXT HISTORY AND IN THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIEVAL HEBREW PHILOSOPHICAL TERMINOLOGY

GAD FRIEDENTHAL

ABSTRACT

Ketav ha-da'at is an anonymous Hebrew translation of al-Farabi's Risālah fī'l-'aqal (Epistle on the Intellect), preserved in a single manuscript (in Vienna). For the first time it is here distinguished from a similarly entitled text, also preserved in a single manuscript (in Paris), which is a commentary upon Ketav ha-da'at, by the litterateur Yeda'aya ha-Penini (early 14th century). The paper offers the editio princeps of Ketav ha-da'at, preceded by an introductive study.

The philosophical vocabulary of Ketav ha-da'at is unique: it is unknown from any other source and appears to be the translator's (mostly inelicitous) own creation. Ketav ha-da'at is not merely a translation, for it contains many interpolations (not marked as such), by the anonymous translator, introduced with a view to clarifying the text. An analysis of the interpolations sheds some light on the author and shows that he was competent in philosophy and had some original thoughts, as e.g., identifying "the mover of the first heaven" with the Shekhinah. A study of the vocabulary, notably of the history of the term da'at for "intellect," leads to the suggestion that the translation was done in the mid-12th century, probably in Provence. Ketav ha-da'at is thus one of the earliest translations into Hebrew of a non-Jewish philosophical work.

The annotated critical edition closely compares the Hebrew text with the Arabic original and signals the interpolations. Following upon it is an Arabic-Hebrew comparative glossary of the terms used in Ketav ha-da'at, in

1 The research on which this paper is based was done at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, especially at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts; it is a pleasure to thank its staff yet again for their competence and unfailing helpfulness. For having read an early draft of this paper and/or making useful suggestions I am greatly indebted to Resianne Fontaine, Ruth Glasner, Bernard R. Goldstein, Steven Harvey, Hanna Kasher, Y. Tzvi Langermann, Jim Robinson, Shlomo Sela, Mauro Zonta and, last but not least, the (no-longer anonymous) referee for JQR, W. Z. Harvey. The critical edition of Ketav ha-da'at presented here owes its existence to Ruth Glasner's friendly yet insistant exhortations. Special thanks go to Youssef Taharoufi for his kind advice on the Arabic text of the Risālah and to Giora Hon for his patient longterm help with the typing of the Hebrew texts.
the two other known medieval Hebrew translations of the Epistle on the Intellect, and in Yeda’ay ha-Penini’s commentary. An appendix recounts the history of the research on Ketav ha-da’at in the 19th and 20th centuries as a comedy of errors and missed opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

In his great monograph on al-Farabi published in 1869, Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907) listed among the works of the “Second Master” a short composition on the meanings of the term ٢٢q̲l, “intellect,” which was translated into Hebrew no less than three times, as well as once into Latin. The aim of this paper is to describe these Hebrew translations, establish the relationships between them, and, in particular, offer a scientific edition and preliminary study of the earliest and most interesting of these translations. Along the way, I will also make some observations on the evolution of Hebrew philosophical terminology during the relevant period, that is, the mid-12th to early 14th centuries.

Steinschneider noticed that al-Farabi’s work was known under slightly varying titles; some manuscripts carry the title Fil ٢ql wa’l-ma ٢ql, some Risalah fi ma’ani٢q̲l, or simply Risalah fi٢q̲l. The editor of the most recent critical edition of the Arabic text used the last title, and henceforth I will refer to al-Farabi’s text by that title (abbreviated as Risalah).

In Al-Farabi, Steinschneider identified three Hebrew translations of the Risalah and a quarter of a century later, in his monumental Die hebraeischen Ubersetzungen (hereafter HÜ), he repeated essentially the same indications in a shorter form. Combining the information given in the two works, his statements can be summarized (in a modernized and more complete form) as follows:

3Alfarabi, Risalat fi٢q̲l, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beyrouth, 1938). On the titles under which the composition was known see pp. viii–ix.
5Steinschneider’s indications are notoriously succinct. In what follows I have supplemented some references, added folio numbers, and updated names of libraries. I also add the call number at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (= IMHM) at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, where I consulted the corresponding microfilms.
One translation, entitled Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot ("The Book of the Intellect and the Intelligibles"), is anonymous and is found in the following three manuscripts: (1) Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, B.H. fol. 13/5 (formerly Stadt-bibliothek, catalogue Delitzsch #39, IMHM #15679), fol. 50a–52b; (2) Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 122 (catalogue number 164; = Goldenthal 33; = IMHM #1398). This manuscript contains only our text (a copy of the Leipzig manuscript, as is explained in Appendix III below); (3) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter BnF), héb. 185/10 (old number: 110; IMHM #26872), fol. 151a–155b. An examination of the catalogue of the IMHM brought to light a fourth manuscript of our treatise which was not known to Steinschneider, namely: (4) New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, Mic. 2404/5 (= IMHM #28657), fol. 45b–53b. This anonymous translation, the Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot, was published by Michael Rosenstein in his doctoral dissertation of 1858, which included also Rosenstein's translation from Hebrew into Latin.7

A second translation, also anonymous, carries the title Ketav ha-da'cat. Steinschneider did not himself see the corresponding manuscripts, but surmised that the text is a paraphrase of the anonymous translation, prepared ca. 1300 by Yeda'a'ya b. Abraham ha-Penini. Steinschneider believed that this Ketav ha-da'cat was to be found in the following two manuscripts: (1) Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 123 (Catalogue no. 165; = Goldenthal 32;8 = IMHM #1399), fol. 2a–9b, where the title is Ketav ha-da'cat; (2) Paris, BnF, héb. 984 (old number: 119; = IMHM #30344), fol. 1a–21b, where it carries the long and somewhat peculiar title Sefer ha-sekhel ha-nirse ba-shem ha-nahug ha-yadu'a Ketav ha-da'cat. (I will translate both titles later.)

A third translation, finally, is by the well-known translator Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, who translated the book from Arabic into

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6 In this manuscript, the text of the Hebrew translation of al-Farābī’s Risālah is followed by a few passages (fols. 53b–55a) ascribed to al-Farābī (u-midivrei ha-mehabar ha-nizkar), bearing mainly on the relationship between philosophical proficiency and ethical rectitude.

7 Michael Rosenstein, Abū Nasr Alfārābī. De intellectu intellectisque commentatio . . . (Breslau, 1868). The text of this edition has been reprinted with some additional punctuation in Jacob Klatzkin, 'Oṣar ha-munahim ha-pilosofiyim we-'antologia pilosofit, vol. 1: 'Antologia shel ha-pilosofia ha-ivrit (Berlin, 1926), pp. 221–231.

8 Steinschneider inadvertently cites this as 33.
Hebrew in 1314, under the title Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskal, or, as some manuscripts have it: Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-maskil we-ha-muskal, that is, “The Book of the Intellect (of the intellecting Subject) and of the Intelligible,” a variation Steinschneider ascribes to some copyists who had integrated the “trivial trilogy.” The manuscripts containing this translation are: (1) Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585 (= Neubauer 1649/10; old number: 1172 Qu; = IMHM #17390), fol. 94a–98b. (2) Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, Plut. 88.25 (= IMHM #17852), fol. 139a–143b; (3) Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 125 (IMHM #1619), second part, fol. 63a–70b; (4) Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 308 (IMHM #1174), fol. 45a–49b. In Al-Fārābī Steinschneider includes among the manuscripts of Qalonymos’ translation also “a manuscript in Odessa.” This refers to a manuscript that was then in the possession of Simḥah Pinsker (1801–64) and which in HÜ Steinschneider indicates as “Vienna, Pi[n]sker 15.” This manuscript is now: (5) Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library, A 285/10 (= IMHM #14714), pp. 200–205.9

Lastly, a further, independent Hebrew translation of a passage from al-Fārābī’s Risālah, by Shem Tov Ibn Falaqera, should be briefly mentioned. Rosenstein pointed out that Falaqera quoted the Risālah in his Moreh ha-Moreh10 and Mauro Zonta indicated that he drew on it in his voluminous encyclopedia DeCot ha-pilosofim.11Now Fa-

9 In Al-Farabi (p. 92) Steinschneider gives the reference Kerem Hemed 8, p. 63. Neubauer refers to this manuscript as Pinsker 15; see Ernst Renan [A. Neubauer], Les Écrivains juifs français du XIVe siècle (= Histoire littéraire de la France, tome 31) (Paris, 1893), p. 429. For its identification with the manuscript now in Budapest see Benjamin Richler, Guide to Hebrew Manuscript Collections (Jerusalem, 1994), p. 155.


11 Mauro Zonta, La filosofia antica nel medioevo ebraico (Brescia, 1996), p. 209. The passage is to be found in Parma, MS 3156 (= De Rossi #164; IMHM #13897), fol. 235a–b. (Some of the passages there ascribed to al-Fārābī do not come from our Risālah, however.)
laqera lived a generation before Qalonymos, so only the question of his eventual indebtedness to either Ketav ha-da’at or to the anonymous translation is pertinent. A comparison of Falaqera’s passages with these two Hebrew translations of the treatise shows that Falaqera, as was his wont, translated directly from the Arabic text of the Risālah and did not use any of the Hebrew translations.

Before turning to a detailed examination of the three Hebrew renditions of our Risālah, a few words on the literary history of the Arabic text and of its study are in order. When Rosenstein published the text of the anonymous Hebrew translation of the Risālah, the Arabic original had not yet been printed. In 1892, Friedrich Dieterici published a first edition and German translation of the Arabic text, on the basis of a manuscript he knew to be incomplete; in his German translation he filled the lacuna of the Arabic text by drawing on Rosenstein’s Latin translation.12 In 1930, Etienne Gilson published a lengthy study of what he has construed as an “augustinisme avicennissant,” in which he included an edition of the medieval Latin translation of our text as well as a French translation from the Latin.13 Not long thereafter, Maurice Bouyges published a critical edition of the complete Arabic text of the Risālah.14 Bouyges’ superb edition, which can be considered as definitive, gave rise to two translations: Francesca Lucchetta’s translation into Italian and Arthur Hyman’s partial translation into English.15 In what follows my main purpose will be to throw light on the Hebrew tradition of the Risālah.


14 Bouyges (above, n. 3) gives a very complete account of the publishing history of the Risālah, pp. ix–xix.

I begin this study by considering the anonymous translation, preserved in the four manuscripts listed above and edited by Rosenstein on the basis of the Leipzig and Paris manuscripts. Although not free of errors, Rosenstein’s edition is quite correct and gives a usable text. Louis Massignon, the great orientalist, claimed in 1929 that Rosenstein’s text was an “assemblage” of all three Hebrew translations (viz., the anonymous, Qalonymos’, and Ketav ha-da’cat). This allegation is entirely untrue—indeed, calumnious. In point of fact, Rosenstein did not use Qalonymos’ translation at all, although he was aware of its existence, and he used Ketav ha-da’cat only to make some comparative points in the notes.

The manuscripts of the anonymous translation (except MS New York) carry the title Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot (“The Book of the Intellect and the Intelligibles”). Whereas the author is clearly named in all manuscripts (the text begins: “Said AbūNaṣr”), none of the manuscripts has a colophon indicating the identity of the translator.

The five manuscripts of Qalonymos’ translation fall into two groups: Three (Oxford, Munich 125, and Budapest) carry the title Ha-ma’amar ba-sekhel, we-ha-maskil, we-ha-muskal le-AbūNaṣr.

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16 Rosenstein thus used all the independent manuscripts known at the time. As I will explain below (Appendix III), the third (Vienna) manuscript is a copy made in 1851 of the Leipzig manuscript. The fourth manuscript, now in New York, was unknown at the time and forty years later, Steinschneider still did not know of its existence.


18 L. Massignon seems to have had very rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew; the two lines of observations he devoted to the Hebrew texts of the Risaḥalah (p. 158) contain two blunders (shegel [twice] instead of sekhel; pā‘al instead of pō‘el). Massignon’s confident statement that only Ketav ha-da’cat was translated directly from the Arabic, whereas the two other, supposedly later, translations have “certainly been influenced by the medieval Latin translation” (p. 152) is without foundation.

19 See Rosenstein’s introduction to his edition of Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot, Latin part, p. 8.

20 MS Oxford has the slightly different title: Ha-ma’amar ba-sekhel, u-maskil, u-muskal le-AbūNaṣr.
("Treatise on the Intellect, the Intellecting Subject, and the Intelligible"). These three manuscripts have an identical colophon at the end:

End of the "Treatise on the Intellect, the Intellecting Subject, and the Intelligible" by Abū Naṣr Muḥammad son of Muhammad al-Fārābī. Its translation was completed by the nasi R. Qalonymos, may he rest in Paradise, on the ninth of the month of the spring 74 by the abbreviated era [= 27 March 1314]. Praise be to God alone, for there is no god except Him.

The remaining two manuscripts (Munich 308 and Florence) also contain Qalonymos’ translation, but carry a shorter title: Maʿamar Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī ba-sekhel u-va-muskal ("Al-Fārābī’s Treatise on the Intellect and the Intelligible") and do not have a colophon indicating the translator. These two manuscripts are related, because in both of them our text is followed by a short passage of some fifteen lines whose title reads: “Said Tadrus [?]: Look at [the following] excellent annotation of Ibn Rushd, which I have found in his treatise on the hylic intellect and which I have copied.”

The anonymous translation and Qalonymos’ translation render essentially the same Arabic text; the few insignificant variations are due either to differences in the respective Vorlagen, or to omissions by subsequent copyists of the Hebrew texts. Both translations follow very closely the complete Arabic text published by Bouyges, not the lacunary one transmitted by some Arabic manuscripts (including the one published by Dieterici), which is the one translated into Latin. The vocabulary of both is essentially the same Tibbonide vocabulary (see Appendix II). Since Qalonymos’ translation was prepared in 1314, after the heyday of translations from the Arabic, it stands to reason that it is later than the anonymous translation, which can thus be surmised to date from the 13th century, as suggested by

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21 This text is not contained in any of the Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjunction des separaten Intellects mit dem Menschen von Averroes (Vater und Sohn), edited by J. Hercz (Berlin, 1869). Its distinctly Neoplatonic flavor seems to indicate that it is apocryphal. The name “Tadrus” of course calls to mind that of the 14th-century translator Todros Todorsi (on whom see M. Zonta, La filosofia antica, pp. 249–253), but both manuscripts carry “Tadros” and not “Todros” and there is no other indication to allow us to ascribe the passage to Todros. This fragment has already been noticed by Steinschneider; see his Al-Farabi, p. 246a.

22 See Bouyges, Risālat, p. vii.
As so often, Qalonymos in all probability was unaware of the existence of the anonymous translation.

Here the following problem may be raised and rapidly solved: al-Fārābī's Risālah begins by listing the different senses in which the word "intellect" is used; in the body of the treatise, each of these meanings is subsequently explained in greater detail. Now, the Arabic text (followed by the anonymous Hebrew and Latin translations) lists six different meanings, whereas Qalonymos' translation lists only five. Both lists share the following first four meanings: (1) the colloquial sense, employed when one says of a person that he is intelligent; (2) the meaning attached to the term "intellect" by the Mutakallimūn, as when they affirm that the intellect judges this or that is to be necessary or impossible; (3) the intellect mentioned by Aristotle in the Posterior Analytics; (4) the intellect invoked by Aristotle in Book VI of the Nicomachean Ethics. The Arabic text, followed by the anonymous Hebrew translation, then goes on to give: (5) the intellect Aristotle invokes in On the Soul; and (6) the intellect Aristotle discusses in the Metaphysics. By contrast, Qalonymos' translation (in all manuscripts) has only a fifth meaning of "intellect": the intellect Aristotle discusses in the Metaphysics.

A comparison of Qalonymos' translation with the Arabic original and with the anonymous Hebrew translation quickly shows that the discrepancy is limited to the initial enumeration, with no repercussions in the body of the text. Apparently at one stage or another, sense (5) was inadvertently omitted from the enumeration and a subsequent copyist, noting that only five meanings of "intellect" were listed, changed the numbering so as to make the intellect of the Metaphysics into Qalonymos' number 5.

**KETAV HA-DA'AT AND YEDA'AYA HA-PENINI'S PARAPHRASE**

Steinschneider, we saw, listed a third translation of the Risālah, entitled Ketav ha-da'at, which he believed to be a paraphrase of the anonymous Hebrew translation, by Yeda'aya ha-Penini, the son of the poet Abraham of Béziers, who was himself a well-known Provençal writer and philosopher who lived in Perpignan in the first...
half of the 14th century. Steinschneider did not see either of the two manuscripts he listed as containing the Ketav ha-da'at, and his hypothesis was a mere hunch based on secondary sources which, upon examination, turns out to be wrong. In point of fact, the study of this text, or rather—as we shall immediately see—two texts, has a fairly extensive but loose and unconnected history that long ago had already brought to light all relevant documents and information. Yet the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle have never been put together. This history is described in Appendix III below; here I will attend to the texts themselves.

In the preamble to his work, which is preserved only in a Paris codex carrying a number of Yeda'aya ha-Penini's works, he writes:

Said Yeda'aya son of Abraham: Owing to the paucity of books we nowadays possess in natural science, we may have—or indeed we necessarily have—the obligation to seek after the little that exists [on this subject]. It is mandatory for us to publicize it and diffuse it widely, so as to favor its preservation. For this reason, it so happened that while I perused the books on soul and looked after some scattered treatises on this matter [viz., soul], I became interested in one of them called Ketav ha-da'at. I realized that it is useful in explaining what can be known about matters pertaining to the intellect (ha-sekhel), although this treatise is sealed and shut, owing to its bad translation. Its benefits are hidden and its sparks are covered, so that the pursuers of philosophy (ha-mecayyenim) have almost no perceptible benefit from it and thus despise it. I therefore tried my hand at improving it in two ways: first, by improving its phraseology and transforming it into a second, clear, translation; second, by elaborating and explaining whatever is in need of it. We first ask God for help and assistance in carrying out our good intention. And thereafter we say:


26 The late Schlomo Pines has drawn attention to this codex (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Héb. 984); see his "Ha-surot ha-'ishiyyot be-mishnato shel Yeda'aya ha-Penini" (1965), reprinted in his Bein mahshevet Yisra'el le-mahshevet he-'anim (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 263–276; the only texts by Yeda'aya so far published from it are contained in Glasner, A Fourteenth-Century Scientific Philosophic Controversy.
Then the title follows: *Sefer ha-sekhel ha-nirse ha-shem ha-nahug ha-yadu’ca “Ketav ha-da’cat.”*\(^\text{27}\)

Clearly, then, Yedacaya says explicitly that his composition is a paraphrase of a text called *Ketav ha-da’cat*, and this has already been recognized by Neubauer. Which text is this? A look at the Vienna and the Paris manuscripts immediately shows that Yedacaya had at his disposal the *Ketav ha-da’cat* in roughly the version we now have in MS Vienna, and that MS Paris contains his paraphrase of it.\(^\text{28}\) Yedacaya now quotes, now paraphrases, in his own terminology the text of *Ketav ha-da’cat* as found in MS Vienna, adding fairly long developments of his own. In Yeda’aya’s text we thus find side by side the peculiar terminology of *Ketav ha-da’cat* (to which I will return) and the usual, mainly Tibbonide, medieval Hebrew philosophical terminology. It is noteworthy that the Vienna *Ketav ha-da’cat* and Yedacaya’s paraphrase are anonymous: both texts begin with the words: *amar ha-pilosof* (“the philosopher said”). Indeed, Yedacaya’s preamble makes clear that he was unaware of the identity of the (by then already very well-known) author of *Ketav ha-da’cat*, although he realized that *Ketav ha-da’cat* was a translation. Since the other two Hebrew translations of the Risālah explicitly ascribe the text to al-Fārābī (in all the manuscripts) it follows that Yedacaya did not use any of them; a close study of Yeda’aya’s text confirms this conclusion.

On the basis of this reconstruction I will henceforth refer to the Vienna *Ketav ha-da’cat* as the original version of the text, and to the Paris text as the one reworked by Yeda’aya ha-Penini. It is now clear that the title of Yeda’aya’s composition must be translated as “The Book of the Intellect (sekhel), which is Referred to by the Customary, Usual Name ‘Book of the Intellect (da’cat).’” The correct meaning of the title was thus perceived already by Munk in 1847. (See Appendix III.)

In what follows I will concentrate on the original *Ketav ha-da’cat*, of which a critical edition is given below. (References to *Ketav ha-"

\(^\text{27}\) This text was published in Renan [Neubauer] (n. 9 above), pp. 394–395; I checked this text against the manuscript.

\(^\text{28}\) Neubauer’s hunch (Appendix III, below) thus turns out to have been correct. It is difficult to understand why he did not connect the *Ketav ha-da’at* whose existence he had conjectured with the text by that name described in Goldenthal’s catalogue of 1851.
The term Ketav ha-da'at will be given according to this edition by line number; references to Yedacaya ha-Penini’s paraphrase will be given to the unique extant manuscript by folio and line numbers.) The first question we should ask is when and where Ketav ha-da'at originated. On this issue we owe some insightful remarks to Goldenthal, who observes that Ketav ha-da'at does not use the established Hebrew philosophical terminology and he interprets this fact as an indication that Ketav ha-da'at is an early translation, antedating the other two translations of the same text, both of which use the standard, mainly Tibbonide, philosophical Hebrew terminology. Although this kind of consideration must be treated with caution, as some apparently “early” translations turn out to be later than “canonical” translations, it seems warranted in the present case. Goldenthal notes the following peculiar terminological usage (in addition to rendering 'aql as da'at instead of sekhel): for “book” ketav is used, which is closer to the Arabic kitāb than sefer; Aristotle's Kitāb al-akhlaq (Nicomachean Ethics) is referred to as Ketav ha-minhagim, rather than as Sefer ha-middot which became the standard name for this book; similarly, Aristotle's Metaphysics is referred to as Ketav asher ahar ketav ha-tevakiim (“The Book that Comes after the Book [on] Physics”); the Arabic ma'ani, customarily translated as 'inyan, is here translated as ma'aneh, which is another calque of the Arabic; the Arabic root b.l.qh. “to reach” is rendered as tavlag, which does not exist in Hebrew with that meaning. These examples show, Goldenthal argues, that Ketav ha-da'at is quite helpless in the face of the Arabic technical philosophical terminology, since it is unaware of the Tibbonide Hebrew terminology, to which it must therefore be anterior. Goldenthal’s claim is corroborated by the comparative list of terms used in the Risalah to be found in Appendix II below. There I show that the anonymous translator, Qalonymos, and Yeda'aya ha-Penini in his paraphrase to large extent all share a common philosophical vocabulary, which differs from that of Ketav ha-da'at. While Goldenthal thus correctly recognized that Ketav ha-da'at must be early, he did not suggest a precise date. To this task I now turn.

Between the 10th and the 14th centuries, the transmission of knowledge from Arabic to Hebrew was the result of an encounter

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29 In the title Ketav ha-da'at, the word ketav translates risālah, but it translates kitāb in the titles of books mentioned in the body of the Risālah.

30 See, e.g., Steinschneider, HÜ, p. 209 (§ 110).
between Jews at home in the Arabic culture and Jews whose only cultural tongue was Hebrew. Jewish scholars knowledgeable in both languages either prepared Hebrew compendia summarizing knowledge in various fields obtained from Arabic texts—this is the case, notably, of Abraham bar Hiyya and Abraham Ibn Ezra—or they translated works from Arabic into Hebrew. The first translations date from the late 10th or early 11th centuries, but the translation movement gained momentum after a number of scholarly families fled the Almohade persecutions in Spain and settled in southern France in the middle of the 12th century. 31

It is very likely that Ketav ha-da'at was translated in the geographical area that witnessed most of this cultural transfer, that is, in northern Spain or southern France. This suggestion is confirmed by the facts, to be discussed below, that the translation testifies to a very early influence of Ibn Ezra’s astrological writings, and that the only evidence we have of a familiarity with Ketav ha-da'at comes from Provence. The question remains: when? The only way to approach this problem seems to be to trace terminological similarities between our treatise and other Hebrew works. However, the above remarks concerning the terminology of Ketav ha-da'at suffice to show that its author was writing in almost total ignorance not only of “mainstream” (mainly Tibbonide) Hebrew philosophical writing, but of Hebrew philosophical writing altogether. Indeed, a look at the table of philosophical terms used in Ketav ha-da'at reveals that most of them are hapax legomena, recorded neither in Jacob Klatskin’s Thesaurus, nor in Ben-Yehuda’s dictionary. We are thus led to think in general terms that Ketav ha-da'at antedates most of the philosophical writing that began to flourish in the middle of the 12th century. But is a more specific determination of the period of Ketav ha-da'at possible?

Some considerations can help us to be more definite. The most noticeable clue given by Ketav ha-da'at as to its date is obviously

the use of the term *da'at* for "intellect," rather than *sekhel*, which became almost ubiquitous in post 12th-century medieval Hebrew philosophic literature. In his *Sefer ha-shorashim*, David Qimhi (ca. 1160–ca. 1235) gives the meaning of *sekhel* as "close to the meaning of attention and scrutiny (hashgahah we-ṣiyyun)," making no allusion to the sense in which it was already used in contemporary philosophical translations; he thus shows that this meaning was not yet entrenched at that time. Indeed, at that period, the notion of intellect was still often designated by the term *da'at*, a usage that, as far as I can see, has at least two independent sources: some very early translations from Arabic into Hebrew, an example of which is an 11th- or early 12th-century anonymous translation of Saadia Gaon's *Commentary on the Book of Creation*; and, Maimonides' *Book of Knowledge*. Let us consider them in chronological order.

Judah b. Barzillai of Barcelona incorporated into his *Commentary on the Book of Creation* (1135) substantial portions of more than one Hebrew translation of Saadia Gaon's *Commentary* on the same book (composed in Arabic in 931). One of these translations consistently renders Saadia's term *aql* by *da'at*, and eventually by *da'at u-vinah*. For instance, when Saadia writes that inquiry proceeds from one level to the next until it reaches the level of the intellect (*martabat al-ṣaql*), this Hebrew translation reads: *ad she-nihyeh ẓolim be-ze ha-davar ẓel ha-da'at we-ẓel ha-binah*. Saadia goes on to affirm that God is "the world's Intellect" (*aql al-ẓalam*), rendered in

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34 All following references to the Arabic original of Saadia's *Commentary of the "Book of Creation"* are to be found on p. 70 of Lambert's edition, and on p. 106 of Qafih's (p. 92 of Lambert's translation).
Hebrew as *da'at ha-olam u-vinat ha-olam*. When Saadia argues that just as man's intellect is not split when his body is divided and does not die when the body dies, so also the Creator would not split if the world were to be divided and would not die if the world were to be destroyed, the Hebrew translation consistently uses *da'at* to render *'aql*. Again, in Saadia's statements to the effect that the intellect is superior to the soul despite being a part of the soul, and that the soul takes counsel from the intellect for all its undertakings, the term *'aql* is consistently translated as *da'at*.

Thus, very early in the 12th century, the term *da'at* (eventually accompanied by *binah*) was in use as an equivalent of the Arabic technical term *'aql*. Interestingly, Meir ha-Levi Abulafia (Ramah), writing about 1202, quotes from the paraphrastic translation of Saadia's *Emunot we-de'ot* a passage in which *'aql* is likewise rendered as *da'at*.

Another translation which systematically uses *da'at* and *de'ot* as terms denoting "intellect(s)" and which perhaps belongs to this early period is the alchemical *Sefer ha-tamar* ("The Book of the Palm-Tree"). Abraham Ibn Ezra also uses the term *da'at* and its derivatives, as when he writes: "Be not astonished that the Lord calls 'the Lord,' for He alone is *yodea*, *we-da'at*, *we-yadua* ("an intellect-subject, an intellect, and an intelligible").

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36 Ibid., p. 177:26, 32.
37 Ibid., p. 177:34–35.
38 See 1 Chr 22:12.
40 Gershon Scholem, ed. and trans., *Sefer ha-Tamar*. *Das Buch der Palme, des Abu Aflah aus Syracus* (Jerusalem, 1927), Hebrew section, pp. 18:26, 27; 19:7; 20:1, etc. The author identifies the intellect with "light" emanating from the tenth sphere. Scholem did not try to date the translation, and only noted (p. 2) that it was used by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, which indicates a rather late *terminus ad quem* of ca. 1300.
41 Commentary on Exodus 34:6. For this reference I am grateful to W. Z. Harvey.
Independently of this usage of *da'at*, however, the alternative term *sekhel* was introduced, and it quickly became predominant in most of the Hebrew philosophical literature. It is employed, for instance, by Solomon ibn Gabirol and Abraham bar Hiyya, and it is systematically used in Juda Ibn Tibbon's translations of the second half of the 12th century (*Beliefs and Opinions, Duties of the Hearts, Kuzari*, etc.). Still, *sekhel* did not immediately and entirely supersede *da'at*, and for some time both terms were used concomitantly. Evidence of this transitory period can be found in the *Commentary on the Book of Creation* by Eleazar b. Judah of Worms (ca. 1165–1230), which reproduces the very same passages discussed above from Saadia's *Commentary on the Book of Creation*, but draws on a translation that differs from the one that had been used by Judah b. Barzillai, and in it the twin terms *da'at* and *sekhel* are used interchangeably in a single passage. The same passage is preserved also in Moses b. Hisdai Taqu's *Ketav tamim*, which was written in northern France, in the first third of the 13th century. Moses, who was already familiar with Maimonides' *Book of Knowledge* (on whose significance more will be said below), frequently uses *da'at* to denote the intellect. We may note in passing that the fact that the Bible affirmed that *ces ha-da'at* (the Tree of Knowledge) was nehmad le-haskil (Gen 3:6) certainly gave impetus to the consideration that *da'at* and *sekhel* were equivalent terms which could be used side by side.

Another, presumably independent, source for the use of *da'at* for *caql* was of course none other than Maimonides, especially his *Mishneh Torah*. Already in his early *Commentary on the Mishnah*, written in Arabic ca. 1168, in the introduction to *Pirquei Avot* (known

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42 See Jacob Klatzkin, 'Oṣar ha-munahim ha-pilosofiyim, 4:93–104.
43 *Perush ha-R[av]* E[ll'azar] *al Sefer Yesirah* (Przemysl, 1883), p. 2a; see also p. 3a. On the influence of these Saadian ideas on Hasidei Ashkenaz (to which R. Elżazar belonged) see Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 171ff. (Our passage is quoted there in the early translation preserved by Judah ben Barzillai.)
45 Ibid., 11a, 17a and following; see also the index s.v. *da'at*. Another translation of the same text renders *'aql* by *madda*; see D. Kaufmann in Halberstam, *Commentar*, p. 340.
as *Eight Chapters*), Maimonides identifies the *daʿat* referred to in a biblical verse with the human intellect (*ʿaql*); he affirms that the verse *gam be-lo* † daʿat nefesh lo † ṭov (“without daʿat a soul is no good”; Prov 19:2), states nothing other than that the existence of a soul that remains without intellect (*be-lo* † daʿat) is no good.⁴⁶ Hence, when he composed *Eight Chapters* and had not yet been confronted with the necessity of expressing Aristotelian science and philosophy in Hebrew, Maimonides had no doubts that the Hebrew term for intellect is *daʿat*.

This usage was to become systematic in the *Book of Knowledge*, composed some ten years later (ca. 1180) in Hebrew. There, Maimonides writes that “they [the angels of the tenth degree] are called *ʿIshim* because their rank approximates to that of the intellect [daʿat] of human beings.”⁴⁷ Further, he writes:

> The soul of every living being is its form, which God has given it. The superadded intellect (*ha-daʿat ha-yeterah*) in a man's soul is the specific form of the man whose intellect has been perfected (*ṣurat ha-ʿadam ha-shalem be-daʿato*). To this form the Torah refers in the text “Let us make a man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). . . . [This verse refers] to the intellect (deʿah) which is the soul's form.⁴⁸

This passage of course parallels the well-known sentences in *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.1, where Maimonides writes:

> The term image (*ṣurah*) . . . is applied to the natural form. . . . In man that notion is that from which human apprehension (*al-ʿidrak al-ʿinsānī*) derives. It is on account of this intellectual apprehension (*al-ʿidrak al-ʿaqli*) that it was said of man “In the image of God He created him” (Gen 1:27).⁴⁹

The juxtaposition of the two passages establishes that by *daʿat*—and at times, at least in the printed editions, *deʿah*—Maimonides


⁴⁸ Maimonides, *Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah* 4.8, trans. Hyamson, p. 39a (modified). The superadded intellect (*ha-daʿat ha-yeterah*) is the acquired intellect. (I am indebted to W. Z. Harvey for the last observation.)

refers precisely to that concept which in Arabic he names 'aql, "intellect," and which Samuel Ibn Tibbon, in his translation of the Guide, was to render into Hebrew as sekhel. A last example: in the Book of Knowledge Maimonides writes of the Deity, "hu ha-yode'a we-hu ha-de'aah ašmah, ha-kol ehad," a sentence to which he explicitly refers in the Guide 1.68, where he expresses the same idea using the term 'aql and its derivatives. The Hebrew translation of Samuel Ibn Tibbon reads: "hu ha-sekhel we-hu ha-maskil we-ha-muskal" (al-Ḥarizi's translation uses the same terms).

Clearly, when Maimonides wrote in Hebrew, he used dacat and its cognates as technical terms denoting precisely the same notions to which his translators from Arabic were to refer using sekhel and the like. Maimonides was apparently unacquainted with Juda Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew philosophic terminology, in which sekhel had already been systematically introduced; nor does it seem likely that he was acquainted with any Hebrew translations that had used da'at for 'aql, although he presumably knew that it had been used by Abraham Ibn Ezra in his biblical commentary. It seems likely that Maimonides and the early translators who used the term da'at found it appropriate because it was part of the expression 'es ha-daCat and also occurred in other biblical verses (e.g., Exod 31:3, Isa 11:2, Jer 3:15, Prov 3:19–20). Presumably they wished to use a term familiar to their audience from the Bible.

When Samuel Ibn Tibbon undertook to translate the Epistle on Resurrection, he apparently came under the temporary spell of

50 I leave out of consideration various passages in which da'at (or de'aah) can be taken to mean either "intellect" or "knowledge." E.g., Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 2.8, 2.10, 3.10.
52 Further occurrences of da'at in the sense of "intellect" can be found, e.g., in Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 1.10, 2.7, 3.9, 4.8; Hilkhot terumot 12.22; Hilkhot melakhim 12.5.
53 I owe this suggestion to W. Z. Harvey.
54 Note that in addition to da'at, Maimonides also uses the term de'ah, which, however, denotes a very different concept, namely, that of an ethical-moral trait or quality; the plural of both terms is de'ot (cf. Maimonides' Hilkhot de'ot).
Maimonides' own Hebrew terminology. Although his father, Judah Ibn Tibbon, already had systematically used sekhel and its derivatives in his translations, Samuel at times rendered ʿaql by daʿat. Thus he writes, “Those who dwell in the world-to-come are separate souls, I mean deʿot,”55 using the latter term to render ʿuqūl, intellects.56 Similarly, in his own work, Maʿamar yiqawwu ha-mayim, Samuel Ibn Tibbon remarks that angels are “separate deʿot.”57 Again, when Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated Maimonides’ Commentary on Pirquei Avot, he was at one point constrained to follow Maimonides’ use of daʿat instead of sekhel: in commenting on the phrase ḫim ein binah ḫein daʿat (Avot 3.17[20]), Maimonides identified the daʿat of the mishnaic text with the cognitive power that allows one to apprehend intelligibles (here the word muskalot, deriving from sekhel was used) and to separate (in thought) form from matter, adding that separate forms are not hypostases, but rather exist per se qua daʿat.58

At a certain point, however, Samuel Ibn Tibbon apparently decided to fall back on the consistent translation of ʿaql by sekhel, and this is the term he uses, with one noteworthy exception, throughout the Guide59 and in other translations.60 Indeed, the fact that Samuel deliberately chose to render as central a concept as ʿaql by a term different from the one consistently used and endorsed by Maimo-

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55 Maimonides, Iggeret tehiyat ha-metim, in Iggerot ha-Rambam, vol. 1, ed. by M[ordekhai] D[o]v Rabinovitz (Tel-Aviv, 1951), p. 354; see also Joshua Finkel, “Maimonides’ Treatise on Resurrection,” PAAJR 9 (1938-39) 8 of Hebrew pagination (line 12); see the variant readings, which may be due to revisions in the translation made by Samuel Ibn Tibbon himself.


58 The passage is quoted in Simon B. Scheyer, Das psychologische System des Maimonides (Frankfurt am Main, 1845), pp. 45–46, n. 18.

59 The exception is at Guide 1.37. See also Israel Efros, Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy. Terms and Concepts (in Hebrew; Tel-Aviv, 1969), pp. 32–33.

60 E.g., Ibn Rushd’s treatises on the intellect; see Hercz, Drei Abhandlungen (above, n. 21).
nides himself is quite remarkable, but we know that he did not follow all the suggestions Maimonides made in his letter to him on how to translate the *Guide*. In the reasoned glossary *Be’ur ha-millim ha-zarot* that he appended to the *Guide*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon devoted an entry to *sekhel* in which he writes:

> An equivocal name common to many species (*minim*), which it would be too long to explain and which is difficult to understand for anyone who does not know the quiddity of the intellect and its divisions. [The terms] *sekhel* and *da’at* are synonymous [referring to] all those species.

Perhaps the last sentence should be understood as an apology for not having used Maimonides’ term.

Another very interesting piece of evidence appears later, but still sheds important light on this terminological wavering. It comes from the commentary on Proverbs by the well-known philosopher and translator Zeraḥiah b. Isaac ben SheṬalīzal Ḥen of Barcelona, which was written in Rome in 1289. Apropos of the verse *yir’at Adonai r’eshit da’at* (“the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge [*da’at*]”; Prov 1:7) Zeraḥiah writes:

> I will now explain to you in how many meanings the term *da’at* can be used according to what has been said by the philosophers (lit. “the masters of science,” or “of wisdom”). Know that in most of its occurrences the term *da’at* is synonymous with the term *sekhel*. There is no clear difference between them, but [the term] *sekhel* is applied to the acquisition of wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) more often than *da’at*. For *da’at* is

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62 Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Be’ur ha-millim ha-zarot Ṭasher be-ma’amar ha-Rav z.Š.l.*, ed. Yehuda Even Shmuel (Jerusalem, 1946), p. 70. Similarly, in the “Glossary” appended to the *Epistle on Resurrection*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon mentioned both terms side by side: “the Master has already explained in his *Book of Knowledge* and in the *Guide* that the human soul subsisting [after death] is the *da’at* and the *sekhel*.” Finkel, ed., “Maimonides’ Treatise on Resurrection,” on p. 41:6–7 (Hebrew section).

sometimes said of the natural da'at (ha-da'at ha-tiv'i) found in a man when he is good (tov); such a man is called by the multitude da'at-an [lit. the one who is imbued with da'at]. The term da'at is also applied to one who knows one of the sciences (hokhmot) of the intellect [i.e., the philosophical sciences]. This is what the Scripture refers to when it says, "God's knowledge (da'at) is exquisite" (Hos 6:6) or "There is no knowledge (da'at) of God in the land" (Hos 4:1), for these [verses] and their like apply to the acquisition of the [philosophical] science (ha-hokhmah).

This difference between da'at and sekhel exists only in our Hebrew tongue, but in Arabic you do not find it. Rather they [the speakers of Arabic] have here a single term, namely al-'aql. They have many species (minim) of it, just as with us the term da'at is [applied] to many species (minim), as we have mentioned. The translators [from Arabic into Hebrew] are used to translate this term [viz. 'aql] now by the term da'at, now by the term sekhel. They did not introduce a clear distinction when they said, "the intellect, the intelletcting subject, and the intelligible."66

Having explained the difference between da'at and sekhel in our Hebrew tongue, we should explain the term da'at, [and say] in how many meanings (panim) it has been used by the philosophers. Know that the term da'at is applied in different meanings (panim), and that there exists no comprehensive definition of the common da'at [i.e., of da'at in all meanings].67

R. Zerahiah goes on to say that "there is one school (kat) of philosophers that has discussed this term, I mean the term dacat or the term sekhel, and affirmed that it is an equivocal term (shem

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64 Zerahiah is apparently referring here to the moral qualities, de'ot, which are the subject of Maimonides' Hilkhot De'ot. (The singular of de'ot in this sense is, however, de'ah. See above, n. 54.)

65 Apparently reading meculot, where our vocalized versions carry mecolot.

66 The precise meaning of this sentence in the present context is unclear to me. Our author very probably quotes Maimonides' Guide 1.68 in one of its two Hebrew translations.

67 Imre Daath. Commentar über die Sprüche Salomo's von R. Serachja ben Isaac ben Schealtiel aus Barcelona, ed. J. Schwarz (Vienna, 1871), p. 8; the passage is printed also in Hercz, Drei Abhandlungen, pp. 19–20 (Hebrew pagination). Both publications follow MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 79. I checked the text against this manuscript as well as against the only other known manuscript, Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Levi 3/3 (IMHM #1485), unpaginated.
meshuttaf) that denotes eight different notions ("inyanim)." For our present purposes we need not go into further details.\(^6^8\)

We may thus conclude: The term dacat was used as a translation of 'aql in some early (late 11th- or early 12th-century) translations. For some time, this term coexisted peacefully with the term sekhel (which was current already in the early 11th century), although the latter was dominant. When Maimonides' Book of Knowledge reached Europe, about the year 1193, its impact apparently created a short renaissance of the term da'at. There again ensued a period of wavering, during which translators occasionally used da'at, often concurrently with sekhel. In fact, in the early 13th century, scholars like Samuel Ibn Tibbon consider sekhel and da'at as equivalent. Not long afterwards, however, the two translations of Maimonides' Guide, a work that was to become canonical for both its contents and its terminology, definitively instituted sekhel at the expense of da'at. Still, although da'at no longer seems to have been used in Hebrew compositions or translations, scholars remained perfectly aware of its meaning. This is amply evidenced by R. Zerahiah's long discussion, as well as by the fact that Yeda'aya ha-Penini had no difficulty in understanding that the subject of Ketav ha-da'at was the intellect.

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\(^6^8\) According to Zerahiah, the eight meanings are as follows (already summarized by Steinschneider in Al-Farabi, 245b–246a): One is the meaning in which the term is used in the Posterior Analytics (Sefer ha-mofet), and seven further meanings appear in the Book on Soul (Sefer-ha-nefesh; the author henceforth uses only the term sekhel): theoretical intellect (ha-sekhel ha-'iyyuni), practical intellect (ha-sekhel ha-ma'asi), hylic or material intellect (ha-sekhel ha-homri), intellect in habitu (ha-sekhel be-qinyan [= bi-7-malaka]), actual intellect (ha-sekhel be-fo'al), acquired intellect (ha-sekhel ha-mo'ot [= mustafad]), the active (or agent) intellect (ha-sekhel ha-po'el). The fact that Zerahiah discusses the different meanings of "intellect" raises the question whether he was acquainted with al-Farabi's Risalah, either in Arabic or in any of its Hebrew translations. An indication in favor of a positive answer is the fact that he uses the term panim to refer to "meanings." However, the fact that he does not mention al-Farabi in this context (he mentions his name subsequently, but apparently to refer to another treatise he wrote, namely Haṭhalot ha-nimṣa'ot [= Mabādī al-maujudā; cf. Steinschneider, HŪ, pp. 290–291]), and the fact that in the above listing of the eight meanings of "intellect" he makes more than one mistake of category, plus the fact that he does not at all follow al-Farabi when discussing the meaning of "intellect" in the Posterior Analytics—all these seem to me to constitute weighty evidence that Zerahiah was not acquainted with al-Farabi's Risalah.
In regard to the original Ketav ha-da'at, it should be noted that although its translator uses da'at systematically to refer to the various kinds of intellect, he nonetheless must have been acquainted also with the term sekhel, for he more than once uses the adjective sikhli (e.g., de'ah sikhli [4], ḥokhmot sikhliyyot; ha-ṣurot ha-sikhliyyot [104, 105]). Remarkably, he clearly assumes the equivalence of the terms sekhel, da'at (and also binah) and their derivatives when he writes da'at u-mudaCat we-yodaCat, sekhel u-muskal, binah u-mevin u-muvan . . . kol zeh yiqtabbes be-guf ehad (119–121). This use of the term da'at together with the awareness of the term sekhel leads me to believe that Ketav ha-da'at dates from the 12th century. It seems to have been composed sometime between the early 12th century, when the first occurrences of da'at are found and when sekhel and da'at were used side by side, and the end of that century, during the period of the short “renaissance” of the term da'at, subsequent to the arrival of the Book of Knowledge in Europe but prior to the wide diffusion of the Hebrew translation of the Guide of the Perplexed.

It seems certain, however, that Ketav ha-da'at antedates the terminological influence of Maimonides' Book of Knowledge. Goldenthal has already pointed out that Ketav ha-da'at uses—indeed coins—numerous terms, which are clumsy in comparison with the elegant alternatives of the Book of Knowledge (see comparative terminological table in Appendix II). Consider the following examples: for the Arabic mufariqah, Ketav ha-da'at uses words derived from the corresponding Hebrew root (viz., frq.), yielding quite maladroit expressions (hitparqut, mitparqim; e.g., lines 160, 214, 237) for “separate,” where Maimonides uses the much more suitable nifrad,69 which indeed became standard terminology; for “bodies undergoing generation and corruption,” Ketav ha-da'at again uses a calque of the Arabic (geshamim mtkwnwt. npsdwt. [320], vocalization uncertain), whereas Maimonides uses the elegant howim nifsadim;70 where Ketav ha-da'at uses shorashim or peshutim to designate the elements (206, 207, 258, 265), Maimonides has yesodot. Lastly, the author of Ketav ha-da'at apparently had no idea how to translate falak, writing “the fixed stars” where the Arabic has “the orb of the

69 E.g., Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 1.10.
70 E.g., Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 2.3.
fixed stars." Maimonides, on the other hand, uses the term *gal-gal* numerous times. All these differences strongly suggest that the translation of *Ketav ha-da'at* was done by someone who was unacquainted with Maimonides' Hebrew work. If he had been acquainted with that enormously authoritative work and its elegant Hebrew terminology, it seems most unlikely that he would have persevered in using his own awkward terminology. Similarly, it is manifestly probable that the vocabulary of the corpus of the early Tibbonide translations was also unknown to the author of *Ketav ha-da'at*. It follows that it is very likely that at the very latest, *Ketav ha-da'at* was translated prior to the end of the 12th century.

I can tentatively offer a *terminus post quem* as well. In one of the shorter passages that the author of *Ketav ha-da'at* composed himself and added to the translation of the *Risālah* (see below), he illustrates al-Farābī’s statement that there are kinds of knowledge—namely practical knowledge—which increase as one grows older by adducing as examples “medicine (*sug ha-refu'ah*) and astrology (*mishpatei ha-kokhavim*) and their like, which have become known through experience (*she-nissū bahem*)”.

Shlomo Sela has recently shown that the term *mispaṭim* in an astrological sense (a translation of the Arabic *ahkām*) was coined by Abraham Ibn Ezra (ca. 1089–1167) and first appeared in southern France shortly after the middle of the 12th century, following the introduction there of Ibn Ezra’s astrological writings and biblical commentaries. Thus, for instance,

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71 Compare *Ketav ha-da'at* line 329 with the Arabic text 34:10.
72 *Ketav ha-da'at* line 71 (and the discussion below, pp. 58–59).
the term *mishpāṭ ha-kokhavim* is used in Moshe Qimhi's commentary on Prov 16:10, written before 1190, whose terminology is so influenced by that of Ibn Ezra that it was printed in *Miqra'ot gedolot* under Ibn Ezra's name.74 David Qimhi, the younger brother and student of Moshe Qimhi, uses this term as well.75 Particularly significant is the fact that the rabbis of Montpellier used the term *mishpētei ha-kokhavim* twice in their letter to Maimonides requesting his advice on the validity of astrology, written a little prior to 1195 (the date of Maimonides' answer).76 We in fact know, again from Sh. Sela, that they derived their knowledge of astrology essentially from the writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra.77 Lastly, a horoscope cast in Narbonne (Ibn Ezra's onetime residence) for the year 1160 and ascribed to Ibn Ezra is entitled *mishpētei ha-nolad*,78 and this horoscope may be in fact the earliest dated occurrence of the term *mishpāṭ* in the astrological sense.

All this seems to indicate that even though Ibn Ezra used the expressions *mishpētei ha-mazzalot* and the like, and not *mishpētei ha-kokhavim*, the appearance of this term and of the various other constructions containing the word *mishpāṭim* attested in the second half of the 12th century is a consequence of the diffusion of Ibn Ezra's astrological corpus in southern France. In other words, the term *mishpētei ha-kokhavim* was "in the air," allowing inter alia its use by the Sages of Montpellier (who, as neophytes in the study of astrology, certainly did not create it) and also in *Ketav ha-da'at*. The occurrence in a text of the term *mishpāṭim* becomes particularly telling if one considers that before its creation by Ibn Ezra, equivalent standard terms already existed, notably *gezerah* (*gezerot ha-kokhavim*, the term used, e.g., by Abraham bar Ḥiyya and Maimonides) and *din* (*dinei ha-kokhavim*).

75 Ibid., p. 192.
Some further confirmation of the hypothesis that the author of Ketav ha-da'at was acquainted with works by Ibn Ezra derives from the fact that in the above-mentioned passage which he wrote himself, he associates astrology with medicine, as kinds of knowledge that are both based on "experience" as opposed to "reason"; this association, too, is to be found in Ibn Ezra.79

It thus seems likely that the use of the term mishpatei ha-kokhavim in the brief remark apropos of astrology in Ketav ha-da'at testifies to the influence of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings.80 If so, Ketav ha-da'at must have been written after ca. 1150, for Ibn Ezra's first astrological composition written in southern France is dated late 1147 or 1148.81 As we have seen, the years after 1150 are indeed the time when the term mishpâtîm in an astrological sense made its appearance in a number of writings composed in southern France. This consideration leads to the conclusion that Ketav ha-da'at was composed only after the middle of the 12th century.

Therefore: the ante quem date for the composition of Ketav ha-da'at can be determined quite precisely. Its terminological peculiarities strongly suggest that its author was acquainted neither with the early Tibbonide translations nor with Maimonides' Book of Knowledge, so in all likelihood he worked in the third quarter of the 12th century, and certainly prior to the end of the century. On the other hand, the use of the term mishpatei ha-kokhavim seems to indicate that he worked after ca. 1150. Pending further research on the terminology of Ketav ha-da'at, we may thus tentatively conclude that Ketav ha-da'at was composed shortly after the middle of the 12th century. It thus seems to be roughly contemporary with some of

79 I am grateful to Sh. Sela for this observation. Compare, e.g., Abraham Ibn Ezra, Sefer ha-te'amim (second version), ed. Naḥthali ben Menahem (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 2; quoted from Sela, "The Fuzzy Borders," p. 92. The notion that astrology is based on experience is recurrent, but its association in this respect with medicine is less common and may therefore point to Ibn Ezra as the source of the remark in Ketav ha-da'at. See also below, n. 135.

80 To be sure, it is also possible that the author of Ketav ha-da'at coined the term mishpatei ha-kokhavim himself as an equivalent of ahkâm al-nujûm. However, as a rule, the terms coined by him are very far from those introduced by other translators, and so it seems improbable that just in this instance he hit upon a term already invented independently by others.

81 Ibn Ezra had also written astrological works in Italy in the mid-1140s, but these are less likely to have had an impact in southern France. See Sh. Sela, Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in Abraham Ibn Ezra's Thought, pp. 363–378.
the early, pre-Tibbonide Hebrew translations of al-Fārābī’s *Compendia of the Organon*, according to M. Zonta’s recent suggestion.  

The early occurrence in *Ketav ha-da’at* of a term going back to Ibn Ezra can also be taken as an indication that its author lived in southern France, rather than in Spain, because it is there that Ibn Ezra’s astrological writings first became known and where the term *mishpatei ha-kokhavim* and its cognates were first used.

Very little can be said about the fate of *Ketav ha-da’at*. Stein- schneider already noticed that it is explicitly mentioned in Gershom ben Solomon’s *Sha’ar ha-shamayim*. A comparison of the relevant short passage with the corresponding passage in the original *Ketav ha-da’at* and with Yeda’aya’s expanded paraphrase unequivocally shows that Gershom paraphrased the former and was unacquainted with the latter.

The reference to *Ketav ha-da’at* in *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* has been regarded as problematic. On the one hand, Gershom ben Solomon wrote *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* between 1275 and 1300; this has recently been definitively established by Mauro Zonta. On the other, it was believed that Gershom refers to Yeda’aya ha-Penini’s composition by the name of *Ketav ha-da’at* and that Yeda’aya could not have written much earlier than the first decade of the 14th century; indeed, Ruth Glasner has convincingly argued that Yeda’aya was born ca. 1285. This tiny riddle is now solved: Gershom quotes the original *Ketav ha-da’at*, which was composed about a century before *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* was written, and there is no connection whatsoever between *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* and Yeda’aya ha-Penini.

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83 Gershom ben Shlomo, *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* (Roedelheim, 1801), p. 78a. In the Warsaw 1875 edition, the title is given as *Sefer ha-da’at* (p. 74b), certainly a “modernization” by one of the copyists in the long chain of transmission. A scientific edition of *Sha’ar ha-shamayim* has long been an important desideratum.
84 See *Ketav ha-da’at* 71 and the note ad loc.
85 MS Paris, BnF, heb. 984, fol. 7a:6–14.
89 This has been perceived already by A. Neubauer; cf. Renan [Neubauer], *Les écrivains*, p. 394, n. 1.
It is interesting that the only two references to Ketav ha-da'cat that we have come from two authors, Gershom ben Solomon and Yeda'aya ha-Penini, who lived roughly at the same period and in the same geographical area. One may wonder whether this sudden resurfacing of Ketav ha-da'cat after a long period during which it remained unmentioned is in any way connected to the fact that Qalonymos ben Qalonymos translated it again in 1314. In other words, is it possible that sometime in the later 13th century Ketav ha-da'cat was rediscovered and that this created a demand for a new, more modern Hebrew translation of al-Fārābī's Risālah? I believe this question can be answered in the negative. For one thing, although we have no witnesses of the impact of Ketav ha-da'cat during the 13th century, it would appear that it was nonetheless quite well known at that time, for the title of Yeda'aya's paraphrase refers to the book which is known by “the customary, usual name Ketav ha-da'cat.” Further, Ketav ha-da'cat is anonymous and could hardly have guided anyone to a text explicitly ascribed to al-Fārābī. Again, Qalonymos’ translation shows no trace of acquaintance with Ketav ha-da'cat's idiosyncratic terminology nor with Yeda'aya's paraphrase of and commentary on Ketav ha-da'cat. Lastly, the Arabic text translated by Qalonymos is different from the one used by the translator of the original Ketav ha-da'cat (a point to be discussed below).

Ketav ha-da'cat has rewarding surprises in store for its modern reader. One of these, not of much consequence but still striking, is encountered close to the text's beginning. In the Risālah, al-Fārābī three times mentions the name of Mu'awiya, the famous first Umayyad caliph, as an example of someone who, although shrewd, nonetheless cannot be described as “endowed with intellect” (īqil), because he was unethical. Mu'awiya's name has been corrupted in many of the Arabic manuscripts of the Risālah and, as a result, has completely disappeared from the anonymous and Qalonymos' Hebrew translations as well as from the Latin translation; Bouyges himself, the author of the critical edition of the Risālah, was startled when he discovered the reference to Mu'awiya in 1938.90 In Ketav ha-da'cat, however, the name, correctly spelled, is preserved;91
unique manuscript of *Ketav ha-da’at* in Vienna, together with the unique manuscript of Yeda’aya ha-Penini’s paraphrase in Paris, are thus presumably the only medieval Hebrew documents carrying Mu‘awiya’s name.

More importantly, the comparison of *Ketav ha-da’at* with the Arabic original shows that *Ketav ha-da’at* is in fact much more than a mere faithful translation of the Arabic text of the *Risālah*. The translation of the original text is interspersed with numerous interpolations of different kinds. At times these consist of one or two words, at times of an added phrase or two, and at times of lengthy passages woven into the original text. In contrast, the few omissions are insignificant and appear to be inadvertent, or due to the corruption of the text. In the critical edition of *Ketav ha-da’at* given below, each addition is identified by underlining. In the following discussion, I consider the more significant interpolations, which will allow us to shed some light on the author, his method, and his objectives.

(i) The first addition occurs at the very opening of *Ketav ha-da’at*. Al-Farabi’s *Risālah* begins by enumerating six meanings in which the term “intellect” is applied. Of the first of these meanings, al-Farabi says succinctly that it is “the thing by virtue of which the multitude say of a man that he is endowed with intellect,” and immediately passes on to the second meaning. Ketav ha-da’at gives a correct translation of this sentence (“āqil is translated as ʾish da’at) and then adds the following:

“Multitude” refers to all those engaged in practical knowledge, such as artisans and merchants. [However,] those who speak beautifully—rhetoricians, grammarians and others—are not comprised in “the multitude,” unless they reflect on things. Those who occupy themselves with knowledge by intellect (deʾah sikhliḥ) are called “the unique ones of the generation” (yehidei ha-dor) and “the quintessential [or, choicest] men” (peninei ha-ʾadam).

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92 As is explained in the introduction to the critical edition, the text carried by the only surviving manuscript of *Ketav ha-da’at* is extremely corrupt. The translations below have been made from the critical edition, which at some points is significantly different from the text of the manuscript.


94 Ḥd she-yahashov devarim. The three words may be superfluous (see note ad loc. in the text); if they are not, I am not certain the translation is correct.

95 *Ketav ha-da’at* 2–4. The passage has been printed in Rosenstein, p. 27, n. 2. I translate peninei ha-ʾadam as “the quintessential (or, choicest) men” because the
(Incidentally, one may wonder whether it was the occurrence of the term penini in Ketav ha-da'at that induced Yeda'aya to add the epithet ha-Penini to his name. 96)

(ii) Al-Fārābī's second meaning of "intellect" is that employed by the mutakallimūn. 97 Ketav ha-da'at adds the explanation that these (here referred to as ha-mehaberim ٢٠ ha-medabberim) are "those who rebut philosophy and who sustain the men of religion" (5–6). Similarly, when al-Fārābī enlists the last meaning of "intellect," namely, "the one mentioned [by Aristotle] in the Metaphysics," 98 Ketav ha-da'at adds an explanatory gloss: "This is the science of the Divinity [hokhmant ha-'elohut]" (11).

(iii) Al-Fārābī states that when the "multitude" apply the term "endowed with intellect" (Cdqil) to someone, they waver. At times they apply it to someone like Mu'āwiyah, but at times they deny the term to persons like him, arguing that someone cannot be qualified as "endowed with intellect" when he is sly and shrewd yet is unethical. 99 Immediately following the first mention of Mu'āwiyah, Ketav ha-da'at adds that he "was a great king, and was not of royal descent, and was cunning, and it is through his numerous tricks that he became king." 100 In the same context, following al-Fārābī's statement that the multitude take "intellect" in the general sense which

96 Scholars have advanced a number of conjectures as to the significance of the epithet ha-Penini that Yeda'aya appended to his name, but they have not been able to find a satisfactory answer. (See most recently Schirmann, The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France, p. 499.) According to the hypothesis here suggested, Yeda'aya had in mind the meaning which the term penini has in Ketav ha-da'at (and elsewhere—see note to line 274), namely with a view to suggesting that he was "quintessential," i.e., that he belonged to the group of "the quintessential (or, choicest) men." Perhaps he at the same time wished to play on the phonetic proximity of penini with "Perpignan," the name of his (presumed) place of birth. In his paraphrase of Ketav ha-da'at, Yeda'aya replaced the word penini with segullah.

97 Al-Fārābī, Risālah, 3:5–6.
98 Ibid., 4:3.
100 Ketav ha-da'at 13–14. The second occurrence of Mu'āwiyah's name is not accompanied by an explanation in the text, but opposite the name "Mu'āwiyah" in the manuscript a marginal annotation has: "this is the king mentioned above" (see note to line 24).
Aristotle has associated with "wisdom," Ketav ha-da'at adds the following clarification:

For Aristotle did not wish to call the one who is shrewd [and succeeds in] doing what is evil "endowed with intellect." Rather, [by "endowed with intellect"] he had in mind the [one] who, endowed with discernment, is able to differentiate what one should forsake from what one should love, in a general, unconditional manner, i.e., whether this is good or bad [for the agent] (21–23).

(iv) When al-Farābī explains that in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics the term "endowed with intellect" is applied to the part of the soul that allows man to know certain general premises without demonstration or reflection, Ketav ha-da'at adds, "like the whole is greater than the part and that the ten precedes the twenty and the like." In the sequel to this same passage, al-Farābī writes that the truths known by the intellect are the "premises (muqaddamāt; muqdamot) that constitute the principles (mabādī; tehilloth) of the theoretical sciences (al-"ulūm al-nizriyyah; ha-hokhmot ha-sikhliyyot)." To this, Ketav ha-da'at adds the comment that the theoretical sciences are those that have a proof (mofet). And they are secondary premises (muqdamot sheniyyot), consequences (toledot) of the first ones. The first premises constitute their proofs, and they [the theoretical sciences] are the secondary knowledge (yedi'ot sheniyyot). Inasmuch as they are consequences of the first [premises], they are in that intellect in potentiality. (50–51)

(v) Discussing the meaning in which "intellect" is used in the Nicomachean Ethics, al-Farābī says that it refers to practical knowledge, which increases with age. As already noted above, Ketav ha-da'at adduces two examples for this kind of knowledge: "medicine

101 Al-Farabi, Risālah, 5:5–6.
102 The author of Ketav ha-da'at apparently has in mind Nicomachean Ethics 6.5ff., from which some words may be a literal quotation.
103 Al-Farabi, Risālah, 8:5–9; Ketav ha-da'at, 46–47. The author of Ketav ha-da'at was apparently fond of this idea, for later on he writes similarly (again apropos of the method in Posterior Analytics): "We at first seek to obtain a proof from the knowledge acquired by small children, as e.g. that the whole is greater than the part and that the two is prior to the three and to other [numbers], by way of proof, and thereafter [proceed] to higher [truths]" (243–245).
104 Risālah, 9:2–3; Ketav ha-da'at, 49–50.
or astrology and the like, which have become known through experience (še-nissū bahem).”

(vi) At Ketav ha-da'at 103–105, an interpolated passage begins with a warning: “This is not the right place [of the passage].” It is, in fact, out of context there, but in it the author of Ketav ha-da'at nonetheless summarizes a genuinely Farabian idea:

I say that the potential intellect has no capacity to actualize itself out of itself. Something else actualizes it, and this is the active intellect. It is in the latter that the intelligible forms (gurot sikhliyyot) reside. [The active intellect] is what actualizes the potential intellect, when the latter intellects the intelligible forms.

Elsewhere, the author of Ketav ha-da'at adds a phrase expressing the same idea yet again: “This substance [the hylic intellect] is in potentiality and cannot become actual, except through something else that is in actuality and that actualizes it. And this is the active intellect” (282–283).

(vii) At one point al-Fārābī explains that when he says of “that essence”—viz., the potential intellect—“that it is thinking” (ʻaqi-lah) he means simply that “the intelligibles become forms for it.” Ketav ha-da'at translates ʻaqilah as yodac at and interjects in the middle of the sentence that this word is “carved” (nehesav) out of the term dac at, adding the phrase already quoted above: dac at u-muda'at we-yoda'at, sekhel [u-maskil] u-muskal, binah u-mevin u-muvan, po'cal u-muf'cal u-fο'el—kol zeh yiqabbes be-guf 2eḥad (120–122). Apparently his intention is to clarify the meaning of yo-dac at by suggesting that its relationship to dac at is the same as that of mevin to binah, etc. To this effect, he invokes the well-known triad, using the different Hebrew terms for “intellect” and its derivations known to him.

(viii) The author of Ketav ha-da'at at times adds only a clarifying word or two, aiming to improve comprehension. Like the longer interpolations, these brief additions show that he had a sure grasp of philosophy and perfectly followed al-Fārābī's thought. Many examples can be gleaned by perusing the text of Ketav ha-da'at, and here, in translation, I limit myself to a few instances chosen at random. Where al-Fārābī explains that before having been intellected,
the intelligibles exist in potentiality as "forms in matter outside the soul," *Ketav ha-da'at* adds the words "because they are in the substances."\(^{107}\) Al-Fārābī then refers to intelligibles that have become intelligibles in actuality, and *Ketav ha-da'at* interjects "through abstraction" (*be-hitgarerut we-hitpashetut*).\(^{108}\) When al-Fārābī raises the question why forms should "descend" from their perfect existence in the active intellect into the imperfect material reality, and then considers the possibility that someone will say that this was done in order to endow matter with a more perfect existence, *Ketav ha-da'at* adds an appropriate reformulation: "i.e., it was done in order to mend matter and for the sake of its rank."\(^{109}\)

(ix) Al-Fārābī, in a short digression, comments on the meaning of the term "place." *Ketav ha-da'at*, aptly translating 'ayna as *maqom*, explains that "intelligible forms, which are known by the intellect (ha-surot ha-sikhliyyot ha-muda'ot), have no place whatsoever, for they are not a body (geshem), nor do they inhere in body."\(^{110}\)

(x) Speaking of the intellect that has intellected all intelligibles and has thus become intellect in actuality in relation to all intelligibles, al-Fārābī adds that "when it intelлектs that existent thing which is an intellect in actuality, it does not intellect an existing thing outside of itself [or, its essence], but it only intellects itself [or, its essence]."\(^{111}\) In the middle of this sentence, following the words "when it intelлектs that existent thing which is an intellect in actuality," *Ketav ha-da'at* interpolates the following long comment:

[The intellect in actuality] is not in potentiality. This means that [it has intellected] those forms that have no matter and have never had matter, and have always been in actuality. These are to be distinguished from the forms that have been abstracted away from matter, for prior to having been abstracted, these [forms] are intellect in potentiality. When intellected, the intellect in actuality that they have become [viz., the forms abstracted away from matter] is of a different nature [than matter]. For its [i.e., matter's] nature is perceptible through one of the five senses, but this existent [the abstracted form] cannot be perceived except through the intellect's perception (*hergesh ha-

\(^{107}\) *Risālah*, 16:5; *Ketav ha-da'at*, 126.

\(^{108}\) *Risālah*, 16:6; *Ketav ha-da'at*, 127.

\(^{109}\) *Risālah*, 30:3–6; *Ketav ha-da'at*, 262–263.

\(^{110}\) *Risālah*, 17:6–7; *Ketav ha-da'at*, 135.

But since it [the actual intellect] perceives an existent that has always been intellect in actuality...  

Whereupon follows the end of al-Fārābī’s sentence: “it does not intellect an existing thing outside of itself [or, its essence], but it only intellects itself [or, its essence].”

(xi) Al-Fārābī introduces the acquired intellect with the following sentence: “When the intellect in actuality intellects the intelligibles which are forms in it, insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, then the intellect of which it was first said that it is the intellect in actuality, becomes now the acquired intellect.” Ketav ha-daʿat here inserts the following explanation:

For it [the intellect] was first an intellect in potentiality. It [then] intellected the intelligible forms and became intellect in actuality with respect to those intelligibles that are forms for it. [Then] this intellect turned unto itself (nīthappekh ha-daʿat ha-huʾ ʿel asmo), intellected its own essence, and became acquired. (163–164)

There follows a short explanation concerning the Hebrew terminology. The author of Ketav ha-daʿat translates mustafād (acquired) as muṣṣā, and we could have remained in the dark concerning the etymology of this terminological innovation, had he not added here, “This means that it acquired gain (besaʿ) and pleasure (hanaʿah) for itself” (164).

(xii) Immediately following on the last interpolation, we encounter a phenomenon which recurs more than once in our text (see xiii below). Al-Fārābī continues his exposition with the words: “If there are existing things that are forms not in matters.” Ketav ha-daʿat has the words “if they are,” followed, however, not by al-Fārābī’s subsequent words, but by an interpolated sentence: “Until here we treated of forms abstracted from matter and of forms related to man in accordance with the nature of forms. I now wish to treat other forms.” Only then follows al-Fārābī’s sentence beginning with the words: “If there are existing things...” (168).

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112 Ketav ha-daʿat, 148–152. The passage may be somewhat corrupted, and in the translation I have been helped by Yedāʾaya ha-Penini (MS Paris, BnF, héb. 984, fol. 9b:13–10a:2).
115 For the meaning of this phrase, see Ketav ha-daʿat, 178–179, where the author refers to “forms that exist owing to us, for we abstract them from matter.”
This interpolation sheds some light on the genesis of the text. Two hypotheses can explain what has happened. First, translating sentence after sentence, the author of Ketav ha-da'at wrote “if there are.” He then had second thoughts and decided to add the explanatory sentence, doing so without, however, crossing out the words he had already put down. After the additional sentence was written, he resumed his translation, writing again “if there are. . . .” A second possibility is that the text of Ketav ha-da'at was dictated to a scribe, or taken down by a listener during a public lecture. On this hypothesis, the translator, who perhaps was “reading” directly from al-Fārābī’s Risālah in Arabic, began reading out a sentence in Hebrew, then paused to interject a comment, and then continued his “reading” of the text. The listening scribe or student produced a “raw” copy of the text, which reflects the idiosyncrasies of the spoken text and has not been subsequently corrected by the translator. Some confirmatory though by no means decisive evidence for the second hypothesis can be seen from the following facts. First, at two places (26, 34) we find side by side the Arabic word hal and its translation into Hebrew (ha'im), which may go back to an oral discourse. Second, the text has a few spelling mistakes (see notes to the text at 54 and 153), which may have resulted from someone writing down words phonetically, without reflecting on their meaning. On this construe, these errors are not scribal errors of a later copyist but go back to the original. Third, at times one has the impression of witnessing the beginning of a translation that was subsequently replaced by an alternative without being crossed out (see, e.g., 252–253, 261, 279–280 with the notes). The two hypotheses seem to me to be equally probable; in any event, it is clear that our text was not polished by its author prior to its diffusion.

The text also contains other interpolated sentences with the didactic aim of summarizing the discussion at various points or announcing what will be treated next. Thus, at 240, Ketav ha-da'at adds a sentence saying that “he [the author] will now explain the difference between the order of the active intellect and the order of the intellect that is in actuality.”

(xiii) Al-Fārābī explains that the material intellect is at once the starting point for an ascending series of forms, leading up to the separate forms, and for a descending series of forms, leading down to the material (corporeal) forms.116 He writes that beginning with

the material intellect, "the forms begin to descend to the corporeal, material forms, while before this they ascended little by little until they were separated from matters one after another little by little." The author of Ketav ha-da'at translates faithfully, but after having written the words "before this" he pauses and inserts a short paragraph marked with the word per[ush]:

I.e., from the hyle to matter (gushmaniya), and from matter to the senses, and from the senses to the soul, and from the soul to that essence [= the material intellect], and from that essence to the intelligible forms, and from the intelligible forms to itself [= the intellect itself], and from the [intellect] itself to the forms separate from matter, and thence to the form that is above them, until it reaches the One who is alone and to whom no one is second.118

The author then returns to his translation. He adds the words, "And this is what he [the author] was saying," and continues the translation: "while before this they ascended little by little . . ." (194). This phenomenon and its possible explanations have been discussed above (xii).

(xiv) Ketav ha-da'at comes back to the topos of the hierarchy of forms in yet another passage. Al-Farābī explains that the more perfect form is a form for the form which is immediately below it, so that in the process of cognition the series of forms "does not cease descending until it reaches that essence (the material intellect; Ketav ha-da'at 201 adds here: "which is a part of the soul"119), and the animate powers which are below it. After that, it reaches nature."120 Ketav ha-da'at elaborates this sentence into an entire passage:

For instance, the acquired intellect is a form for the active intellect—the active intellect is like matter for it. The active intellect [in turn] is a form for that essence, which is intellect in potentiality. Again, that essence [the material intellect] is a form for the soul-powers, which are subsequent upon body, such as animate sensation and perceptive sensation [hargashot mahashaviyyot, i.e., the faculty of phantasai], and the five senses found in animals. . . . Then follows the vegetable power, after which comes the composite power. . . . And each of the four elements consists of matter and form. (202–207)

118 Ketav ha-da'at, 190–193. Quoted in Rosenstein, Abū Nassr, p. 29, n. 15.
119 This statement is repeated at Ketav ha-da'at 209.
(xv) To al-Fārābī’s crisp statement that “it is necessary that the order of existent things in the intellect (which is in actuality) be the opposite of that which is in the active intellect,” Ketav ha-da’at adds the following detailed exposition:

The intellect in actuality begins to acquire its knowledge from the sensible [objects] and from the phantasia, which is like a form for the sensible [objects]. Thereafter it passes to conceive the notion by abstracting away the form. Then it conceives itself, then the active intellect and what is above it. This is in the manner of the one who seeks to know the myriad and understands that he must first know the unities, then the tens, then the hundreds, then the thousands. (248–251)

(xvi) Al-Fārābī briefly states that “those forms are indivisible in the active intellect, while in first matter they are divisible.” Ketav ha-da’at renders only the first part of the sentence and then interpolates a particularly long exposé, which assuredly is the most significant added passage of the entire work:

This means that it is not the case that [in the active intellect] the idea [or notion; ma’aneh, corresponding to the Arabic ma’ani] of the form of man [exists] separately (levad), and the idea of the form of the ox [exists] separately, and the form of the lion [exists] separately, and the form of the eagle [exists] separately, nor does any other form [exist] separately. Rather, the sole idea of the form of man comprises the idea of the form[s] of all created things. The reason is that the form of man includes the form of the animal, the form of the plant, the form of the composite, and the form of the element. [Thus,] the idea of the form of man comprises all of these.

For example, the one who wants to manufacture a bridle will firstly frame in his mind [the thought of] producing a curb. He will then need a strap. How many arts are requisite to produce a strap until it is fit for use! He will then need threads. For this he will need the seed of flax (pishtan) or of hemp (qanbas): he will have to sow it, have it grow, dry it, beat it, and spin it. He’ll also need iron and all arts pertaining to blacksmithing, including fire, bellows, various preparations, and the rest of the arts. The same holds for the idea of man (maḥshevet ha-adam), which is one and is indivisible in the active intellect.

The commentator (ha-mefaresh) has had to mention this because a thing which is not a body nor in a body is indivisible. If we had pos-

121 Risālah, 28:6–8; trans. Hyman, p. 219 (modified).
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ited that the idea of every single form—the forms of man, of the ox, of the lion, of the eagle and of the others—exists in it [i.e., in the active intellect] separately, this would have implied that it is divisible. Whence he had to say that the forms which are in the active intellect are indivisible. (263–272)

The importance of this passage for shedding light on the author of Ketav ha-da'at will be discussed below. At this point, I simply note that the passage reveals yet again the author's philosophic culture; not only because he clearly and faithfully explicates al-Farabi's thought, but also because the topos of the various arts requisite to manufacture a bridle clearly testifies to an acquaintance with the Aristotelian idea of the subordination of the arts. 123

(xvii) Al-Farabi affirms that the active intellect does not act permanently, but rather acts at one time and not at another. 124 Ketav ha-da'at advances the following observation to buttress this view: "For the reason (tevunah) of many myriads of people receives no assistance [from the active intellect] and they suffer in order to acquire even the most elementary knowledge" (302–303). The argument is perhaps not totally cogent, but it may show traces of the author's sense of humor (or sarcasm?).

(xviii) At the very end of our text, the author of Ketav ha-da'at inserts a few brief but significant additions. After al-Farabi has concluded that the mover of the first heaven is "an intellect in its substance [that] intellects itself . . . and the essence of that which is the principle of its existence," 125 Ketav ha-da'at (337) inserts: "and this is the highest intellect (ha-da'at ha-celyon)." In the sequel, al-Farabi writes: "But that principle which is the principle through which the mover of the first heaven becomes a substance is necessarily one in all respects." 126 Ketav ha-da'at interpolates the following telling characterization of "the mover of the first heaven":

which has taken its substance [or, essence] from what is above it—namely the First Existent—[and is] that from which it has taken that

123 Nicomachean Ethics 1.1, 1094a10 and following. I was, however, unable to find a more specific source for our passage. I am grateful to Steven Harvey and Steven Livesey for their advice on this subject.
124 Risālah, 32:8–10.
125 Risālah, 35:7–8; trans. Hyman, p. 221 (modified).
126 Risālah, 35:12; trans. Hyman, "Letter," p. 221, where the words "the mover of " are missing.
holy power and which has no motion; and this is the Shekhinah [Divine Presence] in my view. (341–343)

Let these examples suffice. What can we learn of the author of these and the other passages found in Ketav ha-da'at but not in the Arabic text of al-Fārābī's Risālah as we have it? Clearly, the author of these glosses had a sure grasp of the subject matter of al-Fārābī's treatise and was at home in contemporary Greek-Arabic philosophy. Indeed, as a rule the additional passages fit into the text very well, so well indeed that without a comparison to the original text of the Risālah, presumably no one would have suspected that they might not be genuine. Thus the question must be considered whether Ketav ha-da'at reflects a version of the Risālah that is fuller than the one we have in the Arabic text (or in the other, Hebrew and Latin, translations). In view of the fact that the question of two recensions of the Risālah has already been raised on the basis of other considerations, to wit, the existence of a longer and a shorter Arabic version, the eventuality that Ketav ha-da'at preserves a previously unknown version of al-Fārābī's text cannot be dismissed offhand. This eventuality is strengthened by the consideration that Ketav ha-da'at is a particularly credible witness of the Arabic text of the Risālah (e.g., it is the only translation to preserve Mu'āwiya's name).

Alternatively, should the hypothesis that Ketav ha-da'at is the translation of a fuller redaction of al-Fārābī's Risālah be rejected, we must still consider three possibilities concerning the identity of its redactor. The interpolator may have been a Muslim scholar, writing in Arabic, whose reworked version of the Risālah was subsequently faithfully rendered into Hebrew as Ketav ha-da'at. Alternatively, the interpolations may all come from the pen of the translator of the text into Hebrew, who used as his Vorlage the Arabic text of the Risālah as we have it. A third possibility is that two Jewish scholars were involved in the production of Ketav ha-

127 Yedā'aya ha-Penini, in the 14th century, certainly did not suspect that the text he paraphrased was not of a piece.
128 See above, n. 22. Other works of al-Fārābī are known to exist in a longer and a shorter recension. See, e.g., Mauro Zonta, “L'Ihsā' al-Ulīm in ambiente ebraico,” Henoch 12 (1990), 53–75.
129 My thanks to Y. Tzvi Langermann for having suggested this possibility.
daʿat—a first scholar translated it faithfully from Arabic into Hebrew, and the second added the various interpolations.

On examination, the possibility that the additional glosses were written by a Muslim scholar in Arabic, whether al-Fārābī himself or a later scholar, can be ruled out with confidence. As I will show, it seems certain that these glosses were written by a Jewish scholar who, while translating the Risālāh, added explanatory observations and reflections of his own, composed in Hebrew and directed to a Jewish readership.

The first and weightiest indication pointing to a Jewish redactor is the following. In the long added passage considered above (xvi), the author elaborates upon al-Fārābī’s statement that “in” the active intellect forms are indivisible by arguing: “It is not the case that the idea of the form of man [exists] separately, and the idea of the form of the ox [exists] separately, and the form of the lion [exists] separately, and the form of the eagle [exists] separately ...” (263ff.). This passage bears the unmistakable imprint of the author's Jewish culture in the implicit but clear and telling allusion to Ezekiel’s first vision of the four living creatures, each of which had four faces: a man’s, a lion’s, an ox’s, and an eagle’s (Ezek 1:6–10)—the examples adduced here for the “forms” comprised in the form of man.130 Since in Ezekiel’s vision the four faces are in each case faces of one and the same “living creature,” the allusion to it is particularly apt to convey to the Jewish reader the idea that “in” the active intellect the forms are indivisible.131 For this reason it is clear that this passage was written by a Jewish scholar.

The same passage contains a further indication that it was written directly in Hebrew, by someone at home in traditional Jewish literature; namely, the Hebrew style of the passage describing the manufacture of a bridle (266–269), and specifically the use of a rhetorical question (“How many arts are requisite to produce a strap until it is

130 I am grateful to Resianne Fontaine and Rémi Brague for their advice on this passage.
131 Maimonides draws on Ezekiel’s vision in the Guide (3.1–7), but his interpretation is altogether different from the one in Ketav ha-daʿat, so that there is no reason to assume that the author of Ketav ha-daʿat was acquainted with the Guide. It is noteworthy that Yedaʿaya ha-Penini, in his paraphrase of this section of Ketav ha-daʿat (MS Paris, BnF, heb. 984, fol. 16a:20–16b:18), makes no allusion to Ezekiel as its source of inspiration.
fit for use?”). The entire passage is written in a fluent and idiomatic Hebrew inspired by the Midrash, and the rhetorical question, in particular, is a literary device typical of the Talmuds and midrashim, but rarely used in the philosophic literature.

A further hint that the author of the interpolations in Ketav ha-da’at was Jewish is the short passage quoted above (xviii), which identifies the First Cause with the Shekhinah (Divine Presence). Now whereas a corresponding term also exists in Arabic (sakinah), its meaning is very different from that of its Hebrew counterpart. In the Hebrew tradition, the notion of Shekhinah already appears in early Rabbinic literature, and as a result, Jewish philosophers from Saadia Gaon onwards sought to integrate it into their philosophies.\textsuperscript{132} By contrast, in the Arabic-Muslim culture, sakinah played only a subordinate role, and philosophers did not show much interest in it. As far as I can ascertain, no Muslim (or, for that matter, Jewish) thinker identified sakinah with “the philosophers’ God” (or First Cause).\textsuperscript{133} The identification of the Unmoved Mover with the Shekhinah, which probably was motivated by the literal meaning of the Hebrew term shekhinah (dwelling place, rest),\textsuperscript{134} seems to constitute further important evidence in favor of the claim that Ketav ha-da’at is the work of a Jewish scholar.

Lastly, the author’s Jewish identity is further confirmed by the sentence explaining that Muʿawiya “was a great king . . . and it is through his numerous tricks that he became king” (13–14). The sentence can hardly be by al-Fārābī, or any other Muslim author, who would not have thought it necessary to explain to his readers who Muʿawiya was. This explanatory gloss seems rather to fit an author writing in Hebrew, who would correctly have thought that his Jewish readers would not know who Muʿawiya was. (It seems, in fact, that he himself was not sure who Muʿawiya was, and that he simply guessed from the context that Muʿawiya was “a great king.”)\textsuperscript{135}


\textsuperscript{133} See Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. “sakina” (French ed., 8:918–920). I am grateful to Paul B. Fenton for his advice on this question.

\textsuperscript{134} I am grateful to Moshe Idel for this suggestion.

\textsuperscript{135} A further indication against the hypothesis that Ketav ha-da’at is the translation of a long recension, by al-Fārābī himself, of the Risālah is the fact that the redactor of Ketav ha-da’at adds to the original Arabic text of the Risālah the comment that
It thus seems quite certain that the interpolations found in *Ketav ha-da'at* were made by a Jewish scholar. Are they the work of the translator himself or of a later glossator? A careful examination of the interpolations yields no reason to believe that they were authored by someone other than the translator; indeed, while the longer interpolations are often recognizable as such by introductory words “this means,” etc.), the shorter ones are very tightly woven into the text and are unlikely to be later additions. The interpolations thus seem to have been added in the course of the translation of the *Risâlah* into Hebrew. As I suggested above, *Ketav ha-da'at* may have been translated orally.

Thus *Ketav ha-da'at* provides an instance of a distinctive and interesting type of cultural transfer. Unlike the anonymous translator of the *Risâlah* and Qalonymos, who like most of their colleagues in the 13th and the 14th centuries, translated the Arabic Vorlage faithfully word for word, the scholar who produced *Ketav ha-da'at* had a different idea about the nature of translation. He believed that a translator may and indeed should employ all necessary means to put the contents of the translated text within the intellectual reach of his readers. This mission necessitated tinkering with the text and incorporating into it explanatory notes which could help bring home its meaning to its potential readers.136

The aims of the translator-author of *Ketav ha-da'at* may explain two features that distinguish it both from the Arabic original and from the two other Hebrew translations. First, it may plausibly be

136 A parallel phenomenon—a movement from paraphrastic to more literal and accurate translations—can be discerned in other medieval translation movements. Thus, apropos of the translations from Greek into Syriac, Henri Hugonnard-Roche observes: “Les traductions d’œuvres philosophiques ont elles-mêmes évolué d’un style d’abord paraphrastique vers un style très littéral, où les traducteurs cherchent à rendre le texte original jusqu’en ses moindres détails.” See his “Les traductions du grec au syriaque et du syriaque à l'arabe,” in Jacqueline Hamesse and Marta Fattori, eds., *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale. Traductions et traducteurs de l'antiquité tardive au XIVe siècle* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), p. 136.
conjectured that it was the redactor of *Ketav ha-da'at* who deliber-
ately omitted the ascription of the text to al-Farabi, replacing the
words “al-Farabi said” of the original with the words “the philoso-
pher said” (1), possibly assuming that this would make the work more
acceptable to the Jewish reader.⁴⁷ Indeed, at the beginning of the
text the redactor added the phrase, “With the help of the Creator I
will begin to write *Ketav ha-da'at*” (0), thus indicating that he con-
sidered the work his own. Additionally, the redactor of *Ketav ha-
da'at* construed the original text as a commentary, for in one of the
interpolated passages (above, xvi), he explicitly refers to the author
of the translated text as the “commentator” (or “interpreter”; ha-me-
faresh) (270). I assume that he thought of the bulk of the *Risālah* as
a lengthy commentary on “the philosopher’s” six statements on the
meaning of “intellect” quoted at the beginning of the treatise (1–11).
Since the *Risālah* at different points associates various meanings of
the term “intellect” with the meanings it has in different works of
Aristotle, presumably it is he to whom the author of *Ketav ha-da'at*
referred with the epithet, “the philosopher.” *Ketav ha-da'at* was thus
presumably regarded by its redactor as a commentary on Aristotle’s
uses of the term “intellect.”

*Ketav ha-da'at* is thus much more than a mere translation. Its
Hebrew-writing author at once translated and commented, or glossed,
the work he was transferring from the Arabic-language culture into
the Hebrew culture. *Ketav ha-da'at* can therefore be described as a
translation-commentary. It takes its place alongside the other ex-
amples of translation-commentaries that exist in the Arabic, He-
brew, and Latin medieval philosophical traditions.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ None of the Arabic manuscripts of the *Risālah* is anonymous, so we can as-
sume that the Vorlage used by the redactor of *Ketav ha-da'at* was not anonymous
either. Perhaps it was al-Farabi’s bad reputation—of which the erudite author of *Ketav
ha-da'at* may well have been aware—that motivated his decision. It will be remem-
bered that Maimonides, too, concealed the identity of al-Farabi as a source of inspi-
ration for his *Eight Chapters* (see Herbert A. Davidson, “Maimonides’ Shemonah
to Jim Robinson for this suggestion. Of course other possibilities exist, too. If, as
suggested above, the text was taken down by a student without being revised, the
name may have been dropped by him. Naturally, it could also have been omitted by
accident.

⁴⁸ In the Arabic tradition, the most striking example is the circle around al-Kindi in
the early 9th century; see Gerhard Endress, “The Circle of al-Kindi: Early Arabic
Traditions from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy,” in *The Ancient Tradition in*
CONCLUSION

This article has added only a little to what has been known since Steinschneider's day about the Qalonymos ben Qalonymos and anonymous translations of al-Fārābī Risālah. The anonymous translation will in all likelihood remain anonymous forever. Comparison of its terminology with that of Qalonymos' version (see Appendix II), shows that the Hebrew philosophical vocabulary has already become quite standard by this period, thwarting any attempt to identify a translator through peculiarities of his technical vocabulary. Indeed, Qalonymos was a professional translator and the quality of the anonymous translation suggests that its author was one as well. Obviously, the anonymous translation was made after the institution and spread of the Tibbonide philosophical vocabulary in the early 13th century. The fact that al-Fārābī's Risālah was translated twice is not surprising, since texts were notoriously ill-diffused and the phenomenon of double or triple translations is common. The interest in the Risālah is certainly due to the centrality of its problematic, a rational construal of God as the First Existent, and perhaps also to Maimonides' explicit reference to it in the Guide. 139

The main thrust of this paper has been directed to Ketav ha-da'at, preserved in a unique manuscript in Vienna. I argued that its date can be established with a high degree of probability to the middle of the 12th century. It is thus one of the earliest translations into Hebrew of a philosophic work written by a non-Jewish author, a fact that is reflected in its awkward terminology. Early in the 14th century,
Yeda’aya ha-Penini wrote an expository paraphrase of the work (preserved in a unique Paris manuscript), in which the idiosyncratic terminology of the original Ketav ha-da’at coexists with the standard philosophical vocabulary of the 14th century. Ketav ha-da’at was apparently well known in Yeda’aya’s time, as can be gauged from Yeda’aya’s reference to it as the book known under “the Customary, Usual Name ‘Book of the Intellect.’” 140 Nonetheless, Ketav ha-da’at left few traces in the Hebrew literature; in addition to Yeda’aya, Gershom ben Solomon, the author of Sha’ar ha-Shamayim, is the only scholar who is known to have been acquainted with it.

Ketav ha-da’at turns out to be more than a mere translation of al-Fārābī’s Risālah. Rather, its Jewish author interpolated in it a considerable number of explanatory passages, both short and long, which aim to bring it nearer to the reader. Ketav ha-da’at is to be viewed as the outcome of a self-conscious effort on the part of the translator-glossator to make the fairly arduous contents of the Risālah as accessible as possible to the Hebrew-reading student, who, at the time of the translation, was still entirely unfamiliar with philosophical ideas.

Ketav ha-da’at was written in almost complete ignorance of any existing Hebrew philosophical terminology. It thus testifies to the struggle of a scholar with the difficult task of creating a Hebrew philosophical vocabulary capable of expressing Greek-Arabic philosophy in Hebrew. The terminological solutions and inventions are mostly not very felicitous, to put it mildly, and are inferior to those of, say, Abraham Ibn Ezra and Abraham bar Hiyya, not to mention Maimonides, the Tibbonides and Shem-Tov Ibn Falaqera. Still, these very infelicities render the terminology coined by the author of Ketav ha-da’at of considerable interest, precisely because it highlights that those medieval philosophical terms we take for granted as the obvious translations of the corresponding Arabic terms were not so “obvious” before the Tibbonides and their followers set to work. To further illustrate this consideration, and also in order to show that Qalonymos and the anonymous translator already worked

140 See above, p. 38. One may even ponder the possibility that there was a continuous tradition of studying it. Judging from my own experience, I find it is difficult to believe that someone whose philosophical education consisted only of texts using Tibbonide Hebrew would have been able to understand the abstruse Hebrew of Ketav ha-da’at, even if he were an expert in Hebrew like Yeda’aya ha-Penini (who was called ha-melis). Yeda’aya himself refers to the treatise being “sealed and shut” (above, p. 37), but says nothing on how he deciphered it.
within a disciplinary matrix that supplied the tools for a professional, standardized, and unproblematic translation, I append (Appendix II) a comparative table of some terms appearing in al-Fārābī's Risālah, and the equivalent terms in the three Hebrew versions and in Yedaḥayya ha-Penini's paraphrase of Ketav ha-da'at.

APPENDIX I: KETAV HA-DA'AT—A CRITICAL EDITION

Establishing the text of Ketav ha-da'at has been particularly difficult. The single extant manuscript of the text is extremely corrupt, with hardly a single line offering a correct reading. The scribe manifestly did not understand a word of what he copied and often put down meaningless strings of letters. It must be admitted, though, that he cannot be blamed for not having understood a text whose extremely abstruse subject matter is expressed in a language which is almost sui generis and which remains difficult to follow even in its edited form.

Reconstructing this corrupt text would not have been possible without two reliable witnesses: the original Arabic text of the Risālah in M. Bouyges' masterly edition, and Yedaḥayya ha-Penini's paraphrase of Ketav ha-da'at. With their help, the classic hermeneutic circle, or rather spiral, could be followed. At the first stage, bits and pieces of an intelligible text of Ketav ha-da'at slowly began to emerge. Comparison with the Arabic text increasingly convinced me that the author of Ketav ha-da'at had mastered Arabic and also perfectly understood the text he was translating. Although his Hebrew is clumsy and at first rather difficult to follow, a word for word comparison with the Arabic text slowly revealed that almost every word in the Risālah has an equivalent in the Hebrew text. This conviction in turn served as a guiding principle for the reconstruction of the more corrupted parts of the text; wherever the manuscript yielded an unintelligible text, I tended to assume that it was not the translation itself that was faulty, but rather that the originally correct translation had been corrupted in the process of transmission. I then followed this procedure: when confronted with an unintelligible word or phrase, I examined the Arabic text and tried to guess what the author of Ketav ha-da'at would have written. Quite often, the letters or words preserved in the manuscript could then be recognized as...

141 See above, p. 38.
corruptions of an originally sound text, which could thus be re-
stored. Next, I compared the conjectured reconstruction with Ye-
da’aya ha-Penini’s paraphrase, which, it turned out, was based on a
fairly reliable copy of Ketav ha-da’at. Now Yeda’aya paraphrased
the idiosyncratic Hebrew of Ketav ha-da’at in a “modernized” (14th-
century) philosophical Hebrew, but he also often preserved its origi-
nal characteristic expressions, including them in his text side by side
with their more recent equivalents; and even where his paraphrase
did not preserve the original expressions of Ketav ha-da’at, it was
often very helpful as a means to control possible alternative recon-
structions. In this manner, many of the conjectured reconstructions
could be definitely confirmed or at least determined to be plausible.

At times, words or phrases in the Risālah had no equivalent in the
text of Ketav ha-da’at as it is preserved in the manuscript. This
could be due either to the corruption of an originally more compre-
hensive text of Ketav ha-da’at, or to the author of Ketav ha-da’at
not having translated some words (either he skipped them, or they
were missing in his Vorlage). Here again I relied on Yeda’aya. Where
his text testified that his copy of Ketav ha-da’at contained a trans-
lation of the relevant words of the Arabic text, I tried to reconstruct
the missing text, and where reconstruction was not possible, I noted
the gap. In the absence of such a confirmation from Yeda’aya, I
assumed that Ketav ha-da’at did not translate the corresponding
Arabic words.

As discussed above, the author of Ketav ha-da’at interpolated in
the text he translated numerous additional words, sentences, and
entire passages of his own. Where such additions were corrupt, they
obviously could not be restored on the basis of a comparison with
the Arabic, so that Yeda’aya ha-Penini’s paraphrase here offered the
only means to control the conjectured reconstructions.

The manuscript of Ketav ha-da’at has an intriguing peculiarity:
certain words are written in larger characters, have blank space
around them, and in addition, have three dots placed over the letters.
In other instances, dots over words are apparently also used to high-
light the words, but without the characters being written larger.
(Elsewhere, dots over words are used to nullify them, in accordance
with standard practice.) Since there is no parallel phenomenon in
the Arabic manuscripts of the Risālah, nor in any of the manuscripts
of the two Hebrew translations, this is specific to Ketav ha-da’at.
But it does not seem to have been introduced by the author of Ketav
ha-da’at himself, for the manuscript of Ketav ha-da’at used by
Yedacaya ha-Penini apparently did not present this singular feature. The phenomenon in question thus seems to belong only to one family of manuscripts of Ketav ha-da'cat, to which belongs the manuscript that has reached us. In view of the very disorderly state of the only surviving manuscript, it stands to reason that the words highlighted in it may not be precisely those that were highlighted originally. This makes it very difficult to surmise how the highlighted words were originally displayed, and to what purpose. While the layout may suggest that they were intended as first words or titles of sections, they do not in fact fulfill any of these functions. I therefore decided not to indicate the words highlighted in the manuscript through special fonts. The notes, however, do indicate the highlighted words.

In the critical edition of Ketav ha-da'cat given below, every change of the text in the manuscript is indicated. Letters, single words, or groups of words that I have added to the text are surrounded by square brackets. The notes detail and explain these additions and also indicate where and why a word was replaced by another or deleted. The two components of Ketav ha-da'cat—namely, the translation of the Risalah strictly speaking, and the various interpolations—are clearly distinguished by the use of underlining for all the words that have no parallel in the Arabic text of the Risalah. Also indicated in square brackets are the folio numbers of the manuscript of Ketav ha-da'cat, as well as (preceded by the letter ٰ in) the page numbers of the Arabic text of the Risalah in Maurice Bouyges' critical edition.

My purpose has been to come as close as possible to the original text of Ketav ha-da'cat as it left the desk (or, if it was spoken, the lips) of its author. Bouyges' excellent edition of Al-Farabi's Risalah fi'l-aql and Yedacaya ha-Penini's paraphrase have made this task attainable. I hope that the text offered here is not too far off the mark.

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142 In the only surviving manuscript of Yedacaya ha-Penini's paraphrase, the first words of passages are often in larger characters, but these do not correspond to the words highlighted in the manuscript of Ketav ha-da'cat, and the words highlighted in the latter are not so marked in Yedacaya's text.

143 The phenomenon is hardly imputable to the scribe of this manuscript, who was manifestly helpless in the face of the text and would not have taken the liberty of tinkering with it.

144 By contrast, I do not indicate where Ketav ha-da'cat skips words found in the Arabic text of the Risalah.
The Text

Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 123 (Catalogue no. 165; = Goldenthal 32; = IMHM #1399), fol. 2a–9b. I am grateful to the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, for the permission to publish this text from the manuscript in its possession.

כעב הדעת

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 mutants bilingual. In order to create this dictionary, we use a monolingual dictionary of Arabic and English terms. The dictionary is bilingual, and it includes terms from both languages. The dictionary is bilingual, and it includes terms from both languages.

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The rhyming of the initial words suggests a poetic or lyrical style, perhaps meant to invoke a sense of rhythm and flow in the discussion of the subject matter. The text appears to be discussing a topic that requires a nuanced approach, possibly dealing with philosophical or religious implications.

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The text is in Hebrew and appears to be a page from a book or a document. The content is not readable due to the quality of the image and the OCR process. It seems to be discussing a topic related to intellect and intellectuality in Islamic heritage, but the specific details are not clear from the image.
APPENDIX II:

A COMPARATIVE TABLE OF PHILOSOPHICAL TERMS OCCURRING IN KETAV HA-DA‘AT, AL-FĀRĀBĪ’S RISĀLAH, YEDA‘AYA HA-PENINI’S PARAPHRASE OF KETAV HA-DA‘AT, THE ANONYMOUS TRANSLATION, AND QALONYMOS BEN QALONYMOS’ TRANSLATION

The following table aims to give the reader a relatively easy means of access to Ketav ha-Da‘at. The terms are arranged in the order of their occurrence in that text (with the line number indicated), so that a glance at the table will inform the reader of the Arabic and the more usual Hebrew equivalents of a given term. Not all the terms used in Ketav ha-Da‘at have been included, because that would have required a listing of almost its entire vocabulary. The full references for the editions and manuscripts used are given in the body of the article.

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This is a table from the Hellenistic period, listing translations and references in Greek and Hebrew.
Almost all the information needed for a correct identification of the Vienna text of Ketav ha-da’at and its paraphrase by Yeda’aya ha-Penini has been available for more than a century, but curiously, the different components of the puzzle have never before been brought to bear on one another. In what follows, I give a description of these “missed opportunities,” both in order to give each of my predecessors his due, and in order to reveal a telling instance of dysfunction in the system of scientific communication.

In 1847, the great scholar Salomon Munk devoted a brief article to the Paris manuscript Fonds de l’Oratoire, no. 119 (now BnF hêb.
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984), which contains different compositions by Yeda’aya ha-Penini. Of the first composition, bearing the title Ketav ha-da’at, Munk had the following to say:

*Ketav ha-da’at,* le Livre de la connaissance, ou Traité de l’Intellect. Ce traité n’est évidemment autre chose que la paraphrase d’un petit ouvrage du philosophe arabe Al-Farâbi, dont il existe à la bibliothèque royale une version hébraïque sous le titre de *Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot* (en arabe *Kitâb al-’aqîl wa-l-ma’qûlât*), et dont la version latine, intitulée *de Intellectu et Intelecto,* a été imprimée dans les Oeuvres philosophiques d’Avicenne (Venise, 1495, in-fol.).

Dans une courte préface ledaYa dit qu’en parcourant divers Traités sur l’âme, il en avait rencontré un, intitulé *Ketav ha-da’at,* qui lui avait paru renfermer tout ce qu’il est utile de savoir de la nature de l’intellect; mais qu’ayant trouvé ce traité fort obscur et la traduction (hébraïque) fort mauvaise, il a entrepris d’en corriger le style et d’y ajouter les développements nécessaires. Nous pouvons donc considérer l’ouvrage de ledaYa comme un commentaire sur le traité d’Al-Farâbi, bien que celui-ci ne soit mentionné par notre auteur. Il paraît que du temps de ledaYa, le traité d’Al-Farâbi était très connu sous le titre de *Ketav ha-da’at;* en tête de l’ouvrage de ledaYa, après la préface, on lit cette inscription: *Sefer ha-Sekhel ha-nirse ba-shem ha-nahug ha-yadu’a* “Ketav ha-da’at”, le Livre de l’Intellect, désigné par le nom usité et connu de KETHAB HA-DAATH.\(^1\)

An accurate and full précis of Munk’s article was published the following year by Leopold Dukes in *Der Orient.*\(^2\)

A couple of years later, in his well-known book *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (1859), Munk briefly mentioned the existence of a Hebrew version of al-Farâbi’s book on the intellect and the existence of Yeda’aya’s “paraphrase” of it, referring his readers to the article he had published in 1847.\(^3\)

Munk thus identified Yeda’aya ha-Penini’s composition as a paraphrase of al-Farâbi’s work, but he did not comment on the precise

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\(^1\) S[alomon] Munk, “Notice sur quelques ouvrages inédits de ledaYa Penini, fils d’Abraham de Béziers,” *Archives israélites de France* 8 (1847) 69. (The titles given in Hebrew characters have been transliterated here.)

\(^2\) Leopold Dukes, “Übersetzungen aus der hebräischen Belletristik des Mittelalters,” *Der Orient* 9 (1848) 260. Duke summarized Munk’s article apropos of his discussion of an edition and translation of Yeda’aya ha-Penini’s *Behinat ’olam.* He mentions Munk’s article and his own in his *Philosophisches aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert* (Nakel, 1868), p. 64.

identity of the Hebrew text which Yedac'aya paraphrased. When Steinschneider published his Al-Farabi, he had not seen Munk's article, but was aware of its contents through Dukes' account. He erroneously concluded from Dukes that Munk had stated that Yedac'aya had paraphrased the Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot in the anonymous translation of the Paris manuscript.

At precisely the same time as Munk identified Yedac'aya ha-Penini's composition as a paraphrase of Al-Farabi's work on the intellect, another scholar made a very similar discovery at the other end of Europe. MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 122 (cat. no. 164), entitled Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot le-Al-Farabi, carries a preamble (written, the scribe informs us, on Thursday, 26 Tishri 5611 [= 1850]), which begins with the words “Said Jacob, who is called Doctor Goldenthal” (folios unnumbered). In this preamble, Jacob Goldenthal (1815–1868), the well-known scholar to whom we owe editions of a number of important medieval Hebrew works (not the least being Al-Ghazali's Mozney sedeq and Moses Narboni's Commentary on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed), gives an account of the origin of that manuscript. During his second stay in Leipzig, he says, in winter (5)604 (= 1844/5), he copied for himself the treatise On the Intellect and the Intelligibles by Al-Farabi from a manuscript kept at the local municipal library. He had the intention of publishing it together with a German translation, but other matters kept him from doing so and his copy of the Leipzig manuscript remained among his papers. One day—in the meantime he had been appointed Professor for Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of Vienna—he received a request from the “excellent poet,” Baron (in fact, Freiherr Eligius Franz Joseph) von Münch-Bellinghausen (1806–1871), asking him to establish a list of Hebrew manuscripts newly acquired by the Vienna “Biblioteca Palatina.” Among these, there was one codex written on parchment and carrying the title Ketav ha-da'cat. Goldenthal obviously compared Yeda'aya's text with the Hebrew translation of the Risālah preserved in the Paris library, i.e., the anonymous translation that was to be edited by Rosenstein, and with the printed Latin translation. The fact that he deliberately avoided commenting on the relationship between Yeda'aya's "paraphrase" and Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot clearly indicates that he realized that the object of Yeda'aya's paraphrase was not this Hebrew translation.

Steinschneider, Al-Farabi, p. 91.

6 In Hebrew Goldenthal uses "Biblioteca Palatina" to refer to the Vienna k. k. Hofbibliothek; it is not its homonym in Parma that is meant.
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that remarks that no work by that name is mentioned in any bibliographical work of reference, but that he was aware that Moses ben Shem Ṭov ibn Ḥabib, in his Commentary on Sefer behinat ṭolam by Yedaʿaya ha-Penini (printed at Constantinople in 1580), ascribes to Yedaʿaya a work by the name Ketav ha-daʿcat.7 He goes on to say that upon reading a few lines of the text he immediately realized that it was a translation of the very same work by al-Fārābī, a different Hebrew translation of which he had copied in Leipzig a couple of years earlier (Ketav ha-daʿcat using the term daʿat for “intellect,” instead of the more customary sekhel). Goldenthal concludes by saying that in order to be helpful to those who seek knowledge he ordered a scribe to copy his own copy of the Leipzig text in an elegant square script, and that he donated the copied manuscript to the Vienna library. Thus, he remarks, the two distinct translations will be found side by side, and whoever will wish to print them will be able to check one against the other.

In his catalogue of the manuscripts newly acquired by the Vienna library, requested by von Münch-Bellinghausen and eventually published in 1851, Goldenthal repeats this story in his descriptions of the manuscripts of Ketav ha-daʿcat (no. 32) and of Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot (no. 33, which is the one he had had copied for the library).8 A. Z. Schwarz’s catalogue of 1925 confirms that the former was purchased from S. G. Stern in 1849 and that the latter was donated to the library by Goldenthal.9

MS Vienna 164, carrying al-Fārābī’s Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot is a copy, then, of the copy of the Leipzig manuscript (now catalogued as Universitätsbibliothek B.H. 13), which Goldenthal made in 1845. (The copy in Goldenthal’s hand is apparently not extant.) The Ketav ha-daʿcat in MS Vienna 165 has been identified by Goldenthal as being an independent translation of the same text by al-Fārābī, in which the term daʿat denotes “intellect.”10 Goldenthal noted that a work by the name Ketav ha-daʿcat had been ascribed to Yedaʿaya ha-Penini, but he did not take a position on the question

7 The passage can now be found in Renan [Neubauer], Les écrivains, p. 393.
10 Although Munk did not explicitly comment on the term daʿat, he too was obviously aware that it was an equivalent of sekhel.
of whether and how the *Ketav ha-da'at* in Vienna is related to Ye-
dacaya. Unfortunately, and surprisingly, Goldenthal was unaware
both of Munk's publication in the *Archives israélites* and of its sum-
mary by L. Dukes published in *Der Orient*, and thus could not asso-
ciate the *Ketav ha-da'at* he identified as al-Farābī's with the text of
similar title by Yeda'aya ha-Penini that Munk had found in Paris
and that he too had connected with al-Farābī. Steinschneider, for his
part, assumed that the *Ketav ha-da'at* in Vienna was identical with
Yeda'aya's text in Paris (which he knew only through Dukes' sum-
mary of Munk's findings), believing both to consist of Yeda'aya's
paraphrase of *Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot* in the anonymous
translation.\(^{11}\)

A small step forward was made by Adolf Neubauer (1831–1907)
in the *Les Écrivains juifs français du XIVe siècle*, published at about
the same time as Steinschneider's *Hebräische Übersetzungen* (1893).
Neubauer there follows Steinschneider's indications concerning the
anonymous translation and that of Qalonymos,\(^{12}\) but on the basis of
a direct examination of Yeda'aya ha-Penini's text in Paris, he states
that Yeda'aya paraphrased not the anonymous translation carrying
the title *Sefer ha-sekhel we-ha-muskalot*, but rather a different trans-
lation of the same text, which, he conjectured, must have been
known to Yeda'aya under the title *Ketav ha-da'at*. Neubauer in fact
did little more than read carefully Yeda'aya ha-Penini's preamble to
his work (above, pp. 37–38). Sadly and again surprisingly, Neubauer
was apparently unaware of the existence of the *Ketav ha-da'at* in
the Vienna manuscript, although it had been described by Golden-
thal some forty years earlier, and consequently he did not ask how
the two texts titled *Ketav ha-da'at* are related.\(^{13}\) And Stein-
schneider, as we have seen, surmised that the Vienna *Ketav ha-
da'at* described by Goldenthal was identical with *Sefer ha-sekhel
ha-nirse ba-shem ha-nahug ha-yadu'a “Ketav ha-da'at”* in the Paris
manuscript. Thus although all the information concerning *Ketav ha-
da'at* has been available in the literature for over a century, until
now no attempt has been made to tie up the various loose ends.

\(^{11}\) Steinschneider, *Al-Farabi*, p. 91.

\(^{12}\) Neubauer saw the *Hebräische Übersetzungen* in proofs (see p. 394, n. 1) and
had had access to its first, French, version, dating from 1885 (see ibid., e.g., p. 15).
On the latter see Dominique Bourel, "Les traductions hébraïques du Moyen Age. Un

KETAV HA-DA‘AT—FREUDENTHAL

Intellect and Intellectuality in Islamic Heritage

Selected Readings and Studies

(English - 1)

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Al-Mustafa International University

Tehran Branch

Courtesy of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. gr. 123, f. 2a
Courtesy of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. gr. 123, f. 4b
Courtesy of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. gr. 123, f. 5a
One of the most outstanding features of the modern world is its rationality – such that it is based on this concept that many of both the positive and negative aspects of modernity are assayed.

Rationality has numerous levels and dimensions. Any given society develops its own special culture and civilization depending upon which of these levels is made operative in it. The area of rationality that has become actualised in the modern world, more than any other, is one that can be termed instrumental rationality (‘aql abzārī).

The present paper will initially present the different meanings, dimensions, limits and levels that have been ascribed to rationality and the rational faculty in man. It will then survey the historical formation and encroachment of instrumental rationality in the modern world, and will continue by noting some of its innate difficulties and defects. In conclusion, a solution to some of these problems will be proposed.

For man’s cognitive faculty (‘aql, reason, or intellect) various meanings have been put forth and terminologies coined. Each one of them takes into consideration a certain dimension, level or layer of the faculty in question. Some of these terms are as follows:

1. Instrumental reason (‘aql abzārī)
2. Metaphysical reason
3. Speculative reason (‘amālī)
4. Practical reason (‘amālī)
5. Conceptual reason (‘μαθήματα)
6. Intuitive intellect (shuhūdī)
7. Sacred intellect (qudsī)
8. Common sense (‘urfī)
9. Universal intellect (kullī)
10. Individual intellect (juzzī)
11. Empirical reason (tajribī)
12. Intellect in potential (bi l-quwah)
13. Intellect in acquisition (bil-malakah)
14. Intellect in act (bil-f’īl)
15. Acquired Intellect (mustafād)
16. Active Intellect (fa’a’āl)
17. First Intellect (awwal)
18. Horizontal and Vertical Intellects

1- Instrumental Reason (‘aql abzārī)

Instrumental reason and rationality is primarily geared for man’s complete domination of nature. It was with this meaning of rationality in mind that Francis Bacon in his book Novum Organum took knowledge to be the same as power and wrote, “Human knowledge and human power meet in one.”

Max Weber saw instrumental rationality as one of the defining elements of Western civilisation and saw Western man’s behaviour to be dominated by this type of
rationality. He held that this goal-oriented rationality, or *zweckrational*, guided social behaviour along the lines of the worldly ends within man’s reach. He counted technology, industry, and bureaucracy to be the natural results and effects of the domination of rationality in this meaning.

2- Metaphysical Reason

Metaphysical reason or intellect, strives to determine the conditions and states that apply to being itself. Metaphysical laws and axioms, though not limited to the material world, are usually applicable to material existents as well. For example, the axiom of non-contradiction or the principle of causality, are relevant in the physical realm as much as they are in the metaphysical. Questions and issues of philosophy and ontology are the prime concern and responsibility of metaphysical reason.

3- Speculative Reason (*aql nażarī*)

Speculative reason involves itself with those realities that are outside the sphere of human volition. In scope, it is more general than metaphysical reason. This is because metaphysical reason is only a part of speculative reason, which includes in its other parts, and is responsible for addressing, issues of physics and mathematics. Instrumental reason as well, to the extent that it concerns the knowledge of natural and material realities, comes under the purview of speculative reason.

4- Practical Reason (*aql ‘amali*)

Practical reason and speculative reason are opposites – their realms of application and subjects of study being entirely distinct from one another. Practical reason engages itself with realities that are based upon man’s will. Do’s, don’ts, manners, personal and social rights, rules, and human organizations, are all the objects of attention for practical reason.

Kant was a philosopher who questioned the value and validity of the cognitive content of speculative reason. In spite of his scepticism of speculative reason though, he attempted to defend the substantiality of practical reason.

From the foregoing definitions of speculative and practical reason, it is clear that practical reason – just like speculative reason – is a faculty employed in the search for truth and reality. In this meaning, these two rationalities are two parts and domains of human knowledge. Their difference lying in the subject to which they apply themselves.

Practical reason is sometimes taken in a meaning by which it opposes the cognitive faculty. In such case it represents the practical faculty of man. The acts ensuing from it then become acts of beauty and grace, precisely because they conform to the dictates of human reason and intellect.

Whenever practical reason is understood in this last sense, speculative reason in contrast is taken to mean the totality of man’s rational cognition. In this case, speculative reason, in addition to being opposed to man’s practical faculty, also becomes pitted against all other non-rational modes of cognition. For instance it excludes sensuous
cognition (*aisthetikon*) and its accompanying divisions of sensuous perception (*aesthesis*), imagination (*phantasia*), and memory (*mneme*).

5- Conceptual Reason (ʼ*aql mafūmī*)

Conceptual reason has a meaning that is even more general than both speculative reason and practical reason. The central characteristic of conceptual reason is that it apprehends its subjects of study by way of mental concepts. Many epistemological discussions are aware of the importance of this type of reason in acquiring knowledge of concrete reality. Kant, though, doubted the substantive content of conceptual reason and devalued its ability to understand the external world. Conceptual reason is increased and expanded by the means and methods of discursive logic.

6- Intuitive Intellect (ʼ*aql shuhūdī*)

Intuitive reason or intellect\(^1\) apprehends universal and pervasive realities directly, without the mediation of mental concepts. From one perspective intuitive reason is contrasted with conceptual reason. While from another point of view, intellectual intuition is seen to be different from both sensuous intuition (which lies below it and is sub-intellectual) and mystical intuition (which lies above it and is supra-intellectual).

Sensual intuition is acquired by way of direct and unmediated contact with individual and material things, whereas its intellectual counterpart is had by coming face to face with universal and ubiquitous realities. Supra-intellectual intuition, according to the reports of Muslim mystics, is obtained by a vision of God’s beautiful Names and His attributes.

> Mind desired in stealth light from the passional fire  
> Then jealousy welled and nigh was the world rent asunder  
> The courter desired a glimpse of the inner chamber  
> Thundered the voice from beyond, Whither goes ye intruder?!\(^2\)

Intuitive reason is the existential root of conceptual reason. Mullā Şadrā, the famous Muslim philosopher of the 17\(^{th}\) century, held conceptual reason to be of a lower order than intellectual reason and the intellect.\(^3\) Kant, by explicitly denying intuitive rationality, cut off the existential and substantive roots of conceptual reason. In so doing, instead of seeing conceptual reason to be a true representation of concrete reality, he saw it as an impediment and veil hiding it.

7- Sacred Intellect (ʼ*aql qudsī*)

\(^1\) In what follows, the word “intellect” will be used to designate the intuitive faculty (*nous*) in rational cognition, whereas the word “reason” will usually refer to the discursive or inferential faculty (*logos*). In this sense, “reason”, when used by itself and without a qualifying adjective before it, will stand for “ratiocinative reason” (*dianoia*). Such distinctions were deemed to be quintessential due to the bewildering chaos of notions surrounding the words “intellect” and “reason” in our times, and also due to the main theme of this paper. *Trans.*

\(^2\) This is a very freehand paraphrase of a poem by the Iranian poet, Ḥāfīz.

\(^3\) To quote St. Thomas, “Reasoning is a defect of intellect.”

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Sacred intellect is the highest type of intuitive intellect. The holder of this intellect is in direct and immediate contact with intellectual realities (or intellectus when used to denote a species of being). In expounding on the sacred intellect and its genesis, religious texts, mystics and philosophers have been prolific. He who has a sacred intellect, directly apprehends the essences and realities that others only approach by concepts and discursive demonstrations (dianoia and episteme). His apprehension of these realities can be likened to the true and prophetic dreams that some people see. According to the mystics and sages, the divine revelations made to Prophets and the inspirations of the Saints, are consequences of their sacred intellects. The Peripatetic philosophers (mashā’) call this sacred intellect ‘aql mustafād (acquired intellect). In religious texts, the teacher or medium for “teaching” and conveying the sacred intellect is the Holy Spirit – Gabriel, the divine archangel. This very same medium, in philosophical terminology, is an immaterial existent that is sometimes called the Active Intellect (intellectus agens or nous poietikos).\(^1\)

The person with sacred intellect has access to knowledge that is over and beyond the acquired and discursive knowledge available to others. So if metaphysical reason can prove the immateriality and eternality of the human soul, then the sacred intellect can provide the details of man’s ascent and final felicity.

That which is given to humanity by way of sacred intellect in the form of a decree pertaining to conceptual reason, whether speculative or practical – is called a decree of guidance. This is because sacred intellect guides and leads the way for others towards that which they themselves can acquire or become. If, on the other hand, the decree is of such a nature that it is beyond their reach, then it is termed a decree of origination. A decree of origination is supra-intellectual, but it is not anti-intellectual.

8- Common Sense (‘aql ‘urfī)

“Popular reason”, or common sense as it is called, is a part of rational cognition or knowledge that has become actualised in the mass mind or perception of society. Common sense can include knowledge that has been acquired and taught to man by way of conceptual reason or sacred intellect, or it can be the collection of perceptions that have been produced in the process of man’s practical tendencies and mediated by his imaginations and conjectures. This collection becomes established in any given culture in its movement towards civilization.

Common sense aids in creating man’s communal life and shared world. If that which is commonly accepted coincides with the findings of conceptual reason, it shows the centrality of intellectuals in that community and is thus called a “common intellectuality”. But if, on the other hand, it does not agree with conceptual reason and the latter in fact remains silent on the issue, but sacred intellect does refer to it by way of a decree of guidance or origination, then this is tantamount to a full-fledged approval. In such a case, society operates under the auspices of sacred intellect. Failing this, society falls to the level of mere common sense.

\(^1\) Muslim philosophers take this to be the activity of the Divine intelligence. St. Thomas, on the other hand, only sees it to be choristos (separate) and amiges (pure, unmixed) implying that it is distinct from matter and incorporeal.
9- Universal Intellect ('aql kullī)

Universals are divided into two groups: Extended universals (kullī saʿī), and conceptual universals (kullī mafhūmī). Extended universals take into consideration the existential compass and inclusivity of one single reality; like the human soul, which exists as “soul” and is present in all of its different levels but is not bound to, or limited by any specific one of them. The universal intellect, in this sense, is an expansive concrete reality and is not conditioned or limited by nature and its contingencies – just like the Platonic idea.

A conceptual universal is that very same expansive mental concept which is predicated of many individuals and applies to all of them equally. The universal intellect, in this particular meaning then, is that human faculty which apprehends the universal and general meanings of things, and by this comes to understand the properties of all individual things.2

10- Individual Intellect ('aql juzzī)

The individual intellect is contrasted to and is the opposite of the conceptual universal intellect. The cognitive agencies of the individual intellect apply themselves to individual objects and sense data. The individual intellect is also called “conjecture” (eikasia). Instrumental reason mainly makes use of the individual intellect in its processes.

11- Empirical Reason ('aql tajrubī)

Empirical reason is that part of speculative reason which applies itself to natural phenomena – using in the process, sense data and empirical analogies. The latter are based on universal and non-empirical propositions that are taken from the higher levels of the rational faculty, such as metaphysical reason.

Instrumental rationality, more than any thing else, has its roots in empirical reason. Due to the predominance of empiricism and sensationalism in instrumental rationality, it denied the non-sensual bases of experimental and experiential knowledge and put (quantitative) inductive methods in the place of analogical ones. Next, by not accepting a valid role for non-sensual propositions in empirical knowledge, it denied their ability to represent concrete reality. Hence when presenting non-sensual propositions (those whose subject is not strictly material), instrumental rationality – instead of relying on metaphysical reason or sacred intellect – takes recourse in common sense.

* * *

1 In this meaning, the universal intellect extends through the different states and levels of a single individual of a species. Trans.
2 In this more common meaning, the universal intellect extends through the different individuals, potential or real, of that species or the concept and idea of that species. It must be noted that these distinctions are not the same as those referred to by “direct” and “reflex” universals. Trans.
Up until this point some of the terms and concepts directly involving reason and intellect have been briefly discussed. Deliberation upon the very existence of these concepts, or their ability to represent concrete reality and hence their cognitive content, would call for a purely philosophical and epistemological debate and study. This present paper, though, does not approach them from this angle and suspends judgement on these issues. Instead, this article will apply itself to a description of the domination of instrumental rationality and an elucidation of the shortcomings involved in this connection.

The modern world took shape only after turning its back on intuition and the sacred intellect and the Enlightenment took off in a real way from within the parameters of conceptual reason. Pre-modern philosophers, in a considerable part of their discussions, gave attention to intellectual intuitions and the sacred intellect. The debate about universals and their modus operandi was one of the more serious ones between Plato and Aristotle. Plato held that the perception of universal concepts is by way of intuiting and “witnessing” the Ideas – which are the intellects. Aristotle, though he gave more attention to the act of prescinding in the mind, was of the opinion that the causal agent for the existence of the forms is a heavenly Intellect, which is called the tenth Intellect, or the active Intellect.

The Muslim philosopher Fārābī, wrote a book called al-Jamu’bayn al-Rā’yayn, in which he deliberated on these two opinions. This debate continued its course amongst Muslim philosophers and was taken up by the Peripatetics (mashā’), the Illuminists (ishrāq), and the Transcendentalists (muta’āliyah) in a very serious fashion. On the other hand, this debate and discussion was more or less sidelined by the rationalist philosophies that took shape in the modern world.

The enlightenment that preceded the modern world was firmly rooted in the sacred intellect. The enlightenment of the modern age though, began with conceptual reason. Muslim philosophers like Avicenna and Suhrawardī, by logical demonstrations, proved that the cognition and knowledge of the reality of the human soul is not possible but by recourse to intuitive intellect. While Descartes on the other hand, attempted to find his soul on the level of conceptual and discursive knowledge. Cartesian “intuition” then does not go beyond conceptual truisms.

Intuition, in its meaning of a direct and unmediated apprehension of reality, is limited in the modern world to sub-intellectual levels. It was Kant’s awareness of this fact that led him to explicitly deny the existence of intellectual intuition. In conclusion, he came to hold that intellectual concepts have no connection to the external concrete world. He took those concepts that were not reducible to the level of sense data to be impediments to external reality, rather than taking them as the guiding lights towards it. In this way, transforming Cartesian scepticism into a formal scepticism, Kant introduced the latter into the very fabric of human cognition and basis of knowledge.

In the thought of Kant, conceptual reason was not seen to be able to throw any light on the externally existing world - all philosophical deliberations being limited to the rigid structures of mental concepts. Hence it was in this way that ontology was replaced by epistemology.
Alongside the weakening of intellectualism, sensationalism – which took into consideration only the practical dimension of life – grew stronger. In the nineteenth century, sensationalists and materialists took up the banner of an enlightenment with respect to the external world. At the start, they attempted to shed light upon the concrete world by methods of induction.

The nineteenth century is also the century of the creation of many an ideology. Just as before this time all things were measured and judged by means of the sacred intellect and metaphysical reason, Auguste Comte and Marx also sat in judgement with regards to the same issues. So where previously the Prophets would speak about the Origin and End of all things, and metaphysicians would prove the existence of immaterial worlds – Comte, Marx and their like, now spoke of a dialectical materialism and the materiality of all parts of the world, denying thereby the metaphysical dimension of existence. The Fall of man from the transcendental levels of being to the natural world now appeared in the form of a story of his descent from the trees to the ground.

Comte held that religious thought and metaphysics corresponded to the periods of man’s childhood and adolescence. He then – in a similar fashion to the Apostles of Jesus – wrote letters to the emperors of his time asking them to declare their belief in the greatest of all pantheons, experimental science, and its high priest, which was himself. He expected empirical and individual reason – now inductive in form – to perform the functions of metaphysical and sacred intellect. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Durkheim was still attempting to replace religious morality with a scientific one.

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, the limitations and shortcomings of instrumental reason slowly became apparent to the intellectual community. Intellectualist philosophers, and even some materialist philosophers, had known of these limitations from ancient times. Hobbes and Hume, and before them the intellectualists, were aware of the truth that sensory knowledge and instrumental reason could not pass judgement on issues of moral values. Hume had spoken of the separation of knowledge from morality in the eighteenth century, but it wasn’t until the end of the nineteenth century that this issue had become one of public knowledge.

Another point that caught the attention of the intellectual community was the impotence of instrumental reason vis-à-vis metaphysical propositions. Logical positivists of the Vienna Circle - unlike the positivists of the nineteenth century who took metaphysical propositions into consideration and then refuted them – declared from the outset the meaninglessness of metaphysical propositions.

Individualistic rationality of the nineteenth century, despite its materialistic bent, would still appraise questions of total being and issues of eschatology – as well as speak on matters of social etiquette and morality. At the beginning of the twentieth century, though, such was not the case, and it saw these issues to be outside its ability and field of expertise. It was with this in mind that Vilfredo Pareto, the Italian sociologist and economist, called the knowledge of the nineteenth century a “stupid knowledge”.

Viennese positivists, in spite of their awareness of the limitations of sensory knowledge, attempted to separate the realm of science from the other fields of man’s learning – so as to protect its position as the principal means of knowing external reality.
In the debate and discussions that have taken place since the third decade of the twentieth century under the heading of "philosophy of science", one point stands out: the realm of science is not anything separate and different from the other realms of human knowledge. This point was the same old truth that intellectualist philosophers of ancient times were well aware of. They knew that empirical knowledge and sensory data was perpetually in need of propositions that it acquired by way of metaphysical and philosophical intellect - such things as the principle of contradiction, impossibility, and causality. They were also aware that the practicability and usefulness of instrumental reason was only feasible in a framework of laws and principles which themselves did not arise from this reason, but rather were derived from the practical or sacred intellect.

In consideration of the limitations of instrumental reason and under the prevailing conditions, the metaphysical and sacred intellect – and even practical reason – lost their social role and cultural presence, making it necessary for instrumental reason to look elsewhere for cognitive content and a substantive base of knowledge. It found this “base” in common sense, as previously defined. It was in this fashion that instrumental knowledge formally came under the sway of a thing that is variously called, common sense, paradigm, or life world. Hence, whenever the authority and validity of the higher and transcendental levels of intellect are doubted or flatly denied, it is custom and common sense which takes over, with the prime factors and sources of cognition being reduced to social and political elements. In this case, it is these very same factors and elements, which form the very fabric of instrumental reason and knowledge, that decide the nature and course of the fundamental propositions.

Propositions that take shape in line with customary understanding and common sense are affected by factors that have the power and ability to affect the public mind. Hence, the cognitive content and ground of knowledge of instrumental reason is finally and fundamentally tied to the workings of social power. In another words, instrumental rationality and knowledge is not only the means and tools for power, but it is also one of its products.

While instrumental rationality kept a safe distance from common sense and customary reason, it in reality kept the last flames of enlightenment going for the modern world. This is because in spite of the fact that it labelled metaphysical or value propositions as non-scientific, it claimed to a true knowledge of reality by means of experimental propositions.

Once the distance between instrumental reason (including all that goes by the name of science and empirical knowledge) and common sense was abolished - thereby revealing the fundamental role of non-empirical propositions in the fabric of empirical knowledge – the instrumental role of empirical knowledge became evermore apparent. The consequence to this was that its ability to represent external reality came to be doubted and finally rejected.

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1 The term “paradigm” in this context, was coined by Thomas Samuel Kuhn. In 1962 Kuhn published The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, which claimed that the sciences do not progress by scientific method. Rather, scientists work within a paradigm (set of accepted beliefs), which eventually weakens until new theories and scientific methods replace it.
Now even if instrumental reason, in its capacity as a knowledge – albeit scientific, had even kept some semblance of external representability, it still would not have been able to answer the fundamental questions and values of human existence. Such questions as regards the beginning and end of man and the world, life and death, existence and non-existence, purpose and direction, dos and don’ts, excellences and faults.

It is not the case that during life, man comes face to face with such questions in times of leisure. Rather, these questions spring from his very existence and are always with him – his life always corresponding to the type and quality of answers that he finds for them. Man has no choice, he must answer these questions. The person who has not contemplated and thought about the answers to these questions, dreads to come face to face with them.

The subject of these questions is beyond the limits and purview of instrumental reason. Some of these questions concern metaphysical intellect while others have to do with practical reason. In giving consideration to the limits of instrumental rationality and its impotence in answering these type of questions, Max Weber held that the modern world – due to an absence of metaphysics – was without any firm standard or scale in relation to these issues. Consequently, this type of world gives licence to all and sundry to follow their carnal desires, and nothing more.

Moderns, after some deliberation on the internal structure of instrumental reason, have not only come to see the external limitations of modern science – which are only the natural results of such a rational system – but have come to doubt the internal independence and integrity of this type of rationality in relation to the natural and empirical realm. Hence the representational validity of instrumental reason, even within its own “home” realm, has come under scrutiny and has finally been denied. In this way, any hopes of a modern enlightenment to the truth have been lost and the way towards postmodernism opened up.

When instrumental reason gives up the higher levels of intellect and basis of knowledge, it becomes totally engrossed with customs and common sense – which is really the lowest forms of human knowledge and awareness. That is to say, public opinion creates both the basis and decides the directionality for this level of rationality. Now common sense and public opinion are not realities that are based on methods of logic or intuition, rather they are issues of social power that are in the hands of those controlling the reins of mass media and communications.

The way out of this quagmire is not to deny and oppose instrumental reason. Knowing the present state of affairs and becoming aware of the shortcomings and defects of instrumental rationality is necessary, but not sufficient. Postmodernists have usually satisfied themselves by describing the status quo – calling that which has come to be, an inescapable reality. Their wholehearted acceptance of the authority, power and dominance of science has all but closed any window of opportunity that may have been there for the pursuit and disclosure of reality.

The pursuit of truth and reality on the conceptual and practical levels is tantamount to the acceptance and official recognition of conceptual and practical reason. If there is a way out of the crisis of the modern world, without doubt it lies in the direction of researches and inquiries concerning reality on the above-mentioned levels. By reviving
such discussions and debates, a culture and civilization will follow that does not suffice itself with just a refutal of instrumental reason and common sense, but strives to make full use of the other levels and types of rationality and intellectuality.

Instrumental and customary rationality, when working under the auspices of higher levels of intellect, become real and acquire intellectual and cognitive content. But when they cut their connection with those higher levels, they become nothing but an unfettered power – blind to itself. Now, the inner content of any such blind power is nothing but a cynical nihilism.

The Prophets of God (may His Peace and Blessings be upon them all) strove from the outset to enrich the intellectual life of men – by calling them to what already lies and has been placed in their innate nature and essence. The Prince of Believers, ‘Ali (upon whom be Peace), has said in this context: “God raised amongst the people His Messengers and sent Prophet after Prophet to them so as to have the Covenant of His nature fulfilled…and so as to bring out their hidden intellects.”

There are few words that are seen as abundantly as “intellect” and “knowledge” in the Qur’an. In the Qur’anic terminology, these two words signify faithful representations of concrete reality and denote all the levels of intellect and knowledge - not being limited by any means to just empirical or instrumental reason and knowledge.

The highest level of intellect is the sacred intellect. The sacred intellect, enlightened directly by Divine Grace and inspired by the Holy Spirit, reveals the Divine Word to man. The next level, that of conceptual and discursive reason (in both its aspects of speculative and practical rationality), applies itself to deliberation on the origin and end of man, defining thereby his duties and responsibilities in this world.

The sacred intellect and conceptual reason are divine proofs and His “messengers” – their role being complementary. Man’s conceptual reason allows him access to higher truths and knowledge. The sacred intellect, in the beginning, actuates and engenders man’s discursive reason, and in the end, opens up the higher realms of being for him.

Modernity starts with the denial of the authority of revelation and the sacred intellect. This denial has its apparent roots in the historical disfavour shown to reason on the part of the Church. The Church’s disregard of conceptual reason led to the inception of a perceived dichotomy and opposition between the two levels of rational cognition. While the Church remained a world power, this opposition worked to the benefit of what was called faith. This very same opposition works now, in the modern world, to the favour of reason. In its turn, conceptual reason, by turning its back on intuitive and sacred intellect, has severed its existential roots and has in effect “dried up” and become lifeless. Instrumental rationality and customary reason, when emptied of the authority and dominion of Intellect and Revelation and made secular, are as two abandoned corpses on the hands of modernity. It is only the light of the Intellect which can revive them, and give life to those who are dead.

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1 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 1
2 This remained the historical reality, despite the valiant efforts of such figures as St. Augustine and St. Thomas, who attempted to resolve this opposition in a very real way. See, *Summa Theologica*, I:58:3, II-II:49:5.
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THE SHACKLES OF REASON: SUFI/DECONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION TO RATIONAL THOUGHT

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He who claims to know that God is his Creator While not being perplexed, this is the evidence of his ignorance.
Futuhat, chap. 50, p. 81

If one were ambitious enough to compile a chronology of oppositions to Western rational thought—a chronology broad enough to include such figures as al-Ghazālī, Meister Eckhart, Rousseau, Blake, Nietzsche, and Levinas—it would be interesting to see what kind of common denominators, if any, such a study would produce. Metaphors of wind, breath, spirit, and freedom would probably abound, along with a common emphasis on ‘openness’ (futūḥ ouvert—an important word for both of the thinkers examined here), an aversion to rigidity and systems, an exaltation of wandering, and a defamation of reason as somehow unnatural and restrictive—in other words, a rejection of reason that would be almost aesthetically motivated.

In this study, two such oppositions to rational and metaphysical thought will be examined alongside one another: Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī’s critique of nazar or reflective thought and Jacques Derrida’s much wider reexamination of the entire theo-philosophical tradition of the West—the “fundamental conceptual system produced by the Greco-European adventure,” as Derrida puts it. In dealing with texts whose origins lie almost eight hundred years and many more kilometers apart, one important point should be kept in mind. It is not the intention of this study to turn a thirteenth-century Sufi into a postmodern theorist, any more than it is our desire to ‘Islamicize’ Jacques Derrida or transform his writings into a form of Islamic mysticism (producing a “Jacques of El-Biar,” as John D. Caputo has already quipped). Over the past fifteen years, scholars from departments of comparative religion and theology around the world have been rediscovering in their own religious traditions various precedents for Derrida’s deconstructive writings, a trend there is certainly every reason to encourage. Figures such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, Śāmkara, Lao Tzu, and Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani have all been credited with deconstructing the rigid logocentric assumptions within their own respective faiths, rescuing a more authentic spirituality from the legalistic metaphysics of their times. Certainly one aim of this study is to show how a similar deconstructive process can be found in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī—a demonstration, however, that is far from turning the Great Shaykh into a medieval poststructuralist.

Hopefully, such comparisons will act as a point of departure for this study, and not as a destination in themselves. Rather than simply serving up a postmodern version of the Futuhat and the Fusus al-Hikam, a number of more serious questions will
be raised: what is the exact relationship between these two thinkers? How analogous can the vocabulary of a Sufi saint be to the work of a contemporary French theorist who, on his own admission, “rightly pass(es) for an atheist”? Do the metaphors, strategies, and motifs of deconstruction change their meaning at all in the context of a comparison with Sufism? Can Ibn ʿArabi teach us how to read Derrida differently (and vice versa)?

The first thing the attentive reader notices about both Derrida and Ibn ʿArabi is the absolute singularity of their positions. Neither of the two seems willing to attach his writings to a particular school of thought (madhahib) or tradition; a curious solitude seems to pervade their work as they critique—sometimes subtly, sometimes openly—practically every thinker they encounter, be they Muʿtazilites or phenomenologists, Ashʿarites or structural linguists, esotericists (al-batiniyya) or existentialists. Probably the best example of this in Ibn ʿArabi occurs toward the end of his treatise Shajarat al-Kawn, where the Shaykh envisages an omnitemporal Allah foretelling to Muhammad the numerous ways in which subsequent thinkers are going to misunderstand His Essence:

O Muhammed, I created my creatures and summoned them to Myself, but they differed among themselves with regard to Me. One group among them claimed that Ezra was My Son (IX:30), and that My hand is fettered (V:64–69). These are the Jews. Another group claimed that the Messiah is My Son (IX:30), that I had a wife and child. These are the Christians. Another group gave Me partners. They are the idolators. Another group gave Me a form. They are the Mushabbiha. Another group made Me limited. They are the Muʿattila. And there is another group who claim that I shall not be seen in the hereafter. They are the Mutazilites.

Not surprisingly, passages such as these have earned Ibn ʿArabi the description ‘arrogant’ on more than one occasion. Not only does the Shaykh distance himself from his contemporaries, but he puts his criticisms in the mouth of the Divine. Clearly, the author wants to avoid the two dangers present to any Islamic thinker—the possibility of taʿtil or complete denudation of God’s attributes on the one hand and tashbih or overdetermining God with positive attributes on the other. This difficult course that Ibn ʿArabi charters between the apophatic and the cataphatic will have to be followed carefully if we are to understand exactly why the Shaykh remains aloof from every form of reflective thought. The author’s objections to the groups of thinkers mentioned in the passage above—the Muʿtazilites, the Mujassima, the Muʿattila, and the Mushabbiha, not to mention the Christians and Jews—are not merely partisan quibbles. Some common error lies at the heart of Ibn ʿArabi’s criticisms, some perceived, fundamental mistake motivates his slightly generic dismissal of five centuries of Islamic thought.

Derrida, likewise, cultivates a certain distance between his own textual strategies and the thinkers he writes about, isolating moments of self-presence in their work that re-consign them to an uninterrupted tradition of logoscentric metaphysics. Unlike in Ibn ʿArabi, praise and critique in Derrida’s writings are often subtly
blended together, particularly in dealing with figures whose own aims seem to resemble closely those of Derrida’s. Derrida’s 1964 essay on Levinas, while never renouncing a tone of respect for the thoughts “assembled and enriched in that great book Totality and Infinity,” nevertheless portrays a Levinas “resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse.” In “Structure, Sign and Play,” Derrida’s “fascination” with Levi-Strauss’ “remarkable endeavour” doesn’t stop him from finding the anthropologist guilty of “an ethic of nostalgia for origins” (d’éthique ... de nostalgie de l’origine). Various figures in Christian negative theology (St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart), held by many to be a medieval precedent for deconstruction, have received similar treatment from Derrida. On the one hand he has taken great pains to point out his admiration for negative theology—a “corpus at once open and closed,” and written in a language “that does not cease testing the very limits of language.” On the other hand negative theology, for all its radical questioning of metaphysics, still “belongs ... to the onto-theological promise it seems to break.” It still remains ultimately logocentric in its purpose: to preserve the secret name of God.

In other words: just as Ibn ‘Arabi believes that no thinker can provide “a definition of the Real [al-haqq],” Derrida insists that no thinker can escape the history of metaphysics. Even the trinity of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, credited with no less an achievement than “the critique of the concepts of Being and truth ..., of self-presence ..., and the destruction of metaphysics,” even these initiators of the dissolution of Western metaphysics remain “trapped in a kind of circle” (pris dans une sorte de cercle). Something remains, some kind of special knowledge or realization, that distinguishes Ibn ‘Arabi and Derrida from their respective traditions; ‘something’ both thinkers feel they have understood, some kind of gnosis or situation, an awareness of a hidden complexity that enables them to recontextualize their predecessors and contemporaries so confidently.

It is to the examination of this special ‘something’ that the rest of this study is dedicated: what exactly motivates the comprehensive rejection by Ibn ‘Arabī and Derrida of metaphysical thought? Tempted by brevity, one could sum up the reasons of both thinkers in two easy responses: for Ibn ‘Arabī, the philosophers and the theologians have yet to understand the simultaneous transcendence (tanzih) and immanence (tashbih) of God. For Derrida, Western metaphysics has never really problematized the word ‘meaning’, nor has it come to terms with the fact that signs do not lead us to ‘meanings’, but simply to other signs. Such responses, however, would be inadequate. The distrust of metaphysics by both Derrida and Ibn ‘Arabī is far more complex, and will involve an analysis of terms such as al-haqq and écriture if we are to understand their objections at all.

The Emancipatory Project in Derrida and Ibn ‘Arabī: Freeing al-Haqq and L’Écriture from the Shackles of Reason

Both Ibn ‘Arabī and Derrida, in their own contexts, speak of fetters and freedom. It is no exaggeration to say that a certain emancipatory spirit underlies both their
projects—‘emancipatory’ not in any social sense but rather the emancipation of the unknowability of the Real / the uncontrollability of writing, from the shackles of rational/metaphysical thought. Indeed, one could say the entire aim of Of Grammatology is the liberation of écriture from “the rank of an instrument enslaved to full and originally spoken language.” Of course, these are not identical gestures: Derrida’s liberation is a purely semantic one, whereas Ibn ‘Arabī has a more spiritual aim in mind. Nevertheless, the reaffirmation of something vital, inconstant, and elusive that defeats all our attempts to talk about it will play a common role in the vocabularies of both thinkers and evolve according to a common structure. A look at the contexts of the writings of both Ibn ‘Arabī and Derrida may help us to understand this better.

The People of Reflection (Ahl al-Nazr) and the Idolatry of the Sign

In the Futuhat, Ibn ‘Arabī points out that the root meaning of the word for reason (‘aql) comes from the same root as the word for ‘fetter’ (‘iqal). It is a convenient etymology for the Shaykh, whose main objection to the philosophers and theologians is that they narrow and limit a “Divine Vastness” (al-tawassu’ al-ilahi) that is without attribute or limit. “Every group have believed something different about God,” he writes, always exuding a very definite impatience with those who mistake their specific beliefs for knowledge of the Absolute. Ibn ‘Arabī’s impatience here would be with both affirmative and negative schools of theology, both with those who insist that God can be predicated through His effects (the Ash’arites) and with those who say that nothing could ultimately be predicated of God, except only what He is not (the Mu’tazilites). Such a debate would have formed a common background to Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, producing such a proliferation of schools, quarrels, and doctrines that one can well sympathize with the Shaykh’s words: “I hear the grinding, but I don’t see any flour.” Thus, a believer in the eternal attributes of God such as al-Ash’ari (873–935) can declare:

We confess that God is firmly seated on His Throne…. We confess that God has two hands, without asking how…. We confess that God has two eyes, without asking how…. We confess that God has a face…. We affirm hearing and sight, and do not deny that, as do the Mu’tazila, the Jahmiyya, and the Khawarij…. whereas other, more apophatically inclined groups such as the Mu’tazilites are capable of producing statements that, for Western readers, are reminiscent of Dionysius the Areopagite:

He is no body, nor object, nor volume, nor form…. Neither is he provided with parts, divisions, limbs, members…. He cannot be described by any description which can be applied to creatures…. He is a being, but not as other beings….

In a sense these two extreme positions of tashbih (anthropomorphism) and tanzih (incomparability) provided the parameters of a very wide debate. How much can we know about God? What is the relationship between the Divine Names (the Merciful, the Generous, the Knower, etc.) and the Divinity—are they simply analogies? Or do
they reflect some positive eternal attributes? How much of our beliefs concerning God are actually valid? How can we ascertain this? If there really is, as the Qurʾān says, “nothing like Him” (42:11), then how can we know anything about God at all?

Such questions, among others, had been debated over the centuries by the philosophers of the Kalam. As Abdel Haleem has shown, the term ‘Kalam’ is difficult to define with any accuracy. Literally, it means ‘speech’, and denotes the general discussion of religious issues pertaining to the Qurʾān—not just the extent of God’s knowability, but also such questions as the problem of free will and divine pre-determinism, the status of the Qurʾān, and the implementation of the Shariʿah. ‘Kalam’ was not simply a discussion of religious topics, however—it usually required the presence of an adversary, an opposite position against whom the various arguments could be raised. It is not difficult to see why Ibn ʿArabi wanted to distance himself from the thinkers of the Kalam and dismiss their efforts with words such as ‘meddlesome’ (fudul) and ‘obfuscation’. For a thinker whose entire approach to divine epistemology can be summed up in the (to many) cryptic exclamation ‘He/ not He’ (huwa la huwa), a thinker who insists that God is both immanent and transcendent, such polarizing debates would have reinforced the very kind of binary thinking about God that Ibn ʿArabi was trying to escape.

Another aspect of Kalam that Ibn ʿArabi would have resented is its claim to a knowledge of God through reflection and reason (nazar, ‘aql), the kind of knowledge that for Sufis could only be obtained through ‘tasting’ and ‘unveiling’ (dhawq, kashf). Some past definitions of Kalam are quite telling in this respect—al-Fārábī saw Kalam as “a science that enables a person to support specific beliefs and actions laid down by the Legislators”; al-ʾIrī goes slightly farther, insisting that Kalam does not support but rather “establish[es] religious beliefs, by adducing arguments and banishing doubts.” For Ibn Khaldūn, Kalam is “the science that involves arguing with rational proofs in defense of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate from orthodoxy,” while the modern Muhammad ʿAbduh proposes as a definition “a science that studies the Being and Attributes of God, the essential and possible affirmations about Him.” In all of these definitions, a certain theme is constant: the acquisition of divine knowledge in order to justify social and legal practices, facilitate hermeneutics, systematize theology, and ascertain exactly what is orthodox and what is heresy (ilhad).

The Incomparability of the Real

Ibn ʿArabi’s first gesture in reply to the philosophers and theologians is to underline, beneath all the ideas and concepts of God that we construct for ourselves, an utterly unknowable, unthinkable God, bereft of all names and attributes (shifa). This unknowable entity, which is the source of all effects and actions but cannot be described by any of them, he refers to as the Divine Essence (dhat Allah) or sometimes the Real (al-haqq)—a word that, for Western readers, is not without its Lacanian echoes. “In our view there is no disputing the fact that the Essence is unknown.” Rather like Eckhart’s God beyond God and Plotinus’ Ineffable One, it
remains forever untouched by every proposition we try to make about it. Hence the error of the rational thinkers, who have mistaken their constructs for the Real itself:

When a person rationally considers God, he creates what he believes in himself through his consideration. Hence he considers only a god which he has created through his consideration.

Such constructs Ibn 'Arabi refers to, near the end of the *Fusus al-Hikam*, as the "God of Belief," which changes according to the predisposition of the believer. As we shall see, Ibn 'Arabi has a generally benign attitude toward such constructs, as long as the believer is aware of the "actual situation"—that is, the artificiality of his/her God. The problem with thinkers such as the Ash'arites is that they have built and elaborated their entire theology upon an empty construct—one which they feel sure to be 'God'. It is here where parallels with deconstruction become most interesting; just as Derrida sees all metaphysical thinkers as basing their thought systems upon illusory moments of 'self-presence'—a "center" that is never really the center, a signifier that can only ever lead to other signifiers—Ibn 'Arabi sees all reflective thinkers as building their ideas about God on something that is not really God. In both cases, the philosopher falls victim to a certain illusion—the unquestioning conviction that the semantic foundation of the thinker's thought-system ('God', 'experience', 'reality', 'innocence') is somehow sufficient in itself, and requires no further justification.

**The Infinity of the Real**

Apart from the incomparability of the Real, which renders every conceptual proposition about the Real potentially idolatrous, there are three other reasons why Ibn 'Arabi feels that our rational faculties can tell us nothing about the Real—and all three have to do with the uncontrollability/unthinkability of the Real. The first and most important reason why reflective thought is inadequate for giving us any knowledge about God is, quite simply, its finitude:

> He who does not restrict Him does not deny Him, but affirms His Reality in every formal transformation, worshipping Him in His infinite forms, since there is no limit to the forms in which He manifests Himself.

> ... [T]he intellect restricts and seeks to define the truth within a particular qualification, while in fact the Reality does not admit of such a limitation. It is not a reminder for the intellectuals and mongers of doctrinal formulations who contradict one another and denounce each other... and they have no helpers. (3:91)

Although in this passage it is not so much the unknowable Real that is infinite, but rather its manifestations, the problem such infinity presents to the narrowing parameters of Reason remains the same. God encompasses an infinite sea of forms. He "possesses relationships, faces and realities without limit." Among this endless, ever-fluctuating plethora of images and forms, the philosophers and thinkers have seized upon one or two images and attempted to found their epistemologies on
them, mistaking them for the Real itself. In this sense, all theologies for Ibn ‘Arabi are idolatries (shirk) if they do not take into account the infinite range of divine possibilities in addition to their own. Although Ibn ‘Arabi has many positive things to say about reason, his insistence on the theologians’ ignorance of God’s infinite semantic richness pervades both the Fusus al-Hikam and the Futuhat.

If Ibn ‘Arabi loses his patience with those who chain the Real to their own meanings and dismiss any other manifestation as heresy, Derrida spends a similar amount of energy exploring the infinite semantic possibilities of a text—and how various thinkers have sought to restrict these possibilities to their own interpretations. For Derrida, the desire to restrict a text and make it say only what we want it to is embodied in the ‘preface’—the short text with which an author introduces his work, and which is intended to ‘sum up’ the general aim and intentions of the work that follows, so that no misunderstandings can take place. In Dissemination, Derrida is particularly interested in the Hegelian preface—how Hegel sees, and doubts, the Vorwort as a way of ensuring that certain unacceptable interpretations of his work will never take place. In Ibn ‘Arabi’s terms, the preface is the attempt to limit the text’s infinite possibilities (batin) to one interpretation only (zahir), the others being considered heretical. It chains the semantic infinity of the text to one manifestation and one only—that of the author’s desired reading. A preface is an attempt to say what is, has been, and will be:

The preface would announce in the future tense (‘This is what you are going to read’) the conceptual content or significance ... of what will already have been written. ... From the viewpoint of the foreword, which creates an intention-to-say after the fact, the text exists as something written ... which ... a bidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader as his future. ... The pre reduces the future [possibilities of the text] to the form of manifest presence.  

It is this ‘reduction’ that both Ibn ‘Arabi and Derrida, in their own contexts, will object to, even though the reasons for such an objection will not be the same. If Derrida feels the original, reductive purpose of the preface to be an “essential and ludicrous operation” (ibid.), it is not because the text (like Ibn ‘Arabi’s God) already has within it an untapped infinity of meanings, but rather because of the uncontrollable semantic play within the text that must necessarily open up new and unexpected readings of the work—new readings that no preface, however careful and comprehensive, can anticipate. On this point, at least, the difference seems clear: Ibn ‘Arabi resists logocentric reductions of the Real on the grounds of God’s inexhaustible Divinity, while Derrida’s objections toward totalizing exegesis stems more from a belief in the unarrestable play of forces within the text, rather than any theological concept of its infinite unfathomability.

The Unrepeatability of the Real

Ibn ‘Arabi’s second reason why the Real resists all exclusive appropriations lies perhaps somewhat closer to the structure of Derrida’s own approach: the fact that the
Real, in all its manifestations, never repeats itself. Ibn ‘Arabi’s main justification of this is the Qu’rânic verse 55:29, Each day He is upon some new task. It is a feature of the Real that, although alluded to only briefly in the Fusus,31 is elaborated upon quite heavily in the Futuhat:

That which is past never returns, since were it to return, something in existence would repeat itself, but there is no repetition because of the Divine Vastness. (pp. 104–105; II.185.27)

[God’s] returnings undergo variation (tanawwu’), His Self-disclosures are diverse, and His loci of manifestation are multiple, without repetition. (p. 105; II.589.28)

But the gnostics . . . know that “God never discloses Himself in a single form to two individuals, nor in a single form twice.” [Ibn ‘Arabi is quoting Abû Ṭalîb al-Makki, III.384.18]

Because, in one sense at least, God is an infinite storehouse of images, the unrepeatability of the Real is directly linked to the infinity of the Divine Vastness. In one single, theological bound, Ibn ‘Arabi re-inscribes every act of signification that has ever taken place as only a minute fraction of the infinite capacity of the Divine. Ibn ‘Arabi is hardly the first to place such emphasis on the infinity of God—his originality lies, as we shall see, in the way he fleshes out all the epistemological and hermeneutical consequences of such an infinity. If God encompasses all images, graven and holy, then idolatry is impossible when one is aware of the “actual situation,” for all images signify Him. An infinite God who encompasses all images also encompasses all interpretations; hence there is no interpretation of the Qur’ân that God has not already understood and comprehended.

Seen from the point of view of the Real, the endlessly diverse flow of manifestations is an effect of the Real itself, stamping its image upon the corporeal world with a different seal each time, infinitely and omnipresently. From the point of view of the believer, the Real is almost Protean in its movements, forever changing from one form to another, forever manifesting itself in different ways to different groups, while remaining untouched by any of them. If we can keep in mind this view of the Real as a constantly fluctuating source of manifestations, Ibn ‘Arabi’s dismissal of reason and rational thought as a “fetter” becomes clearer—like Derrida’s preface, Reason fetters constant change, it constrains the Real from repeating itself in a different way:

In the view of the Verifiers, the Real is too exalted “to disclose Himself in a single form twice or to two individuals.” The Real never repeats anything, because of His non-delimitation and the Divine Vastness, since repetition amounts to constraint (dhiq) and delimitation.32

To describe God is to restrict Him; to predicate his Essence is to constrain Him. Whoever practices theology, in effect, forces God to repeat Himself, again and again, imposing a banality and a predictability upon God that, Ibn ‘Arabi clearly feels, is misplaced. Rational thought (‘aql), the tool so treasured by the philosophers

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of the Kalām (mutakallim) as a means to divine knowledge, becomes a way of fossilizing God’s dynamic flexibility. The Real, Whom no signifier can signify, Whom no sign can contain, immediately abandons any name or attribute that the philosophers attempt to nail to it, in substantia. The Shaykh is not against anyone naming one of God’s attributes, providing they keep the utter unthinkability of the Real in mind. For Ibn ‘Arabi, one could even make a distinction between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ modes of speech concerning God. The authentic thinkers are the Verifiers, those who predicate names and attributes to God, but at the same time are aware that the Real has an infinite range of other names and attributes, too. ‘Inauthentic’ thought would belong to those who, like the Ash’arites or the Mu’tazilites, fix their own rational/theological constructs onto God, to the exclusion of all other perspectives.

Hence the accusation of idolatry (shirk) that Ibn ‘Arabi levels at the rational thinkers, who mistake their constructs for the Real. The mutakallim all attempt to fix a sign onto the Real, to tie it somehow to their own finite perspective; the possibility that the Real has no sign—that it only moves “from veil to veil”—does not occur to them. Nor are they in the least disconcerted by the dizzying infinity of God, by the unfathomable reservoir of His forms and faces, which, if they were to realize it, would turn their doctrines from incontestable, overarching Truths into just another glimpse of an infinitely manifesting Divinity. In this depiction of Kalām as ‘fettering’ the infinite unrepeatability of God, Ibn ‘Arabi seems to be entertaining the kind of fear to which both Maimonides and Meister Eckhart gave voice—the fear that people desire knowledge of God ultimately for their own worldly purposes. It is a familiar theme in the Guide for the Perplexed, where Maimonides chastises the sophists who “derive [from the scriptures] inferences and secondary conclusions” in order to exploit the “multitude who listen to these utterances.” Eckhart also spoke of those who “want to see God with the same eyes with which they look at a cow. . . . [They] love it for the milk and the cheese and for their own profit.” Such fears as the unpleasant speculation that all our theologies may be born not out of a humble desire to understand better the will of God and the limits of our own knowledge, but rather out of a will-to-power, a proprietary desire to familiarize and control something for our own self-aggrandizement, fuel Ibn ‘Arabi’s emphasis on the unknowability of the Essence:

Were the Essence to make the loci of manifestation (mazahir) manifest, it would be known. Were it known, it would be encompassed (ihata). Were it encompassed, It would be limited (hadd). Were it limited, It would be confined (inhisar). Were it confined, It would be owned (mulk).

Manifest-known-encompassed-limited-confined-owned. Ibn ‘Arabi clearly sees a danger in too eagerly constructing sign systems about the Real—like the sign systems of the Ash’arites, which, not content with making observations about the various knowable manifestations of the Real (Allah, al-rabb, al-wahd, etc.), trespass beyond such manifestations and make claims about the Real itself. In this sense, Ibn ‘Arabi’s punning of ‘aqīl (reason) with ‘iqal (chains) becomes highly apt: when we
attempt to rationalize and speculate about God, we treat Him in the same way that we treat an animal that we want to chain and tame for our own use. One is reminded of the images of writing and zoology that Derrida playfully juggles with toward the end of *Of Grammatology*: "writing as zoography, as that painting of the living which stabilizes animality [fixant l’animalité]."38 The philosophers of the Kalâm wish to do precisely this—‘stabilize’ the Protean unrepeatability of the Real, standardize the variety of its manifestations, equilibrate and control the unpredictability of its theophanies.

How far any comparisons between Derrida’s unrepeatability of the sign and Ibn ‘Arabi’s Real can be pushed remains a difficult question. We have already seen how the Real cannot repeat a sign because of the infinite store of its images; for Derrida, the unrepeatability has two, much more terrestrial reasons: the play of presences and absences *within* the text that renders it semantically unstable, and the infinite number of different contexts *outside* the text that will forever change how it is read. In different places, Derrida has emphasized one or the other of these factors as a reason for the unrepeatability of the sign/text. Sometimes he stresses the undecidable play of oppositions within a text—what he calls “a determinate oscillation between possibilities,” a feature he is careful to distinguish from “polysemy”: “If polysemy is infinite, if it cannot be mastered as such, this is not because a finite reading or a finite writing cannot exhaust a superabundance of meaning.”39 In other words, if Derrida’s text is, like Ibn ‘Arabi’s *al-haqq*, “infinite,” the reason for such unmasterability has nothing to do with the infinite imaginal richness of its ‘deeper meanings’, but rather is because of “a certain fold” (*un certain pli*)40 within the text, which forever fissures and doubles the text without repeating it. Derrida’s debt to the Saussurean ‘discovery’ of the essentially differential nature of language—that sign systems ‘work’ not through any positive elements but only through differences, and hence that we only know what something is through what it is not—enables him to see texts as a bristling collection of forces, forever oscillating undecidably between various parameters of meaning.

In other places, however, Derrida seems to connect the hermeneutic unrepeatability of a text with the uncertain future of its trajectory—the fact that no one can say who will appropriate the text or to what kind of use it will be put. Thus, “there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring,”41 which accounts for the large number of wandering motifs in Derrida’s work. The text wanders from reader to reader, its signs forever repeating themselves for different audiences with different results, acquiring a different meaning each time the context is changed. The impossibility of repetition for Derrida stems directly from the potentially infinite number of different contexts in which a text can be read and reread.

All this seems a far cry from Ibn ‘Arabi’s infinitely differing *zahir*. If the Derridean text, to use Abū Ṭalīb al-Makki’s words, “never discloses itself in a single form to two individuals, nor in a single form twice,” such hermeneutic elasticity is certainly not the product of some vast, Neoplatonic sea of images. Probably because of its religious resonances, Derrida has always been careful with the word “infinite,” often preferring the synonym ‘non-finite’ instead. In *Of Grammatology*, we are warned of
the “profound unity among infinitist theology, logocentrism and a certain techni-
cism”;42 to infinitize God still remains a metaphysical gesture, for it fails to call into
question the idea of presence or meaning. This idea of a “positive infinity”—a
phrase Derrida uses in his essay on Levinas as a synonym for God43—does not face
up to the genuine unthinkability of God but only infinitely defers it, producing no
real critique of presence but only an infinite postponement of meaning. Hence Der-
rida’s refusal to connect the utter unpredictability of his text with a “superabundance
of meaning”; far from any idea of plenitude, it is a certain emptiness beneath the text
that allows it to double and differ without repeating itself.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to say for sure whether Ibn ‘Arabi’s God—that is, his
idea of the Real or Essence—can be so easily dismissed as just another one of the
“infinitist theologies” that Derrida regards as a closet logocentrism. There are cer-
tainly moments in the Fusus where Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of God resembles
Derrida’s description of the text as a constant play of forces, “producing a force
of dislocation that spreads itself ... fissuring [the text] in every direction and thor-
oughly delimiting it.”44 In his chapter on the “Wisdom of Eminence in Moses,” for
example, Ibn ‘Arabi gives a similar description of God as a life-giving chaos:

[True] guidance means being guided to bewilderment, that he might know that the whole
affair [of God] is perplexity, which means perturbation and flux, and flux is life. There is
no abatement and no cessation, but all is being with no non-being.45

This is a picture of God quite different from the calm, unchanging, transcendent
infinity of orthodox theology. As God is the source of all polarities—good and evil,
immanence and transcendence, mercy and wrath—reaching Him produces a state
of perplexity (hayrah) in the believer. Nevertheless, this is still a perplexity that pro-
duces, a primordial confusion that allows order to come into being. To underline
this, an analogy is made for God with water, whose unceasing course and flow
allows all things to live and flourish:

The same is the case with water by which the earth lives and moves, as in His saying and
it quivers in its pregnancy, and swells in its bringing forth, and brings forth every joyous
pair. (Ibid.)46

The idea of creation as a consequence of overflowing is typically Neoplatonic—we
see it in authors as diverse as Plotinus (“the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has
overflowed and in its exuberance has produced the new” [V.2.1]) and Eckhart
(“God overflows into all creatures, and yet he remains untouched by all”47). The
word that Ibn ‘Arabi uses for this is fayd, an effusion or radiation. The idea is of
interest to us because Derrida also uses the same metaphor (déborder) to describe
the way the oscillating, alternative meanings in a text ‘spill over’ their boundaries
and bring a text to life: “If the play of meaning can overflow signification ... this
overflow is the moment of the attempt to write” (si le jeu du sens peut déborder
la signification ... ce débord est le moment du vouloir écrire).48 In this use of déb-
order, which means literally to exceed a certain mark or boundary, Derrida is trying
to analyze the elusive moment of the act of writing—the moment when, as soon as the mark appears on the page, a multiplicity of meanings overflows the text and transforms it, giving life to new and various interpretations. Chaos and indeterminacy, so to speak, give rise to various kinds of order, although how far this corresponds to Ibn ‘Arabi’s divine, life-giving harakat and flux will be examined further on.

The Impossibility of the Real: Simultaneous Immanence and Transcendence

The topic of perplexity brings us to the third reason why, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, the philosophers and theologians can make no proposition about the Real. Up to now, Ibn ‘Arabi has been presented somewhat in the guise of a negative theologian: the three reasons why ‘reflective thought’ remains forever inadequate to representing the Real all involve a radically apophatic understanding of God as incomparable, infinite, and unrepeatable. Given Derrida’s interest in negative theology, this is an aspect of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writing that will become increasingly important as we progress.

To read Ibn ‘Arabi as a negative theologian, in the manner of Eckhart and Dionysius, forever stressing the ultimate transcendence and unspeakability of God, makes sense in a certain way: it enables us to understand why the Shaykh criticizes positivist positions such as those of al-Ash’ari, the corporealisists, or the Mushabbiha. However, such insistence on the unknowability of God does not explain Ibn ‘Arabi’s objections to groups like the Mu’tazilites and the Mu’attila, groups who were equally keen to stress the radical ineffability of God. Far from offering any sympathy toward such positions, Ibn ‘Arabi seems to include both positive and negative theologies (both Mu’tazilite and Ash’arite) in his dismissal of the ahl al-nazar or People of Reflection:

However, the mistakes of the People of Reflection in the divine things (ilahiyyat) are more than their hitting the mark, whether they are philosophers, Mu’tazilites, Ash’arites or any other sort of the people of consideration.... [Philosophers] are blamed because they make errors in the knowledge of God by opposing the reports brought by the messengers.49

In other words: Ibn ‘Arabi’s objection against the People of Reflection is not necessarily a theological objection—a disagreement with a certain school of thought over a certain issue or the interpretation of a certain verse, something that would require the taking of a position or the elaboration of a doctrine. The philosophers of the Kalam, quite regardless of whatever their own positions are on the eternity of the Qur’an or the attribute(lessness) of God, are guilty of a much more fundamental error—that of limiting God to only one half of a dualism. When Ibn ‘Arabi criticizes the Mu’tazilites and Ash’arites together, he is criticizing two opposite poles of a very familiar debate—that of the knowability of God. One pole emphasizes the absolute transcendence (tanzih) of God, the other His immanence, but neither have understood the actual situation—that the Real can actually be both at the same time:

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If you insist only on His transcendence, you restrict Him,  
And if you insist only on His immanence you limit Him.  
If you maintain both aspects you are right,  
An Imam and a master in the spiritual sciences.  
Whoso would say He is two things is a polytheist,  
While the one who isolates Him tries to regulate Him.  
Beware of comparing Him if you profess duality,  
And, if unity, of making Him transcendent.  
You are not He and you are He and  
You see Him in the essences of things both boundless and limited.50

To say that God can be two different things at the same time is impossible—and it is precisely this possibility of the impossible, the idea of God as an experience with the impossible, that the thinkers of the Kalâm have failed to take into account. In the Tahāfut al-Falāsifah (The incoherence of the philosophers), al-Ghazālî cites this very idea of a simultaneous affirmation and negation (‘A is both black and white’) as an impossibility that falls within the Law of Contradiction.51 From a deconstructive angle, Ibn ‘Arabī’s insistence on the simultaneity of everything being He/not He (huwa la huwa) is an important step: it acknowledges the illusion of the dualism, the fundamental mistake of believing God to be either ‘this’ or ‘that’, transcendent or immanent, ‘out there’ or ‘in here’. As long as rational thought conceives of God in terms of binary oppositions, “opposing the reports brought by the messengers” in order to establish ‘true’ knowledge of God, then “reflection can only roam in its own specific playing field (maydan), which is one of many fields.”52 Because of its committal to a simplistic, logocentric law of identity (‘Is God X or Y?’), reflective thought finds itself a priori unable to grasp the true complexity of God. Moreover, in observing how “the one who isolates Him tries to regulate Him,” Ibn ‘Arabī seems to anticipate Derrida’s own reasons for his objections to binary thought: namely, that whenever two terms are opposed to one another (spirit/flesh, nature/culture, speech/writing), a hierarchy always ensues; one half of the term is artificially privileged over the other for ultimately ideological purposes. Ibn ‘Arabī seems to be prefiguring this—the Ash’arites will privilege ‘immanence’ over ‘transcendence’ in order to justify their own versions of God.

“From the moment there is meaning,” writes Derrida, “there are nothing but signs” (Il n’y a donc que des signes dès lors qu’il y a du sens).53 Once again, the danger arises of assuming analogous gestures to be identical ones. Both Ibn ‘Arabī and Derrida reject binary thought as illusory and, at worst, potentially tyrannical. Whether their objections stem from a common source remains to be seen. Derrida sees binary oppositions as illusions because of a certain semantic emptiness—signs forever need their opposites in order to define themselves negatively. For Derrida, then, to believe in a word like ‘transcendence’ is to believe in a certain absence. ‘Transcendence’ and ‘immanence’ are semantic vacuities that can only pretend to meaning through contrast with their opposites—in other words, the immanent can only be understood as the non-transcendent, the transcendent as the non-immanent. Ibn ‘Arabī, however, is making no such critique of meaning; the passage above from
the *Fusus* is not questioning whether signifiers like ‘transcendent’ and ‘immanent’ can ever lead to anything other than signifiers. Ibn ‘Arabī still believes in the positive, independent signification of such words, and he still believes these meanings to be opposed to one another. However, it is an opposition that is dissolved in the Real. Ibn ‘Arabī believes in a God paradoxical enough, all-comprehensive enough, impossible enough to be both immanent and transcendent at the same time. If Derrida rejects binary oppositions because they veil an absence, Ibn ‘Arabī resents the dualism because it veils a presence—the presence of a paradox, the ultimate, unthinkable Oneness of God.

It remains the object of another study to see whether it is possible to re-describe this situation in different terms—that is, whether the Oneness of God so central to Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought is just another logocentric moment of infinite self-presence, or whether such a “negation of negations” actually moves closer to the Derridean *œuvre* than anyone could suspect. For now, it is sufficient merely to underline how Ibn ‘Arabī sees beneath what we call ‘God’ something infinite enough, uncontrollable enough, paradoxical enough to recontextualize and ultimately undermine everything we try to sing, say, or scribble about Him.

Notes


3 – Hamid Dabashi’s essay “Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani and the Intellectual Climate of His Times” offers just one example of how figures in medieval Islam have made use of a “soft counter-metaphysics” to deconstruct “the hard metaphysics of logocentrism that particularly with the advance of Greek philosophy cross-countered Islamic nomocentrism.” See Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 396.


6 – Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 84; *L’Écriture et la Différence*, p. 125: “... qui se rassemblent et s’enrichissent dans le grand livre: Totalité et Infini.”


10 – Ibid., p. 310.


16 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 336; *Futuhat* I.266.15.

17 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 75; *Futuhat* II.319.15.


20 – See his article “Early Kalam,” in Nasr and Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy*.

21 – Ibid., p. 75.


23 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 62; *Futuhat* I.60.4.

24 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 350; *Futuhat* IV.143.2.


29 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 156; *Futuhat* II.671.5.

   “Some servants have God disclosed to them in various forms, other than those first seen, since Self-manifestation is never repeated.”


33 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 230; *Futuhat* IV.105.3.


36 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 60; *Futuhat* II.597.17.


38 – Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 292; *De la grammatologie*, p. 413.


42 – Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 79; *De la grammatologie*, p. 117: “... une unité profonde ... entre la théologie infinitiste, le logocentrisme et un certain tech- nicisme.”


44 – Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 20; *L’Écriture et la Différence*, p. 34: “... produise une force de dislocation se propageant à travers tout le système, le fissurant dans tous les sens et le dé-limitant de part en part.”


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49 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 203; *Futuhat* II.523.2.


52 – Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 165; *Futuhat* II.281.15.

53 – Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 50; *De la grammatologie*, p. 73.
Toward a Critical Arab Reason: The Contributions of the Moroccan Philosopher Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābīrī

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At the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country. He contents himself with stamping these instruments with a hallmark, which he wishes to be national, but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism.¹

[Philosophy] is the first cause of man's intellectual activity and his emergence from the sphere of animals, and it is the greatest reason for the transfer of tribes and peoples from a state of nomadism and savagery to culture and civilization. It is the foremost cause of the production of knowledge, the creation of sciences, the invention of industries, and the initiation of the crafts.²

Furthermore, can a national culture be achieved completely in countries where the material bases of power are not indigenous but are dependent on foreign metropoli?³

La diversité des cultures fait place à l’unité de l’esprit humain.... La culture est universelle; donc les cultures des peuples dits à tort ‘primitifs’ participent comme celle de l’Europe à l’universalité.⁴

Introductory Remarks

Does the process of decolonization come to a close by the time the ‘natives’ achieve their independence, as Frantz Fanon seems to imply in his classic, The

¹ Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 223.
Wretched of the Earth. Or does decolonization encompass the cultural aspects of a nation, besides its political freedom? One has to agree with Fanon that decolonization is first and foremost a violent process. Often a strong coalition of heterogeneous forces embarks upon a violent programme of decolonization, taking its cue from other liberation forces around the world. In the case of Morocco under French colonization, the nationalist coalition put its faith in the king as the symbol of opposition against French colonial presence. However, once the king is installed after political independence is achieved, his status escalates and those around him begin to spread the false assumption that besides being the 'father' of the nation, the nation's prosperity and stability also lie in his hands.

Although the process of political decolonization is successfully completed, it is unlikely that the country has achieved economic independence, even decades after the termination of political colonialism. In the same vein, it is unlikely that the country has broken away from the cultural influence of the colonial centre, which will have left behind its indelible cultural imprint. All of these realities challenge the 'native intellectual' in his capacity as theoretician of culture once the colonizer has departed. The task of the post-colonial nationalist intellectual is indeed formidable. The intellectual, philosopher, or writer does not possess the material means, the physical force, to single-handedly construct the new nation-state. This important task is left to the bureaucracy, the police force, and the new people who surround the king. These people often mediate between the palace and the people, as in the colonies of yesteryear. The philosopher possesses the power of his argument, his logical charm, and perhaps a series of long forays into the cultural and religious history of his

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5 Fanon says that, "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon...To tell the truth, the proof of success [of decolonization] lies in a whole structure being changed from the bottom up". Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 35.
nation's past. The revolutionary philosopher takes a leading role in providing the masses with a quality education. Typically, the masses have had long been dehumanized and deprived of this valuable commodity and made backward by the colonizer. In the new nation-state, the philosopher finds him or herself in competition with the Ministry of Education, which is set up by the government to regulate, order, and dominate the 'thinking habits' of the people.9 The post-colonial nationalist intellectual and philosopher, although steeped in the cultural ways of the West, turns his or her attention to the cultural legacy of the people, looking for ways to salvage the cultural values of a broken nation.

It is unrealistic to expect such an intellectual to accomplish much alone. He or she usually represents a whole nationalist movement, a political, economic, and cultural attitude or way of life. The nationalist movement in Morocco, as in Algeria, was a coalition of heterogeneous forces that represented both Berber and Arab, rural and urban, and rich and poor.10 Post-colonial North Africa, especially Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, emerged from colonialism carrying a heavy economic, political, and cultural burden. In the long struggle against French colonialism, the nationalist movement articulated three major positions on independence: Pan-Arabism, Pan-Maghribism, and local nationalism. In each of the three countries, local nationalism was to triumph and pave the way toward its country’s independent industrialization without significant economic or political coordination with other Maghribi or Arab countries.

In Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābiri’s view (hereinafter referred to as Jābiri), the idea of the Maghrib evolved from the local to regional to Arab levels in response to the complex structure of colonialism imposed on each of the three Arab countries. Internally, the reaction against colonialism was spearheaded by a mixture of Salafi and nationalist forces, who were aware of the importance of Arab-Islamic culture in the fight against cultural colonialism.11 However, this alliance, which fought a winning battle against colonialism, for

10 Fanon argues that “The peasantry is systematically disregarded for the most part by the propaganda put out by the nationalist parties. And it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain”. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 61.
11 “Moroccan salafiyyah was not only militant in the sense of playing an active role against corrupt Islam; it was also militant in its resistance to the colonizer...Religion and nationalism in Morocco went hand in hand”. Mohamed El-Mansour, “Salafis and Modernists in the Moroccan Nationalist Movement” in John Ruedy, ed., Islamism and Secularism in North Africa (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 60.
all sorts of reasons, did not succeed in achieving regional or Pan-Arab unity after independence. To a large extent, Jābiri’s thought has matured against the absence of regional or Pan-Arab unity in North Africa. The intention of this paper is to examine Jābiri’s philosophical project as an expression of contemporary Arab nationalist thought, which seeks to make profound changes, not just in the political and social map of post-independent North Africa, but also in the epistemological structure of twentieth century Arab Reason. One must read Jābiri’s identification with Arab Reason and Arab-Islamic history as the first ambitious attempt to create an independent nationalist cultural project in the post-colonial era. This cultural construction reflects the aspirations of a good number of people who participated in the nationalist struggle against colonialism.

Jābiri has emerged as one of the most distinguished thinkers in the contemporary Arab world. His work is read differently by different people. His intellectual formation in both Syria and Morocco and his refusal to write in French have made him the favourite of a new generation of Arab intellectuals and students. Jābiri’s oeuvre is widespread; he has written on subjects ranging from the academic to the political. Some of Jābiri’s writings can be sometimes quite difficult to follow. Jābiri discusses the following themes: first, the problem of knowledge in Islam and the meaning of ‘Arab Reason’; second, the historical evolution of Muslim society and the role of the intelligentsia; third, the Arab world and the West; fourth, contemporary Arab thought and universal ideas and, fifth, the implementation of the Shari‘ah and future directions of Arab societies. The purpose of this article is to critically discuss these major themes by linking them to the ongoing discussion in contemporary Arab thought.

Jābiri received his primary education in the philosophy of science and epistemology. The evolution of his thought put him in the driver’s seat of the contemporary Maghrebian school of Arab and national renaissance. The salient features of his intellectual system resonate with those of ‘Allāl al-Fāṣi, \(^{15}\)


\(^{13}\) For a select bibliography of Jābiri’s work, see “Ḥiwar ma‘ Muḥammad ‘Abīd al-Jābiri” in Prologues: Revue maghrébine du livre, Number 10 (1997), 55–58.


Mohammed Arkoun, Abdallah Laroui, Muhammad al-Kittānī, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādis, Muhammad Ṭalbī, Ali Merad, and many others from North Africa. These thinkers have proposed that only a critical process of transformation can lead to real renaissance in the Arab world. Criticism is the common denominator in their thought. Like Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) of the fourteenth century, who attempted a renaissance of Arab-Muslim civilization by way of a powerful ‘asabiyyah, Jābirī stands at the crossroads of both national and intellectual independence. He envisions a plan of modern Arab renaissance, which can be achieved with the power of reason. Philosophical renaissance is a precondition for the renaissance of the entire Arab culture and civilization in the modern period. Does such a project of ‘intellectual emancipation’ have a chance of succeeding under the current political conditions of the Arab world?

The Appeal to Classical Arab Reason

Jābirī’s preoccupation with the problem of knowledge in Arabic and Islamic
philosophy underlies his philosophical quest. The problem of knowledge is deeply a complex issue and a truly in-depth discussion of this topic is unfortunatel beyond the scope of this article. However, it suffices to say that Jābirī’s fresh, if not controversial, examination of this problem in the context of Islamic philosophy is pertinent to the question of the meaning of knowledge and rationalism in the contemporary Arab world. In his major philosophical work, Jābirī’s main objective is to create bridges between the huge Arab/Muslim intellectual tradition and the modern Western intellectual tradition, on the one hand, and the post-colonial Arab world, on the other. In one sense, Jābirī’s is an advanced formulation of the Nahdah thinking on intellectual revival. In another, however, his thought is part of the cultural decolonization project that began after independence in North Africa, and which seeks to anchor modern Arab thought in certain rational patterns of classical intellectual tradition.

Jābirī thus follows a double process: a deconstruction of the past and a reexamination of the most pressing issues facing post-colonial Arab thought. Unlike Abdallah Laroui, Jābirī does not dismiss Islamic philosophical and religious tradition, neither does he espouse a wholesale acceptance of any form of European school of thought or philosophy. Jābirī’s intellectual quest is primarily anchored in the field of philosophy. He argues that there is a strong link between the professions of philosophy and political criticism, a link which is indispensable to the task of cultural decolonization. He maintains that the contemporary Arab political elite cannot “put up with the rudeness (waqāhab) of philosophy and the philosophers” mainly because they represent the most serious hurdle in the quest for full liberation of the Arab world. Since political methods have proven barren in the Arab world, it is philosophy and not politics that offers real solutions.

Jābirī’s point of departure is philosophy, not metaphysics or theology. The problems of Islamic theology developing in the Classical Age concern him only to the extent that they impinge on reason and culture. Although he does not directly condemn theology, his identification of Arab renaissance with philosophy, especially critical philosophy, casts doubt on the usefulness of theology as an intellectual medium in contemporary Arab culture. Jābirī believes that philosophy can free contemporary Arab culture from the parochialism of the theological mind (that is, Salafi mind) and distance it from

those theological presuppositions that belong to a bygone era. To his mind, it is possible to utilize philosophy as a method of reviving the grand Arab nationalist project, in both the Maghreb and the Mashreq, to be anchored in the grand environment of Arab rationalism that existed before Islam. Therefore, Jabiri preaches the birth of a new Arab age of Tadwín, that is, writing down the main principles of modern Arab thought and culture.  

In Jabiri’s thought, turdth (tradition) encompasses a wide array of intellectual and cultural activities, and must not be equated only with theology or religion. Since the encounter with the West in the nineteenth century, Arab thinkers have turned to turdth to derive the necessary lessons to help them out of their predicament. The process of examining turdth accelerated after the 1967 Arab defeat with the view of understanding the reasons behind such a defeat. “What are the reasons behind defeat and how can we achieve progress”? is a question often asked by a number of Arab intelligentsia. Contemporary Arab discourse on turdth is very complex and revealing by virtue of the tremendous intellectual energy devoted to it by the world’s most important Arab thinkers, representing different perspectives. In Jabiri’s, turdth is understood in a specific way: it is the contemporary articulation or rearticulation of Arab Rationalism, which has shaped the Arab world since the time of Jahāliyyah, and which was active in the formative phase of Islam in producing Arab-Islamic philosophy and scholasticism. Unlike Abdallah Laroui, Jabiri is convinced that no one can adequately meet the challenges facing the contemporary Arab world without taking into account the colossal Arab and Muslim philosophical heritage of the past. Simply put, to ignore the past is to commit intellectual suicide.

Jabiri’s thought is anchored in the urgent concerns of the modern Arab world. His definition of rationalism as the organized habit of critical reconstruction allows him to examine the rationalist undercurrents of the Arab and Muslim past for the purpose of reconstructing the rational foundations of modern and contemporary Arab culture. The past poses many

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problems indeed, and its legacy has entangled the modern Arab world in parochialism, superstition, and anti-rationalism. A past reconstructed in an enlightened and rational manner paves the way for the contemporary Arab world to appropriate the fruits of Arab and universal reason and turn modernity into a creative process. One must understand Jābiri’s thought, then, as an engagement with those rational trends of the past, which can furnish a direction for contemporary Arab thought.

Because part of his quest is to bring turāth into contemporary Arab intellectual discourse, Jābiri focuses his efforts on the deconstruction and critique of Arab Reason (al-‘aql al-‘arabi). More or less following the logic of Edward Said in his appraisal of Orientalism, Jābiri elicits what he considers to be the underlying and essential religious, linguistic, philosophical, and political components and epistemological underpinnings of Arab and Islamic thought. For this, he consecrates a trilogy that centres on criticism: (1) Takwin al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi (“Genesis of Arab Reason”), appearing in 1984; (2) Bunyat al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi (“Structure of Arab Reason”) appearing in 1986, and (3) al-‘Aql al-Siyāsi al-‘Arabi (“Arab Political Reason”), appearing in 1991.

Jābiri does express appreciation for the efforts of nineteenth century Arab Nahdah thinkers in reviving Islamic heritage and attempting to meet the challenges of the West. However, he believes that the nineteenth century reform movement failed because it was not committed to an overall critical appreciation of Arab Reason. The Nahdah thinkers bitterly criticized the stagnation and backwardness of their societies; however, their criticism was bereft of deep philosophical content. In their rush to condemn what they considered the concrete social and political manifestations of stagnation, they employed inadequate theological methods, in the case of religious thinkers, or borrowed European rational concepts, in the case of Uberai thinkers, without stirring the rational passion of the people.

Reason and only reason can lead to the end of cultural chaos in the modern Arab world. With this as his thesis, Jābiri presents rationalism as Arab society’s only defence against the shackles of the past and the only instrument to negotiate the hurdles of the present. A systematic investigation into the foundations of ‘Arab Reason’ becomes fundamental. Jābiri does this with the aid of universal reason, that is, the thought of French deconstructionist philosophers such as M. Foucault, Godelier, Lacan, Barth, DeLeuze and others. To be sure, Jābiri is not the only Arab philosopher to enlist the aid of

universal deconstructionist reason. Other Moroccan philosophers have done this in the past as well. But Jābiri is the only Moroccan philosopher to have gained a reputation across the Arab world for his ambitious work of deconstruction.

The main goal behind Jābiri’s archeological project is to investigate the historical growth and movement of Arab Reason for the purpose of uncovering its most fundamental components, its underlying and hegemonic concepts, methodological tools, and main political and ethical objectives. This is a daunting task, indeed. Although fully aware of the ideological consequences of ideas, especially religious ideas, Jābiri proposes that it is important to reveal and understand the basic epistemological components of Arab Reason before investigating its ideological formation and the hegemonic culture it created in the medieval period. Epistemology, he maintains, has never been free from ideology, which in turn describes the nature of hegemony in Muslim and Arab culture and the different elite or communities who have been active in either supporting or opposing this hegemony. Jābiri does not directly refer to the Antonio Gramsci writings on hegemony, although he seems to have learned quite a bit from Gramsci’s insights into this important concept.

By identifying epistemology with hegemony, Jābiri tries to explain what is most puzzling about the interplay between reason, ideology, and society throughout Arab history. To deconstruct the role of hegemony in classical and modern Arab society, Jābiri proposes to uncover the deep epistemological foundations of Arab Reason and the mechanisms that give rise to concepts and ideas. To his mind, Arab epistemology is distinguished by a certain way or logic of producing ideas. In other words, both the thematic and problematic of Arab Reason are products of the tools of this reason and its surrounding social, economic, religious, and political conditions. Before any useful critique is made of Arab Reason it is necessary to reexamine its different components within the framework of modern philosophical methods and approaches. This task is indeed immense and one person, however astute and learned, cannot shoulder it alone. Yet Jābiri embarks on an ambitious, although still partial, deconstruction of the epistemological components and ideological implications of Arab Reason.

Jābiri’s philosophical passion and breadth of analysis allow him to write down the main outlines of the historical development and epistemological

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mutations of Arab Reason. In this, he follows in the footsteps of a small number of modern Arab philosophers, such as Ahmad Amin, Mustafa ‘Abd al-Raziq, ‘Ali Sāmī al-Nashshār, Ibrahim Madkur, Tayyib Tizini, Husayn Muruwwah, and ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawi, all of whom have had a major impact on the intellectual environment of the twentieth century Arab world. However, Jabiri seems to stand alone in tracing contemporary Arab Reason to pre-Islamic or jāhili origins. Although Jabiri considers Islam to be the greatest mutation in Arab Reason, it is wrong to consider it the beginning of this Reason.31 Jabiri, therefore, undertakes defining the most stable features of Arab Reason over fifteen hundred years of history. He considers Arab Reason to be endowed with epistemological unity, the product of deep ruptures experienced by Arab Reason over a long period of time. One of these major ruptures is the rise of Islam in Arabia in the seventh century. Although this comprehensive approach may not present an accurate assessment of the major contributions of Arab thought over that period of time, it nevertheless is the only method available that can shed some light on the structure of Arab thought and its progress over the centuries.

In almost all of his writings, Jabiri struggles to uncover what he terms the “epistemological nucleus” (noyeau epistemologique) of the subject at hand. Jabiri is highly indebted to the contributions of the modern French school of structuralism, especially in the writings of Gaston Bachelard,32 Georges Canguilhem,33 and Michel Foucault.34 The notion of “epistemological break”, borrowed from Bachelard, presupposes that “scientific progress always reveals a break, or better perpetual breaks, between ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge”.35 The matrix of his scientific thought is to develop an epistemology capable of meeting the scientific demands of the new age, and which challenges our common-sense acceptance of traditional epistemologies. Canguilhem developed Bachelard’s notion of “scientific break”, especially in

31 This is one of the main theses of Toshihiko Izutsu, Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur‘ān (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).
35 Quoted by Mary M. Jones, Gaston Bachelard, Subversive Humanist: Texts and Readings, 5.
post-Renaissance European thought. Foucault credits both Bachelard and Canguilhem in the introduction to his *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. He says that,

There are the epistemological acts and thresholds described by Bachelard: they suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from its empirical origin and its original motivations, cleanse it of its imaginary complicities: they direct historical analysis away from the search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors, towards the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects. There are the displacements and transformations of concepts: the analyses of G. Canguilhem may serve as models; they show that the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality...but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured.36

One of the key points here is that what defines the history of human thought is not just links and connections but also breaks and discontinuities, which mostly arise in periods of transition and change. However, what is important to note is that under the pressure of transformation, human reason is able to develop new categories and classifications of thought, relationships to both past and future, and either acceptance or rejection of certain attitudes. In spite of Foucault's highly mechanical approach in dealing with epistemology, he never forgets, under the influence of Bachelard and Canguilhem, to give space to both history and human activity.

Jābiri's indebtedness to the French school of epistemology enables him to focus on epistemology, history, and transformation in the classical Arab and Muslim age and on epistemology, society, and liberation in the modern era. Jābiri embarks on an ambitious project of epistemological and historical analysis. In addition to linking epistemology with history (both scientific and socio-economic history), he identifies ideology as a salient feature of human thought. Examined through the lenses of history, the marriage between epistemology and ideology reflects the progress of social and cultural realities and the different players in each situation or epoch. In his faithfulness to French structuralism, Jābiri's critical rationalism does not give much credence to the claims of metaphysics or abstract theology.37

The Role of Philosophy

In an illuminating piece on the differences between theology and philosophy, Paul Tillich argues that “epistemology, the ‘knowledge’ of knowing, is a part of ontology, the knowledge of being, for knowing is an event within the totality of events. Every epistemological assertion is implicitly ontological. Therefore, it is more adequate to begin an analysis of existence with the question of being rather than with the problem of knowledge”.38 Although Jābirī begins his analysis with the problem of knowledge in the Arab world, his major focus is post-colonial Arab existence. Ontology and epistemology are absolutely linked in his approach.

Jābirī locates the beginning and progress of Arab epistemology and rationalism in the field of philosophy. He identifies two primary schools in the formative phase of Islam: first, the Mashriqī school of philosophy, which was Hermetic in orientation, and second is the Maghribī Zāhirite school, which was rational in nature. Ibn Sinā (d. 428/1037) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) belong to the former and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), Ibn Bājjah (d. 533/1139), and Ibn Khalduṅ belong to the latter.40 Jābirī ascribes every evil in Muslim philosophical thinking to Hermeticism, which he wrongly considers a pre-Islamic Persian school of philosophy that influenced a number of early Muslim philosophers.41 Jābirī consider Hermeticism to have had a pernicious impact on early Arab thought because of its preoccupation with esotericism, astrology, and magic. In this sense, he differs from Nasr’s assessment that, “The Muslims identified Hermes, whose personality they elaborated into the ‘three Hermes’, also well-known to the West from Islamic sources, with Idrīs or Enoch, the ancient prophet who belongs to the chain of prophecy confirmed by the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth. And they considered Idrīs as the origin of philosophy, bestowing on him the

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40 For more detail on all of these philosophers, see Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); and Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., History of Islamic Philosophy, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1996).
41 “Hermeticism is the outlook associated with the Hermetic writings, a literature in Greek which developed in the early centuries after Christ under the name ‘Hermes Trismegistus’. Much of it is concerned with astrology, alchemy, and other occult sciences, but there is also a philosophical Hermetic literature”. Frances Yates, “Hermeticism” in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 3: 489. See also Garth Fowden, The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
title of Abū'l-Ḥukamā', the father of philosophers”. Ibn Rushd, of the Maghribī school of philosophy, is Jābiri’s ideal philosopher. Ibn Rushd represents the victory of Arab Reason over the Hermetic and irrational mind of Ibn Sinā, patron of the eastern school of philosophy. Many philosophers would find this premise highly debatable. Jābiri seems to say that occidental Arab Reason has preserved its rational purity, unlike oriental reason, which was very much influenced by Persian ideas. “L’histoire de la pensee arabe et musulmane est, chez al-Jābiri, une histoire dialectique qu’anime l’opposition entre irrationalisme et rationalisme, entre l’obscurantisme et les Lumieres”.44

One has reason to agree with Majid Fakhry’s assessment that “Islamic philosophy is the product of a complex intellectual process in which Syrians, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers, and others took an active part”.45 Undoubtedly, the dramatic expansion of Islam in the first century, the amalgamation of a heterogeneous number of people into the matrix of Arab/Islamic culture and thought, and the appropriation of medical, astronomical, philosophical, and literary traditions of the conquered people created a very dynamic Islamic civilization, which was intent on bringing universalism to its intellectual achievements. The preceding statement proves to be shallow if not examined against the different social, political, religious, and intellectual forces that exploded on the scene after expansion. The point to be underscored here is that Jābiri’s distinction between ‘Oriental Arab Reason’ and ‘Occidental Arab Reason’ misses the point of the Muslim/Arab mind’s dynamic appropriation of all sorts of sciences; this process was as true in the western part of the Muslim world as in the eastern.

Jābiri, however, hastens to emphasize that a complete assessment of the Arab/Muslim philosophical tradition must begin with the Age of Tadwīn, launched in the eastern part of the Muslim world around a century or so after the birth of Islam.46 Unlike theoreticians of contemporary Islamic resurgence
in the Arab world, Jābiri’s point of departure in treating the Islamic foundations of Arab Reason is not the age of the Prophet or the Rightly-Guided caliphs, but a much later phase. In this later age, philosophy was integral to the formation of the rational spirit of Arab culture, thus stretching the rational imagination of Arab Reason and philosophers. Jābiri underlines the function of philosophy in that age as “a struggling ideological discourse that committed itself to serving science and progress in Arab society”.47

Jābiri avoids confining philosophy to the field of epistemology; in the formative phase of Islam, it was engaged with all sorts of ideological and philosophical discourses. In the process of building the rational edifice of classical Arab Reason, philosophy was destined to incur the wrath of Manichean philosophers who, under the cover of Islam, began to spread their old Persian ideas in subtle and destructive ways. Although Jābiri does not belittle the importance of the assimilation of ideas in the age of Tadwīn, he nevertheless believes that the old Persian aristocracy defeated by the Arab forces of Islam was bent on wreaking havoc on the Arab mind of the classical era. In order to compensate for its humiliating defeat on the battle field, this aristocracy used its arsenal of ideas or intellectual ammunition to conquer Islam and the Arab world from within. During the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid ages, “The tense Persian aristocracy launched an extensive ideological attack using its rich Mazdakian, Manichean, and Zoroastrian heritage in order to cast doubt on the nature of the Arab religion and lead to its destruction so that Arab authority and state will crumble”.48 Jābiri argues that the Persian aristocracy used the cover of Shi‘ism and its esoteric symbols to attain its objectives. He further argues that the Arab backlash to this movement took the form of rational philosophy, which was supported by the caliph al-Ma‘mūn in the east.49

Jābiri reaches the logical conclusion that Arab philosophy was ideologically motivated from the very beginning and not just a fruitless exercise in rationalism. This motivation was justified by the attacks of esoteric

47Jābiri, Nahm wa al-Turātḥ, 35.
48Ibid., 36.
49Compare what Jābiri says to the following: “It is known that many dualist texts written within the early Islamic empire had attacked some of the basic tenets of Islam such as prophecy and revelation; effectively, this constituted an attack both on the Prophet and on the Qur‘ān”. Syed Nomanul Haq, “The Indian and Persian Background” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., History of Islamic Philosophy, 1: 57. Majid Fakhry gives a slightly different assessment: “The philosophical awakening that followed in the wake of the introduction of Greek philosophy and was attended by the rise of a hitherto unknown spirit of free inquiry could not fail eventually to place in jeopardy some of the fundamental tenets of Islamic belief”. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, 94.
and mystical philosophers who took the side of ambiguous metaphysics against rational philosophy. Jābiri mentions as an example the Arab philosopher, al-Kindī (d. circa 252/866) who, to his mind, struggled against two types of thinkers: the Gnostics and the fuqaha'. To Jābiri, al-Kindī advocated unity between religion and philosophy, a method which could ultimately lead to the knowledge of God. The next important philosopher in Jābiri's view is al-Fārābī, who committed himself to establishing the unity of the Arab ummah by proposing the universality of reason against the insidious plots of the Persian aristocracy and Shi'ites. Jābiri says that Ibn Sīnā, because of his Persian background, spread Gnostic ideas that were anti-rational in nature.50

Jābiri's strong condemnation of pre-Islamic Manichean philosophy, Shi'ism, and Persian influence on classical Islamic and Arabic thought diverges from the acceptable theoretical position that whatever classical Arab or Muslim Reason accepted from outside sources "was all transformed and assimilated into a matrix that was characteristically Islamic".51 He downplays the notion of Islamic universalism and underscores instead the importance of Arabism in thought and culture in that age.

Jābiri highlights the importance of four thinkers, whom he considers all Arab, in building the edifice of Arab rationalism. These four are al-Kindī, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldūn. Jābiri's favourite philosopher is Ibn Rushd (Averroes).52 He argues that Ibn Rushd's thought must be considered primary in modern Arab thought, as Descartes' ideas are in modern French thought. Jābiri maintains that Ibn Rushd's philosophy deals with the following central questions: (1) how to correctly read and interpret the Qur'ān; (2) how to interpret the philosophy of Aristotle, and (3) how to define the relationship between religion and philosophy in a manner that protects the autonomy of each. Jābiri argues that according to Ibn Rushd, philosophy utilizes a different system from that of religion. The two subjects begin with different premises that lead to different conclusions. The philosopher must not dispute the principles on which the Shari'ah is based and by the same token, the fuqaha' must not dispute the foundations of philosophy. In the final analysis, however, religious truth does not contradict rational truth.53

Against the above, Jābirī raises the following question that summarizes his intellectual preoccupation: "How can contemporary Arab thought retrieve and absorb the most rational and critical dimensions of its tradition and employ them in the same rationalist direction as before — the direction of fighting against feudalism, gnosticism, and dependency"? The Arab world of today badly needs such a reason, whose sole objective must be to create justice, socialism, and democracy. To achieve true renaissance, the point of departure for modern Arabs must be "philosophical rationalism", as construed by Arab philosophers of the medieval and early modern period. It is only by reconstructing the foundations of the Arab heritage that Arabs can preserve their uniqueness and secure a place in the world of nations.

**Historical Outlines of Arab Reason**

The broad outlines of Arab Reason, as discussed by Jābirī, emerge fully after an exhausting process of deconstruction. On the whole, Jābirī thinks that although Arab Reason has from the beginning exhibited a number of essential characteristics, its primary epistemological formation has responded only to three major shifts or discontinuities in its long history, all of which took place during the Jāhiliyyah, early Islam, and the nineteenth century. These three epochs exhibited many co-existing epistemological modes and reflected a number of ideological forces competing to shape the Arab world, each according to its own image.

The co-existence of different modes of epistemology and the great ideological and cultural competition between the different modes has created a unique phenomenon in the modern Arab world, that of the 'migrating intelligentsia' — those intellectuals who migrate from one plane of thought to an antithetical; from the rational to the irrational, from the scientific to the metaphysical, and from the mystical to the philosophical. Many traditionalist intellectuals try to interpret and apply ancient knowledge without the predicate of proper philosophical scrutiny. This phenomenon carries with it cultural and intellectual alienation, an inability to form a coherent image of the 'cultural self', and a failure to adequately assume a progressive vision of the present.

Jābirī claims that the true intellectual history of the Arab world has not yet been written for the simple reason that Arab history as we study it today is a history of schisms and not of epistemological breaks, opinion formation, or

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54 Ibid., 53.
56 Ibid., 45.
scientific refinement. A new Age of Tadwin is past due. We are still far from appreciating the epistemological components of Arab Reason and the tools used to lay down the foundations of Arab culture and thought. Modern Arabs are apt to confuse the ideological and the epistemological, and thus fail to appreciate those components that gave their system of thought its coherence and viability. This fact “made our historical consciousness the product of the accumulation of and confusion in facts and not succession or systemization of historical facts”.57

Jābiri does not attribute much weight to the Islamic intervention in Arabian history in the formation of Arab Reason. Neither the Qur’ān nor Hadīth played a significant role in Arab epistemological formation. The Age of Tadwin takes precedence over the first few years of Islam. This is an odd position to take in light of the importance of Islamic revelation in shaping Islamic history. One must agree with Hasan Ḥanafi that wahy, or revelation, had a significant impact on the Muslim mind, both past and present.58 The classification of the Islamic sciences and the formation of the Islamic oeuvres all took place during the Tadwin Age and not the early Islamic. Therefore, the Age of Tadwin inaugurates a new epistemological and intellectual authority in the world of Islam; it constitutes the primary system of reference (al-sultāb al-marja‘īyyah).59 However, Jābiri hastens to add that, as a matter of fact, two primary systems of Islamic reference arose in this age: the Sunni and Shi‘i systems. Although the epistemological components of both systems were more or less the same, they exhibited different social, political, and ideological formations. Dissension over political authority in early Islam led to the rise of these two different systems of reference.60

What is important to underline here is the Jabirean notion that the epistemological foundations of Arab Reason primarily took shape during the Tadwin. Hence, the Arab appeal to the Age of in the nineteenth century, during colonial expansion into the Arab world. The broad outlines of the Arab system of knowledge were shaped in the Age of Tadwin, and this historical fact must guide our thinking about the historical progress of Arab thought.61 The first task performed by Tadwin thinkers was to lay out the principles and bases of the Arab language — to write down its grammar and to shape its universal traits. Language is both a tool that leads to the production

57 Ibid., 47.
59 Jābiri, Takwīn al-Aql al-‘Arabī, 67.
60 Ibid., 68.
of ideas as well as a coherent form, shape or system of these ideas. For example, *Lisân al-'Arab* was the dictionary that gave coherence to Arabic grammar. In other words, the *Tadwin* Age enabled the Arabic language to evolve from non-scientific to scientific. It has solid rules which enable it to evolve and be flexible enough to include novel elements.

The canonization of language and grammar was followed by that of jurisprudence. Jurisprudence lies at the heart of the Arab-Muslim heritage. Jâbirî argues that Arab-Muslim civilization was based on *fiqh*. The *fiqh* of early Islam was pragmatic, whereas in the Age of *Tadwin*, it was theoretical and epistemological in nature. The function of *fiqh* was to produce laws to regulate society’s social, economic, and political affairs, whereas the main goal of ‘*ilm al-usûl*’ in the field of *fiqh* was to produce rules for the mind, or to enable the mind to legislate rules. Shâfi‘i, the Descartes of Islamic jurisprudence, gave coherence to the principles of *fiqh* that helped Muslim jurists deduce rational rules. Shâfi‘i understood the need to establish rules and systems that give a sense of organization and discipline to meanings and legislations. Shâfi‘i established rules for every opinion.

Although the problem of authority or caliphate was the first challenge facing Muslims in the wake of the death of the Prophet, it was the last question that jurists examined in a systematic manner. This examination established the political foundation and outlook of such groups as the Shi‘is, Sunnis, Mu‘tazilis, etc. Shi‘i thinkers began to formulate the theoretical bases of this question during the *Tadwin* Age as a means of protecting their claims to authority. They based their theoretical justification on a text — they claimed the Prophet left a text promising the caliphate to ‘Ali (d. 40/661) and his family. The Sunnis, on the other hand, followed the precedent of Abû Bakr (d. 13/634) being appointed by the Prophet to lead people in prayer. The importance of al-Asha‘ri (d. 324/935), similar to the job of Shâfi‘i, was to lay down the foundations and principles of Sunni doctrine. Therefore, in matters of language, doctrine, *fiqh*, and *kalâm*, Muslim thinkers in the *Tadwin* Age introduced the epistemological foundations of these sciences and established the reference system of *Bayân* (*al-niẓâm al-ma‘rûfî al-bayânî*).82

Canonization establishes internal coherence and gives authority to certain texts, “The hidden and discursive purpose behind the canonization of both language and *fiqh* was to achieve social and political unity”,63 which was badly needed for the expansion of the Islamic state. However, the epistemological formation of the *Tadwin* Age and the classification of its various sciences took place against the influence of Greek philosophy. Jâbirî does not seem to object

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63 Ibid., 229.
to Greek influence in the same way that he does to pre-Islamic Persian philosophy.

Jābīr introduces the concept of the “Arab religious thinkable” (al-*ma’qūl al-dīnī al-‘arabī), which is based on the belief in the absolute oneness of God and the idea of prophecy. Unlike the ancient Greek thought, God plays a central role in Muslim thought. In other words, the concept of ‘God’ is placed at the centre of the relationship between man and nature. Man cannot conceive of causal or natural laws without first conceiving of God. Comprehending nature and its laws leads to comprehending God. Thus, the knowledge of nature leads to that of God in Islamic thought, and the comprehension of God leads to that of nature in Greek and European thought. What is important about this thinkable in Islam is the Nature/God/Man relationship established in the *Tadwin* Age, which has been translated as the most important part of the sacred text, especially the Qur’ān and Hadith. The fact is that the Islamic thinkable cannot be examined solely in reference to the sacred text or texts. The sacred thus becomes the basis of Islamic rationalism.

Jābīr maintains that the concept of “the religious thinkable” in Islam took shape in negation to Persian Manichean philosophy, which had an important presence in the formative phase of Islam. Islamic ideas flourished in the second century of *Hijrah* and their interaction or confrontation with the philosophical and intellectual heritage of other civilizations. This opening or mushrooming of ideas was not possible during the time of the Prophet for the simple reason that Arab culture at the time was not mature enough to be cognizant of the philosophical achievements of other civilizations or even evolved enough to grasp its own theoretical and epistemological foundations and principles. This was only possible during the time of the *Tadwin*. At the apogee of conquest, Muslims were able to politically and militarily dominate and began to take notice of the intellectual achievements of these cultures through various means, such as translation, assimilation, and thus were able to distil the intellectual integrity of these cultures, assimilate their central ideas, and spread a new form of Islamic hegemony over them. Arab Muslim space was totally dominant in Arabia, but faced new enemies in the periphery, especially in Persia in the form of the battle of the books launched by Zoroastrian and Manichean philosophers and ideologues who did not disguise their distrust of the ascending Islamic culture.

Jābīr highlights three major systems of conceptual reference that emerged during the *Tadwin* Age: the *Bayān*, *‘Irfan*, and *Burhān* systems. He calls the

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first *al-mizām al-ma‘rīsī al-bayānī*, developed by Muslim jurists, which grants the Sacred Text primacy over reason or philosophy. The sciences of *fiqh*, Qur'ānic exegesis, and philology are products of this system. The *Irfān* system, discussed above, emerged hand in glove with the Persian philosophical and mystical influences upon early Arab and Muslim thought. Hermeticism is the core of such a system, which Jābirī calls *allā ma‘qūl ‘aqlī* (uncomprehended reason). The third system of *Būrān* is the product of Arab philosophical activity in North Africa and Spain and is best represented by al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Rushd.65

Jābirī critically discusses the writings of Imām al-Ghāzālī, held in high esteem in the Muslim world for his work in theology and Sufism. Jābirī accuses him of falling a victim to the *Irfān* school and Hermetic ideas.66 It is because of this system of thought that Ghāzālī, according to Jābirī, turned a blind eye to the danger the Crusaders presented to the Muslim world in the last ten years of his life. Jābirī accuses Ghāzālī of masterminding a pernicious plot to unseat Arab Reason. Ghāzālī’s Hermetic thought, he claims, “has left a deep wound in Arab Reason that still bleeds profusely”.67 Jābirī does not provide much evidence to back up such a harsh allegation, neither does he discuss in any detail the ideological or social forces that might have been in play at that particular juncture in Islamic history. Jābirī points to Hermetic influences without analyzing in any depth Ghāzālī’s religious or philosophical views and their positive reception in the Muslim world. However, Jābirī points out that during Ghāzālī’s time (the eleventh and twelfth centuries), the Muslim world was at a crossroad, beset by political and social turmoil and in search of stability in the midst of chaos. As a result, the three epistemological systems, which developed during the *Tadwīn* Age, were in a state of friction and competition. To appease the conservative jurists in Islam and to satisfy his Hermetic bent of mind, Ghāzālī spent many years working on a synthesis between jurisprudence and mysticism. However, one of the main consequences of such a synthesis was the blocking of philosophical and rational progress in Arab and Muslim minds, which ultimately reduced the

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66 Ibn Khaldūn has a similar view about the relationship between sufism and Shi‘ism: “The Sufis thus became saturated with Shi‘ah theories. Shi‘ah theories entered so deeply into their religious ideas that they based their practice of using the cloak (*khīrbāb*) on the alleged fact that ‘Ali clothed al-Ḥasan al-‘Askāri in such a cloak and caused him to agree solemnly that he would adhere to the mystic path. The tradition thus inaugurated by ‘Ali was continued, according to the Sufis, through al-Junayd, one of the Sufi shaykhs”. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr., Franz Rosenthal (NY: Pantheon Books, 1958), 2: 187.

influence of rational philosophy in many parts of the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{68}

As seen above, Jābiri examines what he calls ‘Arab Rationalism’ over a period of fifteen centuries. Arab Rationalism predates Islam. Its constituent elements have been shaped by three major mutations, discontinuities, breakthroughs and cataclysmic events. Arab rationalism is uniquely Arab, which means that Jābiri implicitly dismisses the notion of ‘universal reason’. There exists a multiplicity of reasons in the world. Jābiri looks at Arab Rationalism as a living reality that transcends the limits of tradition. The concept of tradition refers only to the past, or a certain ordered and well-defined past. Jābiri looks at Arab Rationalism as a sort of progressive system, which renews itself with every moment of dramatic change.

Jābiri does not explain how ‘Arab Rationalism’ emerged. He only mentions in passing that it first emerged in pre-Islamic Arabia. What are the conditions which led to the rise of Arab Rationalism? Also, as mentioned above, Jābiri does not accord any significant epistemological or doctrinal importance to Islam in the development of Arab Rationalism. The historical eruption of Islam on world history is brushed aside. He focuses instead on the Age of Tadwin, which began at least a century after the appearance of Islam. In the Age of Tadwin, all the basic Arab sciences were written down, commented upon, argued, critiqued, elaborated, and classified.

In one sense, Jābiri follows in the footsteps of the Egyptian thinker Țāhā Hussain, who traced ‘Egyptian rationalism’ to the philosophical formations of pre-Islamic Egypt. However, the conclusions of each are entirely different. In The Future of Culture in Egypt, released in 1936, Hussain aimed at establishing a transhistorical link between modern European Reason and ancient Egyptian Reason.\textsuperscript{69} Jābiri, on the other hand, was busy tracing the roots of modern Arab Reason to the Jāhiliyyah Age of pre-Islamic Arabia. Although he ended up discussing the Tadwin Age and its intellectual ramifications, he was able to establish some major links between the formative phase of Islam and modern Arab thought.

On the basis of the above arguments, Jābiri argues that the triumph of the Hermetic philosophy and its propagation by such major thinkers as Ibn Sinā and Ghazālī led to the decline of Arab Reason. It is only by freeing Arab Reason from such a capitulation that sound rational progress can be achieved. “The Europeans”, he says, “achieved progress the moment European Reason


began to wake up and raise questions. Capitalism is the daughter of Reason”. Jābiri, therefore, gives a purely epistemological answer to a vexing social and economic problem. Although his epistemological approach is essentially rational, it lacks a socio-economic dynamic or reference to social forces inside the Arab world as well as outside, that have no vested interest in the advancement of capitalism within their societies.

Politics and Renaissance

After treating the epistemological formations of Arab and Muslim history, Jābiri turns his attention to the question of politics while highlighting certain notable examples in Islamic history. “Islam and politics are one” is a cliché often recounted, especially by Islamist thinkers. It is impossible to understand what is meant by this statement unless a thorough examination of the classical environment of Islam is undertaken. Therefore, a good number of modern Arab thinkers have studied the perplexing relationship between Islam and politics in the early history of Islam and have come up with different conclusions. We all remember the famous arguments of Shaykh ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq back in 1926. He postulated that the Prophet (peace be on him) was not concerned about politics or even this world but was totally immersed in worship in order to attain the best station in the other world. A great number of contemporary Arab thinkers try to understand the complex relationship between politics and Islam in the present Muslim world through the lenses of the past relationship between Islam and politics. The work of Hichem Djait on this matter is qualitatively different from that of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1386/1966). Qutb prefers to speak of early Muslim pioneers, the builders of a God-ordained civilization. Jābiri ventures into the much-trodden territory of early Islam in order to ascertain the complex relationship between religion and society/state in the modern Arab world.

What Jābiri has in mind, I suspect, when writing about the relationship between politics and religion is the argument proposed by many Islamists: that Islam constituted a total revolution against Jāhiliyyah, tribalism, and disunity, and that from the beginning, the Islamic state was religious in nature, that is, was not based on secular foundations. Jābiri does not think so. He proposes that it is impossible to come to grips with the formation of the early Islamic state under the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Rightly-Guided caliphate

70 Jābiri, Takwin al-ʿAql al-ʿArabi, 347.
71 See Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
without investigating the importance of three major concepts or factors: tribe, doctrine, and booty. These concepts do not elicit any epistemological or hidden arguments, but provide an explicit appraisal of socio-economic and political forces throughout Islamic history. Whereas Jābiri does not accord any importance to Islamic revelation and the role of the Prophet (peace be on him) in his earlier argument, he seems to think that in any political or economic treatment of early Islamic society, these factors are central. Jābiri contends that the Prophet made full use of all of these factors in the formation of the early Islamic state in Madinah, while giving preference to the tribal factor in order to protect his mission in its infancy. After his death, the early caliphs used a combination of the tribe/booty/doctrine to build a multi-glot, multi-ethnic Islamic empire. The political was not divorced from the religious in early Islam, and this could be taken as the genesis of secularism in early Islamic thought.73

In Naqd al-ʿAql al-Siyāsī ["Critique of Political Reason"], Jābiri raises the following main questions: first regarding the relationship between the religious and political in early Islam; second, the basic constituent elements underlying the formation of the early Islamic state; third, the absence of a coherent Qurʿānic political theory and the constitutional vacuum left after the death of the Prophet; fourth, the political mechanism in place to elect the caliph and questions of political despotism in Islamic history and, fifth, the state in the modern Arab world and the meaning of both democracy and civil society.

Jābiri’s launching pad in the treatment of religion and politics in early Islam is the primacy of the political over the theological during that period. The Islamic message was political in nature: “From the beginning, the Muḥammadan message was carrying a conspicuous political project with the aim of bringing to an end the political foundations of both the Persian and Byzantine states and controlling their treasures and riches”.74 In other words, Jābiri argues that even in the Meccan phase, the Islamic message was political in nature and it is false to argue, as did ‘Ali ʿAbd al-Rāziq, that the Prophet and his early followers were not interested in this world or that they did not understand the political threat the Islamic message posed to the authority of Quraysh in Makkah or even the dominant tribal system in Arabia as a whole. Quraysh itself was alerted to the political implications of the Islamic message.

and therefore chose to fight it politically to kill it in its infancy. Jābiri also argues that the Prophet (peace be on him) was aware of the importance of ideology, which was the same as ‘Aqidah, in reinforcing his political ideas in the hearts and minds of early believers. In this, Jābiri does not differ much from the main claim of Arab Islamists that Islamic doctrine played a critical role in the diffusion of Islam.

Jābiri shows that the Prophet (peace be on him) offered his life as a political model by fighting against the Meccans with the aid of revelation. He attacked the Meccan idols, the supreme religious symbols of pagan Arabia, criticized the wealthy as a means of attracting the poor and giving them a political space in his message of radical change, and aimed at attracting the young and oppressed (mustada'fīn). This is to say, the Prophet (peace be on him) was well aware of the religious importance of Quraysh before Islam. His critique of the religious practices of the Meccan aristocracy was a necessary prelude to the dissemination of new ideas. The Prophet (peace be on him) accomplished his critique with the aid of ‘asabiyyah, a new form of solidarity, that of the poor and the marginalized in Arabian society.

Jābiri poses the following questions: Why weren’t the enemies of the Islamic message capable of putting an end to the Prophet’s preaching at an early stage in Makkah? The answer lies in the tribal system and the role of the tribe in protecting the Prophet and many of his early followers. In a sense, argues Jābiri, the Prophet derived his legitimacy not so much from the Qur’ān as from tribal solidarity, or tribal ‘asabiyyah, if we are to use Ibn Khaldūn’s term. This mechanism was essential to the survival of his message; this becomes even more conspicuous in the second important phase of the Da’wah in Madīnah, when the Prophet secured the help of several tribes in Madīnah against his enemies in his native town of Makkah. Thus, Jābiri correctly argues that, “These complex tribal connections did not permit the tribe of Quraysh to kill the followers of the Muhammadan message for the simple reason that any physical attack or shedding of blood would have led to a dramatic explosion and an overall civil war”. The tribal ‘imaginaire’, in a sense, protected the Islamic message and ensured its progressive spread throughout Arabia.

In Madīnah, the Islamic message begins to operate on a higher political and economic plane. It lays down the seeds of a state, or a mini-state, of political and social organizations led by the Prophet (peace be on him) and made successful by the novel sense of solidarity discovered by the Medinian tribes supporting Muḥammad (peace be on him). Those tribes begin to

75 Ibid., 75.
76 Ibid., 88.
envision a larger political and military battle with Quraysh in which they will play significant roles. In Madinah, the Prophet follows a number of strategies: internal consolidations of his ranks; fighting enemy tribes in Madinah, especially the Jewish, and preparing to consummate his final battle against Makkah.

The conquest of Makkah in 8/630 inaugurates a new progressive phase in the life of the message. Muslims are ready to fight a larger battle for the future of Arabia and later on the Near East as a whole. Jābirī maintains that the booty that accrued to Muslims from the attacks on the commercial caravans of Makkah played a major role in the spread of Islam, since the followers of Muḥammad (peace be on him) were motivated by material gains, in addition to the Islamic doctrine. Booty was taken not just to prepare armies against Quraysh but also to excite the imagination of the Muslim individual. That is, when Muslims with the aid of the Qur’ān were able to see that the notion of the ummah was far from parochial, they were challenged to think of it in universal terms.

The death of the Prophet (peace be on him) created a number of important challenges to the nascent Muslim state: first, the question of political authority. The Qur’ān as a text does not stipulate exactly how a caliph is selected after the death of the Prophet (peace be on him). Therefore, to find a solution to this dilemma, the early followers of the Prophet sought a purely political solution based on their tribal background and their Islamic experience until then. They met and chose Abū Bakr. The followers applied a tribal mentality to the selection of the shaykh, leader or head, taking into account the expanding territory of the state and common interest of the members of this emerging state. This was a purely political process, unaided by Qur’ānic text, which later proves to be an important precedent in Islam and a basis for the development of Islamic political theory, especially for Sunnis. It was neither ‘Aqidah’s logic nor booty that decided this sensitive political matter, but the logic of the tribe.

A second important problem facing the new Muslim state was the Riddah wars. On hearing of the death of the Prophet (peace be on him), many tribes (especially outside of the Ḥijāz) withdrew their pledges of allegiance to the young Muslim state and opted for their centuries-old freedom. Abū Bakr, with the help of that political nucleus built in Ḥijāz, was able to crush the Ridda with his followers, especially those from Madinah. In summation, Abū Bakr used a number of strategies: booty, ‘Aqidah, and politics to reconstruct the Muslim state and continue conquest beyond Arabia. Both he and ‘Umar

77 Ibid., 113.
78 Ibid., 140.
(d. 23/644) used the tribes that had tried to recede from the body politic of the ummah in a new series of campaigns of expansion. As a result of the political possibilities emerging after the conquest of Makkah and the re-conversion of the tribes, both could envision the possibility of further expansion, even to the point of laying down the foundations of a new Islamic empire. The center becomes more powerful with the return of the tribes. They become extremely busy in their efforts to reap booty and in focusing on the expansion of Islam.79 The Islamic state under the leadership of Abū Bakr and later on ‘Umar succeeds in embodying a new political discourse, that of pragmatism and commitment to the vision of the Prophet (peace be on him) of creating a large state.

Abū Bakr’s death led again to the intervention of the logic of the tribe again in the selection of ‘Umar as the second caliph. Here, the caliphs were careful to differentiate between the religious/theological and political functions of the Prophet (peace be on him) and their political functions. They did not inherit the Prophetic mission of the Prophet but his political mission and message. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were the caliphs of the Messenger of God and not the caliphs of God. Being close to the Prophet (peace be on him) in this sense gave them a strong sense of legitimacy in addition, of course, to recognizing the eternal values of Islam, such as forbidding evil and commanding good.

The dramatic expansion of Islam during the Rightly-Guided caliphate and the booty Muslims gained from their conquests led to mass conversions to Islam for the sake of material and other gains and created a new class of nouveaux riches in the Muslim ummah. This was an indication of the creation of a class society in which a minority, especially of some ṣaḥābah, become rich, and the majority consist of commoners.

So far, religion underlies the universal values of the Muslim ummah; conquest and booty were the dynamos behind expansion, which was also motivated by doctrinal issues. Religion is important in a metaphysical sense as a new bond of unity, although it could not completely annihilate the tribal mentality and sense of allegiance that is revived during the Umayyad caliphate. But one must note that even the Umayyads, who were known for their Arab ethnocentrism, immense wealth, and love of this life could not abolish religion as a bond among believers. But the egalitarian quality inherent in Islam move some people to protest the amassing of wealth. This was clear in the career of Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī (d. 32/653) and ‘Ammar ibn Yāsir (d. 37/657) who strongly believed in the absolute concepts of Islamic egalitarianism and support for the poor and downtrodden. Abū Dhar and ‘Ammār took the

79 Ibid., 206.
‘Aqidah to heart, especially as they themselves underwent harsh treatment from the Makkan aristocracy. In this new phase, they began to apply their early efforts toward a doctrinal rather than worldly Islam. The state, on the other hand, especially the Umayyad state, although it could not escape the umbrella of Islam, began to use both latent and manifest coercion as a means of asserting its authority. Here we are confronted with two imaginaires: one is statist and supported by a tribal mentality with Islamic legitimacy and the other is anti-statist and reclaims the early experience of Islam, especially Makkan Islam and frowns upon the excessive materialism of the Muslim consciousness, the worldliness of the Umayyad state, and the co-opting of large numbers of the Prophet’s followers by the Ummayyad state.

Jābirī correctly notes that the explosion of Islam on the world scene then took place under the auspices of the Rightly-Guided caliphate. This “was an age of transition — a transition from Paganism to Tawḥīd; from revelation to explanation and from the state of message to the state of conquest. Before this transformation, the caliphs followed an open-door policy that was antithetical in nature to both sectarianism and orthodoxy. The essence of the behaviour of the Prophet’s followers was based on the hadith: ‘you are indeed cognizant of the affairs of your world’”.

Mu‘āwiya (60/679) and the Ummayyads generally begin a new phase of state formation after they win the early civil war against and the Shi‘is. This was an era of deep political and some doctrinal divisions with the Muslim ummah. According to Jābirī, many Sunni fuqaha’ lent Mu‘āwiya their support because he infused the Muslim state with new energy by expanding its physical and mental territories and actually beginning to lay down its foundations as an empire. Mu‘āwiya was indeed able to create a new political model in Islam in which the three factors mentioned above — tribe, booty, and ‘Aqidah — began to interact in a new way, thus giving the nascent Umayyad state its social, economic, and religious legitimacy and integrity. Here, the political game takes on its strong shape, the purpose of which is to retain the power of the Umayyad family, build new institutions that parallel the whole plethora of complex changes affecting state and society, and the rule from Damascus, which becomes a new intellectual and political center competing with the old centers of the Rashidūn caliphate in Hijāz.

Another major difference between the Umayyad and the Rightly-Guided caliphs is the fact that the latter were totally immersed in the religious problematic; they were religious and political leaders who used their influence to build the foundations of Islam. With Mu‘āwiya, the central game becomes

80 Ibid., 228.
81 Ibid., 232–33.
political. In the time of Mu‘awiyyah, a split takes place between religion or doctrine and politics, or between the ulama and the sultan (between power and religion). Politics becomes the profession of the elite to the exclusion of the masses. Mu‘awiyyah begins his rule with the strength of his tribal background and the support of a large army. He embodies a novel phase in the world of Islam where the political takes precedence over the religious.

Because of the domination of the political ethos over the doctrinal one, a new ideological warfare erupts between the Ummayyad state and its opponents. Although a number of the Prophet’s followers abstained from politics because of its divisive nature, others were co-opted by the state and went on the attack against its enemies, particularly the Shi‘is, Khawārij, and others who stood against the Umayyads. Kalām begins to take shape, especially with the conversion of large numbers of non-Arabs to Islam. A new intelligentsia begins to emerge, an intelligentsia that quickly puts to use its past intellectual and cultural heritage in the service of this party or that, and the result is a great enriching of the ideological and cultural space of the Umayyad state. The Shi‘is used their ideology of the Imamate (that, in fact, there was a text in which the Prophet promised authority to ‘Alī and his family) in order to wage their warfare against the Umayyads and later the ‘Abbāsids. This state used the ideology of predestination to justify its existence and a great number of hadīth were invented to justify this ideology.

As long as the Umayyad state was able to maintain a balance between the three factors that went into its construction — tribal power, distribution of booty, and predestination ideology — it was able to thwart the attempts of various enemies. The great expansion of the state and the success of its opponents to forge a new alliance, which was based on the allegiance of the Mawālis, Hashemite lineage, and a seemingly new egalitarian ideology, allowed the ‘Abbāsids to win their battle against the Umayyads. Here a new relationship takes place between the three factors enumerated above. To use Gramscian terminology, the world of Islam witnesses the emergence of a new “historical bloc” that mobilizes its force against the ancien régime. Jābiri discusses the influence of Persian political writings on this new historical bloc, and the caliph begins to rule in the name of God. During the Rightly-Guided caliphate, the caliph ruled in the name of the Prophet of God; whereas the Umayyads had relied mainly on their army, the ‘Abbāsids began to rule in the name of God.

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82 Ibid., 233–37.
83 Ibid., 259.
84 Ibid., 350.
Islam was primarily a political community developing in Arabia. However, it lacked a coherent political theory. Politics evolved from a delicate balance struck by successive rulers in early Islam between tribe, booty, and ideology. As the Islamic political community became more complex, the relationship between these three factors became more complex, although they remained constant. In his writings, Jābiri does not treat the Prophet (peace be on him) as a saint or religious figure but primarily as a charismatic politician with a tremendous vision for the unification of Arabia. It was, therefore, for the first caliphs to translate this political ambition to a higher plane, which was achieved with the explosion of Islam on the world scene a few years after the death of the Prophet (peace be on him).

What is interesting about Jābiri’s argument is his emphasis on the development and consolidation of the religious elite in the early Islamic state. The disciples of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Sādah (the descendents of the Prophet) climbed on the bandwagon of Islamic expansion. Social mobility was made possible by the tremendous political expansion of the early Islamic state. However, the disciples of the Prophet (peace be on him) were shortchanged when it came to control the Islamic polity. Most could not develop into an oppositional group, since many were co-opted by the state. The dramatic expansion of Islam gave them a chance to migrate and settle in different regions of the state and enjoy the material benefits of such an expansion. Some fought with Muslim armies and died on the battlefields. Others, of course, stayed behind in Arabia, without showing any interest in the riches of this world.

The Umayyad state in particular used the ‘ulamā’ in its expanding administrative structures. Did the Umayyad state take an active role in the institutional training of the ‘ulamā’ in order to meet the increasing religious needs of society and place it under tighter political control? Jābiri does not answer this question directly. However, what he proposes is interesting. He argues that the formation of the religious elite in early Muslim society was totally contingent upon their acquiescence to political authority. Jābiri does not believe, as Gellner argues, that Muslim society had a weak state but a strong culture, which kept “a relatively open, non-hereditary and thus non-exclusive class, but without a central secretariat, general organization, formal hierarchy or any machinery for convening periodic councils.”

hierarchy in order to defend its expanded interests. In addition, Jābiri’s argument about the centrality of the state in the formative phase of Islam and the general dependence of the literati class or religious elite on the state made Islam a weak component of both the social and political fabric of society. Once again, Gellner argues that what is distinctive about Muslim society is that “Islam is the blueprint of a social order”.87

Because of the support they lent the state and the great advantages they derived, the ‘ulamā’ were uninterested in applying the Shari‘ah; in their view, this was not necessary.88 The ‘ulamā’ did not dare raise the banner of the Shari‘ah because in theory, at least, it contained a higher metaphysical authority than the worldly authority of the rulers. The function of the ‘ulama’ did not change much with the advent of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate. On the contrary, in its affluent days the ‘Abbāsid caliphate built more schools and mosques, mainly support its religious authority over both the religious elite and the masses. Therefore, any modern call to implement the Shari‘ah has no historical precedent in Islamic history. The call to apply the Shari‘ah was a direct result of Western intervention in the Muslim world. Undoubtedly, Jābiri’s thesis is intriguing and is damaging to the religious claims of modern Islamic movements. What makes his claim stronger is the fact that the Shari‘ah movement in the main has been spearheaded in the modern Muslim world mainly by people with little formal Islamic education, but by lay Muslim intellectuals and activists impatient with the delicate balance of forces in modern Muslim societies, in which the official ‘ulamā’ play a conspicuous role.

In analyzing the evolution of Islamic political discourse, Jābiri attempts to determine the ideological and discursive bases of political hegemony and dictatorship. He argues that his commitment to democracy as a concept and a process in the modern Muslim world led him to investigate these bases.89 This is all the more justifiable in view of the fact that Islamic political theory did not stipulate a specific kind of Islamic government. Many believe that modern Muslims must choose democracy if they are to revive their political consciousness. In a sense, Jābiri is not at all satisfied with the political unfolding of events, especially in early Islam, which is commonly used as an

87 Ibid., 1. “Islam is the blueprint of a social order. It holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained and independent of the will of men, which defines the proper ordering of society. This model is available in writing; it is equally and symmetrically available to all literate men, and to all those willing to heed literate men. Those rules are to be implemented throughout social life.... Judaism and Christianity are also blueprints of a social order, but rather less so than Islam”. Ibid.

88 Jābiri, al-’Aql al-Siyāsī, 365.

89 Ibid., 365.
ideal by contemporary Muslims and Islamists. Jābirī argues that early political Muslim thinking failed in the following areas: (1) it did not establish clear mechanisms for the appointment of the caliph, nor did it canonize the appointment of the successor; (2) it did not specify the duration of the rule of the caliph, and (3) it did not specify the functions of the caliph; in a sense, these functions were open-ended. The lack of legislation in early Islam left a major political vacuum that the Umayyads utilized in their own way. The political language of the Qurʾān is very thin in that it does not help us understand the normative discourse. The Qurʾān functions as an ideal or model point of view, and a reference that lends support to such universal concepts as justice, equality, distribution of wealth, and brotherhood. Jābirī envisions these qualities as forming the basis of the democratic society he aspires to attain.

Against this background, Jābirī shows that the political game, as practiced in the classical phase, centered on the control of power by one sultan or family. This fact proved to be a hurdle to the growth of political modernity in the medieval Muslim world and an obstacle to real authority for the masses through the process of democracy. Therefore, Jābirī’s basic contention is that the logic of the contemporary Arab state does not much differ from that of the medieval Muslim state; the political elite still rely on a combination of different factors: the tribe, army, ideology, and religion.

The modern Islamic movements have spearheaded a campaign for the application of the Shariʿah in the Muslim world. What is the historical and religious context of such a call? Jābirī discusses this important issue from the point of view of the relationship between religion and politics and its evolution throughout Islamic history. He maintains that this relationship must be examined against the context of the work of the Rightly-guided caliphs; their historical and social experience must work as the model. This relationship has evolved according to the following factors: (1) On the eve of Islam, Arabs lacked any organized political structure; (2) the Prophet (peace be on him) was aware of the theological integrity of his religious message. He was not a statesman but a messenger; (3) the Islamic message evolved into social and political projects, not merely the religious, even during the time of the Prophet (peace be on him), and it was natural that his death caused ‘institutional vacuum’, which since neither the Prophet nor the Qurʾān left any clear rules about how to govern or type of government should emerge. The Qurʾān states only general rules; (4) the meeting taking place in Madinah between the sahabah after the Prophet’s death and their decision to elect Abū Bakr as the first caliph was purely political. Tribal mentality dominated; it was not a religious decision per se. What that means is the issue of the relationship
between state and religion was not subject to discussion during the Prophet’s life or during the time of the Rightly-guided caliphs. Further, early Muslims were aware of the evolution of the Muslim community to an ummah, but to their mind, this was a social and spiritual ummah that shouldered the responsibility of the last religion, the perfect religion, in the view of the Qur’ān. This ummah did not look at itself as establishing a new state, but as bearing the heavy responsibility of the final call. “From the point of view of the Muslims, the Muslim ummah emerged from the Islamic message and its own identity was formed before it evolved into that political system that we call today a state. The term ‘state’ emerged only on the eve of the victory of the ‘Abbāside revolution when the ‘Abbāside and their followers used the term ‘this is our state’ to denote the transition of authority from the Umayyads to them’.”

Against the above context and in the wake of the expansion of Islam and the growth of contending ideologies and political theories, Islamic political thinking developed three positions vis-à-vis the relationship between politics and religion: first was the Shi‘i position, which stipulated that the question of Imāmah (political authority) was the heart of the Islamic message and that its centrality derives from the importance of spreading the Islamic message; further, the Prophet (peace be on him) left a clear text promising the transition of political authority to Ālī and his family. (2) The second position is best illustrated by the Khārijites, who argued that the Imāmah was not necessary as long as the common good was protected and every Muslim family applied the Shari‘ah to its own life. But if Muslims should establish such an Imāmate, it should be established without bloodshed or chaos. (3) The third position is held by the majority of the Sunnī ‘ulama*, who believe that the Imāmah is a must to ensure the common good and protect Muslim life and property.

Jābirī therefore shows that Muslims were not unanimous on the question of politics and religion and that, historically speaking, this relationship was subject to the socio-political and military conditions of the Muslim state. However, the Shari‘ah itself did not mean politics all the time. The Shari‘ah revolved around the common social and economic good of the Muslim community. The common good of modern day Muslims is an important question and is subject to much dispute. Some propose reviving the example of the Rāshidūn caliphs, their example to be correct, having evolved apart from

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91Ibid., 24–30.
political and doctrinal conflicts taking place later. Many insist Muslims must rely on *ijtihad* in order to decide the best rule for them, but agree that rule must recognize that the Muslim world is in a totally unique phase and to competently address the challenges of Western modernity.

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Reason and Revelation: Abū Zayd al-Dabbūsī on Rational Proofs

MURTEZA BEDIR

Background

A typical text of legal theory (usūl al-fiqh) in Islam lays down the ways in which the ethico-legal assessments of human acts are articulated and explained. The main interest of this literary genre is the set of sources (dalīl, literally indication, or hujjah meaning proof or authority) on which these assessments (ahkām) are based. The usually approved sources of law in the Sunnī understanding of Islam, as we know, are four: Kitāb, sunnah, ijmāʿ and qiyās. These four constitute the given in the Sunnī sources of law, so much so that one can hardly argue for a new ‘source of law’ without one’s orthodoxy coming under question. The so-called disputed sources, or as some put it, ‘secondary sources’ of law (for example istiṣlāḥ, istiḥsān, istiṣḥāb, and so on) are either interpreted as sources that are not independent of one of the above-mentioned four sources, or are in fact denied as sources of law in the proper sense. On the other hand, modern Islamic scholarship is disposed to assign crucial importance to these ‘disputed sources of law’ presumably because they tend to assign a relatively higher value to the human dimension of the law.¹

The fundamental characteristic shared by the four sources of law is that they are primarily rooted in divine guidance rather than human-rational evaluation. Even qiyās, wherein human evaluation is somehow involved, becomes a legitimate source of law only when a mujtahid links his evaluation to a particular divine text by referring to ratio legis (‘illah). It may in fact be argued on the basis of the above statement, that it is not an independent source of law but a means to discover what is suggested by the text to be Divine will.²

Consequently, one cannot come across, in a typical usūl text, a separate discussion on the purely rational means of making ethico-legal rulings. Thus, the importance assigned by modern Muslim scholarship to these so-called disputed sources of law did not have much grounding in the classical theory of usūl al-fiqh.

Even so, two interrelated questions are debated in most usūl texts. These, to some extent, touch upon the role of reason in the sharī'ah, which may give us some idea about the relationship between the divine and human dimensions of Islamic legal and ethical reasoning as understood by the classical Islamic scholars. The first of these two themes relates to the nature of things, i.e. whether things are good or bad (ḥasan or qaḥīḥ) per se, or alternatively, to use George Hourani’s formulation, whether the basis of moral-legal values is “objective” or “subjective,” in other words, subject to the commands of God. As known, the first one, the objectivist view, was the Mu’tazili position, while the second was the Ash’ari one. The proponents of the former view believed that there were objective values independent of revelation, whereas the Ashʿarīs rejected any suggestion of there being any means of obtaining values independent of revelation.

The second theme pertaining to the role of reason is treated under the heading of al-ḥazr wa ‘l-libābih (prohibition and permission) in the texts of usūl al-fiqh. This underlies the question: “what is the legal assessment of human acts before the arrival of revelation?” This latter question is related to the problem contained in the former question by the fact that when one answers the first question affirmatively (i.e. affirms that things have an intrinsic quality of good or evil), one is obliged to ask a further question: can human reason, independent of revelation, make a good act obligatory or prohibit an evil act?

In a recent study on these two questions, A. K. Reinhart, shows that the early Islamic thought produced two responses, one arguing for permission and the other for prohibition; namely, that things are regarded either as permitted or prohibited before the arrival of revelation. The former was a widely held view among Muslim scholars down to the middle of the fifth century of Hijrah, while the latter was a minority view. Nevertheless, Reinhart admits

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that the Mu'tazilah and the Ḥanafī school appeared to be the most prominent representatives of the permissive position. When the Ash'arī school became dominant among the Sunnis, the question began to fade away and only the Ḥanafīs were willing to discuss it. However, Reinhart also notes another point: that the Ḥanafīs position on the question was far from being consistent throughout history. After exploring the ideas of Jaṣṣāṣ on the subject in question, Reinhart concludes that the Ḥanafīs were also unanimously in favour of permission in Jaṣṣāṣ' time, a position which was followed by a group of later Ḥanafī thinkers. At the same time, however, there developed among the later Ḥanafīs the trend to blur the distinction between the Ash'arī and Ḥanafī positions. This led Reinhart to conclude that on this issue the Ḥanafīs increasingly moved towards the traditionalism of the Ash'arīs.

Abū Zayd al-Dabbūsī on Reason and Revelation

In this essay, I shall attempt to examine the role of reason vis-à-vis revelation in an usūl text titled Taqwīm al-Adillah by a late 4th/10th and early 5th/11th century Ḥanafī jurist, Abū Zayd al-Dabbūsī (d. 430/1039). Abū Zayd was a prolific writer, a non-Ṣūfī spiritualist and an influential jurist, who had considerable impact on the subsequent development of both Ḥanafī positive law and legal theory. Dabbūsī specially excelled in the science of disputes to the extent that the famous biographer Ibn Khalilikān (d. 681/1282) reckoned him to be the founder of “the science of dispute (ʿilm al-khilāf).” He exercised a great deal of influence on two of the greatest figures of the Ḥanafī usūl, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) and Abū ʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Pazdawī (d. 482/1089). Some of his views in usūl al-fiqh created controversies even among the Ḥanafīs, to the extent that a Māturīdī-Ḥanafī theologian and usūlī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandi (d. 539/1145), probably accused him of being less vigilant as compared to Abū Maḥṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) with regard to the theological implications of his views. According to Samarqandi, most of the Ḥanafī usūl writers — most

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6 Ibid., 43-56.
7 Ibid., 51-56.
probably he was referring to Dabbûsi and his followers in Transoxania — in
his time were not aware that their position ran counter to the Hanafi
principles and was more in line with those of their opponents, namely either
the Mu'tazilah or Ahl al-Hadith, meaning the Ash'arîs.\(^\text{12}\)

Turning to the question of the basis of obligation, the importance of
Dabbûsi lies, firstly, in the fact that he provides invaluable information
regarding the 'objectivist' position of 'permission' to an extent that no other
classical usûl text provides, at least in the Sunni tradition. He gives a detailed
account of the question of the legal value of acts, especially from a rational
perspective. Secondly, he goes beyond the question as presented in the usûl
texts and gives interesting insights about the background and true nature of
the debate in question. He devotes a separate section to this whereby he puts
the issue in the wider context of the relationship between reason and
revelation.

Indeed Dabbûsi bases his whole epistemology on the division of
revelational and rational proofs. Under the former — that is, revelational
proofs — the traditional usûl themes are explored whereas under the latter —
that is, rational proofs — Dabbûsi introduces a new approach to the traditional
usûl al-Fiqh. In order to appreciate his innovation it would suffice to look at the
Hanafi usûl tradition before and after him. No scholar other than Dabbûsi has
treated this subject with such clarity and elaboration nor has given it the same
degree of importance. Before Dabbûsi, Jaṣṣâṣ had dealt with this issue in a
short chapter titled "Discussion on the assessment of the things before
revelation with regard to permission and prohibition". In this chapter Jaṣṣâṣ
only implicitly spoke about a general framework of relationship between
reason and revelation. Indeed, as Reinhart points out, Jaṣṣâṣ is our main source
for the early Ḥanafi position on the matter.\(^\text{13}\)

It is true that two extremely influential Ḥanafi usûl authorities, Sarakhsi
and Pazdawî, closely adopted Dabbûsi's ideas on legal theory. However, on
the question concerning the role of reason, they seem to have chosen to
largely ignore Dabbûsi's contribution, perhaps because his ideas would no
longer fit in the ideological framework of their age — the late fifth/eleventh
century Muslim thought. This is the age when the Muslims began to regard,
to a very large extent, the doctrines of the Ash'ârî and Mâturîdî schools of

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 2-3. The fact that Samarqandi here refers Dabbûsi and his followers is very clear from
his statement that in his time the students of usûl were attracted towards the furû‘-oriented
approach and neglected the more theoretical approach of al-Mâturîdî. The furû‘-oriented
approach in the fifth century onwards was popularized by Dabbûsi and his followers. For this
last point see, M. Bedir, "Early Development", esp. chapter 1.

\(^{13}\) Reinhart, Before revelation, 45-51.
thought as the only forms of Sunnism. Thus, though Sarakhsī and Pazdawi strictly adhered to the “classical” themes of *Taqwīm*, the former even adopting its organizational schema, they did not assign a separate section that Dabbūsī had assigned to the subject of rational proofs. Again, although Sarakhsī and Pazdawi discussed some of the problems that Dabbūsī had treated under the title of “the rational proofs,” they did not adopt the latter’s general theoretical framework. Pazdawi, and following him the later *‘ṣūl* writers, even introduced a heading with the title of “reason (*‘aql*),” under which they treated a few problems relating to reason as Dabbūsī had done, but this is far from being a comprehensive treatment of the relationship of reason and revelation. However, some Ḥanāfī jurists continued to discuss the problem of the tension between reason and revelation in their works throughout the later centuries. An important example is *al-Tawdīḥ* of ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd Ẓād al-Sharī‘ah (d. 747/1346), wherein the author defended the Ḥanāfī position against the Ash‘āri one. Ẓād al-Sharī‘ah’s treatment of the problem was so well received that it drew a number of super-commentaries from the 14th century onwards throughout the Ottoman period. It seems that around this period the problem of the basis of moral obligation was the medium through which scholars pursued their intellectual concerns.

Thus, the late-classical Islamic legal tradition summed up the debate over the role of reason vis-à-vis the *shari‘ah* in the following terms: as to the question whether things in themselves have intrinsic values of good and bad, the Mu‘tazilah and the Māturīdīyyah believed that things are indeed inherently good or bad and that human reason can discover those values. On the other hand, the Ash‘ārīyyah argued that good and bad are not necessary attributes of things but are dependent on the command of God. As to the question whether reason can declare a good act to be obligatory, the Mu‘tazilah and Māturīdīyyah differed among themselves. The former believed that reason could create an obligation while the latter denied that. For the Ash‘āris this second question, which is nothing but an extension of the issue regarding the nature of things before revelation, and was thus irrelevant. Thus, in the late-classical legal literature, the Ḥanafī position was formulated as a Māturīdī one. As a result, the issue was relegated to the sphere of *kalām*. It

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also shows that the later Hanafis preferred to be identified as Māturīdīs, hence Ahl al-Sunnah as distinct from the Muʿtazilah. However, the history of the debate between reason and revelation in the Ḥanafī tradition that position can hardly be regarded as strictly in conformity with the Māturīdī doctrines; on the contrary, it displays much greater complexity. In the following analysis, by exploring the ideas of Dabbūsī in Taqwīm al-Adillah, we shall attempt to shed light on the early history of the debate in question, especially in the Ḥanafī school.

Rational Proofs

The heading Dabbūsī chooses for his treatment of the relationship between reason and revelation is “Rational Proofs (al-ḥujaj al-ʿaqliyyah).” The emphasis on the word ‘proof’ is prompted by the fact that the concept of proof (ḥujjah) constitutes the pivot of his organization of all ṣūṣūl themes. To him, the science of ṣūṣūl, or legal theory, is in fact the science of sources of [legal] knowledge, and hence, in a sense, an aspect of epistemology. In the realm of ḥiqb and šāriʿah, one has to base oneself on the revelational (šariʿ) sources of knowledge: Kitāb, sunnah, ijmāʿ and qiyyās. In the realm outside the šariʿah, however, rational sources of knowledge prevail. However, reason and revelation are not altogether independent of each other, as their main source is the same, i.e. God, the creator of both reason and revelation. Thus, for Dabbūsī, this is a matter that vitally concerns the relationship between religion and reason. On this account, he first explores the traditional treatment of the interconnected issues of reason and revelation by Muslim scholars. However, he is aware that these issues cannot be understood without reference to a general theoretical framework within which these problems make sense. Therefore, he gives a comprehensive account of the relationship between reason and revelation.

The chapter on rational proofs opens by referring to the consensus (ijmāʿ) of the rationalists (ʿuqalaʾ) that one can discover things beyond senses through reason, just as the senses discover things within the world of senses. In fact, Dabbūsī uses the term ʿaql (reason) throughout the text in a highly positive sense with reference to a group of persons, perhaps the philosophers. This is presumable because, in his time philosophy used to be widely taught in Bukhārā where he lived.

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18 Dabbūsī, Taqwīm, 442.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibn Sinā (d. 428/1037), a contemporary of Dabbūsī, studied ḥiqb, and then philosophy in Bukhārā. See L.E. Goodman, Avicenna (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 12. It is
Dabbūsī then refers to a famous discussion on reason, this time among the 'ulamā', thus introducing a debate on reason in the realm of law. This debate concerns whether one could know God at all through reason without the aid of revelation. According to Dabbūsī, there are four opinions on this question:  

(a) that God cannot be known independently by rational means without the assistance of revelation;
(b) that God can be known independently by rational means, but the obligation to reflect on this ensues from revelation;
(c) that God can be known by rational means and that reflection about Him is obligatory even before revelation; and
(d) that this question is absurd. This because man is never left with his reason alone; instead, revelation has always been available to him for his guidance. So he does not need to engage in things which he was not made responsible for.

Dabbūsī's view seems somewhat complex because he places his own position somewhere between the second and the third views. He is aware that the third view, which is known as the Mu'tazili view, goes against the view of the jurists who thought that there can be no obligation before revelation. This latter is the view to which Dabbūsī himself subscribes, something that he makes clear more than once. However, there is a certain appeal for him in the Mu'tazili view which he seems to choose not to ignore. Thus he first praises the second view as the moderate view between two extremes in the following words:

This view, therefore, falls between two extremes, between overrating and underrating (bayna al-ghuluww wa 'l-taqṣīr); the one who denies [the possibility of] knowing God through the indications of reason alone is short of common sense, whereas the one who obliges reasoning without [the aid of] revelation and does not count him (man) excused due to the predominance of desires, which is [also] from Allah Himself, is a transgressor [of the boundaries of mind]. It is more reasonable, then, to accept that God is amenable to be known independently by rational means, but the act of reasoning becomes obligatory only after revelation.

Significant, perhaps, that Dabbūsī speaks of the consensus of the rationalists, not that of the 'ulamā'.

21 Dabbūsī, Taqwīm, 442-3.
22 Ibid., 443, 446, 451, 462.
23 Ibid., 446.
Dabbūsī then draws the reader's attention to the fact that obligation was possible even outside revelation because there are things that reason knows by necessity and man is bound by that knowledge. One example of it is that a mature mind is expected to know God and His basic attributes such as His uniqueness. Just as a reasonable person can conclude from a building that there must be its builder and from a picture that there must be an artist who made it, so will such a person necessarily know the Creator of the universe. What is important here is that Dabbūsī attributes obligation to know God to something other than revelation, namely reason. He says:

... knowledge about the artist of the picture is necessary, because the picture through reason draws his attention to reflect upon it; hence man is obliged to think in a way that completes this knowledge. This indication [arrived at] by means of clear reason resembles the indication of a messenger whose call to men occurs through words that draw their attention.24

Thus Dabbūsī considers rational signs that lead one to believe in God to be on par with the revelational call for belief. This reminds one of the Mu'tazili position that reason and revelation are nothing but two bases of action bestowed upon man by God.25 Two things, however, make Dabbūsī's exposition different from the Mu'tazili one: firstly, his ambivalent and ambiguous expression, so much so that his statements sometimes appear to be mutually contradictory; and secondly, and more importantly, Dabbūsī's circumspect attitude as compared with the Mu'tazilah in formulating his stance which evinces his desire not to diminish the importance of revelation. Thus, while accepting that both reason and revelation are signs of God, he seems to avoid being subjected to the charge of belittling revelation, the usual charge that was directed against the Mu'tazilah.26

What explains this contradiction? That is, why does Dabbūsī say, on the one hand, that the obligation to reflect ensues only from revelation, whereas on the other hand, he accepts the possibility of obligations based on reason alone? What is more, the rest of Dabbūsī's exposition in this piece of writing turns exclusively to rational proofs without referring anymore to the assistance of revelation.

This apparent contradiction can be explained by the historical circumstances of Dabbūsī's age. He lived and worked as a qādi in Bukhāra, in

24 Ibid.
25 Reinhart, Before Revelation, esp. 157–60.
26 Ibid., 173–5.
the last days of Samanid dynasty, who strongly supported the Hanafi school.\textsuperscript{27} Besides, unlike the juridical doctrine, the Hanafi theological position was far from being uniform which gave rise to a variety of doctrines. A certain segment of the Hanafis followed Mu'tazili ideas in matters of creed.\textsuperscript{28} The text of \textit{Tag\u0131m al-Adillah} suggests that there is a certain degree of deliberate effort on the part of Dabbusi not to associate himself with the Mu'tazilah, which perhaps led him to have recourse to a somewhat ambivalent expression. Nevertheless, he seems somewhat attracted to the Mu'tazili attitude on reason. Also, he seems to have borrowed many notions from their repertory of ideas. However, according to Dabbusi there is no contradiction in arguing, on the one hand, that obligation ensues only from revelation while, on the other hand, that in principle even reason can impose an obligation without any reference to revelation. For him, the consensus of jurists that there is no obligation outside the revelation in fact refers to "the obligation to perform (\textit{wuj\u0131b al-ad\u0131})" which is different from "pure obligation." Reason may establish a pure obligation whereas the obligation to perform comes only with revelation.\textsuperscript{29} Dabbusi does not, however, explain what he means by this distinction between the "obligation to perform" and "pure obligation". I will turn to this point later towards the end of this paper.

The Consequences of Rational Proofs

In spite of his hesitant language, Dabbusi feels certain about the role of reason; he advances a theoretical framework within which he attempts to bring rational elements in line with the legal-ethical language of \textit{fiqh}. His starting point is the concept of \textit{hujjah} (proof), as mentioned above. Thereafter, using \textit{fiqh}'s value-language, i.e. the tripartite division of obligation-prohibition-permission (\textit{wuj\u0131b-tahrim-ib\u0131hah}), Dabbusi enumerates what we can learn through our reason. I will first give a concise account of each category of what can be learnt, in Dabbusi's opinion, through reason and then make a few observations at the end. However, before classifying the consequences of rational knowledge, Dabbusi briefly enumerates the rational proofs, namely the indicants, that make a compelling argument, and these are four.\textsuperscript{30} The first of these consists of what may innately be known by reason such as the knowledge of the createdness of the world, or of the existence of a builder


\textsuperscript{28} W. Madelung, "The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks" in \textit{Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam} (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 112 f.

\textsuperscript{29} Dabbusi, \textit{Tag\u0131m}, 451.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 444.
because of the existence of a building. The second category consists of knowing through reason. An instance of this is that after reflection one concludes that the physical world indicates the existence of its Creator. The third type of knowledge is acquired through experience, that is, it is gained empirically, such as the knowledge of medicines and foods. Finally, there is the category of knowledge acquired by reason through the senses. Both humans and animals share this type of knowledge. Thus, these are the four ways in which reason operates, and when it operates, it produces the following alternative results in terms of moral responsibility:

1. It creates an obligation either due to a worldly consideration or a religious consideration.
2. It prohibits in the same way, i.e. it prohibits either due to a worldly consideration or a religious consideration.
3. It allows mankind to act either way, i.e. it produces a result which can be obligatory, prohibited, or else permitted.

Thus the moral obligations created by reason alone amounts in total to six categories: (i, ii) religious and mundane obligations; (iii, iv) religious and mundane prohibitions; and (v, vi) finally, religious and mundane permissions with the possibility of being otherwise. We now proceed to the details of these six categories.

**Worldly Permissions and Obligations**

Dabbūsī’s first category is designated as “the acts definitely permitted on rational grounds relating to worldly matters but not pertaining to mundane matters (mubāhāt al-'uqūl li lhayāt al-dunyā lā li l'din qat'ān)”; these are necessarily and conclusively permitted (wājib al-ibābah qat'ān). Under this category, Dabbūsī enumerates four fundamental elements on which man’s life is based: eating and drinking, protecting the body from external harm, having sexual intercourse, and rearing children. All these are good because life is good; therefore, these acts have to be permitted, for the permission is the very minimum for anything that is good. Permission here is the original state while prohibition is accidental. In other words, it is the nature of these things that dictates their permitted status. When such things are declared as prohibited, that would be for secondary, such as religious considerations. For example, reason can enable one to understand that God created sexual pleasure and that His creation is not devoid of wisdom; the wisdom in the sexual pleasure can be realized only when we take it to be permitted in the first place. However, not every sexual intercourse is permitted, because avoiding pleasure sometimes becomes an act that deserves divine reward. Besides, in order to realize another
fundamental requirement of life — the rearing of children — sexual intercourse outside the matrimonial bond is prohibited.31

A clarification needs to be made regarding this category of acts where the basics of life, though essential, are regarded as permitted. Although Dabbūṣī admits that these acts obligatory, he is careful not to phrase it as such. This is in deference to the maxim: “there is no obligation before revelation” which was so well-entrenched in the minds of his contemporaries that he could not ignore it. Even so, as will be seen in the next category, and indeed in many of the categories that follow, Dabbūṣī uses the word ‘obligation’ or ‘prohibition’ quite freely. In the second category he explains why he used the word ‘permitted’ instead of ‘obligation’ with regard to the first category. In fact his reason is already clear from the title both regarding the first case and the rest of categories of moral obligations created by reason alone.

Dabbūṣī classifies human acts in consideration with their motives, i.e. whether they are motivated by worldly or religious considerations. However, this does not correspond to the distinction between acts before and after revelation. Instead, here reason acts in quest of worldly or other-worldly considerations. The question, however, is: if an act is performed owing to religious considerations, does this mean that it is like an act after revelation and hence can be classified as obligatory or prohibited? For, if there is no obligation outside revelation, then there can be no possibility of obligation for any acts before revelation, irrespective of whether they are motivated by worldly or other-worldly considerations. Thus by making a distinction between the acts done for the sake of worldly and other-worldly considerations, Dabbūṣī tries to avoid the charge that he contradicts his own position that there is no obligation outside revelation.

Here it seems that Dabbūṣī does not subscribe to an overly strict concept of the sharīʿah; instead, he argues that a religiously motivated act can also serve as a basis for an obligation, subtly implying that it was so before or after the arrival of revelation. This seems to be related presumably to the concept of ʾistiṣlāḥ or ʾistiḥsān, according to which a religiously-defined purpose can constitute a legal basis. Since with regard to acts motivated by mundane considerations we are like animals, an obligation cannot be based on them. We can talk of obligation only in respect of acts motivated by religious considerations. Acts done under purely worldly considerations, therefore, cannot be classified as obligatory or prohibited, but if they are in some way linked to a religious consideration then it would be possible to classify them as

31 Ibid., 449-50.
obligatory or prohibited. For example, the basics of life are essential for the existence of human beings which, in turn, is a prerequisite for a pious life.

To sum up, on one hand Dabbūsī rejects the possibility of obligation outside revelation, and on the other, he takes the term revelation (šarî'at) as relating to acts motivated by religious considerations, thereby attributing a role to human reason in constituting moral obligations.

Religious Obligations

The second category deals with the obligations that reason dictates on grounds of religious considerations. Here again it is not revelation but reason that dictates certain obligations. However, the concept of obligation established by reason for religious considerations is still problematic. It is for this reason that Dabbūsī makes a proviso: as he had already pointed out, reason can only constitute “pure obligation”, not “an obligation to perform”. The pure obligation is “the obligation as a duty imposed upon us by way of God’s claim (haqq Allah)”. That is why here four things are considered obligatory: recognition of one’s servitude to God, recognition of God’s divinity, recognition of the world as a place of divine trial, and recognition that the creation of the world is conducive to worldly and other-worldly benefits for mankind. Man is under the obligation to recognize these on grounds of reason for religious considerations. One can perhaps replace the word ‘religious’ by ‘civil’ here because Dabbūsī sees in religion something that distinguishes us from animals.

Religious and Mundane Prohibitions

The third and fourth categories are conclusively rational prohibitions: one consists of the prohibitions for worldly, and the other for religious considerations. Under the former — that is, rational prohibitions for worldly considerations — Dabbūsī enumerates four prohibited things: ignorance, oppression, absurdity and harmful action (jahl, zulm, ‘abath, safah). As for rational prohibitions for religious considerations, they again consist of four acts: recognizing someone other than God as divine, the assertion that the world is created not for trial but for acquisition of pleasure, disbelief in the Creator, and disbelief in the Day of Judgment. Religion prohibits these acts, prohibition here being the original state rather than accidental, i.e. these acts are prohibited because they are intrinsically evil.

32 Ibid., 451-4.
33 Ibid., 455-7.
Worldly Permissions

In the fifth category, Dabbūsī introduces a new element that completes his theoretical framework: inconclusive permissions based on reason in worldly matters (mubahāt al-'uqu'il al-jā'izah li 'l-dunyā). These are again four in number: eating and drinking beyond essential needs, accumulating wealth, and dressing oneself with the intent of adornment beyond one's needs, and engaging in sexual intercourse not for procreation but for pleasure. The permittedness in this case is not decisive; that is, despite the fact that reason sees them permitted, it is possible that revelation informs us of their prohibition. Regarding the conclusively permitted things, permittedness is compelling in a way even revelation is expected to conform due to the fact that God gave man two authorities, reason and revelation. He says:

We mean by 'inconclusive (al-jā'izah)' that it is not definitely but indecisively permitted by reason; and it is considered permitted unless an indication of reason or revelation makes it prohibited ... these are indecisive permissions of reason, that is why revelation sometimes came with their prohibition and sometimes their permission. It was stated before that revelation could not contradict the compelling consequences of reason (mujabāt al-'aql la yaridu al-shar' bi-khilafihā) because revelation and reason are two proofs of Allah on his servants. The proofs of Allah cannot contradict; rather, they but collaborate.

Dabbūsī here offers a solution to a problem which occupied Muslim jurists for long: how to reconcile rational with revelational knowledge when the two contradict each other? Dabbūsī makes a distinction between two kinds of permitted, one is conclusively permitted and the other is inconclusively so. Dabbūsī boldly asserts that the former is compelled by reason regardless of whether revelation affirms it or not. He even argues that revelation cannot contradict these compelling conclusions of reason. Revelation, in fact, becomes active and operative in the second kind of permitted things, whose permittedness is not certain. It is here that revelation is decisive to the extent that it interferes to decide whether it is permitted as reason apparently sees it or otherwise.

Under this category, Dabbūsī concerns himself with the famous debate on the legal assessment of acts that we have mentioned in the beginning of this paper. What is the original moral-legal status of acts? It is clear from Dabbūsī's exposition that he sees this debate confined to some rather than to all human

34 Ibid., 458-61.
35 Ibid., 458.
acts. This is in keeping with Jaššās’s formulation before him.36 This because Dabbūsī thinks that the search for the original status of acts becomes relevant when there is no compelling conclusion of reason. In the latter case, assessments are based on reason. It is only when there is no clear indication of reason that we resort to the argument of the ‘original state’.

Here again Dabbūsī is innovative in relegating the debate to the things reason considers to be permitted indecisively. For some of the jurists, the original state of things is prohibition, while for others it is unknowable by reason. Although we know that Dabbūsī considers the original state of acts to be permitted, he engages in a long debate to provide the justification of his position as well as to answer the points raised by his opponents. The crux of his argument is that the world has been created for man’s benefit, which requires that these things be regarded as permitted. This is further reinforced by the fact that every prohibition imposed on man by God is caused by His concern for man’s welfare: for example, adultery is banned in order to protect the future generations; the swine are prohibited in order to protect people from the perverse nature of swine which would pass to those who eat their flesh had its eating been allowed. If a thing is not prohibited by revelation, Dabbūsī concludes, it is permitted in order that God’s compassionate concern for man to may be realized. He likens the prohibitions of God to the prohibitions of a physician who bans a patient from having certain foods which in normal conditions might be beneficial to him. It is, therefore, reason that lays down the original state of acts, which is permission, while revelation accidently imposes a prohibition because of a secondary consideration. Dabbūsī says:

It is understood that the permittedness of having things beyond the need is an established principle by an apparent but not conclusive indication of reason (bi-
dalīl al-aql zāhiran lā qat’an); but it is still a ground on which one is obliged to act unless revelation makes it clear that the truth is the opposite of it, which is also a possibility of reason. Thus the revelational indication becomes like an indication that specifies [the general verdict of] reason. It has then the same status as the particular that comes after the general where the latter remains operative outside the specified area (ka ‘l-mukhassas li dalīl al-aql wa yakūnu ḥukmubu ḥukm al-khāṣṣ yaridu ‘alā ‘l-‘āmm ḥujjatan fi fīmā lam yarid al-khussūs fih).37

The idea that reason constitutes the fundamental structure of morality and law while revelation makes additional adjustments over that structure is a fairly bold assertion. Dabbūsī reinforces this further when he makes a

37 Ibid., 460.
distinction between “good in itself (hasan li-dhātīh)” and “good for an external reason (hasan li-ghayrih)” or, contrariwise, “evil in itself” and “evil for an external reason.”38 “Good in itself” is what our reason considers good, which is further backed by God’s command, whereas “good for an external reason” is merely what God commands man to do. So is evil. A good established by two indications of God, namely revelation and reason, is superior to a good established by one indication alone, namely revelation.

The Role of Revelation and the Permitted Acts

The final category of moral obligations also deals with the acts that reason considers permitted, but here revelation is also involved; in other words, the role of revelation is discussed vis-à-vis reason.39 The title of the category, as usual, summarizes Dabbûsî’s point: “religious rules whose institution as well as revocation is seen possible by reason, in that the rule of abrogation is operative in them which at times interrupt the continuity of their obligation.” Reason holds certain acts to be permitted and revelation qualifies them as obligatory. Due to reason’s initial permission, the following question arises: what is the legal-moral status of these acts outside revelation? Four views emerged on this point. The first view states that we are not supposed to engage in this question, as we are never left alone. The second view asserts that unless revelation adds further good, the good established by reason remains as such. The third view makes a distinction between acts of worship including believing in God and enforcing punishments in this world. The former, according to this view, is constantly obligatory, while the latter becomes obligatory only after revelation. Dabbûsî attributes this view to some Ṣâfîs. He presents his own position by stating that even on merely rational grounds man is required to believe in God and to recognise that he is expected to surrender himself to God and follow His commands and prohibitions as well as to recognise that he was created to worship Him. However, when it comes to the performance of what man considers God’s expectations of him, Dabbûsî says the following:

He should withdraw himself from action; but this is not because these acts are evil in nature prior to the commandment by God of them but it is due to the respect toward God Almighty (ta’zīman li ‘Ilāh) in spite of recognizing that they are good by the indications of reason. This is the view of our masters — may God’s mercy be upon them. It is for this reason that sending the prophets — peace be upon them — is obligatory on God Almighty so that they [i.e. people]

38 Ibid., 44–6.
39 Ibid., 462–4.
find opportunity to worship.⁴⁰

Dabbūsī turns here to a point that he touched upon in the beginning: the distinction between two sorts of obligation: “pure obligation” and “obligation to perform.” In his opinion, reason provides the basis for “pure obligations”, whereas “the obligation to perform” comes with revelation.

The following diagram includes these six categories:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Reason and moral obligation} \\
\quad \text{Necessary consequences} \\
\quad \text{Worldly considerations} \\
\quad \text{Other-worldly considerations} \\
\quad \text{Permissions (obligations)} \\
\quad \text{prohibitions} \\
\text{Possible consequences} \\
\quad \text{Worldly permissions} \\
\quad \text{Other-worldly permissions} \\
\quad \text{obligations} \\
\quad \text{prohibitions}
\end{array}
\]

**Conclusion**

To sum up, Dabbūsī divides the knowable things according to reason under two major categories. The first category consists of the things that reason knows by necessity, while the second category consists of the things reason may or may not know. The knowledge of the first category, like mathematical or sensible knowledge, is categorical and therefore revelation cannot contradict it. Here Dabbūsī is quite certain that human beings are bound by the knowledge that comes as a result of rational necessity. In the second category, where there is no certainty about the outcome of reason’s effort, the shari‘ah interferes. In a sense, Dabbūsī confines the debate mentioned at the beginning of this paper to this second category, i.e. where reason produces no definite results; this because the first category is not open to controversy. One

⁴⁰ Ibid., 462.
tends to see this distinction as a reflection of the differentiation between the realms of *fiqh* and *kalām*. As we know, even the Ash'aris admitted that in the latter realm reason is indispensable. However, for two reasons this is not true. First of all, Dabbūsī deals with this question not in a *kalām* text but in a text on *usūl al-fiqh*. Secondly, here the knowable things that reason dictates are not only matters of belief but acts of ethical and legal nature, such as acting in accordance with justice, the necessity of eating, etc. Therefore it cannot be read simply as a distinction between belief and action. Dabbūsī’s exposition certainly involves matters that traditionally fall within the domain of *fiqh*. Thus we need a different categorization in order to make sense of the exercise Dabbūsī was engaged in.

Looking from the vantage point of the modern times, one can argue that Dabbūsī in fact tried to formulate a rational system within which the *shari‘ah* could be placed. In other words, he attempted to deduce the general principles of law upon which its detailed rules are based. He seemed to see in the jurists’ debate over reason and revelation a tendency toward belittling the role of reason in their unanimous conclusion that reason could not create obligations. Dabbūsī offered an alternative whereby rational realities are accepted alongside incorporating revelation. However, since Dabbūsī was, after all, a pre-modern scholar, it was not possible for him to make the kind of conceptual distinction that modern man makes between secular and religious realms or between pure science and social or human sciences. He, therefore, tried to accommodate what belongs to the realm of *fiqh* to the general rational system by creating a category of inconclusive sphere of rational knowledge. He also tried to develop the distinction between “obligation to act” and “pure obligation” in order to reconcile his and his fellow jurists’ initial assumption that there is no obligation outside revelation.

Reading Dabbūsī’s account in the light of the developments that the world has gone through during the last two centuries enables one to make some speculative observations. True, it is extremely risky to make speculations in our time regarding the totally different world of Dabbūsī, the world of eleventh-century Bukhārā. Even so, one cannot escape observing that Dabbūsī’s distinction between “obligation to perform” and “pure obligation” can be more meaningful when it is viewed in the light of modern developments. In principle, Dabbūsī believes that reason can impose obligations, indeed it already imposes on us to act in accordance with justice and knowledge and refrain from hurting others, etc. Even revelation is obliged to confirm these and in fact it does so. “Obligation to perform,” on the other hand, seems to be a concession to the traditional worldview which brings the whole ethical and legal relations, even some of the purely regulatory relations,
under the aegis of fiqh, thereby extending it to the proper legal sphere. However, as the modern conditions have demonstrated, reading fiqh in a purely legal sense would distort its original meaning, namely “one’s understanding of what is beneficial and what is harmful for oneself” (ma’rifat al-nafs mā-labā wa mā-‘alayhā) as defined by Abū Ḥanīfah.

A more significant aspect of Dabbūsī’s contribution to the relationship of reason and revelation is related to his expanding the scope of revelation in order to include a rational act prompted by religious motivation. By this means, he tried to accommodate human reason into religious thinking. But the converse is also true, viz. that he incorporated religious morality into a wider context of human morality. To achieve this, it was enough for Dabbūsī to characterize an act on grounds whether it was done with religious or mundane motives. A rational act becomes on par with a religious act if it also has a religious motivation. Here perhaps Dabbūsī again approaches the contemporary notion of ‘individual religion’. An act is seen related to the shari‘ah if it is motivated by religious considerations. However, this aspect of Dabbūsī’s scheme must have stemmed from his Sufi spiritualist formation.

Dabbūsī’s account of the relationship between reason and revelation is extremely sophisticated, but it is neglected even in the Ḥanafī usūl tradition where he was otherwise extremely influential. What is more, the commonality between the doctrine of Mu’tazilah and the Ḥanafī school, two representatives of Ahl ar-Ra’y, at least in the time of Dabbūsī, is beyond what was generally believed to be. This, however, should not to be taken as an indication of this or that Ḥanafī scholar being a Mu’tazili; on the contrary, it only shows that what Sunnism came to mean had not yet been defined at the time of Dabbūsī, namely early fifth/eleventh century. It is only towards the end of that century that one comes across a clear definition of Sunnism in the Ash’ari and then Māturīdī sense. To apply the standards of the late fifth/eleventh century onwards to earlier times would lead to conceptual confusion. Besides, this can also be taken as an evidence that, up until the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, the Mu’tazilah at the level of kalām and the Ḥanafīs at the level of fiqh had maintained a more rational outlook. However, after the formulation of Ash’arism and Māturidism as the two legitimate forms of Sunnism, the rational element was reduced. Nevertheless, we should avoid, at least for the

41 For the reading of fiqh in legal terms see Murteza Bedir, “Teaching Islamic Law in a Secular State”, paper presented at the International Summer Academy by ISIM and Working Group Modernity and Islam: Local Production of Islamic Knowledge, 3-14 September 2001, Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul.

42 For Dabbūsī’s views on Sufism and spiritualism, see Murtaza Bedir, “Interplay of Sufism Law and Theology: An Early Eleventh Century Example”, The IVth International Conference of Islamic Legal Studies on Sufism and Law, Murcia, España, 8-11 Mayis, 2003.
moment, making definitive judgments regarding the early phase of Islamic legal thought. Such judgements will have to wait until the huge literature that lies in the libraries scattered all over the world is thoroughly examined. As to the relationship between reason and revelation, one needs only to compare Dabbūsī's account with that of his contemporaries, especially that of the Muʿtazilah, but not excluding others.
Limits of Instrumental Rationality

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Abstract
This paper is an examination of Robert Nozick's argument in The Nature of Rationality that instrumental rationality is defective, and that the defects of instrumental rationality can be understood through a careful appraisal of the significance of Newcomb's paradox and the prisoners' dilemma.

In both Anarchy, State and Utopia and in The Nature of Rationality, Nozick considers the question of why we should be rational, and concludes that the call of reason issues from the fact that we value what we are. Rationality is so important to us that it becomes a duty because it is in terms of and by means of rationality that we understand who we are. Our worldview is an artifact shaped, at least in part, by our evaluative standards of cognitive assessment.

Nozick goes on to ask why we should value that. And to answer the query, he considers the functions that rationality may have, beginning with instrumental rationality. To be instrumentally rational is to pursue one's goals and desires in the most efficient and effective way. Hence, prudence and self-interest commend instrument rationality, or, what amounts to the same thing, instrumentality commands itself. Being prudent is itself prudent. However, Nozick concedesthat the value of rationality goes beyond what can be explained in terms of a purely instrumental rationality.

Even if we were to begin with a purely instrumental view of rationality, we might come to value it for its own sake, and so it may come to have intrinsic value. We should be rational because we value being that way. The endorsement given by reason to instrumental rationality, however, is not the issuing of a blank check. Instrumental rationality itself will counsel that we not put too much time and effort into developing the skills of instrumental rationality, for beyond a certain point the amount gained in overall efficiency will not be worth the lost opportunities for other pursuits.

Nozick argues that actions could acquire value not only because of the consequences which can be expected to follow from them, but because of what Nozick calls their symbolic utility. Some, but not all, cases in which one decides to perform an act because of its symbolic utility appear to be rational. All of the convincing cases of rational action performed because of symbolic utility offered by Nozick are cases of action performed in accordance with principle. Consideration of the sage provides the occasion to introduce additional means by which value may accrue to an action, in terms of which we may judge the performance of the action to be rational. There is no harm in considering these means as independent elements of symbolic utility, provided we bear in mind that these elements may be quantitatively incommensurable with those derived from accordance with principle.

Rules or principles provide only one way in which actions may be guided. Another way is by consideration of consequences. A third way in which actions may be guided is with reference to virtue. Sometimes the appeal to virtue will be personified in an exemplar. We acquire skills by imitation of the actions of teachers. We may attempt to acquire virtues by acting in ways that are typical of the virtuous exemplar. This mode of practical guidance plays an important role in various traditions, from those of the ancient Greeks to those of the Abrahamic religions.

While Nozick argues in favor of an expanded notion of instrumental rationality, I counter that the notion of practical rationality should be expanded beyond that which can be considered as instrumental rationality.

Keywords: Robert Nozick, instrumental rationality, symbolic utility.
Introduction
Robert Nozick (1939-2002) was a distinguished professor at Harvard University who wrote on a wide range of topics, including ethics, epistemology, philosophy of science, political philosophy, mind, and much more. His book (1974) on political philosophy, Anarchy, State and Utopia received a National Book award and was often introduced as a rival to John Rawls’ (1971) A Theory of Justice. Rawls argued that political institutions need to alleviate the conditions of the least fortunate members of society, while Nozick argued that government should not interfere in the distribution of wealth that results from free markets. His career began, however, with work on Newcomb’s paradox, a puzzle in decision theory that was the topic of Nozick’s dissertation. He returned to this topic in a later work, The Nature of Rationality.

What follows is an examination of Nozick’s (1993) argument in The Nature of Rationality that instrumental rationality is defective, and that the defects of instrumental rationality can be understood through a careful appraisal of the significance of Newcomb’s paradox and the prisoners’ dilemma. But before turning to the details of this argument, some general points about Nozick’s views about rationality are worth noting.

In both Anarchy, State and Utopia and in The Nature of Rationality, Nozick (1974: 42-45) considers the question of why we should be rational, and concludes that the call of reason issues from the fact that we value what we are. Rationality is so important to us that it becomes a duty because it is in terms of and by means of rationality that we understand who we are. Our worldview is an artifact shaped, at least in part, by our evaluative standards of cognitive assessment.

Nozick goes on to ask why we should value that. And to answer the query, he considers the functions that rationality may have, beginning with instrumental rationality. To be instrumentally rational is to pursue one’s goals and desires in the most efficient and effective way. Hence, prudence and self-interest commend instrumental rationality, or, what amounts to the same thing, instrumentality commends itself. Being prudent is itself prudent. However, Nozick concedes that the value of rationality goes beyond what can be explained in terms of a purely instrumental rationality, and he turns to Heidegger for support:

Moreover, there is the theme emphasized by Heidegger: instrumental tools, used often enough, can become extensions of ourselves; our boundaries can extend through them to their ends.

1. Similar points are made by Nicholas Rescher (1993) Also see the discussion by Hilary Putnam (2002) who claims that John Dewey anticipated Nozick’s point.

2. This point is also made by Rescher.
as we interact with the world. Thus rationality . . . can with sufficient utilization become an extension of ourselves and be assimilated within ourselves as an important part of our identity and being. (136)

Even if we were to begin with a purely instrumental view of rationality, we might come to value it for its own sake, and so it may come to have intrinsic value. We should be rational because we value being that way. The endorsement given by reason to instrumental rationality, however, is not the issuing of a blank check. Instrumental rationality itself will counsel that we not put too much time and effort into developing the skills of instrumental rationality, for beyond a certain point the amount gained in overall efficiency will not be worth the lost opportunities for other pursuits. Indeed, something like this seems to be a recurrent theme of Persian poetry.

**Symbolic Meaning**

Perhaps the most important feature of Nozick’s theory of rationality is the role played by symbolic meaning. Nozick argues that standard decision theory needs to be expanded to incorporate the explicit appraisal of the symbolic meanings of actions, along with other factors. The result of this revision is a theory of practical reasoning that is considerably broader than the standard purely instrumental theory. In order to understand the significance of the ideas of symbolic meaning and symbolic utility for theories of rationality, we should begin with some general remarks about the nature of rationality and the employment of principles.

An action or a belief is considered rational for a person in a given context when the action is performed or the belief is held for adequate reasons. The adequacy of reasons depends in part on their generality. For a reason to be a good one it should be applicable to anyone in a relevantly similar context. This generality is captured in the notion of a principle. So, Nozick contends, “To think or act rationally just is to conform to (certain kinds of) principles.” (40).

There are already a few points in these introductory remarks about which we may take issue with Nozick. Nozick speaks of conformity to principles, but this will not be sufficient for rationality when it is accidental. It is not enough for one to believe and do things which happen to conform to principles, rather one should believe and do these things because they conform to principles. There are also philosophical problems involved in various attempt to explain what it means to have a reason for believing something, questions about whether all such reasons must be propositional, and questions about whether one must be conscious of one’s reasons. To explore these issues would divert us from our course, but even if we refuse to accept Nozick’s claim that rationality consists of
conformity to principles, we can grant that rationality requires conformity to principles.

Not only might we inquire into the rationality of beliefs and actions, but we may also discuss the rationality of the adoption of the principles themselves. To do so we will need to appeal to principles for the adoption of principles. If the purpose of this inquiry were to provide a general justification of the employment of principles, circularity would threaten. We should find ourselves attempting to justify the adoption of principles of rational decision on the basis of those very principles. To avoid the circularity we should avoid the question. Our purpose is not to find a general justification for appeals to principles, but rather to examine the functions that principles actually perform. If we value the performance of such functions, and if principles perform these functions best, then at least the adoption of principles may be seen to have instrumental rationality.

Nozick observes that principles of action group actions in order to serve various kinds of functions: intellectual, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and personal.

We use the attempt to formulate principles as an intellectual test of our judgments in both the practical and theoretical realms. For example, to fit a curve through a set of data points is to attempt to formulate a principle in terms of which the data may be understood and further judgments may be extrapolated. Legal decisions also require the employment of principles as a means of checking the bias of one's judgments.

One of the major tasks philosophers of science set for themselves in the 1950's and '60's was to distinguish scientific laws from accidental generalizations. It was found that accidental generalizations fail to support subjunctive inferences to new cases. The features held by Hempel and Nagel to enable lawlike statements to support subjunctive inferences may also be taken as marks of principles:

1. Principles should not contain terms for particular individual objects, dates, or temporal periods - or if they do they should be derivable from others that do not.
2. Principles are universal rather than finite conjunctions of statements.
3. Principles are supported not just by instances falling under them but also by a linkage of indirect evidence.

From philosophy of science we know that for any set of data points an indefinite number of curves can be drawn, many of which may be lawlike by the above criteria, so additional criteria are utilized: simplicity, analogy to lawlike statements in related areas, fit with other accepted theories, explanatory power, theoretical fruitfulness, and ease of computation. Just as there is underdetermination of theory by evidence, there may be underdetermination of
moral theory by the totality of clearly correct moral judgments. But whether we are looking for laws of physics or principles of moral law, the principles we seek will have similar general features. The attempt to formulate principles with these features and to defend them from rivals is a means by which our judgments in the areas to which the principles apply are intellectually evaluated. So, one reason for employing principles is that they feature importantly in the evaluation of our judgments. Since we value this sort of intellectual evaluation of judgment, and since we know of no better means to perform such evaluations, the employment of principles is instrumentally rational.

Another function the adoption of principles may serve is to win trust. This is an example of what Nozick calls an interpersonal function of principles. One who acts on principles can be trusted to some extent not to be overcome by temptations such as threats or bribes or by greed. Trust is given because principles make behavior reliable, and this enables us to make plans contingent on the behavior of others. Reliability in the behavior of those close to us may be based on affection, but in the absence of the ties of affection we depend upon principled behavior. Entering into contracts reinforces principled behavior. It is also reinforced by announcement of principles so as to incur the benefit of what economists have called reputation effects.

Trust is increased if the one trusted is seen to accept principles intellectually, not simply as a means to winning reputation effects. Trust upon which great risk is based will also require that the other’s commitment to principle is stable, even in the face of counter-argument, or other inducements to abandon the principle. In this regard, Nozick notices the value of religious belief:

(Similarly, the belief that certain conduct is divinely prescribed and that all deviations will meet dire punishment might be a useful belief for people to have, whether or not it is true or makes any sense at all, provided it guarantees to others a person’s continuing conduct.) This raises the possibility of a sociobiological explanation not of particular patterns of conduct but of the belief in an objective moral order. Believing in correctness might be selected for. (11)

Nozick also observes that winning trust requires that one can be observed to be following principles, with the result that inferior principles might be followed in some contexts because they are more readily observed. The example of auditing practice is noted, in which auditing firms follow rules whose application
can be externally checked so that they can assure potential investors of their trustworthiness, even though such procedures do not provide the most revealing information about a business’s finances.

Nozick finds further reasons for adopting principles in what he calls their personal functions. Principles assist in defining one’s identity. Principles followed over a period of time help integrate a life and add coherence to it. Principles allow one to engage in long term plans and commitments because one trusts oneself to abide by the principles and thus make the undertaking worth while. Nozick also points out that principles can save decision effort on the part of creatures like ourselves who enjoy only limited powers of rationality by functioning as filtering devices within a certain level of tolerance. We use principles to weed out various choices we would otherwise feel a need to evaluate. Without principles our evaluative task would be overwhelming.

One of the most interesting reasons for adopting principles discussed by Nozick is to overcome temptation. The sort of temptation Nozick has in mind is best illustrated by imagining that at some initial time, \( t=0 \), we find that there is greater expected utility in embarking on a project than in not taking it up. Assume that the completion of the project occurs at the end of interval \( C \). However, during interval \( B \), expected utility would be maximized by abandoning our project in favor of the one whose completion would occur at the end of interval \( B \). To act in accordance with expected utility during interval \( B \) would be to succumb to temptation and abandon the long term goal with greater reward in favor of a smaller but more immediate reward. When a more immediate reward is seen as having higher expected utility during a short-term interval, we have what is called *time-discounting*. Economic and psychological data show that we discount the future. We care less for far future than for immediate future rewards. This caring less is not explained by the decreased probability that far future rewards will be obtained. Nozick suggests that time preference may be evolution’s way of yielding the same effect as taking into account the decreased probabilities would yield. That is, humans don’t take probabilities sufficiently into account, so instead they have a built in mechanism of valuing far future things less. If in our calculations, we then do take probabilities into account, plus we value the temporally distant less than the proximate, there would be a double discounting. Of course this is all highly speculative, for there may be other reasons for time preference, maybe on the grounds that our preferences might change.

Assuming that we would like to avoid succumbing to temptation, there are various strategies that we might employ to get through interval \( B \). Like Ulysses, one could lash oneself to the masts during the period one could hear the sirens’
song. The psychologist George Ainslie also suggests that to avoid temptation one might make a bet that one will not give in, or, one might adopt a principle. The adoption of the principle will have the effect of decreasing the utility of abandoning one’s long term project, because to do so would be to violate the principle. By adopting a principle we consider all actions of a class the same way, so to perform a forbidden act takes on the disutility of always performing the forbidden act. For to violate the rule once makes it more likely that one will violate it again. Not only that, but if one violates a principle, one will be less likely to stick to principles generally, which will have severe disutility. So, a rational policy for the adoption of principles will require our principles to be strict enough so that one’s goals are reached, but not so strict that violations are likely.

We now are in a position to see a conflict between two views of (instrumental) rationality. From the point of view of classical decision theory, the rational thing to do during interval B is to abandon the long term goal in favor of the proximate gain. Nozick argues that it is rational to act otherwise by adopting a principle, making a bet, or other means, because the interval B is not representative. The periods in which one would judge it rational to pursue the long-term goal sum to a longer interval.

There are a number of deep philosophical issues lurking here over which Nozick skips. Standard approaches to decision theory advise that to act rationally one should act in such a way as to maximize expected utility at the time when the decision is made. Times other than the moment of decision are not considered relevant. This limitation of focus to the time of decision or deliberation has the effect of atomizing the individual through moments of choice. This, however, is not the way we see ourselves. We define ourselves in terms of long standing character traits, principles, values, and interpersonal associations. All of these deepen when they are held for a long time; they become more important.

One might try to take account of all this from within standard decision theory simply by considering all of these things as values in terms of which we are to judge the expected utilities of specific actions. There are several ways one might argue against this strategy, (although Nozick himself does not directly deal with the issue here, but discusses a similar point with respect to the Prisoner’s Dilemma, which we shall examine shortly).

First, one could argue that the value of not giving in to temptation is not the sort of value that can be quantified, so that even if the values of the projects completed at the end of intervals B and C are quantifiable, no adjustment could
be made to take into account the value of resisting temptation. There seems to be some point to this line, but I will not press it, because if it were correct we would not need to consider the issue of temptation at all, but could reject decision theory simply on grounds of the unquantifiability of some of the values of our actions. For the sake of argument, then, assume that there is no problem about the quantifiability of values.

Secondly, the point of the temptation example seems to be that no matter what values one uses to calculate expected utility, decision theory will always tell you to choose the action with the greatest expected utility, regardless of what actions one has performed in the past. But intuitively, it seems that we may consider it to be regrettable that we chose to perform an action with maximum expected utility precisely because the choice did not take into account the history of our previous efforts. Decision theory is exclusively future oriented, while our intuitive judgments about rational decisions are not. Decision theory says that the expected utility of an action should be independent of what alternative actions could be performed, but to increase the value of reaching the goal at the end of period C (or to decrease the value of reaching the goal at the end of period B) on the grounds that the prize becomes sweeter with long pursuit will not be sufficient to undermine the rationality of giving in to some temptations. For example, suppose I am an architect and have been working on a project for several years for which I will be paid a certain dollar amount upon the completion of the project, say $1,000,000 ($M). The further the project is from completion, the less likely it will ever be completed because of uncontrollable contingencies. At present, there is a 75% probability that the project will be completed. So the value of continuing the project at present is $.75M. I am now offered $.85M to abandon my project in favor of another whose completion will take less than six months and the probability of the success of which makes the value of accepting the new offer $.8M. Despite the greater expected gain, it would seem rational to refuse the offer because of the value I attach to the $M project, not only because of the money, but because I have become attached to the project. Suppose we try to figure some extra value into the original project to reflect the value which stems from its long pursuit. Suppose this doubles the value at the time of completion, so that the value of pursuing it at present is $1.5M. This means that it would be rational for me to refuse the $.85M offer. Suppose, however, that there were many successive six month projects like this that I could take. Then it might seem rational to abandon the long term project, even though when viewed in isolation from each other, I should resist the temptation each poses to my original project. The values which should be assigned to each project cannot be determined independent of one another, even if extra value is added for length of time dedicated to any given project.
A third and final argument for the inability of standard decision theory to provide a proper account of temptation has to do with the way expected utilities are calculated. The expected utility of an action is determined by the values of the causal effects of the performance of the action multiplied by the probability that those effects will be realized. The value given to the performance of an action because the action is performed in the course of a long term project does not derive from any causal outcome of its performance, but is an additional value. To value the performance of an action because it falls under a principle one has adopted is not to value the action on the basis of its results, but on the basis of the fact that it falls under the principle. This point may be generalized to block the reduction of rule utilitarianism to act utilitarianism. The reductionist claims that act utilitarian principles may warrant the act of adopting rules of action. Suppose then one is faced with a decision of whether to perform a given action. The rule says not to perform it. The principle of utility says to perform it. In such a situation the act utilitarian should violate the principle he adopted and perform the action. The warrant given by the principle of utility for the decision to accept a rule at a given time does not transfer to the acts which are covered by the rule. The reductionist may try to cover his tracks by pointing to the causal effects of violating rules, e.g. the undermining of one's reputation, but these effects are accidental, and in their absence there would be no reason to abide by one's previous decisions.

In fact, Nozick's position with respect to decision theory is in some ways like that of the rule utilitarian who finds fault with act utilitarian theory. The act utilitarian allows appeal to only one ethical principle: act so as to realize the maximum utility for the maximum number of people. Rule utilitarians claim that the attempt to follow this principle is self-defeating, that is, attempts to act solely on the basis of maximizing utility will, in the long run, lead to the realization of less utility than would be obtained if one adhered strictly to moral rules. Nozick's argument is similar, but it is applied to rational choice theory rather than ethics. It is more rational to act in accordance with principle than to act always so as to maximize expected utility, even if the maximization of expected utility is so defined as what we value most.

Nozick's next swipe at standard decision theory comes by consideration of George Ainslie's suggestion that another way to overcome temptation is by investing a great deal into the long term project. But economists argue that sunk costs should be ignored. Nozick claims that the best policy for monetary gain may be to ignore sunk costs, but in life our projects help us define who we are, and sunk costs can only be ignored at the cost of personal integrity. It is also wise to honor sunk costs because to do so gives us a potent weapon against temptation. The idea that principles enable one to avoid temptation also involves
the notion of honoring sunk costs, for to violate the principle is to waste all the previous effort made to honor it. So, we can find good reason to adopt policies for rational decision making, such as honoring sunk costs, which violate economic norms of rationality. The reason why standard decision theory may be acceptable for economics, but not for more general areas of life, is because in economics one is generally concerned exclusively with monetary value, while in general contexts we are concerned with values such as personal integrity and tradition whose maintenance requires more than action which maximizes expected utility measured in terms of fixed values.

Once the rationality of adopting principles has been secured by virtue of the functions they perform, as indicated above, we will find that the actions of someone with principles will often have a symbolic utility. When one acts according to a principle, the action takes on a symbolic meaning. Doing the particular action stands for one’s determination to abide always by the principle. Abiding by the principle in a particular case may play some psychological role to enable one to keep to the principle in the future, and it may effect one’s estimate of the probability that one will hold the line in the future, but Nozick contends that symbolic meaning cannot be identified with either the causal or the evidential element of the adoption of principles. Furthermore, actions may have symbolic meaning in many different ways, not all of which involve the adoption of principles. The symbolic meaning of an action will influence the value of performing it. Nozick suggests that the value of what is symbolized is imputed back to the action which symbolizes it. This sort of evaluation of actions is not always rational. In fact, some paradigm cases of irrational behavior may be explained in terms of symbolic meaning and the imputation of value along symbolic lines. Various theories of personality disorders, such as compulsive behavior, must hold not only that actions can symbolize other events or conditions, but also that they draw upon themselves the emotional meaning and utility values of these other events.

In standard decision theory, value is imputed back to actions along causal lines, and it is in this way that actions acquire expected utility. The performance of an action which has a fifty percent chance of success will have half the value of that success. The expected utility of the action is determined by the utility of its causal effects attenuated by the chance that those effects will not be realized. Psychology and anthropology, however, attest to the fact that, rationally or not, people value the performance of actions not only for the consequences they bring, but for what they symbolize. Symbolic meanings are part of the reason for ethical behavior as well as neurotic behavior. Nozick writes: “Being ethical is among our most effective ways of symbolizing (a connection to) what we value most highly.” Nozick does not, however, propose a theory of how to distinguish
the rational imputation of symbolic utilities from the irrational, although he suggests that symbolic meanings which tend to be lost once one gains knowledge of their causes are irrational.

Another tactic would be to support the rationality of symbolic meanings in a manner similar to that employed by Nozick to demonstrate the rationality of the adoption of principles. The adoption of principles is rational because it enables us to realize various goals, such as the avoidance of temptation, winning trust, gaining a sense of one’s own identity, etc. Likewise, we should consider the functions of the conferral of symbolic meanings. Nozick himself points out that our lives are enriched by symbolic meanings and their expression, the symbolic meanings our culture attributes to things or the ones we ourselves bestow. We have also mentioned that ethical behavior is highly symbolic. The symbolic value of ethical behavior may be explained in part by the role of ethical principles, but the principles themselves may also be reinforced by the symbolic meanings associated with them. If rationality itself is a matter of having reasons according to general principles for beliefs and actions, there seems to be no shortage of reasons for engaging in the attribution of symbolic meaning to various objects and actions.

Nozick does not develop a theory of how symbolic meanings are generated or interpreted. In a note he raises the question of whether the symbolic utility of an action might determined by the interpretation of that action so that the various theories of interpretation might enter into the specification of symbolic utility. Here we find Nozick opening a door between hermeneutics and decision theory, although he does not cross over the threshold. Instead, he remarks on the need to broaden decision theory to take account of symbolic meaning, proposes a few steps in this direction, and admits that a detailed theory of symbolic utility awaits development. He is insistent, however, on the point that symbolic utilities cannot be treated simply as values within standard decision theory. One reason for this is that symbolic utilities do not obey an expected value formula. Sometimes an action which will only probably have a given symbolic effect will have no symbolic utility at all, while in other cases the performance of an action with the intention of bringing about some result with high symbolic value may have symbolic utility precisely because it is so unlikely that the action will be successful. Nozick suggests that we might explain observed deviations from an expected value formula and from the associated axioms of decision theory by attributing these to the presence of symbolic utilities.

The recognition of symbolic utilities is of such monumental importance for Nozick that he is willing to admit that the political philosophy for which he became famous rests on the mistake of failing to consider symbolic value:
The political philosophy presented in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* ignored the importance to us of joint and official serious symbolic statement and expression of our social ties and concern and hence (I have written) is inadequate. (32)\(^4\)

The social dimension of symbolic meaning is also explicitly conceded by Nozick, although the point is consigned to a note in which allusion is made to the shortcomings of the methodological individualism of standard approaches to rational choice theory:

Indeed, given the extent to which symbolic meaning is socially created, maintained, and coordinated, as well as limited by social factors, we might find here a limit to methodological individualist explanations—an important one, given the effects and consequences of such meanings. For a symbolic utility might be social not only in being socially shaped and in being shared—that is, the same for many people in the society—but also in being viewed as shared—that trait being intrinsic to its having that symbolic utility. It is not clear how methodologically individualist explanations might cope with the intricacies involved. (187 n. 43)

We began by considering teleological justifications of the adoption of principles. It will be rational to adopt principles because of the functions they fulfill. One of the most important of such functions is to group actions together in such a way that each may symbolize the others. So, an examination of the way principles work led to a recognition of the importance of symbolic meanings and symbolic utility. This recognition can also help to explain the value we place on being principled. Following principles can symbolize and express our rationality. “Principles thus might have high utility for us, not because of what their use leads to, but because of what that use symbolizes and expresses.” (40).

Nozick next attempts to formulate a broadened decision theory which takes into account symbolic utility, and other factors. He argues that this broadened theory will provide a more illuminating analysis of Newcomb’s Problem and the Prisoner’s Dilemma than is afforded by standard decision theory.

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4. For the recantation Nozick cites his earlier *The Examined Life*.
Nozick introduces Newcomb's Problem and the Prisoner's Dilemma in an effort to display inadequacies of standard decision theory. He suggests that a plausible solution to these puzzles requires us to accept an account of rationality broader than a purely instrumental one. Let's begin with an overview of the puzzles and Nozick's strategy with respect to them before looking at each in more detail.

**Newcomb's Problem**

A being in whose power to predict your choices correctly you have great confidence is going to predict your choice in the following situation. There are two boxes, B1 and B2. Box B1 contains $1,000; box B2 contains either $1,000,000 ($M) or nothing. You have a choice between two actions: (1) taking what is in both boxes; (2) taking only what is in the second box. Furthermore, you know, and the being knows you know, and so on, that if the being predicts you will take what is in both boxes, he does not put the $M in the second box; if the being predicts you will take only what is in the second box he does put the $M in the second box. First the being makes his prediction; then he puts the $M in the second box or not, according to his prediction; then you make your choice. (41)

Crucial to understanding this problem is to see that there are two conflicting ways of reasoning about what to do in this situation, each of which seems to make sense. First, one might reason causally, as in standard decision theory. The being has already made his prediction and has acted accordingly. So, B2 is either empty or contains $M. In either case the expected utility of choosing both boxes is greater than choosing one, for in either case I will be $1,000 richer. Taking what is in both boxes is said to dominate taking only what is in B2. This is called the *dominance argument*. Second, one may reason 'evidentially', by considering the conditional probabilities of the outcomes given the actions. In that case, one will reason that the probability that I will get only $1,000 is very high if I choose both boxes, while the probability will be very high that I will get $M if I choose only B2. So, I should choose only B2.

By varying the example, changing the amounts in the boxes and the probabilities involved, our intuitions about the rationality of the two approaches to the problem may change. Nozick argues that this shows that a complete theory
of rationality should make room for both kinds of reasoning, neither of which takes account of symbolic meanings, which are introduced with regard to the Prisoner’s Dilemma.

**The Prisoner’s Dilemma**

This is probably the most famous puzzle of game theory. Two suspects are apprehended and charged with several crimes. But the authorities do not have sufficient evidence to convict them of all the crimes of which they are accused. So, if both prisoners remain silent, each will be given a two year sentence. In order to solicit confessions, the authorities isolate the prisoners, and promise that if one confesses but the other does not, then the one who confesses will go free, while the one who did not confess will be given twelve years in prison. However, if both confess, each will be given ten years. If each of the prisoner’s applies the standard decision theory to his choice of whether or not to confess, he will reason that no matter what the other prisoner does, he will reduce his sentence by confessing. No matter what the other prisoner does, the result of confessing will be to reduce one’s sentence by two years. Many people in such circumstances, however, reason that it is better if everyone cooperates, and so they cooperate. As a result, those who are rational according to the standards of decision theory will obtain worse outcomes than those who trust one another to cooperate.

Once again, there is much to be learned by considering the ways in which intuitions change with variations in the example. We can consider what would happen if there were more than two players, what happens when they are faced with a series of such dilemmas, and the effects of changing the outcomes. Nozick argues that such considerations support his claim that symbolic utility should be
given a place in a decision theory adequate to explain our shifting intuitions about the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Let's return to Newcomb's problem and some variations on it. But first it is important to distinguish the two ways of calculating expected utilities used by the proponents of the dominance argument and the evidential argument mentioned earlier. The evidentially expected utility of an action A, \( \text{EEU}(A) \), is easier to define than the causally expected utility of A, \( \text{CEU}(A) \), because it simply considers conditional probabilities, without regard for causal relationships.

\[
\text{EEU}(A) = (\text{prob}(O_1/A) \times u(O_1)) + (\text{prob}(O_2/A) \times u(O_2)) + \ldots + (\text{prob}(O_n/A) \times u(O_n))
\]

To calculate the causally expected utility of A, \( \text{CEU}(A) \), the same formula should be used, except that conditional probability will be replaced by a function indicating the probability that an outcome will causally result from A, given that A is performed.

If we estimate the expected utilities of choosing one or both boxes by using EEU, we will decide to take only the second box. If we estimate expected utilities by using CEU, we will accept the dominance argument and take both. To appreciate the appeal of CEU over EEU considers the example of a career choice. Suppose that there is a statistical link between genetic heart disease and a career in architecture. It is a coincidence that there is a statistically significant difference between the proportion of architects who have genetic heart disease and the proportion found in the general population. Since the disease is genetic we know that the career choice is in no way responsible for the disease. In that case it would appear to be irrational for a person to avoid the study of architecture because of the high conditional probability of genetic heart disease, that is, it would appear to be irrational to use EEU.

Although it appears to be irrational to use EEU in the career choice described above, many people find it appealing to use this method of calculating expected utility in Newcomb's problem. If the predictor is right 99% of the time, then even though my choice does not cause his prediction, I will very likely have less money as a result of using CEU. If the world were full of Newcomb like situations, then the adoption of EEU as a method for evaluating expected utility would cause me to act in such a way that I would probably be better off than had I used CEU. Suppose the amount in the first box were reduced to $1.00. The result of using CEU would still be that the choice of both boxes has the highest causally expected utility. On the other hand, if the amount in the first box were raised to $900,000, then even though EEU would still caution against taking both boxes, people seem more likely in this case to ignore this advice and rely on
causally expected utility. Nozick considers this as evidence that people generally do not have complete confidence in either EEU or CEU.

For some particular person, let \( W_c \) be the weight he or she gives to the expected utility principle of causal decision theory, and let \( W_e \) be the weight he or she gives to the expected utility principle of evidential decision theory. . . . Associated with each act will be a decision-value \( DV \), a weighted value of its causally expected utility and its evidentially expected utility, as weighted by that person’s confidence in being guided by each of these two kinds of expected utility.

\[
DV(A) = (W_c \times CEU(A)) + (W_e \times EEU(A)).
\]

And the person is to choose an act with maximal decision value.

I suggest that we go further and say not merely that we are uncertain about which one of these two principles, CEU and EEU, is (all by itself) correct, but that both of these principles are legitimate and each must be given its respective due. The weights, then, are not measures of uncertainty but measures of the legitimate force of each principle. We thus have a normative theory that directs a person to choose an act with maximal decision-value. (45)

Nozick goes on to point out that one who gives nonzero weights to \( W_c \) and \( W_e \) and who maximizes decision value will be seen to shift his approach to Newcomb’s problem when the amount in the first box is sufficiently altered. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether it is rational to adopt this sort of policy. Nozick responds with the observation that professionals who work on decision theory disagree about how best to calculate expected utility, and suggests that decision theory itself should be applied to the problem of deciding between EEU and CEU. Even if we begin with CEU, we may observe that the causally expected utility of using EEU will be higher than the causally expected utility of using CEU in some Newcomb-like cases. Since the employment of EEU thus has greater causally expected utility than the employment of CEU in such cases, Nozick claims, it is rational to give some weight to EEU when making decisions as is indicated in his formulation of \( DV \).
Next, Nozick suggests that another way to calculate expected utility would be in terms of the symbolic connection an action has to a value. We can assign expected utility to an action because of the utility of the causal effects of performing the action, because of the utility of something for which the performance of the action is evidence, and finally, because of the utility of something which is symbolized by the performance of the action. Nozick claims that it makes sense to take all of these connections into account when deciding what to do, and as a result he expands his definition of decision value to include symbolic utility:

\[ DV(A) = (W_c \times CEU(A)) + (W_e \times EEU(A)) + (W_s \times SU(A)). \]

While I am sympathetic to Nozick’s project, I must confess that I find Nozick’s arguments in favor of the use of EEU less than convincing. Nozick simply passes over the question of the rationality of the use of EEU and SU too quickly. Sometimes Nozick seems to think that the fact that people appear to use a certain method of estimating expected utility makes it rational for them to do so. For example, he considers reactions to Newcomb’s problem showing a lack of complete confidence in either CEU or EEU and seems to conclude that it is rational not to rely on either of these exclusively. He also makes some puzzling remarks about Calvinism in this regard. According to Calvinist doctrine, God predestines each individual for heaven or hell. There is nothing one can do to save himself. However, there are signs of election and damnation, among the most important of which are prosperity and poverty. If someone were to seek to become prosperous because this would make it more likely that he was one of the elect, his behavior could be justified by EEU but not by CEU. Nozick remarks that in the original article in which he presented Newcomb’s paradox, he had argued that the rational thing to do is to take both boxes and he dismissed EEU as irrational. He recants in the following words:

Yet I knew that the evidential component of the DV formula has had major social consequences in human history, as the literature on Calvinism and the role that its view of signs (though not causes) of election played in the development of capitalism attests. (46)

Perhaps it is the emphasis on industry and frugality and the moral approval of prosperity rather than the specifically predestinarian elements of the Calvinist doctrine of election which had the social consequences studied by Weber, but even if reasoning according to EEU were responsible for the rise of capitalism, it
is by no means clear why this should be seen as a vindication of the rationality of such thinking.

I would like to suggest that if we look more closely at Newcomb’s problem we can find out why EEU seems so appealing, although it is not generally rational to calculate expected utilities by this method. Note the way in which Nozick begins his exposition of Newcomb’s Problem quoted at the beginning of this lecture: “A being in whose power to predict your choices correctly you have great confidence...”. Suppose, instead, we had been told merely that a predictor had predicted the choices of others in Newcomb situations a great many times and that his success rate was .99. This alteration would seem to decrease our confidence in EEU, even if it does not eliminate it. The fact that the predictor has the power, the ability, to predict correctly most of the time suggests that there is some causal linkage, although perhaps indirect, connecting the prediction and the decision.

Suppose that the Newcomb situation is to be arranged as follows. You are seated in a chair with each of your hands over a button. You are to choose either both boxes or B2 by pushing the right or left button. The predictor is a device which is able to sense whether the muscles in your left or your right arm contract in a certain way, and which empties or fills B2 accordingly in the split second prior to your pressing of one of the buttons. If you knew this, you might be able to fool the device by reaching over and pressing the right button with your left hand. In that case, it would not matter how high the predictor’s previous success rate was, you should forget about EEU and choose both boxes with the opposite hand. Suppose, however, that you cannot fool the predictor in this way, perhaps because your arms are strapped down, or perhaps because the predictor is sophisticated enough to register the switching of sides before the button is pressed. In that case it will be best for you to pick B2 by pushing the appropriate button. Note that pushing the button is not causally responsible for the prediction or the amount of money in B2. What is responsible is something that occurred prior to the button pushing. There is a causal chain of events which branches at the event of muscle contraction, and which leads down one branch to the filling of B2 with $M$, and which leads down another, ever so slightly longer branch, to the pushing of a button. Your pushing of the B2 button does not cause the $M$ to be deposited in it, so you are not lead to push the button by calculating the causally expected utility of the action. Nozick might claim that what this case shows is that the causally expected utility of using EEU might be higher than that of using CEU in various cases. But it is not high evidentially expected utility which makes it rational to press the B2 button, but the causally expected utility of another event which takes place just prior to the button pressing. This indicates that the proper way to calculate causally expected utilities is not to limit one's
calculations to the causal effects of the action to be evaluated, but rather to consider the causal effects of all events whose occurrences causally contribute to the performance of the action, and which would not have occurred were the action not performed. Let's call this the expanded causally expected utility function, ECEU.

The superiority of ECEU to EEU is demonstrated by the following variation on Newcomb's Problem. Suppose that thousands of people have been put in Newcomb situations and the choices made have been predicted not merely by the 'being in whom one has great confidence' mentioned by Nozick, but by a very large number (two raised to a power in the thousands) of predictors who base their predictions on the tossing of a fair coin. One such predictor is found whose success rate is 99%: call it the successful random predictor. You are now placed in the Newcomb situation with the successful random predictor. Certainly you should not decide what to do on the basis of EEU, even if the amount of B1 is reduced to one dollar, "or even one cent or a 1/10,000th chance of one cent." (44) ECEU assigns a higher expected utility to the choice of both boxes because none of the causal contributors to the choice have any causal effect on the prediction.

We may now return to Nozick's presentation of the Newcomb Problem, in which it is neither specified by what means I am to make my choice nor the means by which the predictions are made. If my confidence in the ability of the predictor is warranted, I will also be warranted in believing that I am not faced with a randomly successful predictor. I will be justified in believing that there must be something of which the predictor is aware which will obtain only if I will choose B2. Perhaps it is some feature of my character in combination with the way in which the problem is presented to me which will cause me to choose B2. Or maybe the being has the ability to 'read' the state of my central nervous system the moment before I make my choice. These considerations provide reason for a higher ECEU of choosing B2 than that of choosing both boxes. But Nozick does not specify the basis for my confidence in the predictor's ability. I believe that this vagueness accounts for the tendency to consider it rational to choose both boxes in cases where B1 contains $900,000. If my confidence in the predictor's ability might not be fully warranted, then it will appear rational for me to dismiss this confidence when the amount in B1 is sufficiently raised.

Consider once again the high incidence of genetic heart disease among architects. This will provide no reason to avoid a career in architecture, because there is no causal contributor to career choice which would have a causal effect on the presence of genetic heart disease. Consider the Calvinist doctrine of election. Assume that some Calvinist is fully warranted in his acceptance of the doctrine of election and all this implies. Then this Calvinist need not resort to
EEU in order to justify his pursuit of wealth, for he could use ECEU as well, reasoning that a causal contributor to his pursuit will also cause his election, and that this causal factor would be absent if he were not to be successful. The causal factor considered here would be the decision of God. Thus ECEU can provide an account of the rationality of Calvinist behavior (conditional, of course, on the rationality of acceptance of the doctrines in question) which appeals to causal hypotheses which are irrelevant to the EEU analysis.

Much of our discussion of Nozick’s treatment of Newcomb’s Problem applies to his treatment of the Prisoner’s Dilemma, too. Nozick attempts to show that under the assumption that both parties will probably do the same thing, since both are presumed to be rational human beings, it may be rational to cooperate, despite the fact that there is no causal link from one choice to the other by means of which CEU could be employed. As in Newcomb’s Problem, we simply have a certain degree of confidence that a certain action we perform will accompany some other event which does not causally result from it. Since the issues here are essentially the one’s we have already discussed with respect to Newcomb’s Problem, I will not comment further on this aspect of the case.

Another aspect of the Prisoner’s Dilemma discussed by Nozick is its interpersonal character. One may decide to cooperate not simply on the basis of the expected utility of performing that action (regardless of how expected utility is to be calculated, by EEU, CEU, or ECEU), but because one wants to be a cooperative person. Cooperating has a symbolic value. It can symbolize the kind of person one is, or it can symbolize cooperation generally and we may have adopted a principle to cooperate in cases where this is the preferred action for the group. Nozick then takes up the objection that symbolic utilities should be entered directly into the matrix, and that the result of doing so would be to boost the values of cooperative action and decrease the value of non-cooperation to such an extent that the matrix would no longer represent a dilemma.

His first argument against this tactic is as follows:

[The symbolic value of an act is not determined solely by that act. The act’s meaning can depend upon what other acts are available with what payoffs and what acts also are available to the other party or parties. What the act symbolizes is something it symbolizes when done in that particular situation, in preference to those particular alternatives. . . . Hence, its SU is not a function of those features captured by treating that act in isolation, simply as a mapping of states onto consequences. An act’s symbolic value may depend.
upon the whole decision or game matrix. It is not appropriately represented by some addition to or subtraction from the utilities of consequences within the matrix. (55)

Decision theorists generally assume that the expected utility of an act is determined entirely by the values of the consequences of the performance of that act. Nozick indicates that the symbolic utility of an action, however, will often depend upon the decisions faced by others. One might grant Nozick this point, but nevertheless call for the reform of decision theory not by considering the symbolic value of actions as something in addition to normal expected utility, but by requiring an assignment of the initial utilities of outcomes which is sensitive to the issues of what other acts are available, etc. Nozick responds that this approach would be unworkable.

But if the reasons for doing an act A affect its utility, then attempting to build this utility of A into its consequences will thereby alter that act and change the reasons for doing it; but the utility of that altered action will depend upon the reasons for doing it, and attempting to build this into its consequences will alter the reasons for doing that now doubly altered act, and so forth. (55)

The idea here seems to be that the evaluation of the symbolic utility of an action requires a consideration of the values of its consequences, so that if symbolic utility were added to the consequences themselves, another evaluation of symbolic utility would become appropriate. The point is similar to Kant’s insistence on doing one’s duty for its own sake. Kant appears to have held that one is not supposed to do one’s duty because one values being dutiful and sees the performance of duty as a means of realizing this value. By placing the value of conforming to duty among the consequences of this conformity we would place ourselves in the position of acting simply to maximize value, where this would include doing one’s duty as one value among others, (even if it were taken to be the most important one). So, analogous to Kant’s doctrine of moral autonomy, Nozick seems to have a doctrine of symbolic autonomy: to perform an action because of its symbolic utility is not to perform the action as a means for the realization of that utility, but because of the symbolic meaning of the action itself apart from the utility this meaning might add to the value of the consequences of performing the action.
Finally, and less obscurely, Nozick argues that the attempt to include symbolic utilities among the outcomes of actions is not feasible within the decision-tree framework of rational choice theory because this framework requires that outcomes have fixed conditional utilities regardless of the position on the tree from which the outcome is reached, whereas symbolic utilities are sensitive to differences in the constellation of choices through which one may reach a given outcome.

If we attempt to cope with this by insisting that the utilities within the tree always be fully specified conditional utilities, then we cannot have the same outcomes at any two different places in the decision tree— to the detriment of stating general normative principles to govern such trees. (For each fact about an act, there might be a description that enables you to list that fact as a consequence of the act, but it does not follow that there is a description such that, for all facts about the act, that description incorporates them within the act’s consequences. The order of the quantifiers matters.) (56)

The remark about the order of the quantifiers above implies a denial of the principle that for any two facts there is a single fact which consists of their conjunction, yet Nozick does not provide any argument against this principle, which seems plausible enough, and was explicitly incorporated into Wittgenstein’s logical atomism. Perhaps Nozick means that for each fact of a certain kind (maybe basic facts) there might be a description according to which that fact is a consequence, but from this it does not follow that there is a description which includes all the facts in the consequences of the act. Aside from problems concerning the ontology of facts, however, Nozick’s point seems to be a pragmatic one. To introduce symbolic utilities among the conditional utilities of outcomes would be to complicate decision trees to the point that they would be useless, because symbolic utilities are so sensitive to the context of decision.

Finally, Nozick suggests some conditions for finding the decision value in Prisoner’s Dilemma cases, although he ends inconclusively, expressing the hope that these suggestions might lead to the formulation of sharper results in the future.
As with his discussion of EEU, Nozick seems to assume that the incorporation of SU in the calculation of decision value provides a more adequate theory of rational choice, although he does not provide any means of distinguishing rational from irrational behavior performed because of symbolic utility.

"The DV principle leaves room for general views about what sort of person to be, as this relates to and groups particular choices, not simply as a possible psychological explanation of why (some) people deviate from rationality, but as a legitimate component, symbolic utility, within their rational procedure of decision. (57)"

Intuitively, it certainly seems that it is sometimes rational to perform actions because of their symbolic utility, especially in cases of ethical behavior. But this does not warrant a general legitimacy of acting because of symbolic utility as a principle of rational action. Otherwise we should be in much worse shape than we were with Hume’s declaration that it was not the business of rationality to tell us whether to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of a finger. Hume would at least limit rationality to the efficient means of realizing one’s values. Nozick would not grant that actions may be rationally performed because of their symbolic meanings regardless of their consequences, but he offers no theoretical grounds on which to base such a denial. Just as I suggested that EEU was not sufficiently discriminating, and so should be dismissed in favor of ECEU, I would also urge a narrower range of symbolic meanings to be considered as legitimate grounds for evaluating the rationality of actions. One might, for example, limit acceptable symbolic meanings to those which derive from principles whose adoption is justified on some other grounds. It is somewhat surprising that Nozick does not make this point himself, given the emphasis on principles in the first chapter, and his claim that to act or think rationally is a matter of conformity to principles.

**Optimization**
There is sufficient reason to agree with Nozick that under certain conditions, considerations of the symbolic meaning of an action would be permitted to warrant a decision contrary to the decision which would be made on the basis of a straightforward attempt to maximize expected utility. Although Nozick argued that evidential, causal and symbolic factors should all be weighted to determine total decision value, I have argued that Nozick has provided us with reason to
accept only two means by which an action may acquire value, one consequentialist and one based on rules or principles. Similarly, I would argue that in ethics both consequentialist and deontological considerations should be weighed when making moral decisions. What Nozick has done, in effect, is to show us how to transfer a kind of philosophical pluralism in ethics, according to which both consequentialist and deontological arguments are relevant to the moral evaluation of actions, to a kind of philosophical pluralism about the nature of practical reasoning, according to which we can find good reasons whether to perform an action by considering the consequences of the action and by considering the principles which may govern the performance of the action. In ethics, however, there is also a third moral dimension by which behavior can be evaluated having to do with the character of the agent, virtue ethics. This provides us with some reason to suspect that there should be an analogue in the theory of rationality to a virtue ethic. Before offering a brief review of the argument of the virtue ethicists against deontology and considering how this can be transferred to the issue of practical reasoning, however, several more general points need to be mentioned regarding the decision theoretic approach to rationality, even in the reformed and expanded guise presented by Nozick.

First, there is the issue of quantifiability. Many philosophers have called attention to the fact that there are grave difficulties with the attempts to quantify values in the way demanded by decision theorists and utilitarians. One of the most infamous of such difficulties is the interpersonal comparison of utilities, which is normally raised in the context of discussions about utilitarianism rather than decision theory, because the focus of decision theory on the individual seems to render the question of interpersonal comparisons irrelevant. There are, however, analogous problems even within the context of a single individual’s decisions. One may plan to embark on a project the expected utility of which may be measured in terms of the values one presently has, or in terms of the values one will have at the completion of the project, or in terms of a weighted sum of the changing values one may have throughout the period of the project. For example, consider a decision to enroll in the book club of a historical society. To enroll, one must agree to by a history book every month for the next two years. Should I decide to enroll based merely on my current interest in learning about history, without consideration of the fact that I may become bored with the subject after the first few months? If I decide that I should take into consideration the way in which my estimation of the utility of studying history may change, I will need to compare my present and future values, and the difficulties inherent in this comparison are analogous to those of the notorious interpersonal comparison of utilities.
The problem of the interpersonal comparison of utilities was first raised in the 1930’s in the field of economics. Under the influence of positivism, it was argued the interpersonal comparisons of utility made no sense because there was no objective way to detect error in such comparisons. Utility judgments are attempts to gauge how much someone wants something, but desires are internal mental phenomena for which there can be no verifiable measure. With the decline of positivism, this argument has lost its force. It would no longer be argued that since a measure is unverifiable, it is meaningless. Still, the practical difficulty remains. Economists have not been able to agree upon a standard for comparing utilities among different agents, although may such standards have been and continue to be proposed.

Even in the case of a single individual, it is difficult to assign numbers which would measure the utility of a certain kind of outcome at different times in the person’s life. I liked strawberry ice cream more when I was a child than I do now, but I have no idea how to assign values to measure the degree of satisfaction realized by eating strawberry ice cream then and now. Many economists have noted that even if cardinal values cannot be assigned to utilities in terms of which an interpersonal comparison could be made, we may yet be able to make ordinal comparisons, that is, we may be able to rank preferences. If we could rank all our preferences at any given time on a scale from 0 to 1, we would then have a means for intertemporal utility comparisons, but this is to assume that there is no period during which our dispositions are more intense than at others, deserving of a scale with a larger mathematical spread. Suppose we could estimate the differences in the intensity of our desires at different periods, and adjust the scale accordingly. If one is engaged in ascetic practices as a result of which he expects that his desires will be considerably less intense after twenty years, this would seem to indicate that the maximum utility to be realized in twenty years would be less than that which could presently be realized. Yet it does not appear to be reasonable to value the satisfaction of my future desires less than that of my present desires simply because of their hard won attenuation.

Even with respect to a given individual at a given time, there are problems with the idea that each of us has a structure of preferences in terms of which expected utilities could be calculated, as is indicated by the work of cognitive psychologists over the past twenty years, which has been recently summarized as follows:

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5. Brian Barry reports that the problem was first raised by Lionel Robbins (1932), Cf. Brian Barry (1989; p. 104).
Evidence is mounting in support of the view that our values are often not clearly apparent, even to ourselves; that methods for measuring values are intrusive and biased; that the structure of any decision problem is psychologically unstable; and that the processes whereby elusive values are integrated into decisions within such unstable structures lead to actions that differ in dramatic ways from the predictions of utility theory.

The psychology of our goals, preferences and desires may be simply too complicated to be of much use in calculated the expected utilities required for the application of decision theory to a given practical problem except in idealized situations.

One of the problems with the assumption that each rational agent possesses a preference structure has to do with the incommensurability of different kinds of goods. The idea that there is no single commodity whose presence in various degrees accounts for a thing's goodness is a characteristic of much writing in ethics since 1956, when Peter Geach pointed out that the fact that a good car is not something that is good and a car just as a big flea is not something that is big and a flea (Geach 1967). The point is not, however, one to be confined to ethical discussions, for it has important implications regarding human values generally. Even if we restrict our attention to desires, we will find that they come in different kinds which are not necessarily convertible. People desire comfort, friendship, security, knowledge, etc., in such a manner that a lack of one often cannot be compensated by abundance in another. Rescher develops the implications of the incommensurable plurality of goods by arguing that "Interthematic comparisons of 'utility' are just as problematic as interpersonal ones" (Rescher 1993: 28). Economists have attempted to order preferences between outcomes A and B by considering how an agent would respond to questions of the form: Would you prefer an x percent probability of obtaining A to a y percent probability of obtaining B? Reliance on such questions in order to rank utilities was introduced by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in 1944. This approach presupposes that for any two desired items, A and B, there will be probabilities a and b so proportioned that an agent will be indifferent between an a percent chance of A and a b percent chance of B. In the context of purely economic discussions, the limitations of this procedure are hidden by the availability of market mechanisms to establish exchange rates. With regard to desires for things

which are not marketable, such as security and honor, the assumption of probabilistic indifference often fails because agents cannot answer the questions on which commensurability would be based.\(^7\)

The problem of interthematic utility comparisons is particularly serious for Nozick’s revised decision theory. Nozick is concerned with the failure of decision theory to consider anything but the consequences of an action when evaluating the rationality of the performance of the action. Intuitively, we will have good reason for performing an action not only when the action can be expected to have a desirable outcome, but when the action is demanded by principles we have adopted. In order to accommodate both ways in which one can have reasons for performing an action, Nozick proposes that we should seek to maximize not expected utility, but decision value, a weighted sum of symbolic utility and expected utility. In order for the formula for decision value to make any sense, however, it must be possible to assign weights, values between 0 and 1, in terms of which tradeoffs between symbolic utility and expected utility may be measured. What this amounts to is a demand that we be able to indicate in quantitative terms when the desirability of an outcome will lead us to abandon our principles! One may hold that it is always wrong to lie, but that this wrong may be outweighed by a consideration of the consequences without being able to settle upon any figure at which honor could be purchased.

Commenting on Geach’s analogy between the goodness of a car and the bigness of a flea, Judith Jarvis Thomson (1993) remarks that the incommensurability runs much deeper than Geach imagined, for although there is such a thing as x’s being absolutely bigger than y, there is no such thing as x’s being absolutely better than y. It only makes sense to claim that x is better than y in some way. It does not make any sense to ask which is preferable, learning about Russell’s theory of descriptions or eating chocolate. Thomson makes the point about betterness. There is no absolute betterness, only being better in a way; but the claim generalizes: there is no preferability, only preferability in a way. Thomson suggests that a utilitarian might modify his theory to allow for a number of incommensurable goods, where the revised theory would merely say that for any two actions, A and B, if all kinds of expected utility of A are higher than those of B, then given an exclusive choice between A and B, one should

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7. The analogy between the problems of interpersonal and interthematic comparisons of utility has been recognized by Ralph L. Keeney and Howard Raiffa, who have attempted to construct a “multiple-attribute utility theory” in their *Decisions with Multiple Objectives: Preferences and Value Tradeoffs* (1976), cited in Rescher (1993: 30). Rescher acknowledges that a similar critique of decision theory may be found in Max Black, “Making Intelligent Choices: How Useful is Decision Theory?” (Black 1985: 19-34; Rescher 1993: 31).
perform A. Thomson goes on to complain that such a theory would be silent about all the most interesting cases, those in which ways of being good clash. Later in the same article, Thomson specifically mentions the clash between ethical principles and expected utility which we raised with respect to Nozick. The analogy between utilitarianism and decision theory can be elaborated in such a way as to suggest a modification in Nozick’s attempt to reform decision theory. If we accept the incommensurability of symbolic utility and expected utility, and even if we accept the existence of incommensurable components within each of these, we need not give up entirely on decision theory. Rather, we may limit the advice that decision theory gives to something analogous to Pareto optimality. A Pareto optimum is defined in interpersonal contexts as an outcome such that there is no alternative to it which makes one party better off without making another worse off. With respect to the incommensurate plurality of utility scales, it is perhaps best to dispense with talk of a decision value for each action. Nevertheless, we may say that an action is decision-theoretically optimal when there is no alternative to it with higher utility on one scale which does not also have lower utility on another scale. In the interesting cases, where kinds of utility clash, there will be a variety of actions with optimal decision value. While Thomson dismissed the revised pluralistic utilitarianism on the grounds that it would be of no use in interesting ethical cases, we should hesitate about making the analogous judgment about decision theory, for Pareto optimality has proved to be a fruitful device in economics despite its failure to discriminate between various interesting alternatives, and decision theoretic optimality may prove no less useful.

The claim that considerations of decision theoretic optimality will not provide a sufficient means to decide between alternative optimal actions is not to claim that the choice among such alternatives cannot be a rational choice, for we may be able to decide that on the whole it would be better to perform one optimal action than another even when we are completely at a loss as to say how much better it is. The term we have used for the inability to quantitatively combine different dimensions of preferability, “incommensurability”, may suggest something too strong. Our arguments do not establish that the different respects in which it may be desirable to perform an act cannot be compared at all, but merely that there often seems to be no basis for a quantitative comparison. Even if I am completely unable to give a quantitative preference ordering between my desire to act in accordance with principles of justice and my desire to perform acts whose outcomes will include the least injustice, I may still be able to make rational decisions in cases of conflict between these desires. The textbook example used to illustrate such conflicts is of a prisoner faced with a choice of killing an innocent man or watching one’s captor kill many innocents. The strength of one’s
commitment to the rule to kill no innocents may make it rational for one to refuse to kill, even when one knows that the result will be the killing of five, while it may also be rational for one to violate the principle and kill unjustly in order to save thousands, even though it is not possible for one to determine any number at which the violation of principle becomes justified.

In any case, such textbook examples have little relation to the practical dilemmas which arise in real life, which tend to be dauntingly more complicated. The point is simply that an inability to quantify or to provide a serial preference ordering does not imply that there can be no basis for rational comparison at all. The kind of judgment required in cases of quantitatively incommensurable conflict has often been likened to a recognition of harmony. The metaphor has limitations, however, for while musical harmony can be given a precise mathematical formulation, the practical harmony to which the Confucian sage is so keenly sensitive is notoriously elusive (Neville 1987).8

Mention of the sage introduces the final element of our critique of decision theory. We found in Nozick that actions could acquire value not only because of the consequences which can be expected to follow from them, but because of what Nozick calls their symbolic utility. Some, but not all, cases in which one decides to perform an act because of its symbolic utility appear to be rational. When high symbolic utility is attached to an action because of some personality disorder, performance of the action solely because of its high symbolic utility will not be considered rational. When the symbolic utility is due to conformity of the action to moral principle, however, we will normally judge the action to be performed for good reason. All of the convincing cases of rational action performed because of symbolic utility offered by Nozick are cases of action performed in accordance with principle. Consideration of the sage provides the occasion to introduce additional means by which value may accrue to an action, in terms of which we may judge the performance of the action to be rational. There is no harm in considering these means as independent elements of symbolic utility, provided we bear in mind that these elements may be quantitatively incommensurable with those derived from accordance with principle.

8. As Neville observes, the metaphor of harmony is especially prominent in religious and Oriental discussions of justice. Rescher also appeals to a sense of harmony (Rescher 1993: 43). The connection between rationality and harmony is by way of ethics. I assume that it is rational to behave ethically. Ethical behavior, however, may rely on a sense of harmony. The difference between an instance of rational and irrational behavior may therefore depend upon reliance on a moral intuition of harmony, even if this intuition is itself non-cognitive, in the sense that it cannot be reduced to some set of necessary and sufficient conditions.

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Rules or principles provide only one way in which actions may be guided. Another way is by consideration of consequences. A third way in which actions may be guided is with reference to virtue. Sometimes the appeal to virtue will be personified in an exemplar. We acquire skills by imitation of the actions of teachers. We may attempt to acquire virtues by acting in ways that are typical of the virtuous exemplar. Heroic figures often function as exemplars, but not always. The Homeric heroes and the Jewish prophets, as understood in the Jewish and Christian traditions, do not function as impeccable exemplars, as they do in Islam. Virtue is taught by the failings of the Homeric heroes as much as by their noble qualities. So, the appeal to virtue may also be introduced by reflection on a moral narrative, an allegory, or parable. Some actions may also be considered as typical of a virtue, independent of consideration of a particular exemplar or narrative. In all of these ways, reflection about virtue may guide action in ways that cannot be reduced to the following of rules or the attempt to maximize the utility of the consequences of one's actions. This has been argued at length by a number of moral theorists over the past twenty-five years or so (Wallace, 1978). The particular target of these philosophers has been deontological ethical theory, according to which the only relevant moral consideration governing the performance of actions is universal prescriptions. The virtue ethicists argue that an account of morality solely in terms of moral rules will be incomplete, and must be supplemented by an account of the virtues. Deontologists sometimes try to sneak virtues into rules by employing Kant's notion of imperfect duties, according to which one has a duty to acquire the virtues. There is also considerable controversy about the question of primacy, whether in cases of conflict adherence to duty should outweigh considerations of virtue, and whether duties might even be derived from an analysis of the virtues. These points are of no concern to our present discussion. What is important is that the virtue ethicists have identified a third strand of ethical thought, in addition to those associated with deontology and consequentialism, which is relevant to judgments about whether one should perform an action.

Although the discussion of the virtue ethicists has been concerned specifically with morality, rather than with the broader issue of practical reasoning, it is not difficult to see how the argument would be applied to supplement the notion of symbolic value introduced by Nozick. Actions may acquire symbolic value because they are like the actions performed by an exemplar, or because they typify a virtue, or because of the analogy between that action and an action which figures in a guiding narrative. Just as principles function to group together...
actions, likewise virtues, saints and myths may also serve in the categorization of actions. An ancient Greek may have decided to act so as to avoid the *hubris* of Oedipus; and we Muslims try to follow the *sunnah* of the Prophet, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be with him and with his progeny. One may also simply conduct oneself in a way appropriate to one who is not proud. These things may figure in one’s rational deliberation about what to do. Of course, to show that the function of virtue in deliberation is rational we must do more than show that people in fact do deliberate in with the aid of considerations of virtue. We should start with something relatively uncontroversial, like instrumental rationality, and show that this can provide us with reason to accept more. This was the line of thought that led Nozick to admit that in the evaluation of an action, principles should be taken into account as well as outcomes, for by taking principles into account the general outcome is better than when we look exclusively at outcomes on a case by case basis. The result of leading a life which results from the calculation of expected utilities seems poorer than one which is guided by principles as well, and such a life appears to be further enriched if its actions are also guided by virtue.

All of these elements may come into conflict in actual cases of deliberation. An action may seem to have dire consequences, but to be required by a principle. By themselves, the consequences and principle may not give one sufficient grounds to come to a decision. But if one can recall cases in which exemplary virtuous people have violated the principle in view of similar consequences without threatening their virtue, or to the contrary, if the principle was one about which an exemplar was especially strict, this may tip the balance.

Finally, we should recall the point made earlier about the sage. The resolution of conflicts among the different kinds of reasons one may find for or against performing an action, including reflections about consequences, principles and virtue, will require a wisdom which itself may not be reducible to any of these.

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THE INTELLECT IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT: MIND AND HEART

By:
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Introduction
The Arabic term al-"aql/―intelligence/understanding/ reason” is one among half-a-dozen of the most important concepts occurring throughout Islamic experience and thought. From the beginning of the Islamic era, it had been an opaque term, and Muslim scholars did not always agree that "aql was univocal in meaning. In its early Islamic unfolding the concept of "aql comprised the intersection of primarily Arab and Qur’anic as well as Biblicic components with Hellenic and Iranian traditions. "Aql became the carrier of multiple overlapping or diverging meanings, if not already before Islam among the old Arabs; it assumed particular significances in ethics, humanistic studies (adab), prosody and rhetoric, law, theology, philosophy, as well as in spiritual and metaphysical speculations. A review of the Islamic understanding of ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ would have to deal with the chief disciplines wherein rationality played an extensive role: legal theory (usul al-fiqh), speculative theology (kalam), philosophy (falsafah) and rational spirituality (hikmah & irfan). Attention should also be given to pronounced anti-rationalist features of Traditionalism.

Language and ideas take political and theological expression through discourse, narrative, literary genre or technique, and community setting. In terms of contemporary discourse analysis or text semiotics, contextual employments of this term were commonly viewed by classical Muslim scholars to exemplify a form of textual polysemy admitting multiple significances when its meaning was appropriated by different circles. The attempts of the lexicologists from the 2nd century onwards subscribe to the goal of textual monosemy by searching for an original concrete sense or objective interpretation, through its derivation from al-"iqal /the camel’s binding cord. Successive layers of conceptual drift in linguistic usage over centuries have covered up the thought-forms and experiences of earlier notions. Such early conceptualizations might now appear strange or unfamiliar to many contemporary Muslims, although their foundations are still manifest in Islamic Tradition literature, religious and philosophical ethics, and spirituality.

Early Islamic creation teachings were inspired by the Qur’an and closely related Biblicist (Jewish & Christian) traditions, yet they would grow to encompass the Hellenic emphasis on intelligible reality preceding and transcending the psycho-physical realms, as with the falsafah and related trends in philosophical Shi‘ism. During the twentieth century "aql enjoyed a reincarnation among modernist Muslim thinkers in the face of Western cultural and political
challenges. Recently, there has been a growing interest among contemporary thinkers in *al-nazar al-‘aqli* / the ‗rational argumentation’ of the Qur’an. Today, ‗aql most often connotes ‗reason’, mentality, or discursive mentation, reflecting the brain conception prevalent in our contemporary mentality—(eg. ‗*aql ilaktruni* „electric brain’, computer; or ‗mukhkh ilaktruni*).

**Reason**

There are several views on how to understand or define ‗reason’ and ‗rationalism’. In the ancient and medieval worlds ‗reason’ was often defined in practical terms as an innate trait or faculty of the person; or in a more theoretical vein as a non-spatial ‗substance‘ belonging to the immaterial realm of existence, while at the same time forming part of the human soul with the capacity for perceiving knowledge and exercising cognition. As *an avenue for knowledge and a cognitive function*, reason involves the distinction between innate ideas or conceptions (either as ‗intuition’, or as inborn direct necessary knowledge), and that of acquired or demonstrative knowledge— including both sensory experience, revealed guidance, as well as formal rational-cognitive procedures for ascertaining truth. In addition, reason was always intimately linked with the affective (emotional) and intentional reality of ethical action at the level of conscience and will, and was deemed central to self-awareness and consciousness.

However, in contemporary understanding ‗reason’ is most often defined as a ‗mental faculty’, namely, a faculty of the human ‗mind’ having a distinct capacity for knowledge—in contrast to sense experience. This mentalist conception of reason was at the root of the opposition between Rationalism and Empiricism, since the latter gives priority to sensory data. ‗Science’ proceeds from empirical observation and measurement, while its truth claims are generally seen to adhere to a canon of formal rational procedures yielding probability in most cases. Current notions of reason and mind almost always embrace a physicalistic ‗brain’ or bodily conception, as in cognitive psychology based on empirical bio-genetic and neurophysiological studies that stress the biological basis of cognition by studying the neurophysiology of meaning-perception in humans.

These current notions of reason derive from the period of the Enlightenment and from Continental Rationalism, and they reflect a confidence in the unbridled powers of the human intellect (viewed in terms of ‗brain-mind‘) as a source of knowledge. Intellect was then conceived of in opposition to ‗faith’ and uncritical acceptance of traditional revealed authority as well as to superstition and magic. The eighteenth-century European thinkers of the Enlightenment opposed the traditional Christianity of the institutionalized Church by rejecting ‗non-rational’ factors of traditional spiritual authority and faith, and they viewed reason as contrasted with ‗feeling’ or ‗emotion’. Modern notions of reason and of rationalism arose out of
this spirit of anti-supernaturalism, being an anti-religious and anti-clerical movement of utilitarian outlook stressing historical and scientific arguments against theism.

Thus, the notion of ‘soul’ is now considered problematic due to its spiritualistic connotations, and the term ‘mind’ has replaced ‘soul’ in current western discourse. Presently, the term ‘rationalism’ appears on the way to being replaced by ‘humanism’; while the term ‘irrational’ conveys a (negative) connotation of ‘spiritual’ or ‘supernatural’ associated with transcendent values. Contemporary discussions on consciousness and the philosophy of mind also reflect this conceptual drift toward a (monist) brain conception, where ‘mind’ substitutes for the ‘soul’ concept of the past. ‘Mind’ is frequently allied with brain functions and given a physical locus, or alternatively it is denied any spatial locale and simply reduced to ‘mental events’. Recently, there have appeared a number of creative but tentative attempts to reconceptualize notions of ‘reason’ and ‘intelligence’ along anti-mentalistic or ‘personological’ lines, several drawing on the experience and practice of older non-Western traditions or even popular ‘folk’ conceptions. In the past several decades concepts such as ‘moral intelligence’, ‘emotional intelligence’ or recently ‘spiritual intelligence’ have been popularized in attempts to broaden our conception of what constitutes human rationality and intellect.

The widespread misconception that the conflict between ‘Reason and Revelation’ or between Science and Faith-based traditional authority experienced by Western-European and the subsequent contemporary Western civilization, must also have been experienced within the preceding Islamic civilization, should be laid to rest. (The very same misconception is behind Western puzzlement over why Muslims have not become more secularized.) This unwarranted assumption led in the past to patently wrong assessments of Muslim thought and experience, and continues to foster genuine misunderstanding concerning the real nature of Islamic religious and intellectual traditions. This misunderstanding arose partly from the Euro-centric worldview of Western imperialism inherited by postcolonial globalizing culture in a type of intellectual default; and partly out of entrenched ignorance and explicit hostility.

In contrast to the western view, classical Islamic notions of ‘intelligence’ or ‘reason’ embraced the faith-induced dimension of knowledge yielding conviction and moral-volition in the operation of human intelligence, being intimately joined with its cognitive or perceiving-knowing dimension. This ‘practical’ ethico-religious dimension of reason has a close connection with ethical endeavor and moral-volition (the faculty of conation). Ethics is the domain of practical reason or ‘prudential-mind’ (‘aqlamali), involving the power of conation (volition, will-power): the impulse or striving to change one’s behavior and act in accordance with the directives of both inner conscience and outer guidance or divinely revealed imperatives mediated in revelation.

The normative view in Islamic civilization was always that of faith-in-reason while also simultaneously recognizing the limits-of-reason. Remember that the very term for ‘reason
intelligence' in Arabic, *al-*"aql has at the core of its basic linguistic meaning the practical idea of _restraining_ and _binding_ as an interior self-imposed limit - of holding one’s self back from blameworthy conduct (the polarity of _"aql_ vs. _jahl_ / intelligence vs. ignorance, or wisdom vs. folly). In Islamic thought, those who taught that reason alone is the sole human authority in attaining truth were regarded as disbelievers. Such individuals were very rare - eg. the physician-philosopher Abu Bakr al-Razi (d.313/ 925 or ca. 323/935 in Rayy) who denied prophecy and embraced Platonic and Galenic teachings, even while he wrote on the validity of alchemy as an empirical science and drew on Gnostic teachings in his cosmology. Rationalists attacked the Traditionalists and their doctrines on the basis of reason, claiming that much-but _not all_-religious knowledge may be known only by means of reason.

**Intelligence**

Qur’anic logic and polemic persuasion form part of the operation of God’s _absolutely compelling argument_ (al-*hujjat al-balighah*) in guiding to truth or delivering from error: *a-fa la ta,, qitna…. _The invariably verbal Qur’anic employment of ya,qilu might be interpreted as already intimating an Hellenic component, depending on how one comprehends the essential doctrine of God's _ayat/ Signs_ operating a species of semiotic pointers to the divine providential purpose at all levels of creation. The evidentiary role of the ayat in the creation theology of the Qur’an (see the semantic fields of terms _ya,qilu, tafakkur, & ulu l-albab_), reflects the deep concern for a teleological mode of thought within Prophetic monotheistic wisdom teachings, where humans are asked to ponder and exercise sapiential reflection over the regularity, precision, correspondences and beauty in nature. Glimpsing the wisdom of the overall design leads to a form of intuitive discernment of the Creator and of one’s own creaturely status, which was deemed by the theologians to be an innate form of necessary knowledge provided to all humans (_"ilm daruri_).

One may further discern in the Qur’an the inter-linked notions of a cognitive elite, the _"possessors of understanding_ (ulu l-albab) distinguished by their knowledge, wisdom and God-mindfulness (_"ilm, hikmah, taqwa_), as well as of a cognitive scale forming a hierarchy of response and of understanding on the part of the faithful ( _tafakkur & tadabbur | "aql | dhikr | yaqin / pondering | comprehending | remembrance | certainty_), those who are privy to knowledge and special grace both here and in the Hereafter. Thus, _"aql constitutes a key element in the human reception of divine guidance. This nexus between faith and understanding has always been a hallmark of intelligent Islamic spirituality, wherein the emotions and instinctive faculties operate harmoniously with the proper exercise of human reason and understanding, promoting the true felicity and blessings intended by the Creator of our reason. (Wisdom literature, with its international and supra-religious themes, represents a thought-world common to the ancient Orient.
From early times it included both instruction in practical ethics, as well as theological speculations on the meaning of human suffering and divine justice. Sapiential speculations crossing many cultural boundaries align wisdom with light and mind or spirit. Wisdom grew to embrace not merely an anthropological capacity to successfully negotiate life’s challenges, but a rational system of interpreting and ordering the cosmos, and the beginnings of philosophy and science; as well as a personification, a divine hypostasis and mediator of revelation and creation, or an attribute of God. In Arab-Islamic ‘utterances’ and ‘wise sayings’ (aqwal & hikam, sing. qawl & hikmah) of the first and second centuries H, the notion of „aql featured prominently as chief of the akhlaq /‘virtuous character traits’ and the glorious adornment of humans in both worldly and otherworldly affairs.

Here are ten representative statements gathered from the first three centuries of Islam, landmarks upon the trajectory of enrichment of meaning for the „aql notions that disclose a definite process of islamization.7

1. „-al-mar‘u bi-asgharayhi lisanihi wa „aqlih [or qalbih, ma,qulih, 8 jananih] /Man’s worth lies in his two smallest parts – his tongue and his heart mind.” An old Arab maxim popularized in gnomic verses.9 It is the point behind the tale of the legendary pre-Islamic sage Luqman twice dressing a sheep for his master, then bringing him respectively the two best parts and two worst parts: in both cases the tongue and heart.10

2. „wa qalu law kunna nasma,u aw na,,qiluma kunna fi ashabi l-sa,,iri/ And they will say, „Had we but heeded [divine revelation] or understood, we would not now be among the inmates of the Blazing Fire!”” Qur’an al-Mulk 67:10 - depicting the lament and regret of disbelievers in Hell.

3. „ma qiladatun nuzimat min durr wa yaqut bi-azyana lisahibiha min al-„aqli wa law nasaha l-mar‘u „aqluhula-arahu ma yuzayyinuhu mimma yushinuhu fa-l-maghbunu man akhta”“ahazzahu min al-„aql/ No necklace strung of pearls and sapphires is more of an adornment to its owner than (the innate talent of) intelligence; if his intelligence sincerely counseled a man [ie. Directs him to the good], then it teaches him to distinguish what graces him from what disgraces him; so the truly defrauded is one who missed his share fortune of intelligence.” An „utterance‘/qawl of the late 1st century H Yamani Successor/ tabi’i 11 Tawus b. Kaysan (d. 100 or 106 H).

4. „afdalu qismi llahi li-l-mar‘i „aqluhu/The most superlative of God’s allotment to man is his (inborn disposition of) intelligence.” This popular 1st - 2nd century H saying was attributed to a variety of persons and occurs in a number of forms.

5. „-ma,ubida llahu bi-shay”“in afdalu min al-„aql /God is not worshipped with anything more surpassing than the intelligence understanding.”12 Assigned to either Luqman, or to the 1st
century H Yamani scholar and collector of ancient wisdom Wahb b. Munabbih; this famous wisdom motto originally prefaced a decade listing the virtuous character traits of the sage („aqîh), or faithful one (muḥmin); it became detached to serve either as an epitome of the original decalogue or as a separate utterance.

6. “ma khalaqa llahu mithla l-„aqîl/God created nothing like unto the [innate faculty of human] intelligence.”\(^{13}\) Assigned to the 1st century H Successor al-Hasan al-Basri (d.110/728), and thereafter raised to the Prophet Muhammad.

7. “lamma khalaqa llahu l-„aqîl qala la-hu aql ... / When God had created the [divinely provisioned innate trait of] intelligence, He said to him, “Face forward!“…” This qawl in the form of a brief mythic narrative portraying the creation and testing of „aqîl was taught by a number of late 1st early 2nd century H authorities (including al-Hasan & Muhammad al-Baqir), and often assigned to various Companions; it quickly became raised into a Prophetic hadith by the late 2nd century. The original context of this narrative was to mediate theological views about the human capability to perform deeds, within the intense early debates over qadar.

8. “inna llaha khalaqa l-„aqîlwa huwa awwalu khalqin khalaqahu min al-ruhaniyyin ..... / God created al-„aqîl [intelligence wisdom] and it is the first creature He created among the spiritual immaterial beings’ [ie. bodiless hosts, Archangels] on the right side of the Throne from His Light. Then He said to him, “Face forward!“…” This expansion of the immediately preceding narrative was taught by the 2nd century H imams Ja‘far al-Sadiq (d.148/765) and his son Musa al-Kazim. It functions as a cosmic setting for a listing of seventy-five pairs of virtues and vices in a psychomachia of purgative mysticism and psychological dualism („aqîl light vs. jahl darkness).

(The motif of „aqîl as light - eg. the early utterances: “…ight in the heart /nurun fi l-qalb,” or a lamp in the body /sirajun fi l-badan” - deriving from the supernal realm of the divine Throne, clearly reflects the impact of Near Eastern teachings concerning pre-existing Heavenly Wisdom, as was the pattern in Biblicic as well as Zoroastrian religions. In this rarified realm, the immateriality or spiritualacy of „aqîl is uppermost, with its creation preceding physical existence. Often „aqîl was portrayed in opposition to its adversary/did as a personification of the appetitive soul (nafs, hawa), or of ignorance folly and stupidity (jahl, humq), in a psychological duality.\(^{14}\) This type of interiorized dualism had long been a feature of Near Eastern Wisdom teachings. With Ja‘far al-Sadiq the polarity „aqîl /intelligence wisdom’ vs. jahl /ignorance folly’ became a vehicle to expound upon the conflict between Adam and Iblis, both being empowered by God with psychic traits. While he depicts „aqîl as the first immaterial spiritual being” created by God and deriving its source from divine light, the centrality of its nexus with the innate trait of human intelligence is never lost sight of.)
9. In an interesting narrative included in the 2nd century H Basran- Baghldadi proto-Sufi Dawud b. al-Muhabbar’s Kitab al-‘Aql, the Companion Abdallah Ibn Salam (d. 43/663, a convert from Judaism) is seen to question the Prophet Muhammad about the Throne /al-‘arsh/ as the greatest of all God’s creations. The Prophet informs Ibn Salam that the angels once asked God about the greatest creation, even greater than the Throne-namely, al-‘aql—being beyond the comprehension of even the angels. God informs the angels:\footnote{15}

‘...Knowledge of it cannot be fully comprehended!Do you have knowledge of the number of grains of sand?!’ \footnote{16} Truly I created al-‘aqlas diverse sorts like the number of grains of sand. Of that I give some people a single grain, and to some two or three grains, and to some I give an entire sack; and I give to some of them one camel’s load, to some two loads, and to some, more.’

...[when Ibn Salam asks the Prophet who receives such compounded measures, the Prophet replies:] ‘Those who labor in accordance with obedience to God, (are given measures of ‘aql) in proportion to their deeds and their diligence and their certitude, and in proportion to the light God placed in their hearts. Their custodian (qayyim) in all of that is al-‘aql which God provided them. Thus, in proportion to that [finite measure of intelligence endowed them by God] the worker among them labors and rises in degrees (yartafi,‘ufi l-darajat).’ (This narrative opens a window onto the teachings of 2nd century ascetic mystics who gathered on the island colony of ‘Abbadan below Basrah to pursue their devotional exercises under the direction of ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd (d.150/767, a disciple of al-Hasan al-Basri).

The context of this narrative must be placed within an ancient trajectory of religious speculation upon the divine Throne as locus of first-born Wisdom (Heb. Hokhmah, Gk. Sophia), with this Islamic interiorizing of previous mythic elements exemplifying a process of ‘reflective mythology‘ placing older thought currents onto a higher more rational plane within the context of the Islamic revealed framework. Such a transposition is a marked feature of early Islamic ‘aql creation narratives, constituting an archaic stage in the elaboration of a ‘narrative theology‘ exploiting mythic motifs for didactic, doctrinal, and spiritual intent.\footnote{17}

10. ‘awwalu makhalaqa llahu l-‘aqla, thumma qala la-hu aqbil! /The first that God created-the Intellect [‘intelligence reason’]. Then He said to him, ‘Face forward!’...’ This transformation over two centuries later of the 1st century narrative ‘lamma khalaqa lla hu l-‘aqla” was frequently ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, but never as an authentically transmitted hadith introduced by a proper isnad / chain-of-authorities. This narrative became the subject of heated debate and controversy for centuries. It was exploited and transformed in the service of a wide variety of ethical, philosophical, and theosophic mystic streams of thought ranging from Isma‘ili and Druze cosmology, Sufi metaphysics, to falsafah and ‘irfan
Certain constants are discernible in these early maxims, utterances and hadiths cast in the form of mythic narratives:

- "aql is created/makhlq, and apportioned/maqsum or gifted/ mawhub among humans by God. This theme of the divine distribution of various shares of inborn intelligence among humanity often stressed its inequitable distribution some surpass others (tafdil, tafawut al-"uqul).

- "aql is an innate trait of the native human constitution (gharizah, sajiyyah, jibillah ...). The conjunction of „trait‘ (khuluq) and „physique‘ (khalq) is central to the leading position of „aql as the chief of human moral traits, portrayed as „the commander of his troops/amir junudih.” This theme embraces both an anthropological aspect - the natural aptitude and scope of intelligence subject to increase or diminution - as well as the cognitive aspect of faith yielding certainty and righteous conduct, reflected in archaic Islamic maxims such as: ↪ a person‘s „ideal mode of outward behavior‘ lies in their „ideal mind character‘/ muru’atu l-mu’min/rajul „aqluh;” and ↪ there is no „faith practice‘ for one lacking „innate moral intelligence‘/la dina li-man la „aqlala-hu;” and ↪ intelligence is the guiding director of the faithful /al- „aqlu dal’tu l-mu’min.”

- "aql is the locus for comprehension understanding of speech, preeminently the divine address to humans mediated in scriptural revelation. (Recall the ancient nexus of wisdom with: tongue/ear/heart mind‘.) This axiomatic aspect of intelligence lies behind the Hearing Formula - “Listen! and Understand! /isma,„u wa i„qili‘ or „Take Heed and Comprehend! /ihfazu wa „u” ubiquitous in Near Eastern Wisdom teachings including pre-Islamic sages, the Qur’an, and among the early Muslim Sages (hukama”& „uqalaa€). „Aql is thus a pre-requisite for reception of the guidance mediated through God’s speech in the Qur’an. This crucial aspect gave rise to the widespread motto of the early Sages: ↪ „aqlala„anAllah /one who comprehends of God [His revealed admonitions and guidance].” It was elaborated further within the forensic notion of God’s „decisive argument‘/hujjah against humans, possessing an important function in human moral obligation (taklif). It was this fundamental aspect of „aql as „comprehension of speech‘ that more than any other feature facilitated the eventual integration of the early notions on intelligence with metaphysical ideas of „intellect‘ derived from the Hellenic conception of nous (compare: nutq /„speech reason€).

- „aql affords a role for human intelligence, a role providentially intended by the Creator, perhaps even a synergistic role. The Qur’anic data promoted a vision of an intelligible cosmos susceptible of apprehension by individual cognizing organisms whose perceptions of meaning are necessary for the realization of the ultimate purpose of creation. This Qur’anic teaching represents a rupture with old Arab views, providing a new orientation with profound consequences for Islamic religious thought and practice.
• There is a stress on moral reformation, repentant self-struggle and self-scrutiny (muhasabat al-nafs), and upon the cultivation of interior ethical spiritualizing virtues. The gist of this early religious understanding of „aql is well captured in the summary statement by al-Sadiq who defined al-„aql to be „that by which the All- Merciful is worshipped and by which Paradise is earned/ma „ubida bi-hi l-Rahman wa uktusiba bi-hi l-Jinan.”\(^\text{18}\)

These and related motifs comprise the physiognomy of a social, religious and psycho ethical understanding of intelligence, sheltered under the pavilion of Qur’anic givens and further promoted in the early Muslim appropriation of wisdom teachings in their immediate environment, primarily old Arab, Biblicic, and Iranian. The sapiential background of specific early Islamic „aql notions remains largely overlooked by Occidental students, and unappreciated by many contemporary Muslims. At almost every step, one may adduce both Semitic and Hellenic precedents for specific components. However, the idea of God as one who speaks is a notion without parallel in Greek philosophic thought.

This was easily related to the idea of the divine reason fashioning the universe, since in Genesis 1 creation was depicted as the result of God’s speaking. The Jew Philo of Alexandria was the first to link God’s speaking with the Stoic doctrine of the „reason principle”/logos, and this was taken up and extended by the Christian Fathers. [These „aql notions contributed to the parallel unfolding among early Shi’i and Sufi thinkers of the notion of the Muhammadian Light/al-Nur al-Muhammadi, eventually unfolding a cosmic metaphysic integrating the Qur’anic givens of the Pen and Tablet, and the angelic or sanctified Spirit/Ruh al-Qudus with the pre-cosmic „Reality of Muhammad”. The ancient association in Semitic religions of pre-existent Wisdom with God’s Throne and Light, which are shown here to have been a feature of proto- Sufi and Imami „aql speculations by no later than the mid-2nd century H, could have prepared the ground for the emergence of the idea of the Muhammadian Light as cosmic Mind Intellect.

The subsequent reception of the philosophers’ First Intellect (al-„aql al-awwal) into Islamic religious speculations beginning from the late 3rd/9th century, may well have benefited from the preceding mingling of Heavenly Wisdom with „aql. At least the preparation for such a reception within certain circles becomes more understandable when viewed through the lens of these 2nd century „aql speculations. The fact that the earlier falsasifah (al- Kindi, al-Farabi) are not attested to have explicitly invoked the Aql narrative in support of their appropriation of Hellenic philosophic teachings on First Intellect, lends credence to this possibility. What can be demonstrated is that the first Muslim philosophers who consciously made use of the Aql narrative were the Iranians Ahmad Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and Abu „Ali Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037)].

Our concise indication of the scope of the early Islamic „aql notions requires some appreciation for the historical context. While it is not our intention here to dwell in depth on this context\(^\text{19}\),
brief remarks are in order, particularly in light of the prevailing miscomprehensions over the significance of this term in early hadith. In the literary works of Muslim humanism and religionsethics (adab and akhlaq), the inborn virtue or innate talent of intelligence reason was praised in writings or chapters under the rubric ‘fi fadli l-aql / the surpassing merit of intelligence’. We should again emphasize that early Muslim sages viewed ‘aql to be the chief or leading trait, often placing it at the head of listings of moral traits - ten or one hundred ‘virtuous traits’/khisal - as ‘the commander of his troops.’

The earliest surviving narrative reports written down in compilations during the course of a century (roughly 180–280 H) within at least seven works attest to the importance of this primary stage of development. Several factors intervened to obscure this original Islamic religio-ethical comprehension of ‘aql. Probably the most damaging event leading to the deflection or mitigation of early ‘aql teachings was their almost total repudiation by the Sunni tradents or ‘Guardians of Tradition’, the ashab al-hadith, who fiercely resisted the trend to present these teachings as possessing genuine Prophetic authority. Fortunately, the same Sunni critics faithfully recorded many of these narratives in their collections of ‘weak’ or ‘spurious’ traditions (daif & mawdu,) and in compilations on the merits and demerits of transmitters (jarh wa ta., dij). For Sunnis it was primarily among ascetic mystic or proto-Sufi circles wherein these teachings were cultivated.

In marked contrast the Imami Shi‘ah preserved a number of like narratives through separate ‘lines-of-transmission’/riwayat from their Husaynid ‘Alid imams, placing them at the forefront of their ethical and theological teachings. The presence of these narratives among separate circles should be understood as pointing to the common matrix of tradition and to their early origin. Iraq appears to have been the primary locale for the intensive religious development of the cluster of ‘aql notions, within the circles stemming from the great Successor al-Hasan al-Basri, or in those around the seminal imams Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja‘far al-Sadiq. These circles constituted the cognitive elites of the early Muslim community, viewing the divinely provisioned trait of innate human intelligence as crucial to the religious enterprise and actively contributing to faith certainty, salvation and spiritual insight.

The centrality of ‘intelligence reason’ for Islamic Ethics /akhlaq unfolds out of the central insight that the human volitional impulse arises within us prompted by our own understanding, and directed by the reception of divine guidance from without. As one of its most basic functions, ‘intelligence reason’ energizes the efficacy of ‘ conscience’, thereby possessing a conative or volitional force since without the native intelligence created in us by God no ethical response is possible. This insight is ultimately responsible for the great emphasis put on reason as the condition for valid ‘moral obligation’/taklif among the Mu‘tazili and Ash‘ari theologians.
More significantly, human reception of divine guidance through revelation depends ultimately upon the efficacy and integrity of our reasoning–principle or intelligence. Without the divine provision of reason, humans would be incapable of comprehending and properly responding to God’s guidance. And the more abundant is an individual’s native endowment of reason, then the greater is the possibility for the individual to attain a larger magnitude of understanding and thereby realize a higher level of response. The unfolding of Islamic meditations on the role of reason in religious and spiritual experience flow in one way or another from this master idea.

One major trajectory of development held that there exists a direct proportion between the efforts of individuals who attain understanding, and the measure of intelligence-understanding divinely allotted to them. „Aql was conceived as an individual’s „custodian/qayyim whose individual allotment shapes obedience and the achievement of certainty/yaqin in the performance of deeds, enabling one to advance in degrees/ darajat. This trajectory fed into the emerging notions concerning the hierarchy of saints (al-awliya”). Another major trajectory clustered around the narratives on the creation and empowerment of intelligence reason, all being elaborations of the Aqbil report, the controversial hadith: —When God had created the intelligence, He said to him, „Face forward!’…”- including the motifs of Light, the Throne, the Pen/al-qalam, and the materiality of „aql

For example, the materiality of „aql as developed in early sources centered upon portraying the Prophet Muhammad as being „the weightiest in understanding wisdom/arjahu „aqlan” This took the form of depicting the one hundred, or the one thousand, „created measures/qisam of intelligence reason, of which Muhammad was endowed with nine hundred ninety-nine, the remaining one portion being distributed among the rest of humanity. Perhaps the first to mention this idea was the pupil of „Abdallah ibn „Abbas, the Kufan mawla Sa‘id b. Jubayr (executed 95/714), who was actually recounting an earlier notion: It has reached me that al-„aql was divided into a thousand parts. Muhammad was granted nine hundred ninety-nine parts, and his community was given only one part. Likewise the prophets before him, save that which God excelled Muhammad with - for God elected the prophets on account of their „aql

The thrust of such material distribution of intelligence involves the issue of reward and punishment, allowing for degrees of human achievement and increasing levels of insight. If there exists a set amount of intelligence in creation equally divided among all beings (eg. One kilogram) then every individual would possess an infinitesimal portion of a gram. However, some individuals have even less than that, while others have been endowed with several grams or more. From this ensues the corresponding reality of lesser or greater degrees in Paradise underlying the doctrine of Sainthood /wilayah as it was first elaborated among Iraqi and Syrian ascetic mystic circles (the salihun & zuhhad…, later termed sufi ) and by the Husaynid „Alid imams.
A central dimension of this unfolding is linked to the notion of ‘dissimilarity’ or ‘suppassingness’ (tafdil, tafadul, or tafawut al-nas fi l-„uqul) namely the degrees of the innate scope of cognitive illumination within a light mysticism. The tafdili and/or the predestinarian positions most often upheld the reality of intentional inequities in divine distribution of the created measures of „aql. This has always been the general position of Traditionalist Muslims, including the Hanbali school. Both Traditionalists and Sufis viewed it to be an innate endowment or ‘inborn trait’/gharizah, linking it with fitrah /the primordial human constitution. This stress on the innate dissimilarities or inborn inequities in human intelligence and the variable capacity of the individual „uqul probably reflects early Islamic meditation on and mitigation of widespread determinist views. The 3rd/9th century Central Asian theosophist, al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, termed the mother-lode of understanding-perceptivity as –the Omni-Intelligence/al-„aql alakbar,” declaring the science of its distribution to be a divine mystery. The 5th/11th century philosopher, Ibn Sina, addressed this issue but with differing assumptions in his discussion of the „sirr al-qadar /the secret of the divine measuring-out’. The greatest master Muhyi l-Din Ibn al-„Arabi took up and elaborated the „ilm al-qismah /science of the divine apportioning’ of al-„aql al-akbar, which he also termed –al-„,aql al akthar / the Most-Abundant Intelligence.”

The notion of God’s unequal allotment of discrete portions of intelligence also had important consequences for the theology of the sages. The strict qadari position (perhaps first exemplified only among certain Khariji and so-called Murji‘i25 exponents, and then later developed among the Mu_tazilah) was that all persons possess the same equal endowment. It is significant that the tafdili understanding of intelligence was of no importance for the Mu_tazilah, whose emphasis on „aql as prerequisite for cognizance of God in terms of innate human knowledge shared equally by all and as the basis of moral obligation, led them to a „fat‘ view of natural intelligence. The classical school of Ash_ari theologians also upheld this position, given that they also defined „aql in terms of necessary innate knowledge. For the earlier Ash_ari mutakallimun, „aql is therefore an „accident’/ „arad. It was al-Raghib al-Isfahani and then al-Ghazali who promoted the philosophical understanding of „aqlIntellect as an „immaterial substance‘/jawhar independent of matter, which was to become dominant among the later Ash_ari philosophically-tinted theologians.

There ultimately emerged a creative synthesis of theology with falsafah or hikmah as well as Sufism /tasawwuf; signaling the full bloom of Islamic intellectual genius. This fruit of mature Islamic „rational spirituality‘ was initiated by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.505/1111) through his synthesis of Shafi‘i legal theory and Ash_ari theological doctrines within a spiritual psychology and higher metaphysic containing speculative and experiential elements drawn from both Philosophy and Sufism. Ghazali’s pioneering integration of these heretofore antagonistic components marked the first appearance of a theologically grounded trans-rational metaphysic in Islamic thought.
Islamic thinkers and exponents always sought an equilibrium between the logico-cognitive processes of rational argumentation, proof and systematic thought, and the faith-based components bearing on sacred authority, moral intention and responsibility, and the operation of conscience and perfection of perceptive insight. Reason was fixed within proper bounds in order to properly fulfill its role in human cognition, where the Heart Mind is the true center of perceptive meaning and action. Unfettered reason alienated from the deeper aspects of the autonomous human being results in dis-equilibrium - with severe consequences for humanity and society now being experienced today.
Endnotes

1 We are preparing a detailed lexical-conceptual examination of the development of "aql" notions, entitled "Aql Mind Cognition In Early Islamic Wisdom."


7 Recently Riad A. Kassis has studied the islamization process for a few old Arab proverbial sayings; see his The Book of Proverbs and Arabic Proverbial Works (Leiden, Brill, 1999) 250–258 "Theological and Literary development in Arabic proverbs."

8 maqul was early employed as a verbal noun (masdar mimi) synonymous with aql.

10 See eg. Ibn Abi Shaybah, Musannaf XIII 214 16141; Ibn Hanbal, Kitab al-Zuhd, ed. M. Jalal Sharaf, I 167; and cf. B. Heller & N. Stillman, EI2 V 812 [parallels to Aesop].

11 For orientation on this second generation of Muslims and their important role in transmission of hadith, see S. A. Spectorisky, _Tabi’un_ EI2 X 28b–30a.

12 Ibn Abi l-Dunya, al-–Aql wa Fadluhu 35 §21; Abu Nu aym al- Isfahani, Hilyat al-Awliya ”IV 40–1; Ibn Fatik, Mukhtar al- Hikam wa Mahasin al-Kalim, ed. _A.-R. Badawi (Madrid, 1955) 271; Ibn al-Jawzi, Akhbar al-Adhkiya”8. This maxim occurs also with the wording _– ajfala min fiqhin fi l-din,– where the archaic signification of fiqh (‘understanding comprehension‘ regarding faith obedience) is synonymous with _– aqf; eg. Hilyat II p.p. 192–3.


14 The polarities _– aql vs. humq or hawa, and hilm vs. jahl. The two former pairs are rooted in old Arab usage, while the latter reflects post-Qur’anic employment; further, see our _Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom._


16 Cf. I Kings 4:29, regarding Solomon’s wisdom; _– grains of sand‘ was an old trope for an unlimited number.
See the interesting study by Claude Gilliot treating the *qalam* and *aql* creation narratives, "Mythe et Théologie: Calame et Intellect, Prédestination et Libre Arbitre", *Arabica* 45 (July 1998) 151–192, esp. p.151 & 185–189 on myth and theology; sadly, Gilliot utterly fails to appreciate the primary ethico-theological basis of the *aql* narratives (p.172–185). Other significant utterances (*aqwal*) are assigned to Ibn Salam, e.g. a report in Abu Ya`la al-Mawsili’s *Kitab al-Tafsir*: "ma khalaqa llahu khalqan akrama "alayhi min Muhammadin S.../God created no creature more cherished by Him than Muhammad...,” specifying that the Prophet is greater than Angels Michael and Gabriel or the sun and moon; cited by Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu“, Fatawa Shaykh al-Islam*, ed. al-Asami al-Najdi (al-Riyad 1991) IV 357.


Details are provided in our forthcoming study *Aql In Early Islamic Wisdom*. See the overview in *Between Wisdom and Reason*.


The reasons are complex, and are dealt with in our study, *The Kitab al-,Aql* by Dawud b. al-Muhabbar (d.206/821) and its rejection by Sunni Tradents, *Arabica* [Paris], forthcoming.

See above n.14.


As for the objection that if the objective quantity of *aql*remains constant, and yet the number of humans is always increasing-this would not be valid for those who upheld the pre-creation of souls before bodies, since the number of souls is also fixed from the start.

We mean the theological grouping labeled ‘Qadari Ghaylaniyyah‘, whose doctrines were attributed to the early Qadari activist Ghaylan b. Muslim al-Dimashqi (executed 125/742). Ghaylan’s ideas were supported politically by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid III in the Syrian revolt which brought him to the throne for a brief period in 127/ 744; see W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973) pp. 85–88, 121, 125; W. Madelung, *Mudji’a*’*EI2* VII 606b.
CHAPTER 14

In the Beginning was Consciousness

*Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

One alone is the Dawn beaming over all this.
It is the One that severally becomes all this.

Rg-Veda, VIII, 58:2

The nameless [Tao] is the beginning of Heaven and Earth,
The named [Tao] is the mother of ten thousand things.

Tao Te Ching, ch. 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

Gospel of John, 1:1

But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: “Be!” and it is.

Quran, 36:81

When we turn to the sacred scriptures of various religions, we discover that in every case the origin of the cosmos and of man is identified as a Reality which is conscious and in fact constitutes consciousness understood on the highest level as Absolute Consciousness, which is transcendent and yet the source of all consciousness in the cosmic realm including our own. Furthermore the “in the beginning” is understood not only as belonging to the past but also to the present moment which is the eternal now. That is why “in the beginning” must also be understood as “in principle” as the Latin translation of the opening verse of the Gospel of John asserts, “*in principia erat verbum.*” Whether we speak of Allah who commands things to be and they are, or the Tao, or the Word by which all things were made, or Brahman, we are speaking of Consciousness of an ever-living and present and this truth is made especially explicit in Hinduism where the principial Reality which is the source of all things is described as at once Being, Consciousness and Ecstasy. Nor is this unanimity of vision of the Origin of all things as identified with consciousness confined to sacred scriptures. Both Oriental and traditional Western philosophers speak of the same truth. The *tò Agathon* of Plato is not only the
Supreme Good but also supreme awareness of the Good, and *nous* or intellect, so central to Greek philosophy, is of course inseparable from consciousness. Islamic philosophers consider being to be inseparable from knowledge and therefore awareness, and consider cosmic levels of existence also to be levels of knowledge and awareness. As for Hinduism, in its worldview the existence of a thing, even a rock, is also a state of consciousness.

One can then assert safely that in the traditional world there was unanimity concerning the priority of consciousness in relation to what we call “matter” today. The Reality which is seen by all these traditional religions and philosophies to be the origin of things both temporally and in principle is also Supreme Consciousness and can only be reached when human beings are able to elevate their own level of consciousness. Even in Buddhism, which does not speak of an objective Supreme Reality and of cosmogenesis as understood in the Abrahamic and Iranian religions as well as Hinduism, *nirvana* is the supreme state of consciousness and Buddhahood is also inseparable from consciousness. The only exception to this unanimous traditional view in the old days was to be found in certain anti-metaphysical philosophies of the late Antiquity accompanying the death throes of Hellenistic and Roman civilizations and in certain marginal schools of ancient India which were thoroughly rejected by the mainstream orthodox schools of Hindu thought.

The privileging of denying the primacy of consciousness wholesale remained for the modern world, especially with the advent of the materialistic and scientistic philosophies which came to the fore after the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century. Furthermore, this transformation did not take place until the modern idea of matter, not to be confused with its understanding in Greek philosophy and science, was developed with Descartes and Galileo. By taking away from corporeal existence all its qualitative aspects and reducing it to pure quantity, these men, followed by many others, created a worldview in which there was such a thing as pure inert matter divorced totally from life and consciousness but somehow mysteriously known by the knowing subject or the mind. Cartesian bifurcation created a dualism between mind and matter which has dominated Western thought since the 17th century, a dualism which has led many to choose the primacy of matter over mind and the establishment of the view that in the beginning was matter and not consciousness, even if some still hold to a deistic conception of a Creator God.

The prevalence of this supposedly scientific materialism, which, however, is not all borne out by science as science and not pseudo-theology or philosophy, gained momentum in the 19th century with
In the Beginning was Consciousness

the evolutionary theory of Darwin which itself is an ideology in support of this so-called materialism and also based on it. The penetration of the view that all things begin with matter which then evolves into life and later consciousness into the worldview of the general public in the West has been such that despite the total rejection of the classical view of matter in modern quantum mechanics, there still lingers in the public arena reliance upon a materialistic perspective which reduces ultimately all things to “matter.” This reductionism has become part and parcel of the modern and even post-modern mindset. People believe that it is possible to understand a thing only through analysis and the breaking up of that thing to its “fundamental” parts which are material. They are led to believe that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its parts and physicists continue to search for the ultimate particles or building blocks of the universe which the less sophisticated public envisages as minute billiard balls which are then accumulated together to create all the beings of the universe. In such a perspective based on materialistic reductionism both life and consciousness are seen as epiphenomena of material factors whether they be matter or energy. The whole rapport between consciousness and corporeal existence is thus reversed.

In traditional cosmologies Pure Consciousness, that is also Pure Being, descends, while remaining Itself transcendent vis-à-vis Its manifestations, through various levels of the cosmic hierarchy to reach the physical world whereas in the modern reductionist view things ascend from the primordial cosmic soup. Even if certain individual scientists believe that a conscious and intelligent Being brought about the Big Bang and originated the cosmos, consciousness plays no role in the so-called evolution of the cosmos from the early aggregate of molecules to the appearance of human beings on the planet. In the traditional world view, human beings have descended from a higher realm of being and consciousness, whereas according to the modernist perspective so prevalent in present day society, they have ascended from below. These are two diametrically opposed points of view, one based on the primacy of consciousness and the other on the primacy of unconscious and blind material agents, forces, and processes.

* * *

How we view the nature of reality has a direct bearing upon how we live as human beings. For millennia human beings lived in a universe dominated by the idea of the primacy of consciousness over all that is corporeal and material. They fought wars and there was disease but they lived in a world of meaning and beauty. They created traditional
arts of surpassing beauty and lived, to a large extent, in harmony and peace with their natural environment. They knew who they were, where they came from and where they were going. The denial of the supremacy and primacy of consciousness and the substitution of a materialistic reductionism in its place, has given human beings greater domination over nature and certain earthly comforts while, needless to say, creating new discomforts. It has cured many diseases while opening the door to diseases unknown before. And it has been defended as being a way to peace while making possible wars with a degree of violence and lethal effects not imagined in days of old. But most of all it has destroyed the harmonious relation not only between man and God and the spiritual world but also between man and nature by permitting the creation of a science based not on wisdom but on power and its applications as a new technology which has the capability of destroying the very order of life on earth. On the individual level, it has taken away from human beings the ultimate meaning of life and destroyed the home which they considered the universe to be, making human beings aliens within a world view constructed by human minds.

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Let us examine further the consequences of substituting for the primacy of consciousness, the primal reality of matter or matter/energy according to the modern scientistic perspective. By positing matter as the ground of all cosmic reality, and for many the only reality, a reductionism has developed which reduces the spirit to the psyche, the psyche to biological processes, life to the activity of chemical agents and chemical elements to the particles of physics. People continue to speak of finding the “fundamental” building blocks of the universe from which one could build up step by step to the greatest prophets, saints, sages, thinkers, and artists. The reality of higher levels of being is thereby seen as nothing more than phenomena resulting from purely material and quantitative entities and processes. Life is seen as an accident and consciousness an epiphenomenon of life. The universe is depicted as a “dead” one devoid of any life, meaning, soul or consciousness. Consequently human beings are made to feel like an island amidst a vast, threatening ocean of blind and dead matter. They have no home in the cosmos as did their ancestors and feel alienated from all that is not human. Furthermore, this alienation has nothing to do with the alienation of the spiritual human being from the world as understood religiously. Nor is it in any way related to the saying of Christ, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The new alienation from
the world resulting from scientistic reductionism is of a very different order. Traditional men and women found their home ultimately in the Divine but they also saw in this world a domain dominated by God and full of souls and spirits which corresponded to different aspects of their nature. They never felt as if they were alone in a universe totally blind to their deepest hopes and aspirations. The modern forms of human alienation whether psychological or social, issue from the cosmic isolation created by a worldview which denies the primacy of consciousness.

Human beings are in need of meaning as much as they are in need of air to breathe and food to eat. Modern materialistic reductionism has not only resulted in chemically infested food and polluted air, but also the loss of meaning in its ultimate sense. There can in fact be no ultimate meaning without the acceptance of the Ultimate in the metaphysical sense. It is indeed a great paradox that human consciousness in modern times has produced a view of the cosmos which has no room for consciousness. And when human beings do seek to find consciousness in the objective world, or experience what they consider to be encounters with conscious beings outside of the human realm, they are marginalized and condemned to the category of hallucinating men and women in need of psychiatric care. When our ancestors could encounter angels and even lesser beings in nature, and when such encounters were acceptable within the Weltanschauung in which they lived, they did not encounter “aliens” in the modern sense nor did they feel the need to do so. Nor were they marginalized as abnormal in the societies in which they lived. And the conscious beings they did encounter were not alien to them.

The denial of the primacy of consciousness also resulted both directly and indirectly in the desacralization of nature and the reduction of nature to a pure “it,” to a commodity to be used by human beings as they deemed necessary. The care for nature was turned into its rape as the prevalent view of nature became ever more impervious to its spiritual qualities, its mystery, its innate harmony and beauty. All those aspects of nature, celebrated over the centuries by sages, saints, poets and artists, became subjectivized and made to appear as being objectively unreal. Turned into a commodity to be used by the ever growing avaricious appetite of modern humanity as consumer, the natural environment soon began to suffer, leading to the environmental crisis which now threatens the web of life on earth. Even today few want to accept the direct relation between the materialistic view of nature and the destruction of nature on the unprecedented scale that we observe everywhere on the globe today.
The materialistic world view and the denying of the primacy of consciousness have also had a direct bearing on the weakening of ethical norms and practices. In all civilizations morality was related to religion and a philosophical world view in which good and evil, right and wrong had a cosmic as well as human dimension. We can see clear examples of this rapport not only in the Abrahamic religions, but also in Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Ethics is always related in one way or another to metaphysics. In denying the primacy of consciousness in favor of the material, the modern paradigm has weakened the objective cadre for human ethics not only by marginalizing and weakening religion, but also by reducing the cosmos to a purely “material” reality in which good and evil have no meaning any more than does beauty. À la Galileo and Descartes all such categories are relegated to the subjective realm and banished from objective reality. Ethics is thereby weakened wherever this world view has flourished and secularized ethics based on such a truncated view of reality has never been able to gain widespread acceptance. Moreover, all this has occurred at a time when human beings are in the greatest need of an environmental ethics which would appeal to the vast majority of the human family, most of whom still closely identify ethics with God, with sacred laws and teachings of various religions. Nor is the need for ethics confined to the environment. It is also of the utmost importance to emphasize ethics in the dealing of human beings with each other when, thanks to modern technology, weapons of war and conflict have become lethal to a degree beyond imagination.

If in the beginning was only the soup of molecules, then our deepest yearnings and aspirations, our deepest feelings, our sense of love, beauty, justice and goodness are all ephemeral subjective states caused by blind evolutionary forces and truth has meaning only when operationally defined. What we call our humanity is only an illusion. What is real is what we experience of the outside world seen only as a domain of material entities and forces in various interactions and processes which are totally indifferent to our humanity. To deny the primacy of consciousness is in fact to confirm knowingly or unknowingly our own inhumanity and to admit that all that we consider to be the deepest elements of our thoughts, emotions, and even spiritual states are ultimately illusory and unreal, being reducible to material agents and forces. It is to surrender ourselves to the sub-human, which in fact we see manifesting itself, by no means accidentally, to an ever greater degree in the human order as it pulls humanity with ever greater speed downwards toward the abyss.

If consciousness in its highest sense is not the alpha of cosmic and human existence, it cannot, metaphysically speaking, be its omega.
either. By denying the primacy of consciousness, modern materialism has also cast doubt on the reality of the immortality of the human soul and the afterlife. Today in the West even many religious people do not take eschatological realities seriously. Besides the most tragic consequences for the human soul who denies such realities, the weakening of belief in eternal life also has a direct consequence on how we live in this world and more particularly, upon the destruction of the natural environment. If life on this earth is the only life we have, then we should do everything possible to live a worldly life as fully as possible. For most people such a life means hedonism and consumerism to the extent possible. A few agnostics might be satisfied with “the life of the mind,” but for most people loss of fear of the infernal states and hope for paradise results in giving full vent to their sensual passions and their gratification which result in ever greater expectation of material “benefits” from their environment with catastrophic consequences for the natural world as well as for the human agent within that world.

The consequences of the loss of the vision of the Sacred Origin of the cosmos and denial of the primacy of consciousness are so many and so multifarious that they cannot all be mentioned here. And yet, opposition to this view is so strong within the citadel of the modern scientistic paradigm, that even scientific arguments for intelligent design of the universe, which implies of course the primacy of intelligence or consciousness, are brushed aside in dogmatic fashion by many high priests of the pseudo-religion of scientism. Despite this negative situation, the truth of the primacy of consciousness must be asserted whenever and wherever possible. And there are signs that more and more perspicacious people are awakening from their “dogmatic slumber” and realizing this truth.

If the truth of the primacy of consciousness cosmically and ontologically as well as microcosmically were to be reasserted and accepted on a wide scale again in the contemporary world, human life would become different qualitatively and many of the obstacles facing humanity today would be removed. Human life would have meaning beyond transient psychological states and evanescent sensuous experiences. Human life would also regain the aspect of ultimacy which all religions believe it possesses. The reason for the sacredness of human life would become clear and the quality of sacredness would have an ontological basis rather being mere sentimentality as it is today when seen in the context of a strictly scientistic point of view. And the intimations of immortality would be seen as a blinding reality rather than sentimental wishful thinking combined often with doubt.

Were we to accept the truth that “in the beginning was consciousness” and that “it is now as it was at the beginning,” we would no
longer feel as aliens in a dead and forbidding cosmos, as accidents in a lifeless universe. Far from being aliens, we would feel once again at home in the cosmos as did traditional men and women over the ages. Our rapport with animals, plants and even the inanimate world would change from one of strife and need for control and domination to one of harmony and equilibrium with a much greater possibility of intimacy with more human beings than the current mind-set makes possible.

Finally we would regain the cosmic dimension of our existence. Our deepest values, our attraction to and yearning for beauty, peace and justice, and the experience of love itself on all levels would not be seen as being simply subjective states devoid of any objective reality but on the contrary as corresponding to cosmic and ultimately metacosmic realities. And our ethical actions and norms, far from being simply based on standards set by merely human decisions and agreements, would be seen as having a divine origin and cosmic correspondences and as being much more real than simply convenient accommodations created by human societies for their survival or selfish interests.

If human beings were not to live below the human level, but were to realize the full possibility of being human, they would grasp intuitively the truth of the assertion of the primacy of consciousness. Their own consciousness would be raised to a level where they would know through direct intellecution that the alpha and omega of cosmic reality cannot but be the Supreme Consciousness which is also Pure Being and that all beings in the universe possess a degree of consciousness in accord with their existential state. They would realize that as human beings we are given the intelligence to know the One Who is the Origin and End of all things, who is Sat (Being), Chit (Consciousness), and Ānanda (Bliss), and to realize that this knowledge itself is the ultimate goal of human life, the crown of human existence, and what ultimately makes us human beings who can discourse with the trees and the birds as well as with the angels and who are on the highest level the interlocutors of that Supreme Reality who has allowed us to say “I” but who is ultimately the I of all I’s.

In the Beginning was Consciousness by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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A Path to the Oasis: "Sharī’ah" and Reason in Islamic Moral Epistemology
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A path to the Oasis: Shari'ah and reason in Islamic moral epistemology

Edward Omar Moad

Abstract I propose a framework for comparative Islamic—Western ethics in which the Islamic categories Islam, Iman, and Ihsan are juxtaposed with the concepts of obligation, value, and virtue, respectively. I argue that shari'ah refers to both the obligation component and the entire structure of the Islamic ethic; suggesting a suspension of the understanding of shari'ah as simply Islamic "law," and an alternative understanding of usul al-fiqh as a moral epistemology of obligation. I will test this approach by addressing the question of reason in Islamic moral epistemology via an examination of an argument advanced by a founding usul scholar Muhammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfī'ī (150 A.H./767 C.E.).

Keywords Islam · Shari'ah · Ethics · Moral · Epistemology · Fiqh · Usul

A suggested general framework for comparative Islamic: Western ethics

Frederick Carney (1983) has proposed that the study of any religious ethic proceed on the hypothesis that the ethic consists of an obligation, a virtue, and a value component.1 The task, in this case, is to identify and understand each of these components in the ethic, the ways in which they relate to each other, and the manner in which all of this is affected or determined by the religion itself. Carney illustrated the application of this methodology by way of elucidating some aspects of Islamic ethics; specifically, the five-fold schema for evaluating actions in fiqh, and al-Ghazali's theory of virtue; intended as studies in the ethic's obligation and virtue components, respectively.

1 Carney (1983, p. 159).
Islamic ulema have traditionally organized their disciplines according to the fundamental categories of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. A working hypothesis of what follows is that Islam, Iman, and Ihsan represent what Carney calls the obligation, value, and virtue components, respectively, of the Islamic ethic. The first set of terms is familiar to Islamic scholars, but virtually unknown in the West, while the latter are familiar to Western ethicists, but much less so among Muslims. If these terms are correlates in the way just proposed, then elucidating that relationship may render useful analytical tools for future studies in comparative ethics between the two traditions.

This raises the question, what are 'obligation,' 'virtue,' and 'value,' on the one hand; and Islam, Iman, and Ihsan, on the other? By an ethic's obligation component, Carney means, “all that responds to the question, What ought to be done?” By the virtue component, he means, “all that responds to the question, What kind of person (or society) is it most appropriate to be?” And by the value component, he means, “all that responds to the question, What objects or states of affairs are important?”

Determinations of value, according to Carney, usually proceed by “engaging in some sort of grading or ranking of objects or states of affairs,” of virtue, by “setting forth an attractive ideal of a perfect or authentic person (or society),” and of obligation, by “employing principles and rules (or commandments or laws).”

The scholars of Islam, meanwhile, have traditionally based the triadic organization of their sciences on, among other things, the pivotal “Hadith of Gabriel,” narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al-Khattab as follows:

My father, Umar ibn al-Khattab, told me: One day we were sitting in the company of Allah’s Apostle (peace be upon him) when there appeared before us a man dressed in pure white clothes, his hair extraordinarily black. There were no signs of travel on him. None amongst us recognized him. At last he sat with the Apostle. He knelt before him, placed his palms on his thighs, and said: “Muhammad, inform me about al-Islam.” The Messenger of Allah said: “Al-Islam implies that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and you establish prayer, pay Zakat, observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform pilgrimage if you are solvent enough.” The inquirer said: “You have told the truth.” It amazed us that he would put the question and then he would himself verify the truth. The inquirer said: “Inform me about Iman.” The Prophet replied: “That you affirm your faith in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil.” The inquirer said: “You have told the truth.” The inquirer again said: “Inform me about al-Ihsan.” The Prophet said: “That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don’t see Him, He, verily, sees you” ... Then the inquirer went on his way but I stayed with the Prophet for a long while. He then, said to me: “Umar, do you know who this inquirer was?”

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid p. 160.

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replied: “Allah and His Apostle know best.” The Holy Prophet remarked: “He was Gabriel. He came to you teach you your religion.”

Sheikh Nuh Ha Mim Keller gives some explanation of what has been inferred from this narration. “The use of din in the last words of it,” he writes, “Atakum yu’allimu kum dinakum, “came to teach you your religion,” entails that the religion of Islam is composed of the three fundamentals mentioned in the hadith: Islam, or external compliance with what Allah has asked of us; Iman, or the belief in the unseen that the prophets have informed us of; and Ihsan, or to worship Allah as though one sees Him.”

The five constituents of the Islam component—known as the ‘pillars of Islam’—are all actions, representing, in Keller’s words, “external compliance with what Allah has asked of us.” If we propose that this also represents what Carney refers to as the ‘obligation component’ of the Islamic ethic, then it follows that, in that ethic, the set of our moral obligations—what ought to be done—is co-extensive with what God asks. Keller writes:

The hadith’s very words “to worship Allah” show us the interrelation of these three fundamentals, for the how of “worship” is only known through the external prescriptions of Islam, while the validity of this worship in turn presupposes Iman or faith in Allah and the Islamic revelation, without which worship would be but empty motions; while the words, “as if you see Him,” show that Ihsan implies a human change for it entails the experience of what, for most of us, is not experienced.

There is a certain sense of the term ‘worship’ which, in modern parlance, connotes a narrow range of activities connected to religious ritual, prayer, and the like. Given this idea, the suggestion that the Islam component—through which, as Keller puts it, how to worship is known—represents all that responds, in Islam, to the question of what ought to be done, would seem to pose the troubling implication that moral value is restricted to the performance of purely ‘devotional’ practices. This overlooks the much broader scope of worship in the context of a tradition according to which, for instance, the Prophet stated that ‘work is worship,’ and at another time informed his Companions that the act of sex with one’s spouse can bring divine reward. Indeed, there may be a case that the best way to characterize the idea of worship in this context is to say that it encompasses the entirety of that which ought to be done (in a sense that includes the supererogatory as well as the obligatory), whatever that happens to be under the circumstances in which one finds oneself.

Now, if it makes sense to say that the validity of the proposition that such and such action ought to be done depends on an appropriate connection between the action

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4 Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1—For brevity’s sake, a portion of the hadith, recounting a part of the conversation about signs of the hour of judgment, has not been reproduced here. It is not insignificant, however, that such a topic was included in this conversation.


6 Ibid.
and some object or state of affairs of value or importance, then there is a clear parallel between this plausible relation between obligation and value, on the one hand, and that which Keller describes here as obtaining between the *Islam* and *Iman* components. The latter, as the hadith describes it, certainly lays out fundamental ‘objects or states of affairs,’ so to speak, which are of supreme value in Islam, such as God, revelation, and final judgment. In this case, *Ihsan* would be the way in which one ought to do that which ought to be done—as if you see God; and the change that this entails, according to Keller, is clearly toward being a kind of person understood as “most appropriate to be,” to use Carney’s words in defining “virtue component.”

According to Keller, “the level of *Islam* has been preserved and conveyed to us by the Imams of *Shari’ah* or ‘Sacred Law’ and its ancillary disciplines…” Therefore, if the *Islam* component of Islam is, indeed, the obligation component of the Islamic ethic, then understanding the Islamic ethics of obligation requires a look at *Shari’ah*. On the basis of the etymology of the term, along with its use in the Qur’an, I will present a conception of *Shari’ah* which will support the suggestion that it can be understood as the ‘obligation component’ of the Islamic ethic. Furthermore, this conception carries within it a reference to all three components, and can thus be understood as a reference to the entire structure of that ethic.

**Shari’ah**

The term ‘shari’ah’—شرعية—comes from the root, شرع, and Lane’s *Arabic–English Lexicon* does include among the word’s meanings, “the religious law of God: consisting of such ordinances as those of fasting and prayer and pilgrimage and the giving of the poor rate and marriage and other acts of piety, or of obedience to God, or duty to Him and to men.” Despite this, and the fact that most modern scholars of the topic refer to *Shari’ah* in English as ‘law,’ there are good reasons to keep this term at arm’s length, avoiding a simplistic translation of *Shari’ah* as ‘Islamic law’.9

In translating a term, the probability of distorting the meaning increases with the complexity, specificity, and theoretical baggage of the terms employed in the translation. The term ‘law’ rates quite high on this scale. Its meaning—the question of what law *is*—remains an open question that constitutes an entire field of Western philosophy. Simply defining *Shari’ah* as ‘Islamic law,’ then, entails first, that the question of what *Shari’ah* is also remains open, and second, that its closure is contingent on the closure of the question of law. The consequence of the first entailment is that defining *Shari’ah* as Islamic ‘law’ tells us little or nothing about what it is. The consequence of the second entailment is that it becomes the task of Western philosophers of law to determine what *Shari’ah* *is*, and they should be about as happy to accept such a responsibility as they would be to accept a definition of ‘law’ as ‘Western shari’ah.’

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7 Ibid.
8 Lane (1956, p. 1535).
9 These reasons have little to do with the “mosque and state in Islam” issues, which themselves cannot be discussed with any clarity before the fundamental moral paradigm of Islam is understood.
Majid Khadduri, for instance, opens his translation of Imam al-Shafii’s *Risala* with the proclamation that, “law is a system of social control established for the purpose of maintaining an ordered society among men.”\(^{10}\) If *Shar‘i‘ah* simply ‘Islamic law,’ it should follow that *Shar‘i‘ah* is an Islamic system of social control established for maintaining an ordered society. But while it does make provisions for social order, such can hardly be claimed to constitute the *essential* function of *Shar‘i‘ah*, such that it could be simply defined as a ‘system of social control.’ Such a statement indicates, rather, what the concept of *Shar‘i‘ah* becomes, when uprooted from the context of its native worldview, and transplanted into the context of a worldview the ontology of which does not include the concerns to which the essential functions of *Shar‘i‘ah* refer.

*Shar‘i‘ah* is divine in origin and transcendent in its aims. Consequently, the obligations it entails are understood as obligations to God, and not simply obligations to the state. A simple application of legal terminology, restricted in scope, as it generally is, to the latter, carries the potential for misrepresentation in this respect. By this, I do not mean to imply that no obligations, under *Shar‘i‘ah*, are enforceable by the state. When the *Shar‘i‘ah* obliges the ruler—under certain circumstances—to cut the hand of a convicted thief, then this constitutes a moral obligation, on the part of the ruler, to God; and it means that the individual’s obligation to God to refrain from stealing is deemed enforceable by the state. However, if an individual Muslim were to be stranded on a desert island, alone, and outside the jurisdiction of any worldly government, there are a good number of *Shar‘i‘ah* obligations that will still apply to him. Only under a conception of ‘law’ in terms of which legal obligation is possible under such circumstances, would it be remotely possible for the term to adequately apply to *Shar‘i‘ah*.

**Etymology of *Shar‘i‘ah***

In order to understand what *Shar‘i‘ah* is in its own terms, one must understand the role it plays within its native context, which is the worldview of Islam; and this requires us to start from a definition employing terms in the English language more basic than ‘law.’ Of those listed in Lane’s, “a way of belief or conduct that is manifest and right in religion” is more useful for our purposes, primarily because it shares, in the idea of a way, a conceptual common denominator with the original meaning of the term, which is:

A watering place; a resort of drinkers [both of men and beasts]; a place to which men come to drink therefrom and to draw water...such as is permanent, and apparent to the eye, like the water of rivers, not water from which one draws with the well-rope...and [in like manner it is said that] أُنْسَبْنَا مَعَالَةً signifies a place of descent to water: or a way to water.\(^{11}\)

The idea of a ‘path’ or ‘way’ rests on that of *movement in a direction*. Verb forms of the term ‘shar‘i‘ah’ carry the idea of direction into something, شَرِّعَتْ فِي المَاء (shara‘tu

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\(^{10}\) Khadduri p. 3.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
fil mā") for example, means: ‘I entered into the water,’ as well as ‘I drank the water with my hands.’ (shara’a fil amr) means: ‘He entered into the affair.’ These latter two are essentially intentional in nature; and intentionality is itself essentially directional. Thus, in English, a purpose is also an ‘aim.’ (shar'a), said of a spear, means ‘It pointed directly.’ That is, it aimed.

A Shari’ah is a path that aims; that is, a path with a purpose; and the purpose of the sort of path that has a purpose is nearly always to take you somewhere. Of fundamental importance, with respect to the function of any such path, is that it is marked in some way. An invisible or merely abstract ‘path’ cannot show you the way. A path that takes you to your destination must be one by which the way becomes clear. Indeed, the same term, (shara’a), that in relation to a spear, means ‘It pointed directly,’ in relation to a path (and also to an affair or a case) means ‘It was or became apparent, manifest, or clear.’ The word (shar'), meaning ‘a manifest, a plain, or an open track, or road, or way,’ can also carry the sense of ‘sufficiency,’ as in the Arabic proverb: (shar'uka ma ballaghak-almahalla). That is, ‘sufficient for you is that which will cause you to reach the place (you are going).’

The purpose of a Shari’ah, understood as a path to water, is for the traveler to travel to a place from where he can drink and draw water. This is also, clearly, the very essence of a Shari’ah; for how can a path be a path to water that does not, when traveled, take one to water? The idea that emerges, therefore, contains within itself a conceptual reference to water as well as to a traveler in need of it. Human beings need water for two reasons: to drink and to clean. In the course of life we periodically become thirsty and dirty, and thus have a constantly recurring need of the substance—water—the nature of which suffices for transformation from a state of thirst and filth to one of satiety and purity.

The term ‘shari’ah’ simultaneously conjures a narrower and a broader concept. The former is simply that of the path itself. The latter includes the path, as well as the other components of the relational structure within which, alone, it can be a path to water, i.e. water and its value to, and effect on, the traveler. A Shari’ah shows you what you ought to do (‘walk this way’) to access the source of that which you need (water) in order to bring about the desired state (satiety and purity). In the concrete imagery invoked in the original meaning of the term ‘shari’ah,’ then, we find represented an obligation component: the path, the traveling of which is what ought to be done. We also find a value component: the water, an object the value and importance of which is

12 Lane (1956, p. 1533).
13 Ibid.
14 Commonly, the mark of a path is the effect of its having been frequently traveled, so that the ground is well worn in the place where people have walked before. Thus, the meaning, mentioned above, of (shar')—‘a large street or thoroughfare,’ shows its significance. It is a well traveled path of the community at large. The idea implicit in the image of a path being marked out or clarified by the footsteps of predecessors and a community alludes to a crucial element of Islamic moral epistemology.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid p. 1535.
that in virtue of which the proposition that the path *ought to be taken* is *valid*. Lastly, we find a virtue component: the state of satiety and purity that the water promises for a thirsty traveler, representing a *human change* toward being the *kind of person* the being of which is *ideal*.

**Shar'iah in the Qur’an**

As far as I know, derivatives of the root شریعهُ شریع to appear in the text of the Qur’an in just five places. Two of these five are actually instances of the verb شریعهُ (shara’a), which, as previously mentioned, can mean ‘directed’ or ‘aimed’. These appear in the thirteenth and twenty-first verse of the forty-second chapter, Al-Shura. The statement in 42:13 is translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as: “The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah,” while that in 42:21 is: “Have they partners (in Godhead), who have established for them some religion without the permission of Allah?” The key Arabic phrase in 42:13 is شریعهُ لئام من الدين (shara’a la kum min al-din). Thus, it could plausibly be understood to mean, ‘He aimed/pointed/directed you’ (shara’a la kum) ‘regarding the din’ (min al-din). In 42:21, the key phrase is شریعهُ لئام من الدين (shara’a la hum min al-din), and a similar translation is likewise plausible. The point here is not to offer alternative translations or take issue with Ali’s. It is simply to bring out the element of trajectory at the core of the idea of Shar’iah, which is not so apparent with the term ‘established’ without its being specified as the establishment of an aim.

In 5:48 we find the statement: “To each among you we have prescribed a شریعه عبان (shir’ah wa minhaj),” which Ali translates as “a Law and an Open Way.” But, where the term شریعهُ (Shar’iah) appears in verse 45:18, Ali translates it as: “Then We put thee on the (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), and follow not the desires of those who know not.” The “Way of Religion” here, is the Arabic شریعه عبان (shari’ati min al-amr). An explanation for the difference may rest in context. Just before the statement in 5:48, the Prophet is told: “…so judge between them by what Allah had revealed, and follow not their vain desires…” Indeed, during the revelation of that verse, he had been placed in the position of arbiter between members of various religious communities in Medina; Christians and Jews whom, we are told, had each been given their own shir’ah wa minhaj. The context of 45:18, however, is from an earlier period in Mecca, where this sort of adjudication was not an issue.

Muhammad Asad, on the other hand, translates the verse as: “And finally [O Muhammad,] We have set thee on a way by which the purpose [of faith] may be fulfilled; so follow thou this way, and follow not the likes and dislikes of those who do not know [the truth].” He explains this on the basis of the fact that, “the common denominator in all the possible meanings of the term amr—e.g., ‘command,”

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18 Ibid 5:48, p. 263.
19 Ibid p. 1297.
"injunction," "ordinance," "matter [of concern]," "event," "action," etc.—is the element of purpose…which obviously alludes to the purpose underlying all divine revelation and, consequently, man’s faith in it."21 An interesting fact that Asad does not mention is that the closely related term amaar means "a small sign, or mark, of stones, to show the way, in a waterless desert."22

**Usul al Fiqh as a moral epistemology and the role of reason**

As we have noted, any path that leads you somewhere needs to be clearly marked; there must be amaar to indicate the way. The amaar of Shari’ah are the commands of Allah, delivered to humanity through the revelation of the Books and the Prophets, of which the Qur’an, and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, are considered final. Taking the path, therefore, involves the identification and interpretation, from within this material, of the amaar that mark it out. This raises the question of the role of reason, and its relation to revelation, in the structure of this ethic.

In the opening of his theological treatise, al-Iqtisād fi al-I’tiqad, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (450–505 A.H./1058–1111 C.E.) castigated those who attempt to depend exclusively either on reason or revelation. "Oh how one falls short and trails behind in misguided paths when one does not bring together these differences of reason and revelation!" he writes, "For reason is like healthy sight that has no ailments or flaws, and the Qur’an is like the sun that shines abroad."23 In a later work, entitled al-Mustasfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl, he classifies the sciences into the purely rational (arithmetic, geometry, etc.) and the purely traditional (hadith, tafsir, etc.). "Yet the noblest knowledge is where Reason and Tradition are coupled, where rational opinion and the Shari’ah are in association," he writes, "The sciences of fiqh and its uṣūl are of this sort, for they take from the choicest part of the Shari’ah and Reason."24

Mohammad Hashim Kamali, in a recent textbook of usul al-fiqh entitled Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, defines fiqh as, “knowledge of the practical rules of Shari’ah acquired from the detailed evidence in the sources.”25 Al-Ghazali similarly defined fiqh as “knowledge of the Shari’ah rules which have been established for [qualifying] the acts of the loci of obligation.”26 The faqih (scholar of fiqh), he writes, “specifically denotes scholars of the Shari’ah rules which have been established to [qualify] human acts, such as obligation [wajib], prohibition [haram], indifference [ibāha], recommendation [nabd], or reprehension [karāha]…and the like.”27

_Uṣūl al-fiqh_ refers to the “roots of fiqh”, meaning the system of methodological principles that, in Kamali’s words, “provides standard criteria for the correct deduction of

21 Ibid (footnote).
22 Lane’s (1956, p. 97).
27 Ibid p. 308.
the rules of fiqh from the sources of Sharī'ah.\(^{28}\) Ghazali defined ʿusul al-fiṣḥ as “the sources of these rules [ahkām] and the knowledge of the ways that they indicate the rules as a whole, rather than from the point of view of details.”\(^{29}\) “Fiqīq as such is the end product of ʿusul al-fiṣḥ; and yet the two are separate disciplines,” writes Kamali, “The main difference between fiqīq and ʿusul al-fiṣḥ is that the former is concerned with the knowledge of the detailed rules of Islamic law in its various branches, and the latter with the methods that are applied in the deduction of such rules from their sources.”\(^{30}\)

The suggestion I want to make here—in spite of the title of Kamali’s book, to which I will nevertheless be making reference—is that, rather than jurisprudence and its methodology, fiqīq and ʿusul al-fiṣḥ might be more adequately understood as a first order ethics of obligation and a moral epistemology thereof, respectively. By the latter I mean a paradigm under which questions of moral epistemology are dealt with, which is based on, and therefore partially determined by, a set of inter-related metaphysical, meta-ethical, and epistemological propositions which are dealt with in fields distinct from but organically related to ʿusul al-fiṣḥ proper. Obviously, as a religious ethic, Sharī'ah is grounded in that revelation that forms the basis of Islam. Hence, the strictness with which it regards the purity of its sources. Kamali writes:

The sources of Sharī'ah are, on the whole, well-defined and almost exclusive in the sense that a rule of law or a hukm shar'i may not be originated outside the general scope of its authoritative sources on grounds, for example, of rationality (ʿaql) alone. For ʿaql is not an independent source of law in Islam. ʿUsul al-fiṣḥ is thus founded in divine ordinances and the acknowledgement of God’s authority over the conduct of man.\(^{31}\)

Does this mean that rationality has no place in Sharī'ah? It is, after all, entirely addressed to the mukallaf—one who is subject to taklīf, or moral obligation—a necessary condition of which is that the person is in possession of ʿaql (reason); that is, they are mature and sane.\(^{32}\) The question here is one of independent sources. Ijtihād, which is the deduction, from the implications in the sources, of those Sharī'ah rulings which are not explicitly spelled out therein, is a deduction after all, for which the ʿusul constitute the rules of inference and for which rationality is a presupposition. The first principles of those deductions, however, must be rooted in the authoritative sources. The role of the mujtahid, according to Kamali, is “basically one of deduction and inference of rules which are already indicated on the sources...”\(^{33}\)

The inferential rules governing this process are al adillah al sharʿīyyah, or the ‘proofs of Sharī'ah.’ Adillah is the plural of dalil, meaning ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’, and as a technical term in ʿusul al fiṣḥ, “it is an indication in the sources from which
a practical rule of Shar'i‘ah, or a hukm is deduced," all of which fall under one of four principal categories, "namely, the Qur'an, Sunnah, consensus, and analogy." According to Kamali, the dalil of each category is rooted in the first, which mentions all of them in a number of verses, one of which is translated as follows.

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination.35

"'Obey God' in this ayah [verse] refers to the Qur'an, and 'Obey the Messenger' refers to the Sunnah," writes Kamali, "Obedience to 'those who are in charge of affairs' is held to be a reference to ijmā‘ [scholarly consensus], and the last portion of the ayah which requires the referral of disputes to God and to the Messenger authorizes qiyyās [analogy]."36 The consensus is just that between the qualified scholars in the deduction of a ruling from the Qur'an and Sunnah, and is classified, along with the Qur'an and Sunnah, as one of the adillah naqliyyah or ‘transmitted proofs’, the authority of which are “independent of any rational justification that might exist in their favor.”37 Instances of qiyyās, on the other hand, are classified as adillah‘aqliyyah or ‘rational proofs’, that are “founded in reason and need to be rationally justified.”38 And, since “rationality alone is not an independent proof in Islam,” it follows that, "qiyyās in order to be valid must be founded on an established hukm of the Qur'an, Sunnah or ijmā‘."39

This statement gives us reason to pause. In it, we can distinguish two different senses in which analogical reasoning, or qiyyās, is said to be dependent on transmitted proofs. One is with regard to the legitimacy of a particular execution of qiyyās—in every case it must be founded on an established ruling, as just mentioned. We will see more about that in due course. The other is with regard to its legitimacy as a method. We saw this in Kamali’s mention of the proof of qiyyās being based on the verse of the Qur’an, cited above. The latter is a far more radical sense of dependence than the former, and we aim to clarify the two in what follows. At any rate, qiyyās has been separated from the other three categories of proof, consequently, by the following distinction.

The adillah shar‘iyyah have been further classified into mustaqill and muqayyad, that is, independent and dependent proofs respectively. The first three sources of the Shari‘ah are each an independent aql, or dalil mustaqill, that is, a proof in its own right. Qiyyās, on the other hand is an aql or dalil muqayyad in the sense, as indicated above, that its authority is derived from one or the other of the three independent sources.40

34 Ibid pp. 9, 10.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid pp. 10, 11.
40 Ibid p. 11.
Consequently, every rational proof is ultimately dependent on the transmitted proofs which, alone, enjoy the status of being independent proofs. This arrangement reflects the dominant definition of the legitimacy and role of ijtihād in Sunni thought, which was systematically formalized for the first time by Muhammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfī‘ī (150 A.H./767 C.E.). Shāfī‘ī was simultaneously concerned, first, to defend the use of reason in arriving at practical judgments in sets of circumstances not explicitly addressed by the Qur’ān and Sunnah, and secondly, to anchor the use of reason to those sources in such a way as to provide that judgments arrived at thereby will be made in the light of these sources. In his Risala, he writes:

> On all matters touching the [life of a] Muslim, there is either a binding decision, or an indication as to the right answer. If there is a decision, it should be followed; if there is no indication as to the right answer, it should be sought by ijtihād, and ijtihād is qiyās.41

Qiyās literally means ‘ascertainment’ specifically by reference to a standard unit of measurement. In the context of usūl al-fiqh, the standard units of measurement consist of practical imperatives that have already been explicitly indicated, by the revelation, as binding under specific conditions. According to Kamali:

> Technically, qiyās is the extension of a Shari‘ah value from an original case, or aṣl, to a new case, because the latter has the same effective cause as the former. The original case is regulated by a given text, and qiyās seeks to extend the same textual ruling to the new case. It is by virtue of the commonality of the effective cause, or ‘illah, between the original case and the new case that the application of qiyās is justified.42

In the framework of moral epistemology established by al-Shāfī‘ī, then, proper moral reasoning is a matter of ascertaining the moral imperatives operative in novel circumstances via analogical extension from circumstances in which the operative moral imperatives are already indicated explicitly by revelation, to circumstances in which they are not explicitly indicated. Interestingly, in the Risala, Shāfī‘ī actually draws an analogy in defense of the methodological legitimacy of qiyās. The following is his response to an interlocuter’s question, “on what ground do you hold that [the exercise of] ijtihād is permitted in addition to what you have already explained?”

> It is on the basis of God’s saying:

> From whatever place thou issuest, turn thy face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your faces in its direction. [Q. II, 145].

Regarding him who [wishes to] face the Sacred Mosque [in prayer] and whose residence is at a distance from it, knowledge instructs us that he can seek the right direction through ijtihād on the basis of certain indications [guiding] toward it. For he who is under an obligation to face the Sacred House and does

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not know whether he is facing the right or wrong direction may be able to face the right one through certain indications known to him [which help him] to face it as accurately as he can, just as another person may know other indications which help orient him [in the right direction] although the direction sought by each person may be different from that sought by the other.\textsuperscript{43}

Shāfi‘ī clearly means to justify \textit{ijtihād} in general on the basis of analogy from (and, therefore, on the model of) this specific case. It is not insignificant, then, that he chose the specific example of estimating the direction of prayer as the original case—the \textit{asg}—on which to base the analogy. It is true that the scholars of \textit{fiqh}, including Shāfi‘ī, do draw a distinction between the obligations which pertain to a person’s relation with Allah, involving acts of worship and the like, and those which pertain to a person’s relation to other people. Even so, Shāfi‘ī’s choosing this specific case as the basis upon which to analogically justify (and thereby define a model of) \textit{ijtihād} as \textit{qiyās} in all areas of \textit{fiqh}, entails that all prescriptive norms are relevantly similar to the prescription of the direction of prayer.

Consider, again, the two possible senses, mentioned earlier, in which one might understand the statement that \textit{qiyās} depends on transmitted proofs; one of which was with regard to its general legitimacy as a method. Here, however, we see that Shāfi‘ī’s defense of \textit{ijtihād} as \textit{qiyās}, itself, proceeds on the basis of \textit{qiyās}. Granted, the specific practice of ascertaining the \textit{qibla} from a distance by means of navigational indicators is established explicitly by the Sunna of the Prophet (saw), who prayed in that direction for years while living in distant Medina. Furthermore, this practice is one by which the normativity of an original imperative (‘pray in the direction of the \textit{qibla}’) is transferred, by means of a shared relevant feature (i.e. their being in the same direction) to a new imperative (‘pray in the direction of such and such a visible landmark, star, etc.’). That is, it is an instance of \textit{qiyās}. However, the question remains open, at this point, as to whether applying \textit{qiyās} in circumstances other than those in which there is explicit precedent in the Sunna is methodologically legitimate. Those applications of ‘\textit{qiyās}’ for which there is such a precedent are arguably not genuine instances of \textit{qiyās} at all, but are simply instances of following an explicit precedent of the Sunna. Shāfi‘ī’s defense is of \textit{qiyās} proper. In order for such a defense to be made on the basis of a specific precedent, like that of ascertaining the \textit{qibla}, analogical extension must be made from the specific circumstances under which \textit{qiyās} is known to have been applied, to circumstances under which there is no precedent in the Sunna for its application, on the basis of some relevant similarity between the former and the latter. In other words, the defense of \textit{qiyās} as a method, itself, requires the application of \textit{qiyās}. It may be objected that such a defense is question-begging. However, this is only the case if we hold to a certain interpretation of Kamali’s statement that “\textit{rationality alone is not an independent proof in Islam},” under which the methodological legitimacy of reason itself must be ‘proved’ by revelation. Such a proposition is clearly self-defeating in as much as the very concept of ‘proof,’ itself, \textit{presupposes} rationality.

The question of the legitimacy of \textit{qiyās} just is that of the legitimacy of reason; and this, as philosophers have noticed over the centuries, cannot be defended nor

undermined except by reason itself. Shāfi‘ī’s defense of qiṭṭās by means of qiṭṭās represents, in the history of human thinking, yet another acknowledgment of this basic fact; but while demonstrating thereby the irreducible necessity of ijtihād in fiqh, it also implies its necessary insufficiency. The insufficiency lies in the fact that qiṭṭās alone cannot establish a prescriptive norm which is not simply a specification of a pre-established imperative.

The structure of Shāfi‘ī’s example can be understood to consist of a simple inference on the basis of two premises. The first is the prescriptive proposition that I ought to face the direction of the qibla to pray. This proposition comes directly and explicitly from verses of the Qur’an. The second is the purely descriptive proposition that the qibla is in the direction of the indicator. This fact, which is, of course, relative to my current location, cannot be ascertained by reference to revelation, but must be estimated on the basis of some fixed navigational indicators. Once this estimation is made, the conclusion that follows is a new, prescriptive proposition specific to my circumstances that I ought to face in the direction of the indicator to pray.

(1) I ought to face the direction of the qibla to pray.
(2) The qibla is in the direction of the indicator.

Therefore, I ought to face the direction of the indicator to pray.

Critically, all that is determined by ijtihād here is purely descriptive—the simple fact that the qibla is in the direction of the indicator. Neither the indications, nor the reasoning process by which this fact is ascertained, themselves, imply anything normative at all. The prescriptive force—the ‘ought’—in the conclusion, is based exclusively on the proposition that I ought to face the qibla to pray, itself being derived exclusively from revelation. The scope of reasoning is limited, in this case, to the estimation of purely descriptive facts.

By analogical extension, then, it would follow that the scope of reason is limited everywhere to the estimation of purely descriptive facts, by means of which pre-established prescriptive norms are merely specified to the circumstances at hand.44 This clarifies the other, less radical of the two senses, mentioned above, in which rational proof in fiqh depends on transmitted proof. The requirement that every legitimate exercise of the former must be founded on an established ruling of the latter, amounts to the requirement that the normative ingredient, so to speak, of the new ruling is wholly derived from the established ruling. That is, revelation prescribes, and reason only describes a situation as falling under the scope of a pre-existing prescription.

For instance, the indications mentioned in the example, which are accessible to human reason and by means of which one can determine the direction of the Kaaba, only help to ascertain this direction given one’s current position; they are not what make this the direction in which one ought to pray. These ‘indications’ correspond analogically to the ‘illah, mentioned above, the sharing of which, between the original and a new case, underwrites the analogical extension of the moral judgment from the

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44 In the context of Islamic epistemology, it should be pointed out here that reason qua rationality is not usually considered to be exhaustive of the faculties of human intelligence. Therefore, the fact that reason is limited in the way just described does not necessarily preclude the human being from any epistemological access to the good, or otherwise, of ends. However, this opens onto a topic far too involved to do justice to in the space of this paper.
former to the latter. Consequently, scholars of the Shāfi‘ī school, notably including Ghazali, mentioned above, have frequently been careful to point out that the ‘illah are not ‘causes’ in the strict sense, but only indications on the basis of which moral judgments can be made.

In other words, the natural features of the circumstances, on the basis of which one determines how one ought to behave in the given situation, are not thereby that in virtue of which one ought to behave in that way. We can say, then, that the moral supervenes on the natural, in the sense that what one ought to do under one set of natural circumstances will not differ from what one ought to do under another set which is exactly similar; but not that it is reducible to the natural. Reason is necessary for the reading of the signs that mark out the path leading to water. However, it cannot, by itself, produce that water out of the dry sand.

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HIEROCOSMIC INTELLECT AND UNIVERSAL SOUL
IN A QAŞĪDA BY NĀṢĪR-I KHUSRAW

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Abstract
This essay attempts to decipher some of obscure religious, cosmological, theological, and psychological allusions found in Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s metaphysical poetry. A single qaṣīda is translated, each line given exhaustive commentary and its key concepts—particularly Soul (nafs, jdn), Intellect (‘aql), Substance (jawhar), and Form (sūrat)—placed in their proper philosophical and literary context. Some resemblances between this poet and other Ismā’īlī thinkers such as Abū Ya’qüb al-Sijistānī and Sufis such as Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī are adduced, as well as the intellectual fraternity between his thought and that of Western Neoplatonic thinkers and poets such as Plotinus, Ficino, Milton and Pope noted.

Keywords
Nāṣīr-i Khusraw; Sufi poetry; Ismailism; Rumi; Plotinus.

I. PROLOGUE

Literary historians generally concur that the collected poems (Divān) of Nāṣīr-i Khusraw (d. 470/1077) are a poetic and metaphysical tour de force containing some of the finest homiletic odes in classical Persian.1 His high-minded pithy maxims continue to inspire the imagination of the Persian literary soul and his moral sententia are still taught today in school textbooks throughout Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Iran. In spite of this, he remains without doubt one of the most difficult poets to understand in Persian, his verse often seeming a maze of riddles and enigmas—the product of obscure religious, cosmological, theological, psychological and philosophical theories and allusions that pervade his Ismā’īlī metaphysical system. This system, which owes as much to Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus as to the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, never became widely popular in the Persianate culture and civilisation that dominated the Muslim world down to the nineteenth century in the same way as did the allegories, symbolism, metaphysics and mysticism of the great Persian Sufi poets and masters. Although the Sufi system presented its own enigmas and demanded equal expertise, due to the enduring fascination of its transcendental eroticism and earthly love-symbolism, it became far more attractive to nearly all critics and connoisseurs of Persian verse, who from at least the tenth century onwards, became thoroughly steeped in its legends and lore and came to know its lexicon and symbolism by heart. On the other hand, only a handful of specialist philosophers ever possessed even the faintest conception of Ismā’īlī esoteric terminology, much less its rich tradition of philosophical thought and verse.2 For this reason, it is almost impossible for the average Iranian or Afghan to pick up the Divān of Nāṣīr-i Khusraw and comprehend most of the nuances and ideas in his major Qaṣīdas without having studied in depth the poet’s works of philosophy: Žād al-musāfīrīn, Jamī‘ al-ḥikmatayn, Gushāyish u rahāyish, or his other prose philosophical works through which the codex of his philosophical imagery can be accessed and deciphered.

The stern sage of Yumgan was not only a poeta doctus, master of rhetoric, he was also a ḥakīm, an occult philosopher whose poetry and prose can appear enigmatic even to the most educated. In this respect, he both is and is not comparable to the only other great philosopher among the top eleven poets3 in the Persian Canon, namely ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jámi (d. 1492), whose lyrical and mathnawi poetry can be apprehended and enjoyed by the average Persian-speaker, without needing to study his Lawā‘īk, Lawā‘īm, al-Durr al-fākhira or other works of philosophy. By Jámi’s day, Sufi poetry couched in the technical terminology of Ibn ‘Arabī’s school had completely infiltrated the Persian literary lexicon. Such poetry was known by heart by (the often

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illiterate) millions who memorised and sang ghazals from the *Divān* of Ibn ʿArabi’s poet-disciples such as Ḣarq, Ḥaghribi and Shāh Nīmatullāh without ever having scanned one page of the *Fusūs al-hikam*, or indeed, without ever realising that their favourite verses were elegant paraphrases of Ibn ʿArabi’s convoluted theosophical teachings. On the other hand, the abstruse occultism of the *Bāṭinī* system to which Nāṣir-i Khusraw adhered has tended to remain uncharted territory, which is the main reason why study of his verse remained over the last half century “still in its infancy.”

Setting to one side the Ismāʿīlī terminology that forms the philosophical substance of his verse, in terms of belles lettres, Nāṣir-i Khusraw composed his verse in the tradition of what J.T.P. de Brujin calls “Poems of Abstinence” (*zuhdiyyāt*), a genre which bridges all sects and schools of Islamic theology, encompassing Ḥanbali Sufi poets such as Ḥarq (d. 848/1088), Ashʿarite Sunni Sufis such as ʿAlī Bū Ṣafī (d. 1252/1131), not to mention Shīʿite Ismāʿīlīs such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw (*Ḥujjat*) himself. In this respect, the Sufi poetry composed by Sānāʾ in the *zuhdiyyāt* genre is, in many cases, often indistinguishable in content from Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s odes also penned in this genre. One of the main stylistic factors which Nāṣir-i Khusraw shares with other *qaṣīda* poets of the generation immediately preceding him (particularly Kīsāʾī of Marv, b. 351/963, d. after 991/1000) is an emphasis on preaching and wise instruction (*mawāriz va hikam*). Since the *zuhdiyyāt* genre in which Nāṣir-i Khusraw composed his verse transcends the particular religious sect to which he adhered, it is a mistake to consider him simply as an Ismāʿīlī poet. For this reason his poetic inspiration has been usually understood by later literary critics, connoisseurs, scholars, philosophers and Sufis to transcend the confines of sectarian denomination. His poetic vision contains many a figure of speech, many a flight of imagination, many an insight, not to mention a myriad images and intuitions, which cannot be arraigned for analysis before the academic tribunal—nor confined by the intellectual cachet—of “Ismaili philosophy”, nor yet explained by the reference implicit in his pen-name *Ḥujjat* (the “Spiritual Proof”) to his post as a Fatimid missionary assigned to convert the province of Khurasan to the Ismāʿīlī system of thought. In this tradition of religio-ascetical verse, what distinguishes Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *Divān* from the contemporary writers of this genre or from later Sufi mystical poets is neither Islamic ethics, nor his call to abstinence from and renunciation of the world, nor even his focus on knowledge (*的知识*), reason (*khirad, ʿaql*) and wisdom (*hikmat*). All these were features of a large number of contemporary and later Persian poets. What sets him apart from his contemporaries are mainly two features:

### I.1. Ismāʿīlī Metaphysical Esotericism

As Y.E. Bertels pointed out, “there are a large number of philosophical concepts which Nāṣir-i Khusraw was the first in Iranian history to express in Persian verse”, and we may add to this observation that he was also the first great poet to espouse and expound the Ismāʿīlī cosmogenic vision of the world in Persian poetry. In this respect he has no rival in the Canon either among his forbears, contemporaries, nor even among later poets, with the possible exception of Nizārī (d. 721/1321), although Nizārī was not his poetic equal and—unlike Nāṣir-i Khusraw—was as deeply influenced by Sufism as by Ismāʿīlī doctrine.

As Browne pointed out long ago, Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s religious and philosophical views constitute the main subject of his verse. Despite the existence of several good studies and selected translations of his poetry in English, few scholars have addressed the metaphysical, psychological and cosmological system animating his poetic genius. There are of course the classic studies of the poet, by ʿAli Dashti in Persian and Alice Hunsberger in English, which successfully make use of his poetry to illustrate his philosophical world-view, while the entire study of his poetry stands on the shoulders of a number of scholars who have devoted their lifetimes to exploring and elucidating the terminology of his poetry; foremost of all these must be mentioned Mīḥdī Muḥaqqiq.

### II.2. Rhetorical Power

The second feature which makes Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *Divān* so remarkable is the incredible strength of his rhetorical expression. Noting that Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s prose works are of limited appeal, though indeed, of great importance to “students of Islamic philosophy and sectarian theology”, A.J. Arberry thus rightly comments that it is “by his odes that Nasir-i Khusraw proves his greatness.” Were eloquence a Divine Name, Nāṣir-i Khusraw would rightly be its earthly counterfeit. Out of ten or twelve “Great Names” in the Canon of Persian classical poetry, he excels all of the previous or later...
The following essay attempts to decipher some of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s metaphysical enigmas and poetic riddles by providing an annotated English translation of one of his longer qaṣīdas. Devoted to Cosmogony, this poem18 is a hymn to the Soul and the Intellect, which has fascinated connoisseurs for centuries, although no one ever bothered to write an exegesis of the whole poem or even attempt to decode any of its key verses.19 Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Ode to the Two Substances was written as a philosophical allegory, almost each verse of which deliberately presents a challenge to the reader’s theological and philosophical understanding and expertise by demanding one undertake a hermeneutic exegesis (tā’wil) of its ideas and imagery to decode its allusions. Although parts of this poem have been translated twice before—once by Peter Wilson/G.R. Aavani,20 who together translated 31 out of its 46 couplets, and again by Faqir Hunzai/Kutub Kassam,21 who translated 27 out of 43 verses—neither of these pairs of translators provided anything but the barest notes and commentary on the qaṣīda. Consequently my effort here has been to put the poem’s complex and abstruse images into the wider philosophical context of the poet’s thought by providing a new literal translation of the poem, followed by a detailed line-by-line analysis of all its fundamental concepts, summarising in the process much of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s metaphysics, cosmogony, psychological system, symbolic and religious terminology.

Before entering into a verse-by-verse discussion of the poem (given below in part IV), it will be helpful first to elucidate the meaning of three basic key-words in the poem, namely: Substance, Intellect, Soul.

II.1. Substance

The English word “substance” is derived from the Latin term substantia, which renders the Greek ousia and the Arabic jawhar (in turn taken from the Persian gawhar), which in turn is a translation of the Greek word hypostasis (“standing under”).22 In Aristotle’s thought, “substance is primarily the definable essence or form of a thing, the principle in virtue of which the material element is some definite concrete object. It follows from this that substance is primarily ‘form’ which is, in itself, immaterial, so that if Aristotle begins by asserting that individual sensible objects are substances, the course of his thought carries him on towards the view that pure form alone is truly and primarily substance. But the only forms that are really independent of matter are God, the Intelligences of the spheres and the active intellect in man, so that it is these forms which are primarily substances.”23 It would thus be accurate to say that what Matter is to the material world, Substance is to the spiritual world. Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s understanding of the term “substance” in this poem can thus be seen to be derived, along with nearly all other conceptions of this idea in Islamic philosophy, from Aristotle’s ousia, signifying “the origin of a thing, its natural constitution or structure, the stuff of which things are made, or a natural kind of species.”24

II.2. Intellect and Substance

However, in their metaphysical analysis and theological study of the category of “substance”, both Sunni Peripatetic philosophers such as Fārābī and Avicenna, as well as Shi‘ī Ismaili thinkers such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw went far beyond Aristotle. The Muslim Peripatetics believed in the reality of a supreme Active Intellect (al-‘aqil al-fāwīl)25—a term which Nāṣir-i Khusraw used throughout his Divān—which, they said, dwelled in an eternal and incorruptible Heavenly Realm. “Thither”, the Intellect is a “substance” which is “ungenerated and immortal, the immaterial form which in combination...
with the passive reason activates the thoughts in human beings. Still higher are the Intellec
ts, pure immaterial forms or substances, which are movers of the celestial
sphere, and at the pinnacle is God, the most Real,
substance in the truest sense. ...For Muslim philoso
phers under the influence of the neoplatonic theory of
emanation God is the eternal, constant creator of the
world, co-existent and co-eternal with him. According
to them the plurality of the worlds arises out of God's
unity through the eternal and timeless emanation of a
descending chain of intermediaries, intellec
ts and souls,
immaterial substances moving the heavenly spheres,
and the last of these intellects is the active intellect, the
dator formarum, wāhib al-suwar, which according to
Avicenna, when the matters are disposed to receive
them, provides them with their forms. All these
immaterial substances, essences or forms have a
different degree of reality and their reality increases with
their nearness to God, who is an existent, a substance, an
intellect and a cause,27 these terms taken, however, in a
superior sense to what they have in all other beings, for
... God's substance is the only truly independent
substance on which all other substances depend.28

In this respect, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's conception of
Intellect and Soul in the first line of his Qāṣīda (see
below, III) as being two supersubstantial "substances"
also reflects a common usage of the Aristotelianousia
found in both Islamic and Christian theological
thought.29 According to this conception, God Himself
cannot be described as a substance—rather, He is the
hypostatic Originator of all substances, the very
"Progenitor of Substances" (mujawhir al-jawāhir).30
The Universal Intellect (aql-i kull) is thus a substance
which, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, is the First
Existence Being (hast-i awwal),31 identical to the Active
Intellect (aql-i fa'il) of the Peripatetic philosophers.32

In his cosmology, Nāṣir-i Khusraw distinguished,
effectively replacing the angels as a mediator
of divine truth.34

Also similar to al-Kindī and al-Fārābī (d. 339/950)
before him, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's conceptualisation of both
Intellect and Soul closely follows his reading of the
Theology of Aristotle, an Arabic translation of selected
passages from the Enneads by Plotinus which was
attributed to Aristotle and familiar to all major Islamic
thinkers versed in philosophy.35 Like Plotinus, Nāṣir-i
Khusraw conceived of Intellect as all-knowing, all-seeing
and perpetually thinking, and of Soul as an emanation of
Intellect. "We must think of it [Intellect] as a quiet,
unwavering motion; containing all things and being all
things, it is a multiple but at once indivisible and
comparing difference."36 However, unlike Plotinus, who
clearly distinguished between the One and the Intellect,
the Ismā'īlī poet-philosopher identified the "First Entity"
with the Intellect (awwal aql asti) which knows,
understands and encompasses everything in this world
that lies below it. Nāṣir-i Khusraw identified the One
which has no beginning or end with the divine Kingdom
of God (mulk-i khudā). The One and the Intellect are
identical because nothing exists outside of the Intellect.38

II.3. Soul and Substance

In Nāṣir-i Khusraw's system of thought, after Intellect
comes Soul,39 which is the "Second Entity", while the
Third is prima materia (hayūlā).40 The human rational
soul (nafs-i nāţiqā) Nāṣir-i Khusraw defines as "a
substance quintessentially animate and alive of itself,
immortal. It possesses its own essential motion, and is
the place of abstract forms. Being a master artisan, it is
fully capable of acquiring knowledge, enduring after the
death of the body, for it is not a body, and the name of
this substance (jawhar) according to our teaching is
nafs.41 The individual soul (nafs-i juz'i) is comprised of
the same substance (jawhar) as the Universal Soul
(nafs-i kull), which in turn manifests its "traces" and
"effects" in man. Like the Universal Soul, the human
soul occupies the middle ground between the intelligible
and material worlds.42 If the grace of the Universal Soul
(nafs-i kull) were to be cut off from the corporeal world,
says Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the body would disintegrate and
perish, and all forms would also be truncated from the
bodies to which they adhere.43

Having briefly introduced the three key terms of the
poem and provided an overview of some of the central
philosophical terms in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Qāṣīda, it will
be helpful now to peruse the text itself. The following
literal translation of the poem forms the framework on
which the ensuing commentary (IV below) is based.
کن نور هردو عالم و آدم منصورند
هر دو مصورند وله نامصورند
نامینده در نظر که مظالمه نه ائوازند
پروردهگان دایه قدسند در قبیل
آسایشگاه مشاهده و زان سوی کلیک
در ما نبند و در ما روح پرورند
در هفت کشونزند و نه در هفت کشونرند
یعنی فرشتگان سرپرانتند و بی پرند
بی پر بر اشیاء، علوا همی پرند
چون خاک و باد هم نفس آب و آذرند
هر دو نه جوهرند وله نام جوهرند
هم حاضرند و غایب و هم زه و شکوند
وز باخته به خوارو وز بحر تا برند
زان بی تواند و با تو به خانه اندرند
ویران کنندگان پتند و بنا گرند
خوییگران نه فلک و هفت اختیرند
زان پنج اندرون و از ان پنج بر درند
استاده هر دو فروشند می خرند
با چار خاصیت به یکی خانه اندرند
محور نهاده، عرضند و نه مصورند
دانند کرده های تو بی آنکه بنگرند
بیان پتند و سردند که گشتن ناپدید
و انگاه در تن و سر ماه در معضلند
و این کدام حاجی؟ که از جای بترند
آنجا فرشته اند و بدين چا پربرند
چون ذات ذو الجلاله نه عنصر نه جوهرند
با آنکه هست هر دو جهان ملك اين و آن
گفتارشان بدان و به گفتار كار كن
پنگره به سوايات فلکه که بر فلک
پي دانشان اگر چه نکوهش كنندشان
چندین هزار ديده و گوش از برای چست؟
1. Above the seven celestial wheels are two substances
From the light of both of which the world and man are enlightened.

2. Within the womb of non-existence by way of the spermatozoon of Being
Both have been conceived and formed—yet both are supraformal.

3. They are not objects of sense-perception nor can they be comprehended by any sense;
They can’t be grasped by ocular vision for they’re neither shadow nor light.

4. The nurse of Sanctity nurtured and waited on them in Eternity before time;
They are not substances although they have the characteristics of substances.

5. They exist both Hither, on this side of creation—and Thither, on that side of the existent cosmos;
They’re both internal and external to Time, ranged together, right beside each other.

6. Neither of them are “in” the world, nor is the world yet “in” them;
They are not “in” us and yet they nurture the vital spirit in our body.

7. Of both of them it may be said that they are both microcosm and macrocosm, since
They are both within the seven climes and are outside all seven climes.

8. This one is the Spiritus Dei, and that one is the quintessence of the Angel Gabriel;
That is, the former preens angels’ pinions; the latter, wingless, moults their feathers.

9. Both spread and flap their wings in this base-born place without plumage or pinion;
Volant in flight to heaven’s higher perch they soar without any wing or plume.

10. Alongside the world’s hot and cold and this earthly realm’s dry and damp,
Like earth and air they consort with fire and water.
11. In the treasure house of both pre-eternity and post-eternity
Neither of them are substances, and yet, they both bear the
name of substance.

12. They’re both the cosmos and man, both heaven and hell at
once,
They’re absent and present at once, both a toxin and a
sweet delight.

13. They range from the brightest blazing light to murkiest
night, from abysmal deep to the loftiest height. They
stretch from Occident to Orient, they rove through sea
and land.

14. They exist and exist not — being both invisible and clear
to the sight,
For they are without, and yet, within you — together in the
selfsame house.

15. In the second world, which is their atelier,
They lay waste to edifices and yet are builders.

16. They nurture and provide the bill of fare for the Five
Senses and the Four Humours;
They serve as cooks and caterers for the Nine Celestial
Spheres and the Seven Stars.

17. The adept supervisors who hover round their seraglio are
ten in number
From where there are five within; from there there are
five without the door.

18. Both of them (Intellect and Soul) are the heavens’ market
traders, tending to both of these (the five external and five
internal senses);
Whatever Time offers to them for sale, they quickly buy up.44

19. And that King with ten heads, six faces, and seven eyes
Has four foes who all abide with him in a single house.

20. They are not a substance, while vis-à-vis them, all type of
“substance” is just an “accident”;
They are the establishers of the pivot round which all
accidents revolve and yet they are not pivots.

21. They recite to you an epistle full of arcane mysteries
written without a single letter;
They apprehend all your handiwork without even turning
to regard your deeds.

22. Both of them are manifest since both of them are hid;
They both lack head and body because both are inside the
body and the head.

23. And all this is due to their very nature, which is that they
cannot be comprehended by the cosmos, and yet both of
them lie concealed and latent within our bodies and
heads.

24. There (within your body and head), they have made their
abode for your sake.
Else, what place could contain them? —For they transcend
all spatial locus.

25. They’ve come towards you from a place that has no
“place”,
Yonder they are angels, and here they are prophets.

26. By nature they surpass all hierarchical levels of the angelic
realm;
Like the divine self-subsistent essence they are neither
elements nor substances.

27. In spite of the fact that both the worlds (material and
spiritual realms) belong to one or another of them, they
can be subjugated to your own soul, were you to will it.

28. Apprehend their discourse and apply yourself to its practice
Until from God Almighty they bring you revelation.

29. Contemplate the seven wandering planets in the heavens
that rove the Zodiac—
These act the part of celestial cavalry for the Lord of the
divine Throne.

30. Though ignorant fools may revile them, yet still
They are the governors of the whirling firmament.

31. So many thousand eyes and ears people have, but to what
avail?
—Do not speak of them for they are both blind and dumb.

32. You say to me: “The material substance of the demon is
fire.”
Indeed, the demons of the present day and age have been
all concocted from clay.

33. From our Father Adam only men have been born in this
world,
But why are all these folk who are born of Adam such asses?

34. Wherefore do they proclaim: “We are the offspring of Abraham”? When you deeply scrutinise the matter, they’re disciples of his pagan father.

35. In the revels of the Devil, they are the cupbearer of the Angel of Punishment, These fools who [pretend they] seek the fount of paradise!

36. What joy or cheer lies here below where one brother is foe To another brother for the sake of morsels and scraps.

37. After a millennium, you’ll be still the same; nothing ever changes: Through hither door down were you sent, and by thither gate you’re driven hence.

38. All those who descended here into the world’s nether realm—what have they seen or known of it? All passed away and we’ll depart as well. Others shall come and they too go their way.


40. And these who made such hue and cry of love for ‘Ali, Why are they enemies of ‘Umar if, indeed, they’re mates and comrades?

41. And as for these who claim friendship and fraternity with Abu Bakr, If they’re his confreres, why then are they ‘Ali’s foes?

42. As for these “Sunnis”, whose disposition it is to harbour malice towards ‘Ali, In truth, they’re enemies of both ‘Umar and Abū Bakr.

43. If you’re wise, speak no more of either lot, but rank them both As one, for they know neither vassalage nor liberty.

44. Take care that you never come to belong to that troupe of folk in the world Who eat like cows, and then snatch and grab like wolves.

45. Be either a pagan infidel of principle, or a faithful believer in reality. But these things who are my neighbours—they’re neither faithful nor infidel!

46. Nāṣir is a bonded slave to the one who said, “Soul and Intellect wander itinerant above the verdant wheel of the firmament.”

IV. POETIC PARADOXES, METAPHYSICAL RIDDLES AND ESOTERIC ISMĀ‘ILĪ THEOLOGY IN NĀṢIR-I KHUSRAW’S ODE

Now let us consider the first verse of the poem:

1. Above the seven celestial wheels are two substances, From the light of both of which the world and man are enlightened.

The first and last verses of this qasīda (112: 1 and 46) espouse two of the fundamental notions relating to Intellect and Soul in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s thought. First Universal Intellect and Soul are both transcendent in origin, acting as controllers of the universe, directing and managing human affairs from their supernatural place in the Noetic Realm. Second, both are also transcendent in nature, comprising two celestial substances or jewels—a notion—of the original and natural transcendence of Intellect and Soul—which Qasīda 112 in general and these two verses in particular are dedicated to expounding are common themes expressed elsewhere throughout the poet’s Divān. In another ode, for instance, he wrote:

1. These Watchers atop this turquoise dome, though times they appear below, in truth they’re always above.

2. If the Watcher is one whose eyesight is keen according to us, then these Watchers of the Heaven are themselves all made up of eyesight.
3. According to you, their name is “Star”, but according to me they’re the Operators and Watchers of Fate and Providence.

4. How should I ever escape from Fate and Providence since, with a thousand eyes, these Watchers scrutinise me?

5. They fix on us their regard, since through their very substance, reason (khārid) and the rational soul (jān-i sukhn-gūy) appear within us as their traces.

6. Your reason and rational soul (khārid u jān-i sukhn-gūy) through dutiful obedience (tā'af) and knowledge (ʿilm) are angelic creatures in winged flight above this turquoise dome.

7. There is the pasture-ground of your heart and rational soul—so strive that they graze on naught but obedience and knowledge.

As these seven verses teach, Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are the main causes of illumination and understanding for the human soul and intellect. Our human soul and intellect are “traces” of the Anima Mundi and the divine Mind, which are directly under the supervision of the archangelical pleroma. Vouchsafed their intercessory grace, each of us must play our parts in the drama of a heavenly procession consisting of five hypostases. Only the first two of the hypostases in this pentarchy concern us here—which are the two transcendental hypostatic and angelic beings known as Intellect (ʾaql) and Soul (nafs), the Two Substances described by the Ismaʿili sage in the first line of his Ode. Corbin offers this lovely and evocative description of Nasir-i Khusraw’s conception of the metaphysical drama of their genesis in the higher pleroma. Noting that the celestial (First) Intellect is an Archangel whose motion is incited by its eternal adoration of the One, he writes:

From this eternal movement of adoration, from this cosmic liturgy, the Soul of the World eternally takes its birth. This Soul is a second Archangel which is like the first in that it is perfect (in potentia) but unlike it in that it is imperfect (in actu), since its being proceeds from the principle only through the intermediary of the first Archangel. Just as this Soul is the adoration of the primordial Archangel, so the Cosmos is in turn the adoration of the Soul—with this difference, that the Soul cannot complete its work, cannot make good the margin of imperfection and incompleteness that comes to it solely from Time. That is why it starts the movement of the Cosmos; it tends toward its perfection through the great souls which appear from epoch to epoch in this world, not only the Prophets but in general all members of the esoteric Church.

From the foregoing it may be deduced that the central subject of this qāṣīdā’s overture is the origination of the world and the human rational soul in the highest pleroma. The next twenty-eight verses of the poem discuss the metaphysical structure, composition and activity of these two celestial hypostases during their generation of, and interaction with, the universe, detailing the mysterious process of their relation with the world of time and space.

Let us now examine the next two verses of the poem:

2. Within the womb of non-existence by way of the spermatozoon of Being
Both have been conceived and formed—yet both are supraformal.

3. They are not objects of sense-perception nor can they be comprehended by any sense,
They can’t be grasped by ocular vision—for they’re neither shadow nor light.

These verses celebrate the cosmo-genesis of Being, with the seedlings of Intellect and Soul lying first in non-being, having not yet been generated. In their non-generated condition, Intellect and Soul are mere conceptions, that is to say, only ideas capable of being mentally formed or configured (musawwar). Yet since the process of divine origination transcends reason and rational analysis, their conception is also supraformal, that is to say, beyond all mental configuration and rational illustration—this is the meaning of what he calls their “supraformal” nature.

To understand the precise metaphysical principles subsuming both verses it is necessary for us to examine a small chapter of his major metaphysical work: The Wayfarers’ Provisions (Zād al-musāfīrin) where the poet provides “An Exposition of Why Reason is Powerless to Conceive the Process of the Origination of Creation (bayān-i in kay ʿaql az ṣaṭawwur-i chīghanāʾī-yi ibdā’aisy)
“ājiz āsī).” Here, he admits that while human reason is forced to affirm the fact of the genesis of the world, it cannot formally conceive or mentally figure out (tasawwur) the “why” or “how” of the precise process (chigūnagi) of that genesis, for while “reason can understand that God Almighty is the Creator of Intellect, Soul, Prima Materia and Form (aql, nafs, hayālā va šīrāt) “out of nothing” (ex nihilo), yet it cannot conceive precisely how the process of generation of “something out of nothing” should have ever occurred (chīzī az nāchīzī chīgūnā shāyād kardan).” In the light of this statement, it is evident that verses 2 and 3 teach that any mental conception of the genesis of Intellect and Soul is beyond the formal rational process of human intelligence. Nāsir-i Khusraw’s doctrine here echoes Plotinus’ description of the ineffable supersubstantial substance of the Intellect or Intellectual Principle which cannot be apprehended by sense-based Intellection:

At the outset we must lay aside all sense-perception; by Intellectual-Principle we know Intellectual-Principle. ... We predicate Substance of everything in sense, but predicate it also of the Intellectual order and more strictly there—since we hold that the greater and more sovran substantiality belongs to the Real Beings and that Being is more marked in Substance, even sensible Substance, than in other kinds... As Substance and Real Being, despite the participation of the sensible, are still of the Intellectual and not of the sensible order, so too the unity observed present in things of sense by participation remains still an Intellectual and to be grasped by an Intellectual Act.

To better understand Nāsir-i Khusraw’s theory of the substantial/supersubstantial nature of Intellect and Soul, to which he alludes explicitly in altogether three hemistiches of this qaṣīḍa (vv. 4b, 11b, 20a), the next four verses should be examined all together. These verses elaborate the metaphysical drama of the genesis and emanation of the human soul by means of the celestial powers of the divine Intellect and Soul:

4. The nurse of Sanctity nurtured and waited on them in Eternity before time;
   They are not substances although they have the characteristics of substances.

5. They exist both Hither, on this side of creation—and Thither, on that side of the existent cosmos,

They’re both internal and external to Time, ranged together, right beside each other.

6. Neither of them are “in” the world, nor is the world yet “in” them;
   They are not “in” us and yet they nurture the vital spirit in our body.

7. Of both of them it may be said that they are both microcosm and macrocosm, since
   They are both within the seven climes and are outside all seven climes.

It is clear that where the poet speaks in verse 4 of Intellect and Soul as being “nurtured” by the nurse of Sanctity in Eternity before time”, he is referring to coeternity of Intellect and Soul with God. But how can Intellect and Soul (v. 4) simultaneously not actually be substances and yet “have the characteristics of substances”, as he claims? Nāsir-i Khusraw clarifies the paradox underlying this notion in a key passage of the Zād al-mūṣīfīn where he describes the substance (jawhar) of the human soul as having descended from the “universal frame (kālidī-yī kullī) that is animated by God.” He then adds significantly:

We know that that it is the substance [of the human soul] that is active by God’s will-power (ān jawhar kā yārīl bi-Ḥaq āst), and that it is the body which also becomes active and comes into motion because it converges upon and is ranged together (muğāvirat) with it, and [we know as well that that body] was from the beginning united with another “body” which was even more active than itself. But, that other “body” is not corporeal: rather that other body is the very substance of the heavenly orbs and the stars themselves (jīsmī nīst va ān jīsm jawhar-i falak āst va kawākīb).

From this passage we may deduce that the transcendent hypostasis of the Intellect and Soul of the Heavens described in verse 4 constitutes a substance only in the figurative sense, not in any real sense of the word, an idea reiterated again and again over the course of the poem (cf. vv. 11b, 20a, 26a).

Nāsir-i Khusraw next (vv. 5–6) refers to the perplexity of the rational soul of man—“plac’d on this isthmus of a middle state/ a being darkly wise and rudely great” in the words of Alexander Pope—who is
stranded in bewilderment betwixt the Eternal and temporal sphere. The human condition depicted here by the great Ismā'īlī poet-sage recalls Plotinus’ musings on the nature of the supreme life within the realm of the Intellect, compared to which our present state is a pure nescience:

Our being is the fuller for our turning Thither; this is our prosperity; to hold aloof is loneliness and lessening. Here is the soul’s peace, outside of evil, refuge taken in the place clean of wrong; here is its Act, its true knowing; here it is immune. Here is living, the true; that of today, all living apart from Him, is but a shadow, a mimicry. Life in the Supreme is the native activity of the Intellect; in virtue of that silent converse it brings forth gods, brings forth beauty, brings forth righteousness, brings forth all moral good; for of all of these the soul is pregnant when it has been filled with God. This state is its first and its final, because from God it comes, its good lies There, and, once turned to God again, it is what it was. Life here, with the things of earth, is a sinking, a defeat, a failing of the wing. Of course, the phrase translated here as “both microcosm and macrocosm” (du jahān used by the poet in verse 7) literally means ‘the two worlds’. In his prose works this phrase usually refers to the interpenetration of the material and spiritual worlds and the contiguity of the gross material realm (calam-i kathīf) to the subtle realm (calam-i latīf), which in turn reflects the similar teaching in his Zād al-musafīrīn that human souls can only obtain perfection through the mediating intercession (miyānī) of the Heavens and Stars. With this celestial context of Intellect and Soul in mind, we can now move on to Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s conception of Intellect and Soul as winged angels, detailed in the next two verses:

8. This one is the Spiritus Dei, and that one is the quintessence of the Angel Gabriel;
That is, the former preens angels’ pinions; the latter, wingless, moults their feathers.
9. Both spread and flap their wings in this base-born place without plumage and pinions,
Volant in flight to heaven’s higher perch they soar without wing or plume.

The theme of the Intellect as an angel, often the Holy Spirit itself, frequently sung in the Divān, is prevalent in writings found in both the Islamic philosophical (Peripatetic) and the mystical (Sufi) tradition. In several key verses of the Mathnawi, for instance, Rūmī describes the procession of Intellect from non-existence (cadām) in words which precisely echo expressions given by Naṣīr-i Khusraw here (cf. 112: 2). He characterises Intellect as having been given “a thousand different names” by God, which denote, according to the traditional commentators, the innumerable aspects of its nature, such as “the Most Exalted Pen”, “the Preserved Tablet”, “the Holy Spirit”, and so on. Thus, where Naṣīr-i Khusraw describes (vv. 5–6) the paradox of the apposition (mujāwirāt) of the infinite, timeless Intellect and Soul with the temporal human mind and soul, he points to the spiritual influence and motion of their heavenly “substance” upon man. We may recall the same passage of the Zād al-musafīrīn cited above, where he depicts the Soul as that “substance” which is the true divine Actor (jawhar kay āfāl-i Haqq ast) [animating man’s soul and body] or as “body which is not corporeal.” This is precisely the purport and significance of the paradoxical image used in verse four, describing Intellect and Soul as “not a substance”, yet having “the characteristics of a substance”, etc.

The esoteric theological doctrine of the apposite convergence (mujāwirāt) of the celestial Intellect and Soul with the human rational soul espoused in lines 5 and 7 is also elaborated with quite similar terminology by Naṣīr-i Khusraw in his Zād al-musafīrīn as follows:

The celestial bodies of the whirling Heavens and the stars have always remained in place, nor shall they ever lose their form (sūrat) nor activity (jīl). Their condition is a proof of the fact that this whole substance, the respective parts of which all tend towards a centre, as well as those [celestial] bodies whose condition is constant and unchanging, are [both] constantly overflowing in emanation (mujāwir- ast payvāstā). Now, from its very inception this substance had been connected and united to that supernal body (jism-i āfāl) so that that supernal body, through its contiguity (mujāwirāt) with that substance, which is the true active agent (āfāl-i Haqq), could become continuously engaged in its activity.
It is in exactly this sense that Naṣīr-i Khusraw speaks here (v. 8) of the Intellect being the Holy Spirit or Spiritus Dei. In other verses of the Mathnawi (III: 3193-96), Rūmī informs us that certain gnostic souls who have transcended the multiplicity of created phenomena are essentially angelic. “Like the Angels, they [i.e. those who understand the soul: jān-shināsān] are one in origin with Intellect. It is only for the sake of divine wisdom that these two have taken on two distinct forms.” Intellect itself is an Angel essentially, Rūmī affirms: “The Angel assumed plumage and pinions like a bird, yet this Intellect shunned wings and assumed immaterial splendour.”

Precisely the same image and idea is deployed by Naṣīr-i Khusraw here in v. 9a when depicting Intellect and Soul as “winglessly spreading their wings in this base world.” The poet elsewhere informs us in prose that the human rational soul (nafs-i nātiqa), having realised and actualised within itself the potentials of its theoretical and practical faculties (‘ilm and ‘amal), does become itself “angelic.” The other theme of the soul trapped in the nether realm (nishiman-i suflâ) having hailed from its celestial perch on high (dshiydā-yi ‘ulwi) that is enunciated in verse 9 appears among members of nearly every school and sect of Islamic thought, be they Sunni or Shi‘ite theologian, Sufi or Ishraqi mystic, or rationalist philosopher. It is a frequently sung theme in the Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s Divān; the following five verses from Qaṣīda 78, for instance, expressing it clearly:

14. Your place is a world full of light and eternal;  
   This lower realm is not your residence.

15. Kindle the candle of your reason in the heart, and then hurry  
   With enlightened heart towards the Realm of Light.

16. Since you wish to kindle a candle in your heart  
   You must need have knowledge and action as your wick and oil.

17. One should not travel the way toward the world beyond on foot;  
   Rather, it should be travelled with the soul (jan) and reason (‘aqīl)...

18. Your provisions for this way are knowledge (‘ilm) and obedience (ārāt);

Set out both these provisions on the heart’s mealcloth. Ultimately, most of the imagery of intellect and soul as winged angelic beings used by Islamic thinkers, of whichever sect or school, and many of the Muslim descriptions of the descent of Intellect and Soul into the nether realm of matter and body, hark back to the teachings of Plato’s dialogue Phaedrus as well as Plotinus’ interpretation of that dialogue in his Enneads. Plotinus’ eighth tractate of the Enneads on the “Soul’s Descent into the Body” seems to have had a particular impact on Islamic thinkers’ exposition of this idea. Plotinus’ description below of the human soul’s relation to the Universal Soul presents an excellent overview of the entire metaphysical doctrine of the first thirty lines of this qaṣīda (and of v. 30 in particular). The following passages from this tractate read like a paraphrase in prose of the key metaphysical and cosmogonic themes of Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s ode. Human souls are urged by the divine Intellect to return to their source, but “they have, too”, says Plotinus, “a power apt to administration in this lower sphere…”

1. In the Intellectual, then, they [the human souls] remain with the All-Soul, and are immune from care and trouble; in the heavenly sphere, inseparable from the All-Soul, they are administrators with it, just as kings, associated with the supreme ruler and governing with him, do not descend from their kingly stations.

Then, there comes a stage when the angelic souls are forced to descend from the Universal Soul and become subdivided into partial souls:

With this comes what is known as the casting of wings, the enchainment in body: the Soul has lost that innocence of conducting the higher which it knew when it stood with the All-Soul...It has fallen: it is at the chain: debarred from expressing itself now through its intellectual phase, it operates through sense; it is a captive; this is the burial, the encavernment, of the Soul.

...But in spite of all it has, for ever, something transcendent: by a conversion towards the intellective act, it is loosed from the shackles and soars—when only it makes its memories the starting-point of a new vision of essential being. Souls that take this way have place in both spheres, living of necessity the life there and the life here by turns, the upper life reigning in those able to
A QASIDA BY NĀṢIR-I KHUSRAW

consort more continuously with the divine Intellect, the lower dominant where character or circumstances are less favourable.72

...Thus, in sum, the Soul, a divine being and a dweller in the loftier realms, as entered body: it is a god, a later phase of the divine: but, under stress of its powers and of its tendency to bring order to its next lower, it penetrates to this sphere in a voluntary plunge.73

Since this same subject of the Intellect’s and Soul’s descent had been broached in verse 9, it makes good sense that Soul’s descent into the lower realm of Body and Matter should now form the main theme of the next five lines of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s poem. To the first of these we now turn:

10. Alongside the world’s hot and cold and this earthly realm’s dry and damp,
Like earth and air they consort with fire and water.

Perhaps the most common notion in physics in medieval Muslim scientific thought is that the first manifestation or “imprint” of Form on the Matter of the world occurred by mediation of the Four Elements: Fire, Air, Water and Earth. According to this physical theory, each Element possesses its own distinct nature (tabā’i) by which it is distinguished from its sister. Thus, there are essentially four different “Natures” (tabāyi), known as the “Four Natures”, (chahār tab). Fire is considered to be dry and hot; Air hot and moist; Water moist and cold, while Earth is cold and dry.76 The basic four Natures of the Elements are thus heat, coldness, wetness and dryness. In the Ismā’ili system of physics outlined by Nāṣir-i Khusraw,77 these four “Natures” interact with the four “Elements” in the sublunar realm of generation and corruption (kawn u fasād), the “forms” of matter altering, but the matter of the elements remaining unchanged.78 Matter (hayulā) is the source of the four “Natures”, but Matter itself has no real existence outside these four “Natures”, all of which in turn depend on the grace of the Universal Soul towards the Body (jism) in which Matter is found.79 That is why the poet speaks in this verse (10) of Intellect and Soul as “consorting” (ham-nafas, lit. “conspiring”) with the Natures.80

In the following four lines, he proceeds to discuss the ontological and cosmogonic structure of Intellect and Soul:

11. In the treasure house of both pre-eternity and post-eternity
Neither of them are substances, and yet, they both bear the name of substance.

12. They’re both the cosmos and man, both heaven and hell at once,
They’re absent and present at once, both toxin and a sweet delight.

13. They range from the brightest blazing light to murkiest night,
from abysmial deep to loftiest height.
They stretch from Occident to Orient, they rove through sea and land.

14. They exist and exist not – being both invisible and clear to the sight,
For they are without, and yet, within you – together in the selfsame house.

Line 11 reiterates the supra-substantial nature of Intellect and Soul, analysed above (see the discussion s.v. v. 4b). Islamic philosophical thought boasts a plethora of theories regarding Time’s relation to Motion, Existence and Eternity. Muslim philosophers typically discern two types of Eternity, the first is pre-eternity, called azal or “headless” (azal being adopted from the Pahlavi a-sar meaning eternity a parte ante, without beginning), and the second is post-eternity, known as abad or “footless” (abad taken from the Pahlavi a-pad, “without foot” to mean eternity a parte post, without end).81 Both these terms the poet mentions here (v. 11a).

In the first hemistich of verse 11, Nāṣir’s psalm praises Intellect and Soul as sequestered in the repository of both “headless” and “footless” time, secreted, in other words, in God’s beginningless time and endless duration. But this image is not to be taken literally, for it merely represents the language of negative theology to which contemplative thought resorts in order to grasp the idea of eternity in relation to time.82 Since time anterior and time posterior (azal and abad) are identical in God, Intellect and Soul can only be described as lying in “the treasury of time before time” in a metaphorical sense (the metaphor seems to owe much to Plotinus)83 insofar as Soul ultimately is the Originator of Time.84 One should recall that while it may be correct nominally and notionally to speak of Intellect and Soul as substances (jawhar), they are not actually such, for God in his Essence transcends all such qualifi-
cations and designations, as do Intellect and Soul considered as transcendental hypostases.

The oxymora of verses 12–14 make sense only within the context of Nasir-i Khusraw’s negative theology and the hypostatic theogony outlined in his prose writings, particularly in The Wayfarer’s Provisions. In this book, he describes how the Universal Soul permeates all creation, since “all the substances (jawāhir) that are the seedlings of the vegetable world are but parts of Universal Soul.”85 The entire world with all its various parts is permeated by Anima Mundi, Universal Soul.86 The extreme polarities and farthest fringes to which its permeation pertains are the main subject of poetic celebration in verses 12–14. These verses explain that Intellect and Soul together animate paradise and hell, being agents both of bliss and distress (the former if man be obedient to God, the latter if recreant and false). Once human intelligence realises this, then, as Pope states, it

Pursues that Chain which links th’ immense design,
Joins heav’n and earth, and mortal and divine;
Sees, that no being any bliss can know,
But touches some above, some below.87

Intellect and Soul span both East and West; whether immersed in the sweetness of the divine presence or outcast from that beatitude into estrangement and separation, their operation never ceases. From God’s domicile above the coelum empyraeum down to this muddy vesture of decay staining the white radiance of paradise and hell, being agents both of bliss and distress (the former if man be obedient to God, the latter if recreant and false). Once human intelligence realises this, then, as Pope states, it

Look round our World; behold the chain of Love
Combining all below and all above.
See plastic Nature working to this end,
The single atom each to other tend,
Attract, attracted to, the next in place
Form’d and impell’d its neighbour to embrace.

See Matter next, with various life endued,
Press to one centre still, the gen’ral Good…
Like bubbles on the sea of Matter born,
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.
Nothing is foreign: Parts relate to whole;
One all-extending, all-preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least;
Made Beast in aid of Man, and Man of Beast;
All serv’d, all serving! nothing stands alone;
The chain holds on, and where it ends, unknown.88

Likewise, since Intellect is the “First Originated Being” (mubdi-yi awwal ‘agl asl)89 all things are also necessarily steeped in, dependent on, and ultimately tend towards it, as Nasir-i Khusraw informs us (following his mentor Sijistānī exactly90) in the Zād al-musafīrīn:

The Intellect is, in essence, the First Originated Entity and First Being (nakhustin mawjūd) and the Cause of Causes… The ultimate place of emigration or return of all people is to Intellect, for your own existence originated from Intellect as a matter of necessity. …Soul (nafs) is an effect of Intellect (nafs malul-i ‘agl asl), and since the stability of any effect is through its cause, it follows that the stability of particular souls subsists through the Universal Soul (nafs-i kull). Therefore, all particular souls must return to their own Universal [Soul], and that Universal [Soul] must return to the Intellect, for whose sake it exists. “Verily, unto Us will be their final destination and return, and with Us in their reckoning” (LXXXVIII: 24–25). And these [particular souls] possess various degrees vis-à-vis God Almighty. Cannot this be seen in regard to God’s Elect, of whom God states that they possess various degrees of nearness to Him in this verse: “With God are various degrees (of grace and reprobation) and God is the Overseer of all they do” (III: 163)?

Now, whoever recognises these degrees of spirituality (riḥāniyyāt) and materiality (jismāniyyāt) through the science of divine Unity (‘ilm-i tawḥīd) is vouchsafed a reward that endures forever. But whoever comes to a standstill on the physical level of the matter and is unable to conceive of anything beyond the physical material plane (jism), and who harbours suspicions regarding God, the Transcendental and Almighty, is a polytheist (mushrik) whose place will be in the Inferno forever.91

As Nāṣīr-i Khusraw explains in this passage, in its quest for nearness to God, the partial soul that has issued from the Universal Soul is summoned away from its repose in the material realm. Intelligence thus consists in recognition of the necessity for this spiritual journey, and in the successful opposition, in the battle between Reason and Passion, of the rational to the bestial.

Let us now explore the next verse, in which Nāṣīr-i Khusraw describes the paradox of the constructive yet
destructive operation of Intellect and \textit{Anima Mundi} in the realm of Matter:

15. In the second world, which is their atelier,
They lay waste to edifices and yet are builders.

Reading this verse in the light of his chapter on theology in his prose treatise on \textit{Knowledge and Liberation} helps us illustrate its complex metaphysical allusions. In one key passage of his chapter on “The Divine Word as the First Cause” (§127), the philosopher-poet attempts to explain the relationship of the Divine command (\textit{kalima}) to Intellect with the simile of carpenter and hammer. The divine Command or divine Word is likened to a carpenter, wielding his hammer in this world’s atelier. Ultimately the cause of both the material and spiritual worlds (§131) is Intellect and the divine Word or Command, which are nominally distinct but in reality one and inseparable from each other.92 Everything in the world is contained within the Intellect or divine Command in the same way that an effect is comprised within its cause (§133).

This is precisely the substance of the poet’s reference here in mentioning the “second world” (\textit{ālam-i duvvum}), that is, the present realm of matter and nature which is merely the effect of the Intellectual Realm. The “second world” usually simply refers to the material, as juxtaposed to the “primary” spiritual, realm, but in the theological context of verse 15, the phrase refers moreover to the realm of the Soul that directly derives from the realm of Intellect. Soul is the “animating”, literally “ensouling” principle of the world.93 Working in a subservient, “secondary” capacity, Soul oversees the material realm of this world, the realm of generation and decay, exercising its powers through both construction and destruction, as the second hemistich of this verse precisely indicates.

Following this description of the activity of the \textit{Anima Mundi} in the realm of Matter and Nature, it thus makes perfect cosmogonic as well as poetic sense that the roles of Intellect and Soul in the human realm should be clarified in the next four verses, which we can now examine:

16. They nurture and provide the bill of fare for the Five Senses and the Four Humours;
They serve as cooks and caterers for the Nine Celestial Spheres and the Seven Stars.

17. The adept supervisors who hover round their seraglio are ten in number.

From where there are five within; from there there are five without the door.

18. Both of them (Intellect and Soul) are the heavens’ market traders, tending to both of these (the five external and five internal senses).
Whatever Time offers to them for sale, they quickly buy up.

19. And that King with ten heads, six faces, and seven eyes
Has four foes who all abide with him in a single house.

A brief synopsis of some of the key doctrines of Nasir-i Khusraw’s physics, outlined in chapters 12–20 of \textit{Knowledge and Liberation}, will help illuminate the philosophical context of verse 16.

It is only by grace of the activity of Intellect and Soul that any circumstance in the world ever proceeds in an orderly and harmonious fashion. Human intelligence and the rational soul of man are but particular effects or traces of the Universal Intellect and Soul.94 Psychologically, they nurture the development of man’s Five Senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch,95 and assume control of the Four Humours (\textit{akhând})—the sanguineous, phlegmatic, bilious and atrabilious humours of Galenic psychology—of man.

The Intellect and Soul are also described in this verse (16b) as the cook/caterer (\textit{khwalīgar96}) of the celestial realm. The poem’s reference to the Nine Celestial Spheres (\textit{nuh falak}) refers to the traditional Muslim (as well as Christian and Jewish) conception of the universe as consisting of concentric spheres, wherein the celestial bodies are carried around at different distances from the earth.97 These nine heavenly orbs (\textit{afldak=orbis coelestis}) are the well-known nine planetary spheres of Avicennean cosmology, namely: (1) the Empyrean or Heavens of heavens (\textit{falak al-afldā}); (2) the Sphere of the Zodiac (\textit{falak al-burūj}); followed by the Spheres of (3) Saturn; (4) Jupiter; (5) Mars; (6) Sun; (7) Venus; (8) Mercury; (9) Moon.98 The seven planets are likewise Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury. The precise effect of these Spheres and Stars on the soul of man and his faculties is elaborated in considerable detail in Nasir-i Khusraw’s \textit{Synthesis of the Two Philosophies (Jāmi’ al-hikmatayn)},99 In this work he explains how “these Seven wandering Stars [i.e. \textit{stellae errantes}] which are the administrators of the world (\textit{mudabbirān-i ʿālam}) can all be likened to instruments of the Universal Soul (\textit{nafs-i kull}) which it utilises in order to construct the individualities of the [three]
natural kingdoms (mawālīd)\textsuperscript{100} of the world through the grace of the Universal Intellect (ṣaql-i kullī). The culmination of this process of generation occurs in the individual form of man, who possesses the fairest of forms.\textsuperscript{101}

The reference to “ten adept supervisors (musharrafān dāh)” hovering around the door of the Seraglio of Intellect and Soul (v. 17) are to the five external plus five internal senses of man. The former are touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing; the latter comprise common sense (al-hiss al-mush tarik), conception (mutaṣawwira), memory (mutadhhakira), imagination (mutakhayyila) and estimation (mutawahhiha). While the external senses can only apprehend sensible phenomena, the internal ones can grasp things of an infinite and unrestricted nature (chizāyī nā-mahdūd va nā-muntāhī).\textsuperscript{102} Since they are infinite in their activity (quwwat-i hawwās-i bātīn nā-muntāhīs), they can perceive things that transcend man’s finite sense perception. The human soul, which is an invisible substance beyond the perception or conception of the sense faculties, can only be apprehended by reason and intelligence.\textsuperscript{103} It possesses three grades (vegetative, sensory and rational)\textsuperscript{104}—which he considers to be distinct species (anwār) of their genus (jins)—while the Universal Soul is the source of all souls and its various grades.\textsuperscript{105}

Therefore, the poetic simile in this verse which depicts the ten external and internal senses’ hovering round the door of the Seraglio of Intellect and Soul emphasises the dependence of the human psyche and faculties upon the Universal Soul and Intellect.

In the next verse (18), the poet elaborates further on this metaphor of dependence.

However, before proceeding to discuss this verse, a philological note on the text is required. There are the two alternative versions of this couplet given in the notes to the Divān that make far more sense than the reading finally selected by the editors for the published text. I have followed one alternative version of the second couplet, which reads: Istāda har chih dahr furūshand, mikharand as the text chosen for my translation—reading dahr for dir. Therefore in the first hemistich, I have interpreted the first har dā—“both of them”—as referring to the Internal and External Senses; the second har dā (“both of them”) has been interpreted as a reference to Soul and Intellect. In the second hemistich, I assume the term dahr to be synonymous with rūzāgār: the temporal passage of days in the world, Time, or the temporal realm.\textsuperscript{106}

Let us now return to the dependence metaphor. In this couplet (18), Nāṣīr-i Khusraw radically subverts this metaphor in man’s favour, describing Soul and Intellect as standing in attendance on the sensory faculties of man after the manner of merchants or shopkeepers, who “wait on”\textsuperscript{107} their customers being “sold” items through the network of Time-in-the-World. Located yonder in the hierocosmos, Soul and Intellect are necessarily connected with the human body and mind through the senses’ activity, which is the why and wherefore of the Soul’s and Intellect’s “buying up” (that is, intellectually and psychically “acquiring”) the motions and actions of the internal and external senses of Man—these faculties being their very emanations, so that they are obliged to act as a caterer (khwālgār) to them in the temporal realm. In this verse, the activity of these transcendental hypostases is one of commerce and exchange, with the human senses as their customers whom they serve in marketplace of Time.

Precisely the same idea is elaborated in prose by the poet in a key passage in Knowledge and Liberation. Man, he propounds, comes into the world initially ignorant. He then receives certain sense organs (eyes, ears, heart and tongue) through which he gains knowledge. A person in full possession of his senses can be compared to a man whom the proprietor of a farm sends to his farm with a yoke of oxen, seeds and agricultural implements, so that he may cultivate the farm and not sit idle. The proprietor of the farm is the Universal Soul, the farm is this world, the one who is sent to the farm is man, the yoke of oxen is his body together with the animal soul, the agricultural implements are his eyes, ears, heart and tongue, and the seed is his intellect. Thus, if man has any sense, he must learn and acquire knowledge by using the instruments which are given to him, so that when he returns to the subtle abode which is his origin, he shall have with him something for the sake of which he was sent to this material world.\textsuperscript{108}

Likewise, in his Zād al-musāfirīn, the poet teaches that the internal senses of man enable him to reach the Intelligible Realm and apprehend things of an infinite nature, and ultimately, it is through these spiritualised and infinite internal senses that he is enabled to perceive the Intellect itself.\textsuperscript{109}

In sum, in all three verses discussed above (16–18), the eternal myth of the metaphysical relationship of the
senses to Soul and Intellect has been expounded by three different metaphors:

In v. 16, Intellect and Soul act as providers of provender to the senses.

In v. 17, the senses serve as foremen or stewards hovering round the court of Intellect and Soul.

In v. 18, Intellect and Soul are employed as shopkeepers catering to the needs of the senses in the realm of Time.

We may now look at how the nearly identical theme of the dependent relation of the partial soul on the Universal Soul is treated by a series of poetic riddles deliberately posed in the next verse (19) by Nasir-i Khusraw:

19. And that King with ten heads, six faces, and seven eyes
Has four foes who all abide with him in a single house.

By contextualising the numerical allusions in verse 19 within medieval Islamic psychological theory, its complex symbolism may be decoded. Man himself is of course “that King”—ān pādishāh being a technical term used elsewhere in the Divān with precisely this connotation. The King’s “ten heads” are thus an obvious reference to the ten (five internal + five external) senses. His “six faces” are the standard six spatial directions (= up, down, north, south, east, west). The image of the “seven eyes” of the King, however, is less clear and may refer to any number of Ismaili heptads, such as:

The seven prophets who are the seven pillars of the House of Wisdom, the seventh imam in the succession of prophets being he who convokes the resurrection.112

Likewise, there are seven degrees of the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy: Messenger (rasūl), the Executor (waṣṭ), the Leader (imām), the Proof (hujjat), the Missionary (dārī), the Licentiate (ma’dhūn), the ordinary adept (mustāfīb).113

The seven eyes also symbolise the seven planets of the macrocosm which rule the human microcosm (a similar coinage of the planets being called seven substances: haft gawhar is found elsewhere in the Divān)114, namely:

Sun, corresponding to the Heart, the seat of the soul animating the body;
Moon, corresponding to the Brain, seat of the rational soul governing the body;
Mercury, corresponding to the eyes and the faculty of sight;
Venus, corresponding to the the ears and the faculty of hearing;
Mars, corresponding to the nose and the faculty of smell;
Jupiter, corresponding to the mouth and the faculty of taste; and lastly
Saturn, corresponding to the hands and the faculty of touch.115

The seven eyes may also refer to the seven creative substances (jawhar-i ibdārī) which in the human microcosm are “Life, Knowledge, Power, Apprehension, Action, Devotion, Subsistence.”116

Between these four different heptads, however, the most likely meaning intended by the poet in his metaphor of the “seven eyes” is the third in the above list, namely, the planets corresponding to the human microcosm, as we shall see below in a moment.

The “four foes” likewise refer either to the four akhlāt (bodily humours: the sanguineous, phlegmatic, bilious and atrabilious) or—more probably—to the four types of soul (nafs: i. the lower, domineering, passionless; ii. blaming; iii. inspiring and iv. peaceful souls). Although this last connotation of nafs is unusual in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Divān,118 the term is used in exactly this sense only a generation later by Sanā‘ī Ghaznavī in his own Divān, where, in a manner similar to the Isma‘īlī poet, he rails at the “three foes” of the fourfold human soul hidden beneath a single vest:

Three souls—domineering, blaming, inspiring—first exist
And then last of all comes the Soul of Peace,
Abiding with those three foes beneath one single vest.

Three souls—domineering, blaming, inspiring—first exist
And then last of all comes the Soul of Peace,
Abiding with those three foes beneath one single vest.

...The Souls are four, Humours four, Senses five,
Directions six — So all these seven Lords must survive
Between ten and two, with all of them the foes of all the rest!119

Sanā‘ī’s metaphor of the “seven Lords (haft sultan)” as we see almost exactly parallels Nasir-i Khusraw’s simile of the King with seven eyes (v. 19), that is, the seven
planets of the macrocosm with their microcosmic correspondences, while the Sufi poet’s lament about the psychological conflict experienced by the human soul in harbouring “three foes beneath a single vest” is nearly identical to the Isma’ili poet’s riddle about the King living with “four foes” in a single house.

When considering the next verse (20), it is well to recall verses 4 and 11 discussed above, which posed the riddle that Intellect and Soul are both substances and supersubstantial. This same paradox is reiterated here in slightly more philosophical terms:

They are not a substance, while vis-à-vis them, all type of “substance” is just an “accident”;
They are the establishers of the pivot round which all accidents revolve and yet they are not pivots.

While this verse, just like verses 4 and 11, dallies between the literal and figurative connotations of the philosophical term “substance” (jawhar), Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s doctrine of substance here is far more complex. To solve the riddles in this verse, it will be necessary to examine the poet’s difficult doctrine of “Substance” in his chapter onOntology in Knowledge and Liberation. Here, he explains that the soul is a substance (gawhar) that brings together four contrary humours into harmony without itself undergoing any change. Repudiating the materialist theory that the soul is merely a harmonious combination of the four natural elements, which he argues, implies that the soul must be merely an accident (‘arad), he propounds his own distinctive theory, namely, that there are two types of substances: simple (basīt) and compound (murakkab). The human soul typifies the simple substance, while the whole world is a type of compound substance, combining together the six opposing directions (shish jihat) as well as the four elements (earth, fire, water, air) within itself.

However, since no substance can transcend the limitations of its own definition, and the Absolute is necessarily beyond all substance and accident, God therefore cannot be categorised as constituting a substance of either type. He next tries to describe how the soul is “within” the body, noting that there are twelve different ways that one thing can be “within” another thing. Rejecting eleven out of twelve of these ways, he concludes that the only possible way that the soul can be described as being “within” the body “is like a subtle form (ṣīrat-i lajīf) is within gross inanimate matter (hayūlā-yi kathīf) or like the form of a signet-ring is imprinted in silver. This is because the soul is subtle just as form is, whereas matter is gross and unrefined just like the body, and the soul is not a body.”

In sum, vis-à-vis such transcendential entities as the Universal Intellect and Soul, all simple and compound substances are phenomena of a merely contingent, “accidental” nature. It is Intellect and Soul alone which constitute the true transcendent metaphysical axis around which all the contingencies and accidents of this world revolve, yet their pivotal nature is only a shadow of a poetic metaphor: one cannot describe them as being axes in any real substantial sense. This is the hermeneutical significance—ta’wil—of verse 20b. The centripetal motion of the partial soul and human reason towards Universal Soul and Intellect, which is also broached in verse 20, recalls this hymn to the transcendental hypostasis of the Intellect (aql) in Rūmī’s Mathnawi:

What worlds are spinning in passionate Love, enraptured over Intellect!
How vast, how wide is the Sea of Intellect!
The Mind is hidden, but the world plain to view,
Our forms are waves or just a drop of dew.

The occult, immaterial nature of Intellect and Soul—beyond expression, manifestation, space or place—forms the subject of the next six verses, which we can now examine:

21. They recite to you an epistle full of arcane mysteries written without a single letter;
They apprehend all your handiwork without turning even to regard your deeds.

22. Both of them are manifest since both of them are hid;
They both lack head and body because both are inside the body and the head.

23. And all this is due to their very nature, which is that they cannot be comprehended by the cosmos, and yet both of them lie concealed and latent within our bodies and heads.

24. There (within your body and head) they have made their abode for your sake.
Else, what locus could contain them?—For they transcend all spatial locus.
25. They've come towards you from a place that has no “place”;
Yonder they are angels, and here they are prophets.

26. By nature they surpass all hierarchical degrees of the angelic realm;
Like the divine self-subsistent Essence, they are neither elements nor substances.

The paradoxical language of verse 21, where Intellect and Soul are described as descanting an “epistle full of arcane mysteries”, being “aware of all your handiwork”, and knowing “without looking your each and every act and deed”, is typical of the language of ineffability found in the mystical discourse of apophatic theology in other mystical teachings in Islam. One may recall, for instance, the oxymora of “silent speech” and “deafening silence” in Persian Sufi poetry, countless examples of which appear in the poetry of Attar and Rumi,128 and to which genre the paradoxes of this verse belongs. Verse 21 also recalls the Qur'an's description of God's omniscient audition of all living creatures constantly hymning His praise throughout heaven and earth: “God is aware of their litanies and praise, and God is aware of what they do (XXIV: 40)”, their discourse being inaudible to the sensory ear. Milton's description of the instantaneous nature of God's creation through the divine Logos in Paradise Lost provides a perfect parallel in English literature of how the same doctrine enunciated in this verse by this eleventh-century Isma'ili poet appears in Protestant Christianity:

Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
Than time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told
So told as earthly notion can conceive.129

Where Nasir-i Khusraw speaks of the Intellect and Soul's speech as consisting of a mysterious epistle written without letters (v. 21), Rumi in the Mathnawi later explains precisely why this must be so: “Adam was the master of Science of the Divine Names”, he states, “but these (sciences) were not decked out in the habiliments of the Letters 'Ayn and Lam.”130 Both poets maintain that the reality of God’s speech transcends all phonetic or linguistic expression, for sounds and syllables are too weak for “the glory they transfuse with fitting words to speak”, as Shelley says,131 and what we understand anyway are merely “names of the Names” as Ibn Arabi states.132 The true discourse of the Universal Intellect and Soul to the human mind and soul is beyond words; it is rather, as T.S. Eliot declared, “a voice descanting, though not to the ear, the murmuring shell of time, and not in any language”,133 a sentiment well expressed by two couplets from Rumi’s Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi:

Come, let us speak to one another from the soul,
And let our words be hid from eye and ear.
Let us close our lips and like the First Intellect
Reveal the mystery of the whole world, from end to end.134

The next two verses (22, 23) feature similar sets of oxymora (Intellect and Soul are revealed because they are hidden; without a head yet within our head; cannot be contained in the world yet are present within us) intended simply to add more colour to their paradoxical nature, theologically reiterating the sapiential themes mentioned above in the discussion of vv. 12-14. The Isma'ili poet's allusion to Intellect's and Soul's residence within the human psyche in these verses indicates Soul's primary function: to be descending and ascending, “both as universal and as an individual portion. Without it there could be no benefit of intellect in the lower world. Soul bears the responsibility of conveying reason into the mundane realm.”135

More important clues about the metaphysical nature of Intellect and Soul are found in verses 24 and 25. The Platonic theology taught by Nasir-i Khusraw in these verses became a commonplace topos in a number of later thinkers, Muslim, Jewish and Christian alike. His Islamic theory of Universal Intellect ('aql-i kulli), for instance, is quite similar to Marsilio Ficino’s three hypostases of God, Angelic Mind and World Soul. According to the Platonism of both the early medieval Isma'ili and the later Italian Renaissance theosopher, the One lies at the centre of the universe, emanating Angelic Mind or Universal Intellect, from which World Soul or Universal Soul proceeds, followed lastly by Body, which is why the following passage from Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love provides us with a clear illustration of the thought of our eleventh-century Isma'ili Platonist as well:

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God is above eternity. The Angelic Mind is completely in eternity. Clearly its operation as well as its being remains stable. But stability is characteristic of eternity. The World Soul is partly in eternity, partly in time, for its substance always remains the same, and without any change either of increase or decrease. But its operation runs through intervals of time. For its substance is subject to change and all of its functions require temporal space. Therefore, the One itself is above stability or motion; the Angelic Mind is in stability, the Soul is equally in stability and in motion, and the World Body is only in motion. Again, the One remains above number, motion, and place; the Angelic Mind is placed in number, above motion and place; the Body is in number and motion, but above place; the Body is subject to number, motion, and place.\(^{136}\)

In this passage Ficino describes the relationship between God, Intellect, Soul and Body, or in his terms: God, Angel, Mind and Body. His “Angellic Mind” corresponds to the Ismā’īlī’s “Universal Intellect” (‘aql-i kullī); Khusraw’s “Universal Soul” (nafs-i kullī) being equivalent to the Italian sage’s “World Soul”, and Ficino’s “World Body” basically identical with Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s “Body” (jism). Intellect and Soul according to Ficino are above place (makān)—which is exactly the same doctrine taught in these verses (24, 25) by the Ismā’īlī seer—as likewise, Soul is the cause and source of motion, says Nāṣir.\(^{137}\) Although he maintains that the self-realised human rational soul has itself become “angelic”,\(^{138}\) the conjunction (payvastagt) of the Universal Soul (nafs-i kullī) with the heavenly bodies—which are, by grace of God’s continuous creative generation, actively moving agents—repels all attempts at a qualitative description of the process (chigūnā gī nīst)\(^{139}\) for they are beyond both material substance (mādāda) and time (muddat).\(^{140}\) This is no doubt one reason why he describes (v. 26) Intellect and Soul as surpassing “all hierarchical degrees of the angelic realm.” In verse 26, the idea reiterated above (in vv. 1, 4, 11) that Intellect and Soul are really transcendentdal hypostases, which only metaphorically speaking may be described as “substances”, is here restated.

While Intellect and Soul transcend all local place and habitation, they deign to grace the nether realm of Nature by interacting with the partial mind and soul of man. What Nāṣir-i Khusraw describes in verses 24 and 25 as the utopian (u-topos = lā-makān = az jā’y bātar = jā’y kāy jā’y nīst) nature of Intellect and its ideas is by no means particular to him, but rather is a common topos found in many other Persian poets. Rūmī, for example, in a few key verses from the Mathnawi devoted to the Sphere of the Intellect, abiding in a “Place which is déplacé”, writes:

The “Just Man” and “Learned Sage”—
All these words have spiritual sense,
Which have neither habitation nor place
That one might find them in East or West—
They are pure Ideas that strike the flesh
From a Place that is déplacé:
For there is no sphere in heaven
That may contain the Soul’s sun.\(^{141}\)

The notion that Intellect and Soul are “prophets” in the mundane realm, and “angels” in the divine realm above elaborated in verse 25 constitutes a direct reference to the Ismā’īlī theory of revelation as being “intelligent incarnate” (aql mujassam)\(^{142}\) that is found in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s prose works.\(^{143}\) His doctrine is consistent with (and probably derived from) that of Sījistānī, Paul Walker’s summary of which is worth quoting in this context:

The Holy Spirit is, in al-Sījestānī’s understanding, identical with perfect intellection. The capacity to penetrate the world of intellect, to rise there and see it in its entirety without having to fall back again, to comprehend without physical aids or distractions, that is “inspiration” ... The Holy Spirit is really intellect and intellect is the angel called the ruh al-quds. Prophets... see the sublime world...They converse with the angels and read the “book of the heavens” ... They are, in fact, the deputies of intellect in the mundane world.\(^{144}\)

Of course, the spiritual realm in Ismā’īlī thought is the realm of angels and spiritual beings,\(^{145}\) as well as the abode of Intellect and Soul. This angelic realm, described in various terms in vv. 24–26, is directly connected with the idea of the Soul’s Utopos, placelessness (lā-makān, nā-kujā-ābād) found in Islamic theosophical speculations of diverse persuasions. Placelessness, Henry Corbin thus explains, relates to “le thème de ‘l’âme comme lieu spirituel du corps’ ...La question qui se pose est la question ubi, où? Or, la manière dont nos philosophes se représentent le rapport du monde spirituel au niveau du monde de l’Âme, c’est-
à-dire du Malakūt, avec le monde corporel sensible, nous a conduit déjà à double réponse: à la fois partout (ubique) et nulle part.146 Since the angelic nature (malakūt) of Intellect and Soul in Ismā‘īlī thought in general, and in Nāṣir-i Khusraw in particular, has already been extensively commented on above (see the discussion of vv. 8–9) and analysed in depth by Corbin,147 it need not further preoccupy us here.

Let us now examine the next four lines of his Ode to the Two Substances:

27. In spite of the fact that both the worlds (material and spiritual realms) belong to one or another of them, they can be subjugated to your own soul, were you to will it.

28. Apprehend their discourse and apply yourself to its practice
Until they bring you revelation from God Almighty.

29. Contemplate the seven wandering planets in the heavens that rove the Zodiac—
These act the part of celestial cavalry for the Lord of the divine Throne.

30. Though ignorant fools may revile them, yet still
They are the governors of the whirling firmament.

The technical term “the two worlds” (du jahān) in this verse (27) bears comparison with the exact same phrase in verse 7 which (as noted above) respectively refers to the material vs. spiritual worlds148 or the gross material realm (ālām-i kathīf) vs. the subtle realm (ālām-i latif).149 Nāṣir-i Khusraw directly informs us that “the subtle world (ālām-i latif) is none other but the Intellect and the Soul, the first of which bestows benefits, and the second of which receives benefits” in his Knowledge and Liberation.150 A paragraph later, while commenting on the Qur'ānic verse: “By the day and its world-revealing brightness! By the night and its world-veiling darkness! By that which created (the differentiation between) male and female!” [XCII: 1–3], he uses exactly the same technical phrase (employed in vv. 7, 27), explaining:

The nature of both the worlds (har du jahān) appears in this divine adjuration. For God swears by the fact that that world Yonder is concealed like the night while this world here is revealed like the day. As for what has been created “male and female” by divine command, in reality, the “male” is the Intellect, and the “female” is in reality the Soul in the spiritual realm (ālām-i rūḥānī). The male is in reality the Nāṭiq (“Speaker” [a term in the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy referring to a prophet whose brings a new religious law, sharī‘a, by his discourse, abrogating the previous law]) and the female is in reality the Asās (“Foundation’) [a term in the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy referring to the one who is executor, waṣī, of the will of the Speaker of the new faith151]) in the world of religion (ālām-i dīn).152

As we can see from this revealing prose passage, it may be deduced that, through devotion and obedience to the commands of religion as represented by the divine Intellect of the Nāṭiq and the holy Soul of the Asās, the human soul has a distinct possibility of subjugating the heavens to himself. In light of this key passage, I think it is fair to presume that the “discourse” of the Universal Intellect and Soul’s mentioned in verse 28 probably alludes to the Universal Intellect’s role as Heavenly “Speaker”, Nāṭiq, and Universal Soul’s role as the Foundation, Asās, of his work, whose injunctions, according to the poet’s homily, must be heeded and put into practice (kār kun!) until those two (= Intellect-as-Nāṭiq + Soul-as-Asās) dispense to man revelation directly from God.

The doctrine of the subjugation of the hierocosmos to man’s will, espoused by verse 27, is more explicitly elaborated in this key passage from the Zād al-musāfīrin, where exactly the same verbal form (musakhkhar: the act of subjugation or domination) and the precisely same image of man controlling the forces of providence and destiny in the Heavens—used in verse 27’s rhyme-word—can also be found:

Man is the Causa causans (‘illat-i tamāmi) of the World, and the subjugation (musakhkhar gashtan) of the [four] natural elements (ummahāt)153 and the [three] natural kingdoms (mawālid)154 of the world to man is like the subjugation of the vegetable with all its leaves and branches to the seed, or like the subjugation of the animal with all its accoutrements to the drop of sperm. Thus the subjugation of the Heavens (aflāk) and the four natural elements to man, to all appearances consists in the fact that man can subject the Heavens and the Stars to his own designs and purposes by the power of his own intelligence (‘aql).155

In this context, it should be underlined that Nāṣir-i Khusraw held that there was nothing of greater nobility in the world than man, whom he often describes as the ruler of the universe.156
The whole world may be likened to a tree and humankind (mardum) is its fruit, nor has anything better than humankind ever come, nor will ever be produced by this tree, and humankind is the supreme species (naw-i anwā').

This doctrine is reiterated time and time again in his Zād al-musafirin in which there is even an entire chapter dedicated to man’s ability to subjugate the universe to his own will. Of course, while indeed man is Lord of the macrocosm (mulk-i zdhir), his pre-eminence does not lie merely in the subjugation of this base mundane realm. Rather, it lies in the fact that he is Lord of the esoteric realm which is the hierocosmos of the microcosm (mulk-i batin). It is from the standpoint of his esoteric subjugation of that Kingdom of Heaven which is within158 man that he may be properly be called powerful or learned.159 This is a traditional spiritual doctrine found in theosophers and poets of every wing and feather, whatever their sect or faith—these lines by Shelley immediately spring to mind:

What are numbers knit
By force or custom? Man who man would be
Must rule the empire of himself; in it
Must be supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself alone.

With verses 27 and 28, the zenith of our poet’s teaching on Soul and its substance is attained, with the Ismā’ili sage unequivocally affirming man’s heavenly nature as an envoy of the divine Mind and the celestial Soul. Here man is the universe; he is the universal man. Although several centuries and a civilisation apart, Marsilio Ficino’s commentary on Pythagoras’ instruction to “Honour thyself”, reiterates the same perennial teaching, encapsulating the homiletic context of these verses perfectly:

Why have you been looking at the ground for so long, divine men? Look up, citizens of the heavenly country, denizens of the earth. Man is an earthly star enveloped in a cloud; but a star is a heavenly man.

In the next two verses (29, 30), the poet turns his back on the esoteric spiritual meaning of the Intellect and Soul, to contemplate the planets and spheres whirling through the physical heavens. He reflects that these spheres themselves are the legions or hosts (lashkar, literally meaning “battalions”) of God, “Lord of the divine Throne.” In the commentary on verse 16b above, it was noted how in the Synthesis of the Two Philosophies (Jāmi‘ al-hikmatayn) Nasīr-i Khusraw had used exactly the same term that now appears in both these verses (29, 30) here: “administrator” (mudabbir) to refer to the governance of the seven wandering stars or sāʿrāt.162 One then need look no farther than this passage, which was cited earlier on, for the best summation of the meaning of verses 29-30:

These Seven wandering Stars [in haft sitāra-yi sayyāra, i.e. stellae errantes] which are the administrators of the world (mudabbirdn-i âlam) can all be likened to instruments of the Universal Soul (nafsi-kulli) which it utilises in order to construct the individualities of the [three] natural kingdoms (mawāli’d)63 of the world through the grace of the Universal Intellect (‘aql-i kulli). The culmination of this process of generation is the individual form of man, who possesses the fairest of forms.164

In his homily initially directed at the human soul in verse 27, Naṣir-i Khusraw now sharpens to a disdainful reproach addressed to the benighted public and his philistine critics:

31. So many thousand eyes and ears they have, but to what avail?
—Do not speak of them for they are both blind and dumb.

The rational soul becomes itself endowed with a heavenly and celestial nature only when it actualises the potential of its theoretical and practical faculties.165 Ultimately, this is the purpose of all listening,166 for it is only in this “sense” that any of our senses can truly serve us. There is no further purpose in life, Naṣir-i Khusraw explains, save that the human soul acquire knowledge (ilm), for the pleasure which this knowledge generates is stronger and longer lasting than any sensual pleasure. Therefore, man only realises his humanity when he acquires knowledge, thus liberating himself from the grossness, murkiness and turbidity of the flesh.167 But those who content themselves with sensual pleasures and fail to pursue intellectual delights, who are scorned in this verse as “both blind and dumb”, are doomed to languish in a brute, sub-human condition. The ignorant masses who possess external organs of sight, vision and
hearing and understanding, yet still assail and scoff at the transcendent Intellect and Soul (v. 30), are in reality spiritually benighted and morally dumb, unaware of the reality of these two divine substances, ignorant of Intellect and Soul and their esoteric rank and extended role as Nāṭiq and Asās.

* * *

At this juncture, over the course of the next fourteen verses—from verse 31 down to the penultimate couplet (45)—the theme of our qaṣīda shifts dramatically. As the poet’s imagination returns to this earth of sorrows to lament his exile from Heaven, submitting to his re-descent into the vale of Yumgan, the hypostases of Soul and Intellect exit the stage. A large proportion of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s qaṣīdas express the same bitter plaints and lamentations which these verses exhibit; his purely metaphysical poems are always interspersed with spates of lamentation about the misery of his alienation in backwoods Khurasan. He is obviously far more comfortable moving like winds of light on the dark and stormy air of the hierocosmos, but since the Soul is an Angel King and the Nous an Intellectual Thing and both within the human heart must reign, to build their heaven there or their hell, the Intellect’s gorgeous palaces and the Soul’s solemn temples now vanish like spirits into thin air. What remains behind are stunted human souls all out of shape from toe to head, the poet marooned in windy Badakhshan, harried by those accused demons (dīvān) that rouse such ire throughout his verse. But unlike the ethereal demons of Muslim tradition and Scripture who are created from “fire free of smoke” (Qurʾān LV: 14–15), these are human devils, the same base terrestrial beings we all know too well:

32. You say to me: “The material substance of the demon is fire.”
Indeed, but the demons of the present day and age have been all concocted from clay.

These demons (dīvān) are stock characters in Nāṣir’s poetry and closely resemble the characters of the ascetic (zāhid) and imposter (muddāt) who occasion such invective and satire in Hafiz’s ghazals, comparable as well to those spying courtiers known as lauzengiers who were to cause the separation of lovers and are rivals for the lady’s affections in fin’amors troubadour poetry in France a century later. These demons with a human face are the same base folk among whom Hujjat has been cast into exile in Yumgan “for fifteen years”, as he says in one poem, are virtually identical to the vulgar “asses” that arouse his scorn in the next three verses of the ode:

33. From our Father Adam only men have been born in this world
But why are all these folk who are born of Adam such asses?

34. Wherefore do they proclaim: “We are the offspring of Abraham”?
When you deeply scrutinise the matter, they’re disciples of his pagan father.

35. In the revels of the Devil, they are the cupbearer of the Angel of Punishment,
These fools who [pretend they] seek the fount of paradise!

The asinine folk of verse 33 are no doubt the Sunni “infidels” (nāṣībī), about whom our Ismāʿīlī missionary elsewhere quips: “There’s nothing strange that the Sunni is an infidel—it is not such a marvel that an ass acts asinine!” Since it is by wit and intelligence (ṭaqī) that man ascends to the level of humanity and since the lack thereof makes him worse than a scorpion, it should be stressed that the term khar in verse 33 in particular and throughout Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Dīvān in general means not only “ass”, but also connotes “base, low.” On the grander canvas of humanity, however, the poet elsewhere declares that “any man whose whole state of mind is focused but on sleep and feed, though he have a fair face—is just an ass” (this is, incidentally, precisely the purport of verse 44 below). Verse 33 addresses these same “asses and cows” whose company caused him such grief in this well-known verse in the Dīvān:

If you know I’m not a cowboy
Or muleteer, why is it you ask me
To take these cows and asses as my
Most intimate company?

The spirit of religio-philosophical elitism has never had such a learned exponent:

بی جرم دوست روز یک پس اینشان یسروی
 آتش که این کرودالان را تو برم را ترک دمرد
زندگی یانه همه دو بسی را یارند
من نخواهم که صرا خلق ز درم شنیدر

If these heartblind kinds you number “men”,
I’ll never wish that men account me a man.
You’re just following demons when you follow them
Since all they do is excite the devil in physical man.174

Almost predictably, his general railing at the “asses”
in vv. 33–34 becomes broadened to rebuke his “neighbours” (also cf. v. 45)—the far closer audience of the infidel Sunni Muslims whose character our pious poet in verse and prose always finds so monstrously perverse.175 According to the Qurān (II: 135), Abraham was the founder of the true upright (hanifī) faith, which was the model for the Prophet Muhammad’s later monotheist religion of Islam. Thus we witness the poet’s reproach to his fellow Muslims in verse 34 as being mere idolators176 no better than Abraham’s pagan father Āzar.177 The same taunt is hurled in verse 35, where Nāṣīr-i Khusraw rebukes the pharisees and hypocrites among his fellow Muslims for serving as bearers of the cup of wine to the “guards of Hell” (referring to Qurān XCVI: 18178); this could also well be an allusion to witty Sunni courtiers in collaboration with the murderous Saljuqs.179 The poet’s allusion here (v. 35a) to the “revels of the Devil” is to a verse of the Qurān where the souls being tortured in hell cry out to the keeper of hell “O Malik!” (XLIII: 77).180 At the same time, such devilish folk show their folly by claiming to be Muslims aspiring to “the ambrosial fountain of paradise (kawthar)”, which is a Qurānic term used elsewhere in Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s writings to allude specifically to Shi’ites, and in particular, to Ismā‘īlī esotericists amongst them.181

But despite his earthly travails, the adversities suffered by every sensitive soul undeceived by the world’s gross ornaments, the poet understands that the only philosophically sound attitude to adopt in regard to worldly mishaps and misfortunes, whether wrought by the rod of God or suffered through the spite of man, is to recognise the essentially transitory nature of the world. This forms the subject of the next four verses (36–39):

36. What joy or cheer lies here below where one brother is foe
To another brother for the sake of morsels and scraps?

37. After a millennium, you’ll be still the same; nothing ever changes:
Through hither door down were you sent, and by thither gate you’re driven hence.

38. All those who descended here into the world’s nether realm—what have they seen or known of it? All passed away and we’ll depart as well. Others shall come and they too go their way.

39. And what of these who slept beneath earth’s lids for years?
Who, by mating together a moment, became father and mother.

The insubstantial nature of worldly pleasure expressed in these verses is a frequent motif in the Divān182 and constitutes an inseparable element of the ascetic genre (zuhdīyyāt) of Persian poetry. In these four verses very little original or unusual can be found that has not been expressed with equal, if not with superior, eloquence by later Persian poets. Verse 39, for instance, found its fit reprise in one of Sā‘dī’s ghazals composed in the same rhyme on the theme of the world’s deceit.183

Let us now look at the next three lines (verses 40–42), which place Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s poem in the bāṭīni politico-religious perspective to which it pertains:

40. And these who made such hue and cry of love for ‘Alī,
Why are they enemies of ‘Umar if, indeed, they’re mates and comrades?

41. And as for these who claim friendship and fraternity with Ābū Bakr,
If they’re his confreres, why then are they ‘Ali’s foes?

42. As for these “Sunnis”, whose disposition it is to harbour malice towards ‘Alī,
In truth, they’re enemies of both ‘Umar and Ābū Bakr.

Verses 40–43, which constitute the poem’s envoi and the poet’s farewell to both Sunni and Shi’ite exoteric sectarianism, are composed in an ecumenical spirit in accordance with the esoteric, anti-formalist rhetoric of the whole qaṣīda. One of the things that often makes Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s thought seem so refreshingly “modern” and so in accord with enlightened ideals of tolerance and freedom is his vehement distaste for Islamic legalitarianism, voiced over and over again in his prose works on esoteric hermeneutics such as The Face of Faith (Wajh-i din).184 His own lack of religious bias appears throughout the Divān. The following verses, for instance, in which he rebukes the folly of his fellow Muslims’ derogation of Christians, typify his cosmopolitan character:

فضيل تور جهشت، بتگی، بر تراسا
از سر هنری بلور گونم و سواد ارا
ار کافی هنری که گرفته مسبیح چارا
ابیان پیامبران و سادات

Selected Readings and Studies
(English - 1)
Look, look—O Muslim—at the Christian 
And free your mind of bias,
This rash and vain vehemence
—What is your real pre-eminence?
You pretend to be the true believer
Following Muhammad. The Christian, an “infidel”
You call for following Jesus, 
Despite the fact both are prophets, friends of one another...
Why, why—this stupid hatred of Christians?185

The poet’s disgust at the abuse of emotions in Muslim spiritual life in verses 40–42 leads him to rebuke the crass malignity of Muslim “believers” who assail the faults or follies of certain other fellow Muslims, Shi‘ite and Sunni, causing them to break into stern speeches and accusations against all those who oppose their sect, and so pronounce them apostates. The guilty passion of religious fanaticism is a poison that destroys the Islamic faith, declares Naṣīr—recalling Rūmī’s remark that when the self-righteous, sanctimonious believer rails against the sinner whom he sees committing a sin, his emotions have been enkindled by a fire from Hell, so that he mistakes the infernal blaze of his misplaced zeal for righteous indignation and genuine religious fervour.186

Finally, in the next three verses, Naṣīr delivers an esoteric coup de grace to the whole qaṣīda.

43. If you’re wise, speak no more of either lot, but rank them both 
As one, for they know neither vassalage nor liberty.

44. Take care that you never come to belong to that troupe of folk in the world 
Who eat like cows, and then snatch and grab like wolves.

45. Be either a pagan infidel of principle, or a faithful believer in reality. 
But these things who are my neighbours—they’re neither Muslim nor infidel.

The radical esotericism of these verses, with their view of Islam as a religion of interior sapiential knowledge based on hermeneutical exegesis (ta‘wil) of religious texts,187 and where Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s violent opposition to slavish conformity to formalistic orthodoxy (taqlid) is expressed, appears throughout all his poetry and prose works.188 In *The Face of Faith*, for instance he says:

As the body is to the Soul, so are good works to religion (dhin).189 for knowledge is to religion as the Spirit is to the body, so there can be no Spirit in the religion of anyone who engages in good works without knowledge. Rather, his faith is merely a lifeless carcass, and God Almighty in His book has declared the consumption of carrion to be unlawful (ḥarām), the esoteric interpretation (ta‘wil) of which is that works without knowledge are unacceptable, that is to say, illegitimate and profane, just as carrion is ceremonially unclean and profane. Therefore, he who acquires knowledge but does not apply it in works has no religion, since one cannot affirm the Spirit’s existence apart from the body.190

Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s notion that exoteric Muslims who lack interior knowledge are little better than infidels, their appearance of faith giving the lie to the reality of their infidelity, is expressed in numerous other verses similar to these (43–45) in the *Divān*. The reproach addressed to his unknown interlocutor in verse 45, enjoining him to be either “an infidel-of-principle (kafīr bi-qdcida) or a faithful believer in reality”, and his opinion that his own closest neighbours do not belong to either of these two groups, recalls these other famous verses of his in the same vein:

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represents the flip side of this coin of religious tolerance displayed in texts such as *The Face of Faith*. In striving to shut out others, he often merely ends up closing the door to heaven to himself, for in treating men as pawns and ninepins, he suffers as well as they. Admittedly, many of his Ismā‘īlī beliefs appear today as antiquated religious notions as exclusivistically sectarian and narrow-minded as those of any seventeenth-century Presbyterian puritan or Jesuit missionary. Despite this, I think that verse 45 should not be read as indicative of any lapse of human kindness, misanthropic religiose puritanism, or interpreted as a failing to honour the Qur’anic injunction: “I (God) ask nothing of you but to love your neighbour” (XLII: 23). Rather, it is best interpreted as a stock complaint delivered against the degeneracy of the times, found in poets the world over, and in the literary vein of D.H. Lawrence’s commentary on the Christian homologue/parallel (Mark 12: 29–31) of the Qur’anic verse just cited:

I love my neighbour
But
Are these things my neighbours?
These two-legged things that walk and talk
And eat and cachinnate, and even seem to smile
Seem to smile, ye gods!

Am I told that these things are my neighbours?
All I can say then is Nay! nay! nay! nay! nay! nay!197

V. DENOUEMENT: POETIC GENIUS AND HIEROCOSMIC INTELLECT

As we have seen, some thirty verses—two-thirds—of this poem are composed of philosophical maxims, enigmatic theological allusions, paradoxes, oxymora and riddles consecrated to the greater glory of the Hierocosmic Intellect and Universal Soul. We have arrived now at the ode’s swansong, the final verse of which recalls all its key themes, wrapping up the message of the poem as a whole:

46. Nāsir is a bonded slave to the one who said:
   “Soul and Intellect wander itinerant above the verdant wheel of the firmament.”

Since the cosmogony and metaphysical structure of these two transcendental substances have been expounded at length above, it is unnecessary to revisit those discussions again here. However, to conclude my commentary on the ode, it is relevant to cite here the only extant account of the philosophical cosmogony of this poem that also provides us with an excellent précis of the meaning of this verse. In his still unpublished prose masterpiece, the Ḫawāʾir al-asrār, Shaykh Ādhari Tūsī (d. 866/1461)98 mentions the first line of the *qasīda*, before offering his own view of Nāṣir-i Khursorw’s cosmogony in this verse:

Philosophers have confirmed the existence of the Heaven of the Intellect (*falak-i ʿagāl*) and the Heaven of the Soul (*falak-i nafs*), saying that these two Heavens are the Movers of other Heavens. Our own sky is under their control in exactly the same way that a steed is controlled and managed by its saddle. These different Heavens are like steeds of that hierocosmos (*ṭālam-i quds*), and God has strapped the saddle of those celestial Intelligences and Souls upon them.199

Shaykh Ādhari’s philosophical interpretation of the first verse of the ode (112: 1) gives us a vivid idea of the animate intellectual hierocosmos of the poet, unfortunately quite alien to the clay-shuttered senses of the disencharmed imagination of modern man. But Nāṣir-i Khusraw repeatedly reminds us that the Intelligible Realm, to which Intellect and Soul belong, can only be apprehended through the *internal senses* and that these alone, *through an act of imagination*,200 are capable of grasping its infinite nature. He also asserts that the true state of man is heavenly, for man is the underlying motive for all being (*sabab-i budūš*)201 the light and glory of the earth,202 and the rational soul (*nafs-i nātiqa*) is essentially angelic and celestial in nature.203 From the Ismā‘īlī sage’s point of view, the transcendental hypostases of Intellect and Soul constitute the real origin of this empirical, physical cosmos. But apprehension of their heavenly nature and attaining access to that hierocosmos demands a kind of mystical unveiling (*kashf*) and direct vision (*shuhud*) similar to the esoteric modes of sapience (*māʾrifat*) found in Sufism.204 Unfortunately, the phenomenon of interior spiritual vision in Nāṣir-i Khursorw’s epistemology, quite clearly expressed in many passages in the *Divān*,205 cannot be explored or even articulated in this article,206 the aim of which has been merely to decode some of his metaphysical riddles and not to disclose the mystical realities underlying them. Anyway, as he himself reminds us, the music of the spheres heard by visionaries and best
related by poets cannot be heard but by the ear of the heart:

You could have heard how the seven orbs
Of heaven's circle burst into song
Had not the ear of your heart been so deaf.207

Indeed, the later nineteenth-century English poet Francis Thompson spoke the same truth in these celebrated verses:

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!
The drift of pinions, would we harken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors,
The angels keep their ancient places;—
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.208

One last remark. The poem’s envoi, its final verse, remains enigmatic on a more mundane point: to whom was it that Nāṣīr-i Khusraw here declares himself a slave? Almost a millenium has passed since Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s death. Aside from his evident devotion to a few key figures of the Fatimid political religious hierarchy, such as the Caliph Imām al-Mustansir, whose spokesman he represented himself to be, or al-Mu‘ayyad fi ‘l-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 470/1077)—both of whom he praises in the Divān—most of the interlocutors to whom his poems were addressed, as Julie Meisami has pointed out,209 remain still unknown. We know that his qaṣīdas probably all belonged to the genre of epistles and letters composed in verse (murāsalāt and mukātabāt),210 yet the names of most of those for whom he wrote his verse are today lost. Although it is unlikely that we will ever definitively know to which, if any, concrete individual Nāṣīr’s attentions in this verse was directed, if we recall the poet’s celebration in verse 27 of man as an emissary of Intellect and Soul, it seems quite clear that the poet’s addressee is probably not to any famous name among contemporary theologians, philosophers or men of letters. Rather, since the classical Arabic and Persian literary tradition dictated that the envoi verses of the qaṣīda should voice a deliberate boast of poetic prowess,211 his message in praising his sagacity and insight into the paradoxical hierocosmos of his two beloved hypostatic Muses, Soul and Intellect, was, I believe, a celebration of his own poetic genius. Nāṣīr-i Khusraw was the most eloquent incarnation of the poetic genius in the qaṣīda genre in Persian of his generation. In my opinion, these verses from another ode offers us a definitive, if not final, proof-text confirming that this interpretation is the correct one:

Do not look at my frail corporeal flesh
For in rhetoric’s art and figures of speech
I have books that are more than the stars in the vault
Of the Wheel of Heaven. Though on this dustbowl
Of the earth I reside, yet still, day in and night
Out beyond the Empyrean the space of my flight
And my voyage is found.212 Everyone always tries
Not to get in the way of what Fate and the will
Of Providence for them decrees, but both of these
Are for me just as leaders and guides on my way.
Listen now to this truth a wise man told me once:
“Go and take your intelligence, name it as ‘Fate’,
Then go designate Speech as the ‘Will of Providence’.”
I’m the mind and the soul: they are themselves myself,
Why need I then avoid my self? I’m both the Soul
And the Intellect, anima rationalis
And intelligence that is incarnate in man.213

Notes

1 This essay is a longer version of a lecture originally given at a conference on “The Philosophical Poetry of Nasir Khusraw”, convened by Dr Alice Hunsberger and held on 17–18 September 2005 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. I am extremely grateful to Dr Hunsberger for encouraging me to pursue this study. I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Professor Hermann Landolt in helping me to interpret certain philosophical nuances of some of the key verses in the poem, and thank Terry Graham for his editorial assistance.

2 Misunderstanding of the poet’s thought is still rampant among scholars, evident, for instance, in ‘Ali Dashti’s Tāsīvīr az Nāṣīr-i Khusraw, ed. M. Makhūrī (Teheran, 1362 A.Hsh./1983), where time and time again he characterises the poet as having a “metaphysically confused mind ” and “bewildered brain” (cf. ch. 11, p. 230), when in fact the
author was not adequately versed in the metaphysical structure of the poems he wished to analyse.


4 As Ian Ryhka pointed out almost half a century ago in his History of Iranian Literature (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 189.


6 Hence De Bruijn comments that Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s “odes are full of the same homiletic themes and motifs in which works of later Sufi poets abounded” (Persian Sufi Poetry, p. 35). Arberry is quite right to observe that “Sanāʾi comes stylistically nearest to Nāṣir-i Khusraw [d. 470/1077]; while discoursing nobly on the majesty of God and the dedicated life, he rails incessantly against the evil times in which it was his misfortune to live and urges the wicked to repent of their sins before the wrath to come” (Classical Persian Literature (Richmond, Surrey [repr. of the London, 1954 ed.]), p. 89).


8 Thus Mihdi Muḥaqiq has shown that one of his most famous odes (the “Pilgrimage Poem”) is actually a versified paraphrase of an anecdote that had been told about the leader of the Baghdad School of Sufism, Junayd; see Mihdi Muḥaqiq, Tāḥīl-i ʿashārāt-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw (Tehran, 1344 A.Hsh./1965). The anecdote in question was cited by Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd (London, 1976), pp. 49–50. We also know that Sanāʾi adopted images and ideas and followed metrical and rhyme schemes that first appeared in the Divān of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, revealing that the Ismaʿili’s poet’s literary legacy, even in the first generation following his death, had already come to be interpreted outside the narrow religious confines and cachet of faith and sect. On this see M.R. Shafti-Kadkāni, Tāzaynahā-yi sulūk: Naqš va tāḥīl-i chand qasida az Ḥakīm Sanāʾi (Tehran, 1378 A.Hsh/1999), pp. 292, 293, 299, 306, 307–8, 317, 339, 340, 347, 362, 364, 369, 420, 478, 481. The leading Sufi Shaykh of the Timurid period, Shah Nīrmatullāh (d. 835/1431), also composed a Sufi qasida in a line-by-line response (javāb) to an ode by Nāṣir-i Khusraw (Divān, ed. Taqizāda, pp. 188–90); see Divān-i ʿashārāt-i Shāh Nīrmatullāh Valī, ed. J. Nārbakhsh (Tehran, 1361 A.Hsh/1982), pp. 739–44, using Sufi symbolism in a brave attempt to solve Ismaʿili philosophical riddles!


12 Among these must be mentioned Peter Wilson’s and G.R. Aavani’s Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems from the Divān (Tehran, 1977), and Annemarie Schimmel’s Make a Shield from Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Divān (London, 1993).

13 Tāsūrī az Nāṣir-i Khusraw.


15 Three names in this respect stand out: 1. W. Ivanow, who wrote numerous works on his biography that (where not outdated) are still relevant to the poet; 2. Henry Corbin, who edited his Jamīʿ al-ḥikmatayn, and also wrote extensively on his thought in essays; cf. his “Nāṣir-i Khosna and Iranian Ismaʿilism”, in CHIr, vol. IV, pp. 520–42; and 3. Y.E. Berthels, whose Nāṣir-i Khosraw va Ismaʿiliyān, tr. into Persian by Y. Aṯīnrū (Tehran, 1346 A.Hsh./1967) is a classic.

16 Attention should be drawn to the Mīnūvī/Muḥaqiq edition of the Divān (see n. 18 below), as well as to two other invaluable research tools by Professor Muḥaqiq for the understanding of his poetry, namely: 1. Tāḥīl-i ʿashārāt-i Nāṣir-i Khosraw (Tehran, 1344 A.Hsh./1965); and 2. Sharḥ-i ʿaṣṣāda az Ḥakīm-i Nāṣir-i Khosraw Qubādāyīn (Tehran, 1378 A.Hsh./1999). Professor Muḥaqiq is currently composing a multi-volume commentary on the entire Divān.

17 Classical Persian Literature, p. 69.

18 Divān-i ʿashārāt-i Ḥakīm-i Nāṣir-i Khosraw Qubādāyīn, ed. Muṣṭafā Mīnūvī and Mihdi Muḥaqiq (Tehran, 1978), Qaṣīda 112, pp. 242–44. It will be to this edition that all references below will be made.

19 One important reference to the poem appears in the (still unpublished) Jewels of the Mysteries (Jawāhīr al-asrār) of Shaykh ʿAlī Ṭūsī (d. 866/1461), the poet laureate of Sultan ʿAlamūdīn Shāh Bahmani (reg. 825–37/1421–33), and his son Ṭūsī’s Da-l-Dīn Bahmani (reg. 837–62/1433–57). Shaykh ʿAlī Ṭūsī refers to the first verse of Nāṣir-i Khosraw’s
 ode 112 in order to illustrate the abstruse symbolic allusions of other poets, calling it “his famous Ode to Intellect and Soul.” See H. Ethé, Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the British Library (repr. London, 1980), B.L. MS 1269 (no. 2036), p. 1128, fol. 151r.


24 O’Connor, “Substance and Attribute”, p. 36.


26 Cf. Divān, 113: 16

27 Thus Fārābī calls God “the First”, and the second emanation from God he calls “the Second” (al-thānī), equivalent to the First Intellect, which he characterises as “an absolutely incorporeal and immaterial substance (jawhar) that can comprehend both its own essence and God Himself.” See Ian Netton, Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology (London, 1989), p. 115.


29 This teaching is alluded to by Boethius, for instance, in his tractate On the Trinity, where he says: “When we say God, we seem to denote a substance, but it is a substance that is supersubstantial” (Loeb Classical Library ed., p. 17), cited by Victor Watts in his translation of Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy (London, 1969, repr. 1999), p. 70n. The same sort of language is, of course, met with in the Nicene Creed where the Son is said to be one substance with the Father, as Watts observes.


31 Ibid., p. 195 (= mabda’-i avval.


34 Ibid., p. 168.


37 Nāṣīr-i Khusraw, Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology, with the Persian text of Gushāvīsh va rāhāvīsh, edited and translated by Faquir M. Hunzai with introduction and commentary by Parviz Morewedge (London, 1998), §144.

38 Ibid., §143 of the Persian text. This identification of the One with Intellect is reflected in Ṭaḥdīda 113 of his Divān, where in verses 11–13 he describes the procession of the Intellect and Soul from the divine Essence as follows: “You are the Beloved of the Cosmos and yet do not have a single worthy lover. You lay hidden like the magic treasure of Qarūn, your single pearl concealed within two substances. The cosmos was manifested from these two substances, so Adam reaped his due reward from both of them.”


40 ʿAn yakī bi-ḥaqiqat ʿaql ast, Nāṣīr-i Khusraw states in Knowledge and Liberation, §145 (Persian text).

41 Zād al-musaffirin, p. 71.


44 The two alternative versions of this couplet given in the notes to the Divān make far more sense than the reading finally selected by the editors for the published text. I have followed this alternative version of the second couplet, which reads Istādā har chīh dahr furūshand, mikharand as the text chosen for my translation. See also my commentary on v. 18 below and accompanying notes.


47 i.e. nā-musawwarand: the rhyme-word at the end of v. 2.

48 Zād al-musaffirin, pp. 311–12


50 Ibid., VI.6.13, p. 626. Also cf. VI.7.6 (p. 640) where Plotinus describes the sense-perception of the higher soul as a transcendental mode of sensation “which is the source of the lower soul’s perception of the correspondences in the sense-realm. Man as sense-perceptible becomes aware of these correspondences and accommodates the sense-realm to the lowest extremity of its counterpart There; proceeding from the fire here to the fire Intellectual.”


52 The Enneads, VI. 9, p. 707.

53 Zād al-musaffirin, p. 306.
In this passage the term “this substance” (jawhar) refers to the human rational soul, which has been the general subject of ch. 21 (“On the Process of Conjunction of Soul to Body”) to which this subsection pertains.


62 The identification of the First Intelligence (al-caql al-awwal) with Gabriel can also be found in thinkers of Ibn Ḥarīrābī’s school such as ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlij (d. 1406), on which see Nicholson, Studies in Islamic Mysticism (Cambridge, 1921), pp. 115–16.

63 Mathnawī, III: 3193.

64 Mathnawī, III: 3194.

65 “Such a soul is an angelic soul (ān nafs nafs-i firishtagi bāḥshād).” Žād al-muṣāfirīn, p. 309.


67 Cf. Qəṣīda 59: 15–16.

68 Divān, Q 78: 14–17

69 My discussion here is indebted to Margaret Miles, Plotinus (The Enneads, VI.7.14) writes: “All is within it [the Intellectual-Principle], all the powers and intellections; the division is not determined by a boundary but goes ever inward; this content is held as the living universe holds the natural forms of the living creatures in it from the greatest to the least, down even to the minutest powers where there is a halt at the individual form.” And that is exactly the point of vv. 12–14.

70 The Enneads, IV.8.4, p. 413.

71 Ibid., IV.8.4, p. 413.

72 Ibid., IV.8.4, p. 414.

73 Ibid., IV.8.5, p. 415.


75 For the poet’s use of the term in this sense see Muḥaqqiq, Shāhri ʾi qasīda, p. 150, n. 21.

76 Žād al-muṣāfirīn, p. 48.

77 A good discussion of Ismāʿīlī theories of Physics regarding the Elements and their Natures prior to Naṣīr-i Khusraw is given by Mohamed A. Alibhai, “The Transformation of Spiritual Substance into Bodily Substance in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism”, in Morewedge, Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought (Albany, 1992), pp. 167–77.

78 Cf. Žād al-muṣāfirīn, pp. 56–57.


82 See R. Arnaldez, art. “Kidam”, in EP, vol. V, p. 95. It is interesting that Naṣīr-i Khusraw elsewhere provides his own idiosyncratic definition of the term “eternity a parte ante” (azal: used in v. 11a) as simply meaning “the affirmation of divine Unity (azal ithbāt-i wahdat-i khudāsī) to which reason must be summoned to obey.” Žād al-muṣāfirīn, “On the Difference between Azal and Azali and Azaliyat”, p. 195. This passage, which was analysed at length by Corbin, Cyclical Time in Ismaʿīlī Gnosis, pp. 33–34, has been subjected to a comprehensive study by Hunsberger, “Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s Doctrine of the Soul”, pp. 159–72.

83 In his discussion of the infinity of the Intellectual-Principle, Plotinus (The Enneads, VI.7.14) writes: “All is within it [the Intellectual-Principle], all the powers and intellections; the division is not determined by a boundary but goes ever inward; this content is held as the living universe holds the natural forms of the living creatures in it from the greatest to the least, down even to the minutest powers where there is a halt at the individual form.” And that is exactly the point of vv. 12–14.

84 See Žād al-muṣāfirīn, ch. 10, in particular pp. 116–17.

85 Ibid., p. 178.

86 This theory was upheld by a number of eleventh-century Ismāʿīlī thinkers, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. between 386/996 and 393/1003) in particular; on which see Paul Walker, “The Universal Soul and the Particular Soul in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism” in Morewedge, Neoplatonism an Islamic Thought, pp. 155–57.


89 Žād al-muṣāfirīn, p. 195. This hypostatic view of Intellect was also characteristic of eleventh-century Ismāʿīlī cosmogonic thinking in general; see W. Madelung, art. “Cosmogony. VI. In Ismāʿīlī”, EIr, vol. VI, p. 323.

90 Sijistānī’s views on this matter are summarised by Netton in his Allah Transcendent, p. 224.


92 “The Word (kalima) is called Oneness (wahdat) and the Intellect is called One (wahhid) and Oneness is a single thing
and the One is also a single thing. Although the One has made its appearance from Oneness, the sage thereby understands that the term ‘the One’ amongst these two names is the proper term (to use) since the ‘One’ is in fact in it, and by means of this we may understand Intellect is but one thing, according to hierarchical degree”, Knowledge and Liberation, §133 (N.B. my own translation from the Persian here—which is quite different from the published translation).

Later on in Knowledge and Liberation (§145), he actually calls the Soul “the Second”, where, after explaining that the Intellect and the One are one thing (with different names), he then says: “the Second is the Soul, and the Third is prima materia (hayāla), each of which stands upright in their own proper places, working according to divine command.” Here, the First or Intellect is equated with the nātīq, and the Second with his Legatee (wasī), although neither of these ideas are connoted by this verse.

On the role of the Five Senses in his Divān, see Muhaqqiq, Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda, p. 230, n. 12.

On this term, see Dihkhuda, Lughāt-nama, ed. M. Mucin and J. ShahldT (Tehran, 1993-94), vol. VI, p. 8811, where this very verse is cited for sake of illustration of the word’s meaning.


Referring to the mawālīd-i thalāth, that is: the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 279.

Zād al-musāfīrīn, p. 268.

Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, pp. 246-47.

These three grades are referred to by another poetical riddle in Qaṣīda 145: 10 as being the “three guests (siḥ maymān), on which see Muḥaqiq’s commentary: Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda, p. 266, n. 17.


For the poet’s use of the term in this sense see Muḥaqiq, Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda, p. 115, n. 19. In an important passage in the Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 117, §114, Nāṣīr-i Khusraw defines dahr as being “the subsisting forever of the Eternal Substance (baqā-yi jawhar-i sarmādi)”, identifying it with Universal Intellect (‘aql-i kull). The same identity (dahr bā ‘aql ma’ ast,  ya’ni bārīhār ast: “Time always is with the Intellect, that is to say, equivalent to the Intellect”) is repeated later on (p. 188, §192), for a study of which see Corbin’s Cyclical Time in Ismā’īlī Gnosis, pp. 33–34; and Hunsberger, “Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s Doctrine of the Soul”, pp. 159ff.

I have interpreted the literal sense of istāda (“stand before”) as implying “waiting on.”

§158.

p. 269, ll. 13–16.

See Qaṣīda 145: 11 where this term is used in exactly this sense, and commented on by Muḥaqiq, Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda, p. 266, n. 11. This is to be distinguished from the usage of ān-ast pādhā in Qaṣīda 22: 27 where the reference is to God; cf. Muḥaqiq, Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda, no. 14: 29, p. 179.

See Qaṣīda 59: 23 where the King is depicted as ruler of the Five External Senses.


Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 110.


Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, pp. 281–82, on which see Hunsberger’s illuminating analysis, “Esoteric World Vision”, pp. 96–96;

Jāmī’ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 110.


§51.

For a good discussion of his opposition to this theory, see Hunsberger, “Nāṣīr-i Khusraw’s Doctrine of the Soul”, pp. 75–81.

§48–49.

§57.

This is the subject of a comprehensive study by Muhammad Diyanat T, Yak tapash-i dirang: shinakht-i mutandqis-namá (paradox) va suwar-i khiyāli-i pārādīskīdar shīr-i Mawlawī va 'Aṭṭār (Tehran, 1381/2002), pp. 236–62.

Paradise Lost, W, 176–79.

IV: 2970.

In his “Adonais”, the famous stanza beginning: “The One remains, the many change and pass...”


Four Quartets, “The Dry Salvages. III”. Italics mine.

Kulliyat-i Shams yā Divāni-ka Kabīr, ed. B. Furtūnzār (Tehran, 1976), III, p. 259, ghazal 1540, vv. 16181, 16183; most of this ghazal being devoted to the theme of the apophatic speech of the First Intellect.


Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 188; Zād al-muṣaffīrīn, p. 116. However, there does not appear to be any clear position on the Soul’s relation to the category of “Place”, at least in his prose works that I have examined. Hunsberger, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Doctrine of the Soul”, pp. 126–31, gives a thorough discussion of the Universal Soul’s relation to the material world without coming to any definitive conclusion on this matter.

Zād al-muṣaffīrīn, p. 309.

Cf. my commentary above on vv. 2–3, explaining reason’s inability to grasp the process (chigānagī) of creation.


Walker, Early Philosophical Shiism, p. 92.

Elaborate in his Shīšā ḵašt; see Hunsberger, The Ruby, pp. 132–33.

Early Philosophical Shiism, p. 117. Italics mine.

Ibid., p. 146.


See Corbin, “Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism”, pp. 27ff.

Cf. Knowledge and Liberation, §132.

Cf. ibid., §88.

Loc. cit.

See F. Daftary, The Ismailis, pp. 139–40.

Knowledge and Liberation, §89.

Referring here to the ummahāt-i arbā’ or four natural elements, see Zād al-muṣaffīrīn, p. 1.

Referring here to the mawālid-i thalāth, that is: the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

Zād al-muṣaffīrīn, p. 265.

Ibid., p. 266.

Ibid., p. 179.

Cf. “Whenever the rational soul acquires wisdom (ḥikmat) it becomes heavenly. The wise man is someone who today brings his soul into Paradise.” Ibid., p. 301.

Nāṣir-i Khusrāw devotes an entire chapter to this topic in ibid., pp. 464–65.


On this term, see Dilkhudā, Lughāt-nāma, vol. VIII, p. 11612, who cites this verse for sake of illustration.

Referring here to the mawālid-i thalāth again, see n. 154 above.

Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn, p. 279.

This is the subject of chapter 21 of the Zād al-muṣaffīrīn (pp. 301–3), giving an “Exposition that when the rational soul reaches perfection it becomes heavenly.” The poet here follows the traditional Aristotelian division of the rational faculty into practical (ʿamaliyya) and theoretical (nāzariyya) reason. Thus Fārābī writes: “The rational faculty is partly practical reason and partly theoretical reason; practical reason is made to serve theoretical reason. Theoretical reason, however, is not made to serve anything else but has as its purpose to bring man to felicity.” Richard Walzer (tr.) Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State (Mahādī ārā’ abh al-madīnat al-fāsiliḥ), with text, translation and commentary (Oxford, 1985), p. 209.

Indeed, as the Qurʾān itself repeatedly insists: “Surely in that are signs for those who listen!” (X: 67; XVI: 65).

Zād al-muṣaffīrīn, p. 273.

Qāsidā 90: 1–2; cf. Dashti, Ṭaṣvīrī, pp. 53ff.

Qāsidā 26: 4.


Muḥaṣṣiq, Sharḥ-i sī qāšida, p. 55, n. 14; p. 147, n. 13.

Qāsidā 131: 1.

Qāsidā 90: 11.
174 Qaṣīda 31: 41, 44.
175 Cf. Qaṣīda 14: 14, 30; Qaṣīda 112: 32; Dashti, Taṣwīrī, pp. 56ff.
176 This is a common theme in his Divān: cf. Qaṣīda 109 (vv. 1–11), where he curses the Sunnis as being worse than Hindu idolators.
177 On whom, see Qurʿān, VI: 74; 19: 41ff.
179 See Hunsberger, The Ruby, pp. 229–33, who quotes a number of similar passages in the Divān where he rails against his contemporaries—members of the Saljuq political elite as well as the clerical hierarchy—as being demons, dogs, calves in human form.
181 Interpreting Qurʿān CVIII: 1 “We have given you the kawthar”, in Knowledge and Liberation (p. 88) he states: “The word kawthar means a man who has many children, thus indicating to Imam ʿAlī that his children will stand to execute the command of God and the taʿwil [esoteric interpretation] of His book.” In Qaṣīda 22: 71, the poet identified kawthar as the particular sobriquet (laqab) of Imam ʿAli.
182 Cf. Qaṣīda 22: 49ff., where the world is compare to a scab, whose pleasure lies in the pain of itching, or no. 23, over half of which is devoted to reviling the unfaithfulness of the world. For further discussion of this motif in his poetry, see Hunsberger, The Ruby, pp. 243–45.
183 Cf. this verse: “O you who pace across the back of the earth, time will not be yours forever: there are still many others waiting in their mother’s womb and father’s loins to enter.” Ay kay bar pusht-i zamini, hama waqt ān-i tā nist digest dar shikam-i mādar u pusht-i pidar-and. In N. Izadparast (ed.), Ghazal-hā-yi Sa(dī (Tehran, 1362/1983), p. 319.
184 Wajh-i dīn, ed. Gholam-Reza Aavani (Tehran, 1977), pp. 68–69, where he accepts the validity and authenticity of the Torah, Gospels and even the Hindu scriptures, putting them all on par with the Qurʿān, declaring that (p. 68) “all these scriptures are themselves the Qurʿān without any discord and conflict between them. There is nothing contradictory (in these holy scriptures) except in (the apparent difference of) their outer expressions (laf), similes (mathal) and symbols (ramz). Therefore, among the Greeks is the Gospels, among the Russians the Torah, and among the Indians (hinduvan) is the Abrahamic scripture.”
185 Divān, p. 168, Qaṣīda 77: 42–46.
186 Mathnavī, bk. I: 3347–49.
187 In ch. 10 of Wajh-i dīn, the Ismāʿīlī philosopher subdivides reality into its esoteric and exoteric dimensions: the former pertains to sensory phenomena or “objects of sense perception” (mahṣūṣāt) which anyone can grasp by means of the physical senses and the latter pertains to “intelligibles” (maʿqūlāt) that are apprehended only through knowledge and reason. Devotional works of obedience—works such as the ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, ḣiḥād, and their concomitants—being apprehended by the physical senses, can all be designated as “exoteric” or “external” (zaḥīr). Esoteric matters, on the other hand, which include things that are “beyond belief”, which are matters of the heart’s inner conviction or faith—knowledge of God’s Unity, substantial proof of Prophethood, Paradise, Hell, reward and punishment in the world hereafter, resurrection, etc. It is solely knowledge of esoteric matters that gives a man or woman a vantage over any other. He adduces a number of arguments for the priority of the esoteric core-truth of religion over its exoteric gloss and glitter, for “there exists no exoteric reality (zaḥīr) the continuity of which does not depend on its esoteric reality (bāṭīn).” (Wajh-i dīn, p. 80).
188 Cf. Qaṣīda 90: 36.
189 This statement appears to be a direct paraphrase of James II: 26: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead”, and also has echoes of Luke VI: 47–49: “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you what he is like: He is like a man which built a house and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man which without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream beat vehemently, an immediately it fell; and the ruin of the house was great.”
190 Wajh-i dīn, p. 71.
191 Qaṣīda 28: 1–2, p. 58
193 Qaṣīda 164: 27, p. 346.
194 In Knowledge and Liberation, for instance, he teaches that there is no possibility of understanding “God’s knowledge” without the “permission of His treasurer” who is held to be the Imam of the time (pp. 86–87). By a single stroke of the pen, the trunk of the elect Ismāʿīlī faithful is thus severed from the common limbs of all other Muslims—whom he characterizes as “thieves” (ṣīrāt)! This is because they fail to gain their knowledge by the command of the (Ismāʿīlī) Imam, for
“he who does not have recourse to the Imam of his time, who does not seek knowledge of the truth from him, and who relies on his own power and strength, is a wrong-doer” (§5).

A minority of commentators on this verse interpret it as referring exclusively to Muhammad’s own kith and kin. On the other hand, the early Muslim mystical theologian Hasan al-Baṣṣīr (d. 728) interpreted its key phrase al-mawadda tā l-qurba as comprising a mystical command to “love all those who seek to approach God by devotional works” (Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī, Kasīf al-asrār wa ’udādat al-abrār, ed. A.A. Ḥikmat [Tehran, 1952–60], vol. IX, p. 24). My translation and interpretation of this verse is based on two eminent translators. One, Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur’an (repr. Gibraltar, 1980), p. 744, translates the phrase as an injunction to “love your fellow-men”, noting that “the deliberate omission of any possessive pronoun in respect of the term al-qurba indicates that it is not limited to any personal relationship but, rather, alludes to a relationship common to all human beings: namely, the fellowship of man—a concept which implies the fundamental ethical postulate to care for one another’s material and spiritual welfare.” The other, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation an Commentary (repr. New York, 1988), p. 1312, while translating the term al-qurba as “near of kin”, adds in commentary: “The love of kindred may be extended to mean the love of our common humanity, for all mankind are brothers descended from Adam. Everyone can understand the ordinary love of kindred. But cannot we extend this idea to a mystical meaning of Love for all mankind, thus proving kinship with the divine Love...?”

The biographical context of such complaints must also be kept in mind. As Corbin observes: “The fanaticism of his contemporaries caused him both indignation and sadness, because this fanaticism annihilated the ‘two wisdoms’ and not at all because of the disappointed ambitions for his own career... It was the eternal indignation of the sage, provoked by this fanaticism and interpreted as comprising a mystical command to ‘love all those who seek to approach God by devotional works’...” (in his “Nasir-i Khusraw’s Divān.” Unpublished lecture delivered at the International Conference, Bethesda, Maryland, 28–30 May 2004).


See n. 19 above. Dawlatshah Samarqandī in his Tadhkīrat al-shu’ārāʾ, ed. Muhammad ‘Abbāsī (Tehran, n.d.) p. 70, cites the matla‘ of this qaṣīda in the context of an apocryphal story about the encounter of the poet with Abu ‘l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 425/1034).

British Library, Ethé Catalogue, p. 1128 (no. 2036), no. 1269, fol. 151r. See also n. 19 above.

He thus devotes a whole chapter to the infinite nature of internal senses that allow them access to the realm of the Intellect: “Proofs that man by using his internal senses can apprehend things of an infinite nature”, Zād al-musāfīrīn, pp. 659–70.

Qaṣīda 213: 3.

Qaṣīda 213: 5.

He even consecrates an entire chapter of his Zād al-musāfīrīn (“Exposition that when the rational soul reaches perfection it will become heavenly”) to expounding this doctrine, where (p. 302) he observes: “The rational soul is a substance, whose accidents are knowledge, wisdom, discrimination, understanding, discernment, and the other virtues through which it can comprehend any of the interior realities of suprasensible concepts (ma’nā az ma’nā). When it fails, or is prevented from acquiring, these ideas, then the soul falls into the contrary condition of corruption and decay.”

For a good overview of which, see John Renard, Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology (New York, 2004). In this respect it should be underlined that Muslim philosophers usually discuss cosmology in terms of ontology and human psychology, as points W.C. Chittick, “The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology”, in T. Lawson (ed.), Reason and Inspiration in Islam (London, 2005), pp. 274–83.

Cf. this famous verse: “The world’s Arcana can be seen by the inner eye/ But the outer eye can never see the arcane mystery.” Qaṣīda 5:1.

This aspect of Naṣīr-i Khusraw’s epistemology has been covered in Lewison, Esoteric Traditions in Islamic Thought: Texts on Gnosis & Hermeneutics in Isma'ilism, Sufism, Muslim Philosophy, Twelver Shi‘ism and Illuminationism (London, forthcoming).

Qaṣīda 22: 35.


The same boast is repeated in Qaṣīda 37: 35.

Qaṣīda 6: 12, 13, 33–35.
Abstract: In what follows, I address the broad contours of the Islamic “intellectual tradition,” by which I mean philosophy and Sufism. Specifically, I want to suggest that the important issue for this tradition was not how the technical operation of intelligence that we call “reason” is accomplished, but how human intelligence itself can be fully actualized. Notions of reason, intelligence, and consciousness were rooted in concepts of human potentiality, and these represented versions of what can be called “spiritual anthropology.” Human nature was understood as an on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the Divine Word or the Supreme Reality, and full actualization of this nature was seen as demanding a disciplined body, mind, and heart.

In what follows, I address the broad contours of the Islamic “intellectual tradition,” by which I mean philosophy and Sufism. Specifically, I want to suggest that the important issue for this tradition was not how the technical operation of intelligence that we call “reason” is accomplished, but how human intelligence itself can be fully actualized. Notions of reason, intelligence, and consciousness were rooted in concepts of human potentiality, and these represented versions of what can be called “spiritual anthropology.” Human nature was understood as an on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the Divine Word or the Supreme Reality, and full actualization of this nature was seen as demanding a disciplined body, mind, and heart.

Here I will pay more attention to Sufism than to philosophy (falsafa), not least because it has been the focus of most of my research over the past 40 years. Definitions of Sufism are easy to come by and typically disagree. I use the word in the most general sense: to designate the tendency among Muslims to strive for a personal engagement with the Divine Reality. This tendency, found from the beginning of Islam, led to a proliferation of individuals, movements, and institutions that can be differentiated from other individuals, movements, and institutions that were more concerned with action, morality, belief, dogma, and rational investigation. Jurists (fuqahā’), for example, devoted their attention to right activity; they codified the Shariah (the revealed

law) and offered advice on how to apply it. Experts in Kalâm (apologetic theology) focused on clarifying and systematizing right understanding and right beliefs as extracted from the Koran. Neither jurisprudence nor Kalâm, however, paid attention to the nature of the knowing subject that is striving to act correctly and believe rightly.

Philosophy and Sufism placed intelligence and consciousness at the center of their concerns. Philosophers studied *nafs*, self or soul, with the aim of actualizing *aql*, intellect or intelligence—though in philosophical contexts the word is more often translated as “reason” and sometimes as “mind.” They looked upon *aql* as an intelligent and intelligible luminosity that is innate to the human substance and possesses unlimited potential. Precisely because they gave a high profile both to reason and to logic (*maqāl*), the tool by which reason is gauged, and they also paid a great deal of attention to mathematics and the natural sciences, they have been looked back upon by historians as the foremost “rational thinkers” of Islam. For most if not all of them, however, philosophy was not simply a rational technique or an investigative tool; it was a spiritual discipline that aimed at illumination, awakening, and self-transformation (as was also the case, according to Pierre Hadot and others, in Greek and pre-modern, Western philosophy). As for the Sufis, characteristically they were striving to achieve full self-awareness by reintegrating the human self into its divine prototype. Unlike the philosophers, they explicitly grounded their efforts in the Sunnah (the beautiful model, *uswa hasana*) of Muhammad and often took on the social responsibility of guiding the masses on the path to God. Nonetheless, at least from the time of Suhrawardi (d. 1191), the founder of the Illuminationist School of philosophy, it is often difficult to distinguish the philosophical quest for wisdom from the Sufi quest for God.3

Like scholars in other fields, Sufis wrote countless treatises, usually with a practical orientation, but often containing complex theoretical discussions. Ibn al-`Arabi (d. 1240) was the outstanding example of an accomplished master of every dimension of Sufi theory and practice who felt compelled to offer detailed, rational explanations of the human-divine interrelationship. Hundreds of other important authors—most of them unstudied in modern times—also made significant contributions to the formulation of Sufi teachings, whether theoretical or practical.

Before trying to clarify the notion of intelligence and consciousness, it may be useful to recall that the worldview of the modern West—in the context of which all of us have been educated—is radically different from that of pre-modern civilizations generally and the Islamic tradition specifically. We moderns, for example, feel comfortable talking about “consciousness” as something to be studied and investigated, much as we might study microorganisms or the workings of the brain—and indeed, many would consider
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consciousness totally explicable in terms of biological mechanisms. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the bifurcation of the human being into a clearly distinct subject and object, which we take for granted (however much we may be opposed to it philosophically), took a long time to become rooted in the Western mind, whether or not Descartes was the first to formulate it clearly.

If we want to understand the Islamic way of explicating the nature of reason and consciousness, we need to remember that the sources provide no terminology corresponding exactly with subject and object. Underlying this tradition is a nondual understanding of things that has profound similarities with schools of non-Western thought like Advaita Vedanta, which identified Brahman with Atman, that is, the Supreme Reality with the Supreme Self. For this Indian tradition, life, consciousness, awareness, and joy are infinitely present in the Self/Reality, and the universe can be nothing but its “names and forms” (nama-rupa). Brahman/Atman is sat-chit-ananda, “being-consciousness-bliss,” and everything else—Maya—is its reverberation. Where subject ends and object begins remains always a puzzle, for the two are intimately linked.

Christian theologians of Medieval times, who spoke of Being as the Beautiful, the True, and the Good, would not have found this Hindu view of things too difficult to grasp, nor would Muslim philosophers and Sufis. But over time, the Western tradition tended to drift into an interpretation of existence, and indeed of reality itself, that stripped it of all that is qualitative, good, and beautiful. Islamic thought, however, had no room for existence divorced from consciousness, nor could it ever imagine that the underlying stuff of reality is an amorphous matter/energy waiting for cosmic accidents to occur, eventually giving rise to life, awareness, self-consciousness, and reason as a series of epiphenomena. On the contrary, existence and consciousness, reality and awareness, beauty and joy, are omnipresent and permeate all that exists.

1. THE CONSCIOUS SELF

Any number of Arabic words are used in ways that overlap with the modern use of consciousness and awareness, two words that I take here as synonyms, though their meanings might usefully be distinguished. My purpose, however, is simply to suggest something of the variety of words employed by Muslim thinkers to address a general field of inquiry. These words made sense in a context that acknowledged that most of reality is unavailable to everyday perception. What we experience through our senses is simply the radiation or sedimentation of deeper or higher strata of consciousness and
Awareness. In other words, “In the beginning”—whether we take this as a temporal beginning, or an atemporal, ontological beginning—"was the Word," and the Word was and is alive, aware, and omniscient. What we perceive in our mundane reality can be nothing but what the Koran calls the “signs” (āyāt) of God, the markers and signifiers of the transcendent and immanent Real (al-ḥaqiq).

Generally, Muslim thinkers spoke of the invisible something that animates living things as rūḥ and nafs. Rūḥ, typically translated as “spirit” and cognate with Hebrew ruwach, derives from the same root as rīḥ, “wind” (Latin spiritus). Nafs, translated as “self” or “soul” and employed in Arabic as a reflexive pronoun, is written the same way as nafas, breath, and is cognate with Hebrew nephesh; it plays a role in the conceptualization of the self and the universe analogous to that of both Sanskrit prana and Chinese qi.

Rūḥ and nafs are important Koranic terms and much discussed by Muslim scholars, not least philosophers. Some authors considered rūḥ and nafs synonyms, and others preferred to distinguish between the two, often following Koranic usage. Either term can designate what we mean if we talk, for example, about the awareness or consciousness of animals. Neither term has any upper limit; each designates a perceived or presumed subjectivity, whether in animals, humans, or angels (the last of which are often defined simply as “spirits,” or “spirits blown into bodies of light”). Moreover, it is not unusual for philosophers and scholars to speak of the “mineral spirit” (rūḥ maḏaṁ) or the “vegetal spirit” (rūḥ nabātī), and the Koran speaks of God’s rūḥ as well as his nafs. Clarifying what these terms mean in relation to the Unique, Indivisible God provided theologians, philosophers, and Sufis the opportunity to write countless chapters and volumes.

A third word that is extremely important in discussions of human consciousness is qalb, “heart” (Persian dīl). The Koran situates the heart at the center of human awareness and intelligence. In contrast to modern usage, the heart is not the source of emotions and sentiments, because these are what cloud and obscure the heart. In Koranic terms, the heart becomes “blind,” “rusty,” or “ill,” and this results in ignorance and forgetfulness, which in turn lead to disobedience and sin. The Sufi tradition speaks of attaining nearness to God by means of purifying the heart to the point where only unsullied intelligence remains. Rūmī and others refer to those who achieve this goal as “the folk of the heart” (ahl-i dīl), to whom they see a reference in an often cited ḥadīth qudsī (a saying of Muhammad that quotes the words of God), “My heavens and My earth do not embrace Me, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace Me.”

A parallel discussion goes on in the philosophical tradition using the word ‘aql, reason or intellect, rather than qalb. Whichever word is used, it designates
an ideal human perfection that needs to be realized, not the faculty or organ that goes by the name in ordinary usage. When we ascribe intellect or heart to ourselves, we are speaking in metaphorical terms. The only true intellect—the “actual intellect” (al-‘aql bi’l-fi) of the philosophers—is that which has achieved conjunction (ittiṣāl) with the Agent Intellect (al-‘aql al-fa’āl), also called the Universal Intellect (al-‘aql al-kullī). This is God’s first creation, the radiance of divine consciousness, none other than the Pen (qalam, Koran 68:1, 96:4), which writes out the universe. In a parallel way, the only true heart is that which embraces God and gazes upon him at every moment.

Sufi texts frequently discuss the soul/self as having levels of actualization. Early schemes often focus on three ascending levels, using terms derived from the Koran: al-nafs al-ammāra (bi’l-su‘), “the soul that commands (to the ugly)” (12:53), al-nafs al-lawwāma, “the soul that blames [itself for its own shortcomings]” (75:2), and al-nafs al-muṭma‘ina, “the soul at peace [with God]” (89:27). Other levels are often added, such as al-nafs al-mulhama, “the inspired soul” (derived from 91:7-8).6 It is not uncommon for authors to speak of seven levels; those who achieve the highest level are in constant communion with God.

A similar discussion goes on using the term latṭīfa, “subtlety”, the invisible dimension of the human being—precisely what is called, from various standpoints, soul, spirit, heart, and intellect. This becomes a standard theme in later Sufi manuals, which instruct disciples in techniques of meditation, though the seven subtleties do not necessarily have the same names in each case, nor are they always called subtleties.7 A typical list gives qālab (bodily frame) or tāb (nature), nafs (soul), rūḥ (spirit), ‘aql (intellect), sirr (mystery, secret heart), khaft (hidden), and akhfā (most hidden).8

Not surprisingly, Sufis also discuss levels of heart and intellect. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 912) talks of four stations (maqām) of the heart,9 and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1256) speaks of the heart’s seven stages (tawr).10 Rūmī uses poetical imagery to speak of many degrees of intelligence. As he describes it, the prophets dwell in the consciousness of the Universal Intellect, and others partake of various degrees of the partial intellect (aql-i juzwī). Thus, he writes,

The disparity among intellects—understand this well—
extends in degree from earth to heaven.
One intellect is like the disc of the sun,
another less than Venus or a shooting star.
One intellect is giddy like a lamp,
another is like a spark of fire,
For, when clouds rise up before the intellects,
their God-seeing eye is obscured.
Partial intellect has disgraced the Intellect—
desire for this world has deprived man of his [true] desire.11
If we look at consciousness as a general word for human subjectivity, one Arabic word that comes close to having the same expansive meaning is \(\text{ilm}\), knowledge. As a verbal noun, \(\text{ilm}\) designates the act of knowing, and in early Arabic it had no plural; later, it also came to designate a branch of knowledge, or a “science,” and at that point authors employed the plural \(\text{ul\‘am}\). The word can also mean a person’s knowledge, that is, what someone knows, in which case it is synonymous with \(\text{ma la\‘mat}\) (“known things”) and is likely to be translated as “learning.” In Sufi writings \(\text{ilm}\) often connotes rote and bookish learning as contrasted with real understanding.

Words derived from the same root tell us something of how knowledge was conceptualized. \(\text{Alam}\) means impression, track, trace, landmark, banner; \(\text{‘alam}a\) means mark, sign, token. Knowledge is thus connected etymologically with distinctions, signs, and marks. Most interesting is the word \(\text{‘alam}\), world or cosmos, which the lexicographers explain as meaning “that by means of which one knows,” or “that by means of which the Creator is known.” Ibn al-Arabī is simply reminding us the word’s etymology when he says, “We mention the cosmos (\(\text{‘alam}\)) with this word to let it be known (\(\text{ilm}\)) that by this word we mean that God has made the cosmos a mark (\(\text{al\‘ama}\)).”

When Sufis and philosophers discuss the word \(\text{ilm}\), they typically say that it cannot be defined, because it is presupposed by every definition. Any explanation is simply the act of knowing trying to know itself, like vision trying to see itself. It follows that in order to understand knowledge, one must know the knowing self, and in order to know the knowing self, one must not only know where it is situated in all of reality, but also awaken to the full power of intelligence latent in oneself. Typically, however, the attempt to know the self remains at the level of learning (\(\text{ilm}\)), that is, studying and analyzing the manifestations of self, or discussing what others have said about the knowing self. Such an exercise, despite its usefulness and perhaps necessity, is not self-knowledge or self-consciousness. True self-knowledge can only come through knowing the conscious self directly, without the intermediary of sense perception, imagination, ratiocination, conceptualization, and theorizing.

The Safavid-period philosopher Mullā Šadrā (d. 1640) calls this direct, unmediated consciousness “non-instrumental knowledge” (\(\text{ilm ghayr al\‘i}\)), which is to say that it is found by the knowing/known self without any intermediary whatsoever. In Šadrā’s terms, it is achieved when intellecter (\(\text{‘aqil}\)), intellected (\(\text{ma q\‘ul}\)), and intellect (\(\text{aql}\)) are united as one. One could also say, “when reasoner, reasoned, and reason become one.” Moreover, \(\text{aql}\) is the word that was used to translate Greek \(\text{nous}\), so Šadrā’s expression can be a translation of Aristotle’s definition of God as “thought thinking thought”
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In any case, this sort of synthetic, unified knowledge is none other than the “wisdom” (hikma) that the “lover of wisdom” was striving to achieve. The path to achieving it is identical with the quest to become fully human, or what Sufis call “the Perfect Human Being” (al-insān al-kāmil).

Sufi authors often refer to unmediated consciousness of self as maʿrif, a word that can be used as a synonym for ʿilm, though it connotes recognizing rather than knowing. The secondary literature frequently translates this word as “gnosis” in the sense of direct, intuitive knowledge. Its active participle, ʿarif, is commonly used in Sufi texts—and by the great philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037)—to designate the “gnostics,” those who have achieved unmediated knowledge of the object of the quest.¹⁴ The most important locus classicus for the technical understanding of the word is the purported saying of the Prophet, “He who recognizes (ʿarafa) his own self (nafs) recognizes his Lord.” In the present context, one could equally well translate this, “He who becomes truly conscious of himself becomes truly conscious of his Lord,” which is to say that those who attain true self-consciousness simultaneously reach true God-consciousness. At that point, the knowing Self and the known Object are indistinguishable; intellecter, intellected, and intellect are one. As a scriptural basis for this sort of consciousness, Sufis cite the famous hadith qudsi in which God says, “When I love My servant, I am the hearing with which he hears, the eyesight with which he sees, the foot with which he walks, and the hand with which he grasps,” not to mention the heart with which he is conscious.¹⁵

The mention of love (ḥubb) in this hadith is highly significant. It helps explain the central importance given to love in Sufi writings, not least in the works of the great Sufi poets, like Ibn al-Fārīd, Rūmī, and Yunus Emre. Love is considered the motive force that brings about union between lover and beloved, knower and known, intellecter and intellected. In the last analysis, man as lover of God turns out to have been God as lover of man, for man and God are lover and beloved of each other, and the culmination of their love is union. The Koran speaks of this mutual love in the verse, “He loves them, and they love Him” (5:54). At the summit of realized love, no distinctions are to be drawn between lover and beloved, subject and object.

3. THE UNITY OF THE REAL

To put Sufi discussions of transformed consciousness into a broader context, we need to have a clear sense of the underlying worldview, which is founded on the first Shahadah, the four words lā ilāha illā Allāh, “(There is) no god but God.” This sentence, commonly called kalimat al-tawḥīd, “the statement that
asserts (God’s) unity,” is the starting point of Muslim faith and practice. Islamic God-talk—whether in Kalâm, Sufism, or philosophy—unpacks its implications, typically in terms of the many names by which God calls himself in the Koran.

The two halves of the Shahadah—“no god” and “but God”—are known as the negation (nafy) and the affirmation (ithbāt). They point to two of the Shahadah’s basic senses: First, it negates all qualities designated by the divine names from “everything other than God” (mā siwa’llāh), which is a standard definition of the cosmos (‘ālam), “that by means of which one knows.” And second, it affirms that all positive qualities of created things, inasmuch as they are really present, can belong only to God. In other words, tawhīd declares God’s simultaneous absence and presence, or transcendence and immanence.

The statement of tawhīd tells us that qualities designated by the divine names—such as life, mercy, knowledge, power, justice, and forgiveness—belong strictly to God. God alone is “Real” (hāaqiq), to use the Koranic term; or, he alone is Being (wujūd), to use the philosophical expression. It follows that everything other than God, in and of itself, is “unreal” (bātīl) or “nonexistent” (ma’dām). This way of looking at things underlies the famous distinction drawn by Avicenna between the Necessary Being (wājib al-wujūd) and contingent things (mumkināt). Discussing God in terms of wujūd becomes a mainstay of Sufi theory at least from the time of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who, despite his critique of Avicenna, was thoroughly philosophical in his approach.16

While negating reality from everything other than God, the statement of tawhīd also affirms that things possess a certain conditional and contingent reality. “No god but God” means that everything other than God receives any semblance of reality that it may have as a merciful bestowal from the Real Being. Human consciousness, qua human consciousness, is essentially an illusion, because consciousness is a reality, and “There is no reality but the Real.” Hence, there is no consciousness but God’s consciousness, no intelligence but God’s intelligence, no rationality but God’s rationality. To say that human consciousness and rationality are “essentially” illusions, however, does not mean that they have no reality or existence whatsoever. It simply means that they are dependent upon and derivative from the Divine Self-Knowledge, which is the only consciousness and awareness that is fully real. Whatever consciousness, rationality, and understanding we may have—and indeed, the exact nature and extent of this is precisely the issue—depends utterly on the Real. “They encompass nothing of His knowing save as He wills” (Koran 2:255). To the extent that we do not acknowledge and experience the derivativeness and relativity of human intelligence and awareness, we fail to recognize the Real, the world, and ourselves for what they are.
In discussing God’s relationship with the cosmos, Sufi authors understand implicitly or say explicitly that everything makes manifest the signs (āyāt) and traces (āthār) of the divine names, which is to say that the cosmos (–ālam) and everything within it are signposts (–alam) and marks (–alāma) of the Real. Human beings are distinguished from other creatures by having the potential to show forth the signs and marks of the supreme name of God (that is, the name Allāh), or, what comes down to the same thing, the full range of the divine names. This understanding of the human role in creation explains why philosophers sometimes describe the goal of their quest as “gaining similarity to God to the extent of human capacity” (al-tashabbuh bi l-ilāh bi qadr tāqat al-bashar) or simply “deiformity” (ta alluh, being like unto God). When Sufis explicate the nature of the Perfect Human Being, they prefer the expression “becoming characterized by the character traits of God” (al-takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh), which Ibn al–Arabī offers as a definition of Sufism.

Sufis find the notion of deiformity implicit in God’s words, “He [God] taught Adam the names, all of them” (Koran 2:31). They also find it in the Prophet’s reiteration of the Biblical statement, “God created Adam in His form (ṣāra).” Adam was the first prophet (nabr) and the first perfect human being. His perfection was intimately bound up with his omniscience, the fact that God taught him all the names—of both created things and God himself. It is Adam’s consciousness of the rightful place of things relative to God, as well as his own appropriate response to things, which gave him the quality of being God’s vicegerent (khalīfa) in the earth. As the Koran makes clear (2:30), God created Adam and taught him the names only after voicing to the angels his decision to appoint a vicegerent.

Islam does not consider Adam (a word that is often employed as a synonym for “man” in the nongendered sense) a “sinner.” Rather, Adam “disobeyed” (iṣā) after having “forgotten” (nasiya) the divine command not to approach the tree, and that was the end of his disobedience. When Adam and Eve remembered, they repented and were forgiven. Only then were they sent down to the earth to play their proper roles as vicegerents. Thus human beings are created in the form of God and have the potential of achieving full consciousness of all the names, but they also have the tendency to forget, and this tendency predominates in Adam’s children.

In order to achieve their proper status as vicegerents, people must “remember” (dhikr) God—that is, become conscious of Him—and perform their duties toward him as servant (‘abd). All of Islamic ritual is focused on keeping God in mind, and Sufism in particular takes remembrance of God as the essential
task of human beings. Thus the word *dhikr*, which also means “mention,” designates already in the Koran and Hadith the ritual repetition of divine names or Koranic formulae. This is why scholars often translate *dhikr* in the Sufi context as “invocation” and they point out that the practice is similar to *japa* in Hinduism or the Jesus prayer in Christianity.

So, remembering God is to repeat his name and to attempt to be aware of his presence, for, as the Koran says, “He is with you wherever you are” (57:4). Remembrance is the means whereby people can recover the knowledge, consciousness, and understanding that are innate to the primordial Adamic nature (*fitra*). It is the process of recovering real consciousness and becoming characterized by one’s own latent divine form.

5. THE RETURN

In more theoretical discussions of the human situation, authors speak of the “origin” (*mabda*) and the “return” (*ma‘ād*), terms derived from Koranic verses like, “He originates creation, then He makes it return” (10:4). So central is this notion to Islamic thinking that theologians take the “Return” (often translated as “eschatology”) as the third of the three principles of Islamic faith (after *tawḥīd* and prophecy). In explaining Origin and Return, many Sufis speak of “the arc of descent” (*qaws al-nazūl*) and “the arc of ascent” (*qaws al-ṣu‘ād*), identifying them with the “two arcs” mentioned in Koran 53:9. Together, the two make up “the circle of existence” (*dā‘ irat al-wujūd*), which begins and ends at God.

The cosmos, then, is “everything other than God,” and it consists of a descending arc leading away from God and an ascending arc leading back to God. Some parts of the arc are closer to God and others further away (ontologically and qualitatively, of course, not “spatially”), so things can be divided into three basic worlds, which the Koran calls “the heavens, the earth, and what is between the two.” These are often called the world of spirits (*arwāh*), the world of bodies (*ajsām*), and the world of images (*mithāl* or *khayāl*). This last world, which Henry Corbin called *mundus imaginalis*, is an intermediary realm that allows the intrinsic consciousness of spiritual beings to interrelate with the darkness and dullness of bodily things; on the descending arc, spirits become embodied in the world of images, and on the ascending arc, bodies become spiritualized in the same realm. The three basic levels of existence are replicated in the human microcosm as spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*) or imagination (*khayāl*), and body (*jīsm*). The soul functions as the microcosmic world of images, or the “isthmus” (*barzakh*), between the spirit and the body, allowing the two to interact.
God created mankind, as the Koran puts it, “to serve Me” or “to be My servants” (li ya bu’dūnī, 51:56). Ibn Abbās, the well-known companion of the Prophet, already interpreted this to mean “to recognize Me” or “to become conscious of Me” (li ya rif‘ūnī), using the verbal form of ma rif‘a. In the later tradition this verse is often explained in terms of a purported hadith qudsī: “I was a Hidden Treasure, and I desired to be recognized (yu raf), so I created the creatures that they might recognize Me.” Among all creatures, only human individuals, created in God’s form, can recognize him fully—that is, in respect of his Self and the full panoply of his names. Other creatures are imperfect images of the Divine Reality and, in fact, were created as the means to bring man into existence and as the signs and marks of the divine names in the cosmos. The diversity of creatures with their wondrous mysteries is nothing but the outward reverberation of the infinite Hidden Treasure. The fact that man is the “intended entity” (al-‘ayn al-maqṣūda) in the cosmos is proven precisely by his unique ability to know “all the names,” to become conscious of all that exists, to be the self whose externalized and differentiated counterpart is the cosmos in its entirety.

By meditating on the universe and the prophetic revelations that explain its nature, we can see that it has three basic sorts of creatures—spirits (such as angels), imaginal beings (such as jinn), and bodily things (such as minerals, plants, and animals). At each level, there is an indefinite diversity of kinds and sorts. The distinguishing quality of spirits is the intensity and unity of life, light, consciousness, power, beauty, and so on down the list of divine attributes. The distinguishing quality of bodily things is the feebleness and scatteredness of life, light, consciousness, and so on. The qualities of imaginal beings are situated between those of spirits and bodies. As for human beings, they have the peculiar status of having been created as highly focused forms of the totality. At the spiritual level they have angelic qualities, at the bodily level they possess the diverse characteristics of bodily things, and at the intermediate, psychical or “soulish” (nafsīnī) level, they are neither spiritual nor bodily, neither knowing nor ignorant, neither awake nor asleep, neither luminous nor dark. In this way of looking at things, the situation of the human self, as contrasted with the human spirit and the human body, is always in-between; the self is an imaginal reality, at once the image of spirit and the image of body.

The vast majority of human selves are forgetful of the primordial covenant that they made with God to carry the “trust” (amāna, Koran 33:72), or to act as his viceroy. The function of the prophets is to “remind” (dhikr) them of their own nature and their own function, and their appropriate response is to “remember” (dhikr) who they are and to follow prophetic guidance. The goal is to “worship” God or to be his “servant,” and that demands recognizing him, loving him, and becoming conscious of him.
Origin and Return are among the first implications of tawḥīd—there is no reality but God, so anything other than God is contingent on his reality, both in its coming and its going. The return is compulsory (idjirārī), for nothing whatsoever has any say in the matter. In contrast to other creatures, human beings possess a certain degree of freedom because of their divine form and their self-awareness. They can choose whether to accept or reject the call of the prophets. Like everything else, they are compelled to return to God, but they also have the option of engaging in a return that is voluntary (ikhtiyārī). In other words, prophetic guidance offers the path that leads to recognizing, understanding, and becoming conscious of the Hidden Treasure and to actualizing the latent divine character traits. By this means alone can people live and act appropriately in the world, that is, in full conformity with the Divine Reality, or in full contiguity with the Agent Intellect, or in full realization of their own deiformity.

Having been created in God’s form, human beings are woven of innumerable qualities deriving from the “ninety-nine” divine names. Potentially, they can conform fully to the divine names themselves and make all of them manifest, but typically they manifest only a few, and more often than not they display them in a distorted manner. The soul is dispersed and caught up with bodily and psychical multiplicity, so it needs to be unified by strengthening its awareness of the One. Its latent spiritual and divine attributes need to be brought out, actualized, harmonized, and integrated. Every step taken toward the One intensifies the inner light and, at the same time, brings about further integration of the innate traits of character. The voluntary return, then, aims at, and simultaneously depends upon, the awakening of the human soul to its divine core. That awakening is accompanied by the intensification of the light of reason, intelligence, and consciousness—ultimately, to the point that thought thinks itself.

6. THE PATH

It is worth remembering that the mythic structure of Islamic religiosity is shaped by two events: the descent of the Koran and Muhammad’s ascent (miḥrāj, literally, “ladder”) to the divine presence. God revealed himself through his Word, his articulate and intelligible self-expression. His Word provides the means for human souls to awaken to their innate nature and be guided to self-realization, that is, the actualization of deiformity. The Prophet Muhammad, as the recipient of the message from Gabriel, the angel of revelation, assimilated the message into his own being and was totally assimilated by it; he was then taken by Gabriel to the fruit of that assimilation, the personal encounter with God (the miḥrāj, also called isrā, “night journey”).
The accounts of the mírāj say that Gabriel took Muhammad on a specific route: first to Jerusalem, then stage by stage through the seven heavens (that is, seven ascending levels of being and consciousness), until he eventually reached the furthest limits of the angelic realm. At that point Gabriel told him to continue on to the Divine Presence alone, which he did. Upon his return, he instituted the daily prayers (ṣalāt) as the ritual means whereby believers could themselves rise up to God. As the hadith has it, “The daily prayers are the ascent of the believer” (al-ṣalāt mírāj al-muʿmin).

Islamic practice is understood as a path or road that leads to God. The Fātiha, the opening chapter of the Koran that is recited in every cycle of the ritual prayer, circles around the verse, “Guide us on the straight path,” using the word ṣirāt, which also designates the posthumous narrow bridge that crosses over hell on the way to paradise—the symbolic identity of the straight path and the narrow bridge is not difficult to see. The word that is generally used for the revealed law, Shariah (šarīʿa), also means path, as does the word that is generally used for Sufi organizations, Tariqah (tariqa). A whole genre of Sufi writings explains in more or less detail the stages (maqāmāt, manāzīl) that travelers (sāʿir, sālik, musāfir) must traverse in order to enter into God’s Presence. The archetype for all of this is the mírāj, the ladder to God climbed by the Prophet. Avicenna himself wrote a book explaining the mírāj as the stages of intellectual perfection leading to the fullness of consciousness.20

This is not the place to go over the diverse depictions of the stages of ascent set down by numerous Sufi authors over history. There is no agreement on the number—10, 40, 100, and 300 are mentioned among others, and often no set number is given. The most famous example in the West is provided by Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār’s long poem, Mantīq al-tāyir (“The speech of the birds”), which provides a seven-level scheme, like the Prophet’s own mírāj. What the authors of these treatises hold in common is that they depict the journey as dependent on divine grace and demanding discipline and self-effacement. By following the path, seekers of God can shuck off their blameworthy character traits and become characterized by praiseworthy character traits, which are nothing but the embodiment of divine names and attributes.

Sufis sometimes sum up the path to God with two words: ʿfanāʾ, “annihilation,” and ʿbaqāʾ, “subsistence.” These derive from the Koranic verse, “Everything in [the earthly realm] undergoes annihilation, and there subsists the Face (wajh) of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generous Giving” (55:27). In the typical interpretation, the negative character traits of the soul can gradually be eliminated, and, when they are, they are replaced by the positive traits of the divine Form in which Adam was created—the divine Form that this verse calls “the Face of thy Lord.” Annihilation corresponds to the Shahadah’s negation (“No god”), and subsistence to its affirmation (“but God”).
In short, the path to God is a process whereby the soul is absorbed back into its divine prototype. When seekers advance in nearness (qurb) to God, their character traits, and not least their knowledge and consciousness, are transmuted. The modalities of knowing, however, are beyond count, for, as Ibn al-Arabi likes to remind us, “There is no repetition in [God’s] self-disclosure” (lā takrār fi l-tajalli‘). In the human case, this divine self-disclosure is nothing other than the Face of God manifesting itself as the spirit, soul, and body of the seeker. In becoming manifest, it constantly bestows new consciousness and new awareness, which helps explain why Ibn al-Arabi says, “In the view of those who know the soul, the soul is an ocean without shore, so knowledge of it has no end.”

Nonetheless, the diverse modalities of knowing-cum-being that open up to the soul can be classified into sorts and types. A book like Ibn al-Arabi’s monumental al-Futūḥat al-makkiyya, “The Meccan Openings,” records the modalities of consciousness that were disclosed to the author’s soul when the door to the invisible realm was “opened” to him. As he remarks in a poem toward the beginning of the book,

When I kept knocking at God’s door,  
I waited mindfully, not distracted,  
Until the glory of His Face appeared to me  
and He called me, only that.  
I encompassed Being (al-wujūd) in knowledge (ilm)—  
My heart has no knowledge but of God.

7. SEEING BY MEANS OF GOD

Theologians and Sufis commonly divide God’s “most beautiful names” (al-asmā‘ al-husnā) into categories. For example, some speak of “the seven leaders” (al-a‘immat al-sab‘a), which are the seven principal divine names from which the others derive. Sa‘īd al-Dīn Farghānī, (d. ca. 1296), a second generation follower of Ibn al-Arabi, says that the seven are Alive (hāyy), Knowing (al‘im), Desiring (murid), Speaker (qā‘il), Powerful (qādir), Generous (jawād), and Just (muqṣit). The order is based on relative compass and mutual dependence. Alive is presupposed by the other attributes, given that a dead thing does not know, desire, speak, or act. In the same way, nothing speaks without desiring to do so, and nothing desires without knowing.

Each of the Seven Leaders can be understood as a general divine attribute that has many subsidiaries, and, with a little imagination and reflection, one can categorize the remaining divine names accordingly; this is what Farghānī does, using a typical list of ninety-nine names (though “ninety-nine”
is by no means a definitive number). He says that under “Knower,” we can place 15 divine names that designate various modes of awareness and consciousness: Manifest (zāhīr), Aware (khabīr), Seer (bāṣīr), Hearing, (samī’), Encompassing (muḥīṭ), Embracing (wāṣī), Witness (shāhīd), Finder (wājīd), Subtle (latīf), Light (nūr), Watchful (raqlīb), Wise (ḥākim), Remembering (ḥāfīz), Guarding (muhaymin), Believing (muʿmin). Several of these names provide points of reference in Sufi discussions of transformed consciousness and the actualization of true intelligence. A few examples can illustrate the approach.

The Koran calls God “the Seer” in about 50 verses. We have already met a frequently quoted hadith that tells us that God’s love for his servants can reach the point where he becomes their hearing and their “eyesight,” bāṣar. “Seer,” bāṣīr, is derived from this word bāṣar. Concerning the relationship between divine and human sight, the Koran says, “The eyesights (absār, pl. of bāṣar) do not perceive Him, but He perceives the eyesights” (6:103). This is typical Koranic rhetoric. Yes, the verse says, human beings do have eyes with which to see, but they do not see much and their vision does not extend into the unseen realm (ghayb). As for the Divine Seer, he sees all things, visible or invisible, including the very act of seeing. As the Koran says repeatedly, God is “Knower of the Unseen and the Visible.”

On the human level bāṣar usually means eyesight, but it can also designate any kind of seeing, and it is contrasted in all of its meanings with “blindness” (ʿamā)—the inability to see, whether on the physical, moral, intellectual, or spiritual level. Blindness is a quality found in creation, not in the Creator. As an attribute of the human heart, it is blameworthy and needs to be remedied, for it is nothing other than the firm-rootedness of the momentary forgetfulness that overcame Adam. In criticizing a group, the Koran says, “It is not the eyesights (absār) that are blind, but blind are the hearts (qulūb) within the breasts” (22:46). Or again: “Deaf, dumb, blind—they do not use their intellects” (2:171). The heart, the seat of consciousness, needs to be brought back to health and to its innate vision of things. When the heart sees, it recovers its innate, Adamic intelligence and rationality.

The Koran often refers to the quality of the seeing heart as bāṣīra, a noun derived from the adjective bāṣīr. We can translate it as “insight” to suggest the way it is commonly contrasted with bāṣar, “eyesight.” Insight is the transformation of seeing and consciousness that occurs for prophets and those who follow in their footsteps. The Koran addresses Muhammad with the words, “Say: ‘This is my way. I call to God upon insight—I and whosoever follows me’” (12:108). Insight is one of the many words that Sufis discuss in trying to explain the nature of true consciousness. Ibn al-Arabi says that it is the same as “unveiling” (kashf, mukāsha), the generic term for a God-given vision of the
way things truly are. In the Koran, unveiling is associated with the clarity of seeing that the soul achieves after death: “We have now unveiled from you your covering,” says God to the recently deceased soul, “so your eyesight today is piercing” (50:22). Sufis read this as referring not only to physical death, but also to the death of the lower soul, that is, ignorance and heedlessness, and the birth in its place of true understanding and consciousness. In other words, they take “death” as a synonym for fanā’, the “annihilation” of self-centeredness, and they hold that death to ignorance is rebirth in knowledge; it is baqā’, the “subsistence” of the Divine Face, or God-consciousness.

As Rūmī likes to explain, people should strive to put the advice of the Prophet into practice: “Die before you die!” All of us have passed through many deaths in our on-going return to God. We began at the level of the mineral soul and then developed a vegetal soul (in the womb). In infancy, our souls were lifted up to the animal level, and then gradually we began to actualize our human souls. Every time we died to a lower soul, we were reborn to a higher soul. We should be striving to die to this ignorant human nature and be resuscitated through our angelic, spiritual nature. Once we achieve that, we can die once more and be reborn into the Unimaginable. “Why should I fear?” says Rūmī after detailing these several deaths, “When did I ever become less by dying?”

8. ILLUMINATION WITH THE DIVINE LIGHT

One of the best known verses of the Koran begins with the words, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth” (24:35), and goes on to provide an analogy (mathal) that numerous philosophers and Sufis have undertaken to interpret. The most famous example is probably Mishkat al-anwar (“The Niche of Lights”) by al-Ghazālī. He begins the book by analyzing the meaning of the word light (nūr). He says that most people use the word to refer to that which is seen in itself and which allows other things to be seen, like the sun. Then he tells us that eyesight, the power of the soul that allows us to see, is more deserving of the name, because physical light would remain invisible without it. The seeing eye has many imperfections, however, and these are overcome by the eye of the heart, which is called by names like reason/intellect (‘aql), spirit (rūḥ), and human soul (nafs insānī), so this eye is even more worthy of being called light. The Koran has a still greater claim to the name, because God’s Word has the same relation to the intellect as the sun has to eyesight. Finally, God himself, the source of all light, intelligence, and being, is most deserving of the name; only in God’s case is light identical with the thing itself, that is, with God’s very Essence (dhāt). Every light other than God is contingent and derivative, for God is “the Furthest, Highest Light, beyond which there...
is no light and from which light descends to others.”

It follows that “just as everything becomes manifest to eyesight (baṣar) through outward light, so also everything becomes manifest to inward insight (baṣṭra) through God.”

Al-Ghazālī’s whole treatise is an extended meditation on the formula of tawhīd, specifically the implications of the version in which he cites it: “There is no light but His light.”

He shows that the universe is a hierarchy of beings made manifest by light, and that human development toward perfection goes by way of a series of five basic levels of spirit; at each level, illumination, consciousness, and rational perspicacity become more intense. He calls these five spirits sensing (ḥassās), imaginal (khayālī), intellectual (aqlī), reflective (fikrī), and holy prophetic (qudsī nabawī). He also warns against a common stumbling block: “Do not think that utmost perfection comes to a halt at yourself!”

The opposite of light is darkness (zulma), also an important Koranic term, though in the 23 instances in which it occurs, it is pluralized, for Light is one, and the various forms that darkness assumes are countless. The obvious sense of the word in several of these verses is ignorance and unconsciousness, or the lack of awareness of the way things are: “God is the friend of those who have faith—He brings them out of the darknesses into the light” (2:257). “Those who cry lies to His signs are deaf and dumb in the darknesses” (6:39). “Say: Are the blind and the seeing (baṣr) equal, or are the darknesses and the light equal?” (13:16). “A Book that We have sent down upon you [Muhammad], so that you may bring the people forth from the darknesses into the light” (14:1).

Ibn al-Arabi speaks of light as knowledge and consciousness in numerous passages, as, for example, in the following, where he employs the word to show that God as Light is the root of all perception (idrāk):

Were it not for light, nothing whatsoever would be perceived. . . . The faculties of smell, taste, imagination, memory, reason (aql), reflection, conceptualization, and everything through which perception takes place are all light. As for the objects of perception, if they did not have the preparedness to accept the perception of the those who perceive them, they would not be perceived. Hence they first possess manifestation (zuhār) to the perceiver, then they are perceived. And manifestation is light. . . . So nothing is known but God (lā ma lām illā Allāh).

By this final sentence, another version of the formula of tawhīd, Ibn al-Arabi is saying that there is nothing to be known but God’s signs, or his Face, or his Self-disclosure (tajallī), which is the divine light that fills heaven and earth, spirit and body, and everything in between. Light in itself, however, is unknowable, for, as Ibn al-Arabi likes to put it, in still another variant on tawhīd, “None knows God but God.” It is this divine, all-perceiving, all-knowing Light
concerning which the Koran says, “The eyesights do not perceive It, but It perceives the eyesights” (6:103). At the same time, there is no faculty of the mind and no form of awareness and consciousness that is anything other than this all-perceiving light, for “There is no light but His light.” All consciousness is the radiance of God’s consciousness, for he is “the Light of the heavens and the earth.”

9. FINDING THE TRUE SELF

Al-Ghazālī points out that the divine name “Finder” (waṣīd) indicates that God is the opposite of “lacking” (faqīd). It designates God as he who lacks nothing of what is appropriate for him. “All the attributes of divinity and their perfection are ‘found’ (mawjūd) with God, so in this respect He is ‘the Finder.’ He is the Finder in an absolute sense, and anything else, even if it finds something of the attributes and causes of perfection, also lacks certain things, so it can only find in a relative sense.”

This is straightforward tawḥīd: There is none that finds but God, so anything else that finds has received a glimmer of this divine quality.

In his discussion of the fifteen names subsidiary to the Knower, Farghānī says that the Finder appears “in respect of the Knower’s encompassing what becomes manifest from Him and what remains nonmanifest, what comes forth from Him and what belongs to Him, such that it is inconceivable that He lack any of this.”

In other words, God is conscious of all that he is in himself and all that becomes manifest from him, that is, the cosmos, “everything other than God.”

Notice that Finder is the active participle of three nouns: waṣīd, waṣīdan, and wujūd. All three mean “to find,” but each has different connotations and usages. Waṣīdan commonly designates the act of finding within oneself, so it can mean feeling, emotion, sentiment, awareness. Waṣīd is likely to mean an intense or overpowering form of inner finding and is commonly translated as “ecstasy.” Most interesting here, however, is the word wujūd, which we have already met in its meaning of existence or being.

From the time of Avicenna onward, wujūd in the sense of being/existence is a central discussion in philosophy and soon also in Kalām and Sufism. But, we need to remember that what “exists,” in the original sense of the Arabic word, is simply “what is found.”

Existance and finding, or being and consciousness, are inseparably linked; no object can be found/can be existent (mawjūd) without a finding/existing subject (waṣīd).

Wujūd, in short, cannot be discussed as inert, passive, unconscious, chaotic, arbitrary, aimless, lacking in qualitative richness. Quite the contrary, wujūd in its pure form—the Necessary Being of Avicenna, the Real Being of Ibn al-Arabi—demands by its very essence the diverse attributes that give rise to
an ordered, wise, compassionate, and blessed universe. In one work Avicenna counts these attributes as seven (though he does not call them “the seven leaders”): unity, eternity, knowledge, desire, power, wisdom, and generosity. This list is not quite the same as Farghani’s, but the issue is precisely the same: We cannot understand existence, being, reality, the cosmos, things, consciousness, ourselves, without grasping the basic qualities that are innate to the Real Being and that reach their highest cosmic reverberation in human wisdom and goodness. Knowledge—that is, consciousness of the true nature of things—is inseparable from the Necessary Being, as also are wisdom, compassion, and goodness. All contingent and created forms of knowing and consciousness flow forth from the Divine.

In studying the diverse writings of the Muslim philosophers, it is sometimes easy to forget that the final object of investigation—wujūd, the very being and existence that is the Primal Reality—is simultaneously the Primal Consciousness and the root of awareness. For his part, Ibn al-Arabi frequently reminds us of the quasi-identity of wujūd, wijdān, and wajd, not least by defining the term wujūd, in keeping with a standard Sufi gloss, as “finding the Real in ecstasy” (wijdān al-haqīq fi l-wajd). In other words, we find the fullness of consciousness and existence when we find God by losing ourselves; annihilation of egocentric limitations brings about subsistence of the Divine Form/Face. It is at this point that God is “the hearing with which you hear, the seeing with which you see.” Or, in Mullā Ṣadrā’s terms, this transmutation occurs when intellecter, intellected, and intelligence are united as one.

In this way of looking at things, we as humans cannot claim to have “existence” simply because we are here; our true existence is our true finding and consciousness, and our true finding is finding ourselves in the Real. This can happen only when we step out of the limitations of our ignorant, dark, and obscured selfhoods. Those who achieve this goal are then, in Ibn al-Arabi’s terms, “the folk of unveiling and finding” (ahl al-kashf wa l-wujūd), the perfect human beings.

Ibn al-Arabi has been blamed, by Louis Massignon among others, for being an “existential monist,” when in fact the wujūd that plays such a central role in his vocabulary means consciousness as surely as it means existence. It is only the preconceived notion of “existence” as empty of consciousness and awareness that could have led Massignon to this sort of misinterpretation. When Ibn al-Arabi, for example, says that each thing is a divine word articulated by the Breath of the All-Merciful (nafas al-raḥmān), and that this Breath is nothing but wujūd, he is saying that all things are specifications and limitations of the divine Word, which is the self-aware articulation of the divine consciousness, and that all things are aware in keeping with their own capacity. It is human
beings alone, however, who have the potential to expand their consciousness beyond measure and to become “oceans without shores.”

We have already met the word *kashf*, unveiling, as a synonym for insight (*baṣira*) and as the generic term for the removal of the obscurations that block the innate human understanding of things (that is, the names as taught to Adam). Ibn al–Arabi also uses the word as a synonym for *tajalli* or self-disclosure, one of the most characteristic Sufi notions in discussions of existence and consciousness. The word derives from the Koranic story of how Moses asked God to show himself. God responded that Moses would not see him unless the mountain remained standing. “And when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust, and Moses fell down thunderstruck” (7:143). In Ibn al–Arabi’s terms, “everything other than God”—the cosmos through which God is known—can be nothing but God’s self-disclosure, God’s unveiling (*kashf*) of his own names and attributes. Self-disclosure designates the shining forth of *wujūd* as both the existence and the awareness of creatures; each thing receives existence and awareness in its own measure. If Moses fell down thunderstruck, it was because he was annihilated (*fanā*) by the unveiling of God’s reality from his own independent consciousness.

According to another common expression, the self-disclosure of God that is known as the universe is *wujūd* “deployed” (*munbasit*). Translators normally render *wujūd* here as existence or being, but it equally means finding and consciousness. God, after all, is the Finder, and when he discloses himself, he places the traces of his finding in all things, so all things are finders, each in its own measure. In some, that finding is so attenuated that we observers find no trace of it, so we call them “inanimate.” In others, it is so intense that it blinds our perceptual faculties, so we fail to see the angels and spirits that fill the invisible cosmos, nor do we see Satan and his cohorts among the jinn: “He sees you, he and his tribe, from where you see them not” (Koran 7:27). According to authors like al-Ghazālī and Ibn al–Arabi, the folk of unveiling alone are able to perceive the awareness of apparently inanimate things; this often happens when they hear such things talking among themselves or singing the praises of God, who, according to the Koran, “gave rational speech to everything” (41:21). As Ibn al–Arabi remarks,

Each created thing has a specific speech taught to it by God. It is heard by those whose hearing God opens up to its perception. All movements and artisans that become manifest from animals and do not become manifest save from a possessor of reason (*aql*), reflection, and deliberation, along with all the measures that are seen therein, signify that they have a knowledge of all this in themselves.\(^{39}\) Rūmī often refers to the transmuted senses of those who follow the path to God, as in the verses,
Rational speech (nアウト), eyes, and ears are the radiance of the spirit, like the radiance of fire in boiling water. . . .
The rational speech of water, earth, and clay—
each is perceived by the Folk of the Heart with their senses. 40

10. WITNESSING THE REAL

Al-Ghazālī sums up the significance of the name Witness, šahīd, by saying that it designates the second of the two sorts of knowing that God mentions when he calls himself “Knower of the unseen [or absent, ghayb] and the visible [or witnessed, shahāda]” (e.g., Koran 6:73). The unseen is everything nonmanifest (bātin), and the visible is everything manifest (zāhir). 41 Farghānī explains that the name Witness means that the Knowers are present (ḥudār) with what becomes manifest from him (i.e., everything) and that he cannot possibly be absent (ghayba) from anything. By talking of the two basic worlds, al-Ghazālī makes the discussion of this name pertain to cosmology, and by talking of “presence” and “absence”—standard Sufi terms designating contrasting states (ḥāl) of awareness—Farghānī focuses on consciousness. 42

The name Witness derives from the verbal noun šuhūd, witnessing, seeing with the eyes, being present, testifying. The word will be recognized by anyone familiar with the debates that went on in the Indian subcontinent beginning with the Naqshbandī shaykh, Āḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), who famously criticized Ibn al-ʿArabī for believing in wahdat al-wujūd, “the oneness of wujūd.” According to Sirhindī, a true understanding of tawḥīd demands wahdat al-shuhūd, “the oneness of witnessing.” His critique, however, has little to do with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s understanding of wujūd and is grounded rather in one version of the received wisdom concerning Ibn al-ʿArabī current in India at the time. The gist of what Sirhindī says is that wahdat al-wujūd—an expression that Ibn al-ʿArabī did not use and that gained currency two centuries after him—declares the unity of God and the world, or an ontological (wujūdī) continuity between the One and the many, much in the style of what we might call “pantheism.” According to Sirhindī, Ibn al-ʿArabī mistakenly believes that “All is He” (hama ʿust), an ecstatic formula that had been used in Persian before Ibn al-ʿArabī was born. Rather, Sirhindī tells us, one must come to realize that “All is from Him” (hama az ast), and, when this is truly unveiled, that is “the oneness of witnessing.”

What Sirhindī does not seem to grasp is that Ibn al-ʿArabī saw the true understanding of wujūd to lie in “finding” (wujūd) the Real within the soul and “witnessing” (shuhūd) that there is no finder but God and no witness but God. Like Sufis in general, Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the word shuhūd (and mushāhada, from the same root) to mean contemplation and vision of the way things are in a
supra-rational sort of way; in other words, *shuhūd* is another near equivalent of *kashf*, unveiling. In fact, Ibn al–Arabī often treats the three words *kashf*, *wujūd*, and *shuhūd* as synonyms, especially in expressions like “the folk of unveiling and finding,” or “the folk of unveiling and witnessing,” or “the folk of witnessing and finding.” All these phrases designate those who have achieved *maʿrifah*, true recognition and consciousness of self and Lord. None of them suggests the ontological continuity that Sirhindī perceived in the *wahdat al-wujūd* that he ascribed to Ibn al–Arabī.43

The *tawḥīd* that undergirds Islamic thought ultimately demands that, in each case, what is witnessed, what is found, and what is unveiled be the Divine Self-disclosure. Moreover, the one who finds and understands the disclosure is nothing but the Face of God disclosing itself as awareness and consciousness. Ibn al–Arabī, in particular, insists on this point, given that it is simply *tawḥīd*’s logical consequence: “There is no knower but the Real,” and “None knows God but God.” The issue that needs investigation is the modality in which the unreal is given glimpses and glimmers of what truly is. It is these glimmers and glimpses that make up the unreal’s knowledge, understanding, consciousness, intelligence, reason, and everything else making it what it is. As Ibn al–Arabī says in a typical reminder,

In respect to His Essence (*dhāt*) and His *Wujūd*, nothing stands up to the Real; He cannot be desired or sought in His Essence. The seeker seeks and the desirer desires only recognition (*maʿrifah*) of Him, witnessing (*mushāhada*) of Him, or vision (*riʿāya*) of Him, and all of these are from Him; they are not He Himself.44

Many other terms, some of them deriving from the 16 divine names mentioned by Farghānī, some not, could be discussed in trying to flesh out the Sufi understanding of reason, intelligence, and consciousness. I do not think, however, that we would gain anything more than further proof that Sufis—who represent the tendency among Muslims to strive for a personal engagement with the Divine—look at these words as designating a spectrum of subjective possibilities that extend into the infinite, possibilities available to human souls because each is a unique, non-repeating self-disclosure of God’s own subjectivity.

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**NOTES**


2 Sufism is typically defined as Islamic “mysticism” or “esotericism.” Neither of these words, however, is appropriate to its actual historical reality. See Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), Chapter 1.
REASON, INTELLECT, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

3 The greatest philosopher of the later period, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), was completely explicit about the quest for illumined consciousness that inspires the philosophical quest. Or, take Afdal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. ca. 1210), an Aristotelian whose philosophy has rightly been called an “autology,” because it focuses from beginning to end on the transformation of self-awareness. See Chittick, The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Teachings of Afdal al-Dīn Kāshānī (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

4 The more philosophically-minded Muslim scholars were especially concerned to differentiate among the various terms that refer to the modalities of consciousness. Mullā Ṣadrā, for example, provides a chapter at the end of the first journey of his monumental “Four Journeys” (al-afflehun) on 30 terms that are employed in talking about knowing, such as idrak (perception), shu’ür (awareness), tasawwur (conceptualization), ilhāf (memory), tadhakkur (recall), ma‘rif (recognition), fa‘lum (understanding), ‘aql (intellect, reason), hikma (wisdom), zann (opinion), and khayāl (imagination). This discussion follows three chapters in two hundred pages dealing respectively with the quiddity (māhiyya) of knowledge; the states of the “intellecter” (‘āql), i.e., the one who knows; and the realm of the known object (ma‘lūm). Most of the terms that Ṣadrā mentions, as well as many others, are also discussed in Sufi texts.

5 For a good selection of texts on soul, spirit, heart, and the inner dynamics that are involved in achieving heart-consciousness, see Sachiko Murata, The Tao of Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), Chapters 8–10.

6 The widely read Persian classic Mirʿād al-ʿibād min al-mahdā’ ʿila’l-maʿād, “The Path of the Servants of God from the Origin to the Return,” by the 13th-century Kubrawi shaykh Ṣājid al-Dīn Rāzī, dedicates the fourth of its five parts to the differing manners in which these four souls (which embrace all of humanity) return to God after death. See the English translation by Hamid Algar, The Path of God’s Bondsmen from the Origin to the Return (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1982).

7 For an interesting example of the use of these levels to flesh out the nature of the ascent from forgetfulness to God-consciousness, see Chittick, “On Sufi Psychology: A Debate Between the Soul and the Spirit,” in Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu, edited by S.J. Ashihyan, H. Matsubara, T. Iwami, and A. Matsumoto (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), pp. 341-366. Also published as “Abd al-Jalil of Allahabad on Psychology: A Debate Between the Soul and the Spirit,” Islamic Heritage in South Asian Subcontinent, edited by Nazir Ahmed and I. H. Siddiqui (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2000), pp. 157-185; and “A Sufi Psychological Treatise of nearness (qurb) to God, in one of which God is man’s faculties, and in the other of which
man is God’s faculties: along the way they express many of the mysteries and paradoxes of the divine/human Form that can only be fully realized by prophets and saints. See Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 325–331.  

16 Al-Ghazālī sometimes cites a modified version of the Shahadah to make the point: “There is nothing in existence but God” (laya fi'l-wujūd illā Allāh). See, for example, The Niche of Lights, text and translation by David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), p. 16. For numerous texts from Ibn al-Arabi rooted in this vision of things, see Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge; idem, The Self-Disclosure of God (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). 

17 The final sentence of Avicenna’s famous book al-Najāḥ (“The Deliverance”) ends with the word ta’ alllah: “He [the Prophet] is a human being who is distinct from other people through his deiformity.” The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (fl. 10th. c.), among other early philosophers, also use the word to designate the goal of philosophy (see Murata, Tao, p. 262). Mullā Ṣadrā is famously called Ṣadr al-Muta’illihīn, “The Foremost of the Deiform.”

Chittick, Sufi Path, pp. 283 ff.

19 This three-world scheme should be taken as heuristic, not definitive; as soon as authors pay attention to the fine points, they add other realms and speak of intermediary creatures that do not fall clearly into the categories. Already the soul, which corresponds to cosmic imagination, is one such intermediary, never clearly defined, precisely because, in its potentiality, it is an “ocean without shore,” and fixity would hold it back from achieving its entelechy.


21 Futūhāt 3:121.25; cited in Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, p. 345.

22 Futūhāt 1:10.26; Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, p. xiv.


26 Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, p. 115. For many passages on insight and unveiling, see the indexes to this book and to Chittick, Self-Disclosure.

27 Mathnawī, book 3, verses 3901-5. For these and similar verses, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Love (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 72–82.


29 Niche, p. 23.

30 Niche, p. 20.

31 Niche, p. 37.

32 Futūhāt 3:276.32, 277.12 (Sufi Path of Knowledge, p. 214).


34 Muntaha’l-madārik, vol. 1, p. 32.

35 It is true that the philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191) does not give wujūd the same prominence. Nonetheless, by speaking of reality primarily in terms of “light” (mīr), he stresses even more strongly that illuminated and illuminating consciousness lies at the pinnacle of human possibility. See, for example, Suhrawardī, The Philosophy of Illumination, edited and translated by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000).
Some philosophers made full use of the dual meaning of the word. Afdal al-Din Kashi, writing in Persian, explains that \emph{wujud} has two senses, “being” (\emph{basti}) and “finding” (\emph{yaf\'i}), and then proceeds to describe the entirety of \emph{wujud} as composed of four ascending levels extending from potential being to actual finding. The highest level of “existence,” in other words, is actualized consciousness of all that may be known. See Chittick, \textit{Heart}, pp. 42–45.

The work is the Persian \textit{D\'anishn\'ama-yi Al\'i}, which has been translated by Parviz Morewedge as \textit{Metaphysica of Avicenna} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); see also Chittick, \textit{Heart}, pp. 39–40. For a much more detailed exposition of the necessary attributes of the Necessary Being, see Avicenna, \textit{The Metaphysics of The Healing}; edited and translated by Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), Book Eight.

In later philosophy, a good deal of attention is paid to “presential knowledge” (\emph{ilm h\'ud\'ur}), that is, knowledge achieved through presence with the known object, or through unification of the intellecter and the intellected; it is contrasted with “acquired knowledge” (\emph{ilm h\'us\'ul}), learning that is taken from books and teachers.