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# REFLECTIONS ON IDEOLOGICAL SENTIMENTALISM

**Frithjof Schuon**

A doctrine can be described as sentimental not because of the mere fact that it uses a symbolism of the feelings or because its language is more or less emotional, but because its actual point of departure is determined by a sentimental motive; in fact, a genuine doctrine founded on a particular aspect of reality may not try to avoid appeals to sentiment, whilst, on the contrary, an illusory theory and inspiration governed by passion in its very axiom will affect a rational or "icy" tone and display an impeccable logic while developing its basic error; the "headless" character of this logic, however will not escape the notice of those who know that logic has no validity but by virtue of the soundness– physical or metaphysical– of its point of departure.

If we take the example of a doctrine which is apparently completely intellectual and inaccessible to the emotions namely Kantianism, considered as the archetype of theories seemingly divorced from all poetry we shall have no difficulty in discovering that its starting point or "dogma" is reducible to a gratuitous reaction against all that lies beyond the reach of reason acting alone; it voices therefore, *a priori* an instinctive revolt against truths which are incomprehensible rationally and which are considered annoying on account of their very inaccessibility to ordinary reasoning. All the rest is nothing but dialectical scaffolding, ingenious or "brilliant" if you wish, but contrary to truth. What is crucial in Kantianism is not its *pro domo* logic and its few very limited lucidities, but the predominantly "irrational" desire to limit the intelligence which it voices; this results in a dehumanization of intelligence and opens the door to all the inhuman aberrations of our century.[1] In short, if the state of man earns the possibility of surpassing oneself intellectually, Kantianism is the negation of all that is essentially and integrally human.[2]

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[1] This article was written in 1964. (Ed.)

[2] German Kantianists of the xixth century called their philosopher the "universal nullifier"; they little knew what truth they spoke. In fact what was nullified was intelligence through its' replacement by academic quibbles, if one may be permitted to express oneself so.

Negations on this scale are always accompanied by a sort of moral taint which makes them less excusable than if it were merely a question of intellectual narrowness. The Kantists, failing to understand "dogmatic metaphysics," overlook the enormous disproportion, between the intellectual and human greatness of those they label as "metaphysical dogmatists" and the illusions which they attribute to them; yet even if allowance be made for such a lack of understanding it seems that any honest man ought, to be sensitive, if only indirectly to the claims of these "dogmatists" at the human level. What is evidence in metaphysics becomes "dogma" for those who do not understand it– and here is an extrinsic argument of considerable significance.

It is noteworthy that Descartes has been reproached, not with the reduction of knowledge to simple logic, but with "the arbitrary character of his auxiliary concepts to which the philosopher attaches the evidence and necessity which he demands of scientific knowledge as such" (*Wundt*). Modern philosophy is decidedly the liquidation of evidences. Logic itself is but evidence of the finite and not of the Infinite, which accounts for the latter's inability to accommodate itself completely to the framework of single-handed reason. The Cartesian inconsistency is to have presented as the fruits of logic alone evidences which in reality came to Descartes simply from his intelligence.[3] This disparity between intelligence and mere logic appears in the most brutal manner, if one may say so, with Comte, where "Logicism," emptied of all intellectual content, lands one in a complete negation of the intelligence.[4]

Since Descartes, via the "criticism" of Kant and the "positivism" of Comte– both of which are, all things considered, only systemizations of incompetence– all capacity for synthesis and conclusion has been removed from the intelligence, except on a plane so narrow as to be without relation

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[3] The "categorical imperative" of Kant is "an analogous inconsequence: it is both implicitly theistic and "officially" atheistic.

[4] According to Comte, the human spirit in its "evolution," passes through three stages, the "theological," "metaphysical," and "positive": we would say that here is an "ascension" of which one of the representative bases would be Christ, for example, till it arrived, by way of Aristotle, at the grocer on the corner.

to the real scope of the human spirit.[5]

Formerly people spoke childishly of intelligent matters; in our time they excel in speaking intelligently of stupidities. In those days they made mistakes on contingent matters, when they did make mistakes, and not on essentials; in our era it is on the essential that people are mistaken, while holding positive opinions on contingent things.

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A characteristic tendency of our times– due to the fact that "the gods" have been eliminated– is that everything is crystallized in philosophy; everything becomes an article of faith, even the most innocuous things, even any kind of sentimental reaction or infirmity of the intelligence or will. It is as if one's legs, tired of being what they are by nature, began to think according to their own perspective and assumed for themselves, by the mere fact that they thought, a total and central character. Such a thinking longs to be dramatized in a tragic sense; doubt and ignorance wish to be accepted at least under the heading of a "contribution to culture," as apples make additions to a pile of other apples.[6] By a similar train of thought, not to follow the extravagancies of the day, be it in philosophy, literature, art, or simply in one's manner of living, is called to "desert our own times." But what people forget is that our own times desert truth and all real values. We are told that nothing can or should be out of step with out times, as if they were not out of step with God, and as if it were possible to be out of step indefinitely with

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[5] 'If Positivism still admits the possibility of revealing natural laws, contemporary thought questions even this elementary function of reason; and that, with the help of scientific arguments which, "however, are deployed on completely different ground. It is as if one concluded that because neither white nor black exist absolutely for the eye, there is therefore nothing but grey and the relative differences between-greys; as if this empirical and partial truth, whose metaphysical significance is obvious, could weaken the "relatively absolute" difference between black and white.

[6] In our time the normal admission "I am not intelligent enough" becomes "the world is nonsensical"; and for the old inference that one should "ask the wise" is substituted the new conclusion that "it is the purveyors of the gods and of the worlds beyond who are the bad men", or some other remark of his kind.

God, truth and the nature of things, all three.

Throughout the ages religions have inculcated in man the consciousness of what he really is, of his fundamental majesty, coupled with his actual imperfection and impotence; man accepted this message because he still possessed a natural intuition of his situation in the universe. Now the peculiarity of man desirous of embodying our times is the need to feel at ease in an imperfection that has become for him practically a perfection of its own; it is the desire, as a reaction against the centuries, to feel oneself perfect at small expense– whence the reduction of the real to an infinitesimal segment of itself– and to shake off the yoke of a dogma which is thought degrading because it puts us in our proper place; in short, there is a wish "to start again from scratch" in full liberty of choice. This might well be described as taking one's own wishes for reality, for it is not sufficient to desire a change in order to be able to alter one's colour or size; the reality into which we are woven by an ineluctable fatality is not modified at the will of our impulses, our needs of causality, or our lassitudes; it does not cease to be real as a result of our repugnance towards a given religious formalism, perhaps one that to us seems too imaginative or sentimental, but yet is required *a priori* by the human environment of which we form a part. From the standpoint of eschatological realities, to which nothing can remain immune in the final reckoning, all this rationalist– sentimentalist controversy would seem like a sort of literary game doomed to instantaneous evaporation in the abysses that lie beyond the grave.

Indignation against abuses is only too apt to bring with it the rejection of the positive principles which these abuses had falsified in the first place; when sentimental reaction is given a philosophical twist it perverts and impoverishes imagination. The error itself creates the stage-setting it requires in order to feel comfortable. The world becomes increasingly a system of stage– settings destined to limit and distort the imaginative faculty by imposing upon it an unshakable conviction that all this is "reality" and that there is no other and that all that is outside this system is nothing but naive and culpable "romanticism". In the nineteenth century, and to a certain extent ever since the Renaissance, people have tried practically to create a universe in which there would be only man; in our time man has lost the initiative and is now sliding about in a universe– or pseudo-universe– where

only the machine is "real"; under these conditions one can no longer speak even of "humanism:' In any case, man by attributing to himself his own self-sufficient reason, cannot remain what he is; no longer believing in that which surpasses him and not placing his ideals above himself, he thereby condemns himself to the subhuman. If one is still at all sensitive to true norms, it is difficult to deny that the machine tends to make man into its own counterpart– violent, brutal, vulgar, quantitative and stupid like itself; all modern "culture" is so affected in greater or lesser degree. This is what partly explains the cult of "sincerity" and the mystique of "engagement": one must be "sincere" because the machine is devoid of mystery and because it is as incapable of discretion as of generosity; one must be "engaged" because the machine possesses no value apart from its productive capacity and because it demands ceaseless surveillance and even a complete self-surrender[7] by men and mankind who thus become its food. We are to refrain from "compliance" in literature and art because the machine does not so behave and because in the minds of its slaves and creatures its ugliness, clamour and implacability pass for "reality." Above all one must not have a God, since the machine has none and even usurps this role itself.[8] Moreover, the general trend of our times is instinctively hostile to everything spiritual. Supposing some tribe buys a cannon and that cannon happens to explode, destroying a whole village, then the fault is not with those who bought the cannon, nor with those who sold it or those who did not know how to handle it, but with the priests and gods who had governed the tribe over the ages. Fortunately this is not the whole story and in spite of everything one can also sometimes observe wholesome reactions against this state of mind; but the preceding picture holds none the less a symbolic validity with regard to our deplorable epoch.

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[7] "If it be objected that the same was true of the crafts of old, we would reply that there is a notable difference, in that these occupations displayed a properly human character based on contemplation, and on that account entailed neither the agitation nor the oppressions characteristic of the machine age.

[8] We would stress that in speaking of "God" we have in mind not a concept which would be contrary– or in as much as It would be contrary– to Buddhism, but the "nirvanic" Reality which underlies all traditional concepts of the Absolute. It is this Reality which in the Mahayana expresses itself by the universal *Dharmakiiya.* or in other words, by the Adhi-Buddha. In Japanese terms, the same function attaches to *Amitabba (Amida)* or *Vairochana' (Dainichi).* according to the respective schools.

A typical example of the reasoning which results from this mentality is the following: there are so many religions, each teaches something different, so they cannot all be correct, therefore none of them is true.[9] It is as if one said: there are so many individuals, each one believes himself to be "I", so they cannot all be right and in consequence none of them is "I", starting with the speaker; this proposition demonstrates the absurdity– not logical, but effective–[10] of both the foregoing examples, thanks to the real analogy between the inevitable limitation of religious language and the just as inevitable limitation of the ego. To draw this inference, as do the atheists who invoke the argument in question, is practically to deny the diversity of the conscious subject as well as the diversity of the aspects of the object to be known, and therefore also the existence of points of view and aspects; logically the fact of noticing the diversity of religions could lead to the opposite conclusion, that is to say: since in every period and among all peoples there have been religions, affirming unanimously the reality of one Supreme Power and of a beyond, it is more than probable– to say the least– that this unanimity of the human mind rests on something positive and transmits essential truths, "pre-logical" if you wish, but also supra-logical and "subconsciously evident";[11] if the materialists do not reason thus it is precisely because they are affected by an imaginative and sentimental prejudice. The diversity of religions– or traditions, if one so prefers–[12] far from proving the falseness of religion or tradition as such, on the contrary

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[9] Also why not reason thus: there are so many philosophies which contradict each other, so they cannot all be right, therefore no philosophy is correct, including atheistic materialism.

[10] That which demonstrates only its own logicality is not a guarantee of truth.

[11] We refer, here, not to the inferior "subconscious" of certain psychologists, but to the fact that the truths which Revelation communicates to us, and which are contained in the very substance of the intellect, are "subconscious" for the majority of men.

[12] According to Guenon, the word "religion" is only applicable to the three Semitic monotheisms, which are characterized by three constituent elements: a dogma, a morality, and a cult. In the opinion of Coomaraswamy and also according to general usage, the word "religion" is the western term for all integral, and thus at the same time social and spiritual, tradition, be its formal doctrine theological or properly metaphysical. From this point of view all that need be observed is that the word *religio* (from *relegere,* "to gather together", or *religure,* "to bind together") bears a special connotation amongst the Semites and Westerners, as is the case with many other things. As for the word "tradition," it may be applied without abuse to various things, even in the interior of a religion.

demonstrates the transcendence of Revelation and the relativity of human understanding at one and the same time.

In the same connection it is impossible not to pause over the very crucial question of democratic and anti-theocratic ideology. It is possible for a social theory, founded– as a reaction against particular abuses– on a desire for liberty but at the same time imparting an inordinate character to this claim in disregard of the real potentialities and interests of the individual, to develop without any obvious dialectical inconsistency and thus give the impression of a prefect objectivity. The success of an ideology of this kind is explained by the fact that men who ignore the profound reasons of our terrestrial situations and for whom principles are merely "abstractions," easily allow themselves to be convinced by the violent voicing of a partially legitimate cause, without asking themselves if the ideology that is being added to it be true or false; because we are hungry the inaccessible date-palm is a thief, and always has been. The passionate impulse– even when disguised as "cold" reasoning– takes no account of the fact that a partial truth becomes false when one takes it out of its total context and imparts to it, under this condition of artificial isolation, a quasi unconditional significance.

In reality the external liberty of creatures is relative and conditional and cannot be otherwise; what tradition seeks to realize– and what it does realize to the extent that our world of approximations permits– is a kind of balance between individual terrestrial freedom and the chances of celestial wellbeing; if one believes in eternal life, a liberty which is disproportionate in relation to such and such individual potentialities, and consequently compromises such and such chances of salvation, is clearly not more desirable than a privation of liberty which does not compromise them. It is from this angle that must be considered whatever in traditional civilizations (the mere question of abuses is by the way) offends in too absolute a manner the sensibility of individualists who believe in nothing or whose belief has no bearing on their intelligence and imagination; we say "too absolute" since it is normal for "legitimate" or "inevitable" ills to offend the sensibility of just men; but it is abnormal and in any case illegitimate that men draw erroneous conclusions from their own sensibility.

The experience of the false "liberty" which is propounded as an end in

itself or as "art for art's sake"– as if one could be really free outside the truth and without interior liberty!– this experience we say, is only in its beginning phase, though the world has already gathered some of the bitter fruits of it. All that is still human normal and stable in the world only survives there through the vitality of ancestral traditions– of "prejudices" if one so prefers whether it be a matter of the West, moulded by Christianity, or even of some Nilotic or Amazonian tribe. To have some idea of what the "free man of tomorrow" might be like the man starting again from zero and "creating himself"–[13] but in reality the man of the machine which has escaped from his control– it is sufficient to take a glance at the peculiar "existentialist" psychology of certain young people particularly in the big cities. Let us not anticipate however, since our aim is simply to point out that if the profound and subconscious impressions of tradition are removed from man there remain finally only the scars of his fall and the unleashing of the infrahuman elements[14] in his being.

Logically democracy is opposable to tyranny, but in fact leads to it. That is to say since its own reaction is sentimental– without which it would be centripetal and would tend towards theocracy, the only guarantee of a realistic liberty– it is only an extreme which, by its unrealistic negation of authority and competence calls forth another extreme and a new authoritarian reaction one which this time is authoritarian and tyrannical in its very principle. The democratic illusion appears above all in the following points: in democracy truth amounts to the belief of the majority, whereof the truth is practically the "creation"; democracy itself is only true in as far as and as long as, the majority believes in it, thus it carries in its breast the germ of its own suicide. Authority, which one is obliged to tolerate under pain of anarchy, lives at the mercy of the electors hence the impossibility of real government. The ideal of "liberty" makes a prisoner of the government, a prisoner who must constantly follow the interests of various pressure groups; the electoral campaigns themselves prove that the aspirants to authority must

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[13] And creating the truth at the same time, of course.

[14] Instead of repeating incessantly that the Middle Ages were horrible people would do better to resign themselves to the fact that it is thus that men of the Iron Age behave–in Europe and elsewhere and in both good or evil–when they take their religion seriously; our vaunted "softening of moral codes" and "tolerance" offer little interest apart from the fact that their price is religious indifference anti–spiritual individualism, materialism and, false mysticism.

dupe the electors, and the means of this dupery are so incredibly vulgar and stupid and constitute such a degradation of the people that this alone should suffice to reduce all democratic ideology to nonsense. That does not necessarily mean that no form of democracy is possible; but then it is primarily a question of communities of limited size– especially nomadic ones– and secondly of a democracy having an aristocratic and theocratic centre, and not of a secular egalitarianism imposed upon large sedentary populations.

We can enlarge on this further: it can be that a man is intelligent and competent, or that a minority is; but it cannot happen that the majority is intelligent and competent, or "more intelligent" or "more competent"; the adage *vox populi vox Dei* has no meaning except in a religious framework which confers a function of "medium" on the crowds, who then express themselves, not by thought but by intuition and under the influence of Heaven; unless it is a matter of the competence pertaining to every sane-minded, God-fearing man, in which case the feeling of the majority coincides in all ways with what may be called "the good." It is clear that the people as a collective vehicle of religion enjoys a positive character– all religions 'testify to this[15]– and is thus instinctively right in the face of pernicious and impious exceptions;[16] moreover it is clear that, viewed from a slightly different angle, the people's "fanaticism"[17] in spite of its inescapable limitations and abuses, represents a centripetal and regulating force. The people is what it is, both in good and evil; it has not the virtues of the "centre," but it may have those of the "totality," on condition that the "centre" determines that totality. Besides the word "people" itself admits of two meanings; it denotes either the majority, as opposed to intellectual and aristocratic elites, or the total or integral collectivity, comprising the majority and the elites at one and the

[15] Without which there would be neither "Israel" nor "the mystic body of Christ," nor" the Muhammadan community".

[16] It can also be mistaken when it is a question of phenomena exceeding the bounds of exoterism, even though there is also an aspect of esoterism that is anchored in the people, notably in its craft institutions.

[17] In our time all that is essential, or even merely serious, in a religion is called "fanaticism". Other labels of same kind are "convention", "conformity," "romantic," "picturesque"; it is always a matter of compromising or ridiculing anything which is opposed to the reign of the machine.

same time; in this last sense it is self-evident that the government– apart from its celestial origin– derives from the people and that the chivalric and sacerdotal elites themselves are an expression of the popular genius; one could almost apologize for pointing out anything so obvious.

A word on "free thought," or more exactly on the quasi moral obligation to "think for themselves" currently attributed to all men; this demand is incompatible with the nature of man, for the normal and virtuous man, as a member of a social and traditional community, generally takes into account the limits of his own abilities. One of two things is possible: either the man is exceptionally gifted on such and such a plane and therefore nothing can stop him from thinking in an original way, which he will moreover do consonantly with tradition precisely because his intelligence enables him to grasp the necessity of this harmony; or the man is of mediocre intelligence, either on some particular plane or in a general way, in which case he relies on the judgments of those more competent than himself, which in his case is the most intelligent thing he can do. The craze for detaching the individual from the intellectual hierarchy, or, in other words for individualizing him intellectually, is a violation of his nature and is practically equivalent to the abolition of intelligence and also of the virtues without which real understanding cannot fully take effect. This way only leads to anarchy and to the codification of men's inability to think.

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A "contemporary" variant of the ideological sentimentalism which we have in mind, one that is very prevalent even among "believers", is the demagogic obsession with purely "social" values. Formerly, when all the world was religious, poverty preserved the poor from hypocrisy, or from a certain kind of hypocrisy. In our time poverty too often leads to unbelief and envy, especially in countries which have been industrialized or otherwise contaminated by the industrialist mentality– with the result that rich and poor are quits; the hypocrisy of one side is answered by the impiety of the other. It is profoundly unjust to prefer this new shortcoming of the poor to the habitual and traditionally stigmatized shortcoming of the rich and to excuse the impiety of the ones because of their poverty without excusing the others because of their riches: if the poor are victims of their estate the rich are

equally so of theirs; if poverty confers the right to impiety riches equally confer the right to a simulation of piety. If the one side is to be pitied spiritually the other is to be pitied and excused on the same grounds seeing that the difference between them rests solely on completely exterior and easily reversible situations, and not on anything fundamental in the nature of man. One can only prefer the poor when they are better than the rich in their spiritual sincerity, their patience and their secret heroism– such poor always exist, as also do rich men who are detached from their riches– and not when they are worse by their unbelief, envy and hatred. The Christians persecuted by Nero suffered far more grievously than any underpaid workmen of today without theology granting them for that reason the right to cease to believe in God or to scorn His laws; tradition never admitted this kind of economic blackmail addressed to God.

In short, three questions determine the human problem in spite of all the humanitarian and progressivist sentimentalities now in vogue; if all men were exempt from material cares, would the world be saved? Assuredly not; for evil resides above all in man himself as experience proves abundantly.[18] If all men set themselves to supply the needs of others with regard to their physical wellbeing conceived apart from religion would the world be saved? No, certainly not for the very basis of the problem would remain untouched. If all men thought of God, to the point of forgetting their own wellbeing would the world be saved? Yes certainly; "the rest shall be added unto you" says the Gospel, that is to say the reform of man would involve *ipso facto* a reform of the world, and even a beneficial reaction on the part of the whole cosmic environment.

Progressivism is a desire to eliminate effects without wishing to eliminate their causes; it is a wish to abolish calamities without realizing that they are nothing other than man himself; they necessarily result from his metaphysical ignorance, or his lack of the love of God. Account must equally be taken of this: God cannot in the first place "take an interest" in the wellbeing of creatures; what he wants is their souls and their imperishable good and not

[18] In economically super-saturated countries, imbued with social idealism and "humanitarian" psycho-analysis, the moral problem is in no way solved; privileged youth shows itself capable of the most monstrous crimes without having the excuse of poverty.

primarily the transitory things of the material world. If God also wants our earthly wellbeing it is not because he regards it as an end in itself, but because a certain happiness is the normal condition of man who, however is essentially created with a view to eternal values. God takes interest in our wellbeing to the extent that we may profit from it, in His sight, and not otherwise; but outside this "interest"– if such a word be permissible here despite its obvious inadequacy– God "sends down his rain upon the just and unjust alike." The same applies to bread: truth must be imparted because "man does not live by bread alone"; to hunger with truth is better than to live at ease with error. Wellbeing is there to serve our ultimate ends as clay is there to make vessels.

Many are prone to accuse the contemplatives, preoccupied with their salvation of "selfishness" and maintain that instead of saving oneself one should save others; but this argument is firstly hypocritical and secondly absurd because, on the one hand, it is not from any excess of virtue that those who argue thus refuse sanctification and because, on the other hand it is impossible to save others for one can only know and will with one's own knowledge and one's own will; if it be possible to contribute to the salvation of others it is only by virtue of one's own salvation. No man has ever rendered service to anyone out of "altruism" while remaining attached to his own faults; whoever neglects his own salvation certainly will save no one else. To mask passions and spiritual indifference behind a facade of good works only proves one's own hypocrisy. The social interest can only be defined in terms of the truth; it is impossible to define truth in terms of the social.

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Too often one hears the reproach of "sentimentality" levelled at those who protest, not against some necessary evil, but against meanness; this reproach, even if it accidentally coincides with the truth from a purely psychological point of view, is yet completely unjustified when it is designed to reduce intelligent reactions to their possible emotional concomitants. For: that the strong attack the weak is sometimes an unavoidable evil and even in certain respects an effect of a natural law, provided the means used do not violate the laws of nature as in mechanized wars, and provided that force does not

serve intrinsically false ideas, which would be yet another anomaly[19]; but that the strong should crush the weak by means of an interested hypocrisy with its accompanying meanness is neither natural nor inevitable; it is gratuitous and even infamous to label as "sentimentality" all opinion which condemns these methods; "realism" can justify violence, but never villainies. But there is not only this alternative; there are still facts which, without being in themselves either necessary evils or villainies properly speaking, are due in the main to a distressing and senseless thoughtlessness; such are the abuses brought about by prejudice, complacency, lack of imagination and unconscious habit; such things are inevitable, not only in the particular but universally, the collective man of the "dark age" being what he is. In this case, to be greatly moved by a particular happening does not necessarily spell a culpable sentimentality; what would be so is to be indignant against the very existence of such phenomena within an ancient civilization and to wish to destroy the whole civilization for the sake of abolishing the happenings in question.

When we set out to compare antiquity with our own times two extremes are noticeable; on the one hand we have the abstract and marmoreal hardness of the ancients, founded on the law of natural selection and on the aristocratic virtues of gods and heroes, and on the other hand we have the democratic excesses of our day, such as the reign of inferiors, the cult of mediocrity and vulgarity, the sentimentalist protection, not of the weak, but of weakness and defects as such[20] and the psychological softness in respect of all forms of laxity and vice, by which immorality is upheld in the name of liberty and sincerity– not to mention stupidity and idle chatter masquerading as culture or the scorn of wisdom and the neutralization of religion or the misdeeds of an atheistical science that leads to over-population, degeneration and catastrophy. These aberrations allow us, if not to condone the faults of the ancients, at least to understand their outlook; it will then be understood

[19] We are referring above all to tribal or feudal wars, or wars of expansion of the traditional civilizations. Some will object that there have always been machines and that a bow is nothing else, which is as false as to claim that a circle is a sphere or a drawing is a statue. Here there is a difference of dimensions whose causes are profound and not merely quantitative.

[20] The protection of the weak has always been practised, in one form or another, in civilizations which still remain healthy.

that there is no occasion to condemn this outlook in itself unconditionally in the name of a so-called "moral progress" such as in reality only leads to the opposite excesses, to say the least of it.[21] Like all social dreaming, that of egalitarianism presupposes a fragmentary world made up exclusively of honest men who think only of kneading their bread in tranquillity without being molested by wolves or by the gods; but the wolves are to be found within the "decent fellows" themselves, and as for the conniving gods of "fanaticism," one has only to banish them for devils to come in and take their place.

Nothing could be more false than to claim that the Middle Ages were as good as our era is bad; the Middle Ages were wicked inasmuch as abuses which distorted the traditional principles were developed to their uttermost in relation to the possibilities of the time, without which the modern reaction– Renaissance and Reformation– could not have happened. But compared with our times the Middle Ages were nevertheless "better," and even "good," from the very fact that they were still ruled by genuine principles.

At every turn we are told that we must "be contemporary" in our ideas and that the tact of "looking back" or "hanging back" amounts to treason in respect of the "categorical imperative" which is our own century: nothing could ever confer justification or plausibility on this unreasonable demand. "There is no right greater than that of the truth", say the Hindus; and if two and two make four, this certainly is not more or less true in terms of some particular time or other. Everything which goes on in our time forms part of that time, including opposition to its tendencies; the copying of antiquity formed part of the Renaissance outlook, and if in our time some people look towards the Middle Ages or the East, one is bound to register the fact as also belonging to the period in which we live. It is the nature of things which determines definitely what is or is not of our time; it is certainly not for men to decide what has the right to be true and what has not.

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[21] Collectivist dictatorships have sprung from democracy and re-edit its prejudices in the sense that they also intend to realize the so-called humanitarian ideals, but by Babylonian means.

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Philosophical "vitalism" masquerades also under the guise of an impeccable logic, a fallacious and properly infra-human line of thought. The devotees of "life" for whom religion or wisdom is only an unintelligible kill-joy artificial and morbid overlook all the following truths, namely that human intelligence is capable of objectivizing life and of opposing itself to it to a certain extent and that this fact cannot be devoid of meaning, everything having its efficient cause; also that it is by this capacity of objectivization and opposition versus subjective impulses that man shows himself human life and pleasure being common also to all infra-human creatures; that there is not only life but also death, not only pleasure but also pain, of which man alone can give account *a priori;* that man ought to follow his nature as animals follow theirs, and that in following it fully he transcends appearances and gives them a significance which surpasses their shifting plane and finally unites them in the same stable and universal reality. For man is intelligence and intelligence is the superseding of forms and the realization of the invisible Essence; to speak of human intelligence is to speak of the absolute and the transcendent.

Of all earthly creatures man alone knows, firstly that pleasure is contingent and ephemeral, and secondly that it is not shared by all. That is to say he knows that other *egos* do not enjoy the pleasures of our *ego* and that, whatever our rejoicing, there are always other creatures who suffer, and vice versa; which proves that pleasure is not everything nor is life. Religion and metaphysics spring from the depths of our specifically human nature– precisely by virtue of its profundity which is not the case with the characteristics man shares with animals and plants.

To refute an error does not mean ignoring the fact that its existence is, in a sense, necessary; the two things are situated on different planes. We do not accept error, but we accept its existence because "scandal must needs be". It is feeble and vague minds which accept error merely because they perceive that it is impossible for it not to exist.

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We said at the beginning of this article that a doctrine merits the epithet "sentimental," not because it makes use of a symbolism of the feelings, or because it reflects incidentally in its form the sentiments of the writer who expounds it, but because its point of departure is determined more by feeling than by objective reality, which means that the latter is violated by the former. To this definition we must add a reservation in favour of the traditional doctrines, or some of them; strictly speaking a true doctrine could be qualified by the use of the word "sentimental" when sentiment is introduced into the very substance of that doctrine, whilst at the same time limiting the truth, by force of circumstance, on account of the "subjective" and affective character of sentimentality as such; it is in this sense that Guenon speaks of the presence of a sentimental element in the Semitic exoterisms, while pointing out that it is this element which accounts for the incompatibilities between dogmas drawn from different sources. But, in this case, the term "sentimental" cannot mean that the doctrine itself originates in a sentimental reaction, one that is basically human therefore, as happens with profane ideologies; on the contrary, here the marriage between truth and sentiment is a beneficial and providential concession to certain psychological predispositions, so that the epithet in question is only applicable on condition that one also specifies that it concerns doctrines that remain properly orthodox.

The Intellect– that kind of static Revelation which is permanent in principle and "supernaturally natural"– is not opposed to any possible expression of the Real; it is situated above sentiment, imagination, memory and reason, but it can at the same time illuminate and determine all of these because they are like its individualized branches and arranged as receptacles to receive the light from on high and to translate it according to their respective capacities. The positive quintessence of sentiment is love; and love, in the measure that it surpasses itself in the direction of its supernatural source, is the love of man for God and of God for man; finally it is Beatitude beginningless and endless.

# PHILOSOPHY AND THE ADVANTAGES OF STUDYING IT[22]

**Dr. Seyed Zafer ul Hassan**

Gentlemen of the Philosophical Society and Honoured Guests, There were times when Philosophy was regarded as "the Queen of Sciences," as the noblest of studies, as the highest what man could pursue. Those times seem now to have gone by. They have changed. One is inclined today to look askance at this great subject. The scientist, proud of his achievements, asks: "what has Philosophy achieved?" The Economist, deep down in his problems of finance and exchange, inquires: "what is the money value of Philosophy?", The Historian, sure of his good common sense and understanding of the world, smiles at the dreamer and the abstract thinker as' a queer and useless person, The man of literature and art finds the philosopher a person who is far away from the joys and beauties of life. The Theologian, half afraid of the metaphysician, gives him out as a monster that must be avoided. It has thus become quite a common place to look down upon Philosophy and to regard it as something thoroughly useless and even harmful.

This attitude towards Philosophy is mainly due to materialism of the times and to the ignorance of the nature of Philosophy. But, gentlemen, this was not the view of Philosophy taken by the greatest of human souls, Socrates, whom it is difficult to distinguish from a prophet and who knew Philosophy best, believed it to be the most useful thing on the face of the earth. The Prophet of Islam who knew things better than even Socrates, regarded the teaching of Philosophy *hikmah*, as the real function of his life (the Qur'an 2:149); and held a sage (*hakim*) Philosopher to be very nigh a prophet (کاد

[22] This lecture was delivered by Dr. Seyed Zafer ul Hasan to the Philosophical Society of The Muslim University Aligarh in December 1931. (Courtesy, Khizr Yasin– Burhan A. Faruqi Collection.)

الحكيم ان يكون نبيا ) And, Gentlemen, the Prophet of Islam knew better how to speak to the materially (economically) minded men of the street– he spoke to them of spiritual goods in terms of material commodities, which you exchange and of which you can hold a traffic and he told them emphatically and repeatedly that the spiritual goods were immensely more useful, more advantageous than– the material goods.

But I am not out for a mere popular sort appeal in favour of Philosophy; I am speaking to a Philosophical audience. I must be more exact. I must show as clearly as I can:–

1. What is Philosophy?

2. What is an Advantage? And lastly,

3. What are the Advantages of Philosophy?

As a student of Philosophy, I must first analyze the concepts of Philosophy and Advantage, and then show the relation of one to the other. I must be logical and try to leave no doubts on the point.

Gentlemen, I shall be brief in my analysis of the concepts of Philosophy and Advantage; for I have to speak at length on the Advantages of Philosophy. However, though brief, I trust I shall manage to be clear, so as to be easily understood when I come to expatiate on the Advantages of Philosophy.

**PHILOSOPHY**

Philosophy, to start with, is, as the etymology of the word indicates, the Love of Wisdom. But in its completion, i.e., as a discipline *(fann)*, it is, as the great modem philosopher Kant points out, the Doctrine of Wisdom– wisdom in its most complete sense. What is Wisdom then? It is the state of mind in which understanding (*fahm*) is combined with action (*'amal*). He is a wise man in the ordinary sense of the word, who understands the situation and acts accordingly. The Wise Man, the Sage, the (*hakim*) therefore, is one in

whom the complete understanding of the situation of Man is combined with appropriate action. In other words, one who knows– knows as much as man can know– one who knows What is this Universe, What is Man, and What is the Relation of Man to it; and further; What is the Ultimate End of man which he has to realize in this universe? He is the truly and most completely wise man, who has given his best thought to these gigantic problems, has thought systematically, logically, i.e., scientifically, upon them– has thought with the greatest souls who have thought on these questions before him; and has come to definite conclusions upon them (positive or negative it does not matter); and who conforms his action to these conclusions. Gentlemen, such a man as a Philosopher; and the subject matter is philosophy. He has done what man can do; and nothing more can be demanded. The understanding of the problems just mentioned and the solutions thereof logically and systematically reached is called Theoretical Philosophy (*hikmah nazariyah*); and the moulding of the Action accordingly is called Practical Philosophy (*hikmah 'amaliyyah*) since ancient times.

In a systematic inquiry these problems break up into a number of philosophical problems, and yield various philosophical disciplines, e.g., Logic, Ethics, Aesthetics, etc., and Psychology and Anthropology in the Kantian sense. It will be going too far to work out his articulation of Philosophy into its branches.

**ADVANTAGES**

Now I come to the second concept, viz. "Advantage". When you, speak of the Advantage or Advantages of a thing, what you have in mind in this: what Purpose, what Ends does it serve? You can conceive of it as a Means to an end. Take an example. When you ask me what are the advantages of Philosophy you mean to ask: Is it helpful in bringing me Money, or Influence or Fame or Internal Satisfaction, etc.? In other words, is it a means to these ends? When you say: Economics or Physical Science is a useful study, you mean to say that it will help you in earning your livelihood or bring you influence in the world of human affairs, etc. When you raise the question, why should I go to a University and take a good degree, you mean to ask; what are the advantages of doing so? i.e., what benefits will such an education bring you? Will it help you in making a living or attaining to a

position of influence, etc? Thus in every case you have an end in view and measure the thing under consideration– Philosophy, Economics, Science, University education, as a means to that end. Now suppose the end with reference to which you measure Economics as a means, were Money-making. Cannot I put the question: What are the advantages of Money-making? I can. Suppose your answer were: The advantages of money are evident; it is the sole means of all physical and material comfort. Quite right. But I can have the impertinence of pushing my question further and asking: what are the advantages of Physical and material comfort? You may feel yourself at the end of you wit, and say unto me: Well, Sir, I don't understand you Advantages of Comfort? Comfort itself is an advantage; it is something which we covet in itself whether it brings us any further advantages or not. I may agree with you. But what you mean to say now is that comfort is not valuable as a means to a further end, but on the contrary it is an end in itself; other things. e.g., money, are valuable as means to it, but comfort is valuable in itself– we seek it for its own sake. You mean to say: If I could get to this end without money, I have no use for money– it has no value for me, it is no Advantage to possess money.

. In other words, firstly, the Advantages of a thing are its value merely as a means to an end; it draws its value wholly from that end or ends. And, secondly, there are ends which are means to no further ends; they have their value in themselves; other things are valuable merely as means to them. Plainly, the value of such ends is immensely greater than the value of any means.

Now, Gentlemen, bear these distinctions in mind. If I could show that Philosophy is for Man an End– in– itself and that this cannot be rightly said of any other science, then I shall have proved the immense superiority of Philosophy to other branches of study. And if I could further show that as a Means to other ends Philosophy compares favourably with any branch of study, I think I would then have carried the cause of Philosophy in the domain of "advantages" of which so much is spoken.

**ADVANTAGES OF PHILOSOPHY**

Now I shall first take Philosophy as Theoretical Philosophy *(hikmah*

*nazariyah)* and try to show that as such it is an end-in-itself, and then I shall take it as Practical Philosophy *(hikmah 'amaliyah)*; and show that as such too it is an end-in-itself.

Then I shall point out in detail the value of Philosophy as a means to further ends; in other words, the "advantages" of Philosophy in the sense in which one ordinarily speaks of advantages.

Knowledge is an end-in-itself. In ordinary parlance we speak of it as "knowledge for the sake of knowledge." That knowledge is an end-in-itself, is the discovery of the Greek mind. Muslim thinkers and modem philosophers agree with Greek philosophers on the point. I believe that every human mind agrees with them implicitly. No man will agree to lose his eyes and ears and reason even if all the "advantages" that he can draw from them are guaranteed to him– he will retain sight, etc, for their own sake. In any case there are men for whom knowledge is an end-in-itself; and they are not the lowest kind of men. I mean the Scholars and the Learned. This also shows that knowledge is not only an end-in-itself, but also that it is one of the noblest ends of man. Indeed the Greeks regarded it to be the highest end.

Theoretical Philosophy is the knowledge of the Universe as a whole– the knowledge of the nature of the world and of man and of their relation. It is moreover the knowledge of these things so far as human mind can see. That is, it is the profoundest knowledge of the profoundest objects. If, therefore, there is any knowledge, which ought to be sought for its own sake, that knowledge is Philosophy. Other sciences too, physical, and mental, give us knowledge, which is apparently sought for its own sake. But firstly, this quest of sciences is confined to phenomena– to what appears to the eyes, etc., and to its interpretation. They stop where appearances of things stop. They cannot go further. They cannot probe deep down into that which may be at the bottom of things and which cannot by its very nature be an object of senses. The knowledge they give is all right so far as it goes, but clearly such knowledge is not complete knowledge of the nature of the things. Secondly, the sciences confine themselves to this or that portion of the universe to matter, to life, or to mind. Each science inquires into the nature of its objects apart from other portions of the universe. But can such knowledge be called

complete knowledge of the nature of that object? No. The knowledge of Matter is incomplete if the knowledge of its relation to Life and Mind is not forthcoming. In other words, "Sciences" do no give us complete knowledge of anything. Only that Science, which goes to "the bottom of things and considers the universe as a whole, can give us Knowledge in the complete sense of the work. And indeed, in their Origin (beginning) and in their true Intent (End, Purpose), all scientific inquiry is subordinate to Philosophy– it is there to study the universe piecemeal in order later to utilize the results thus obtained for constructing a true picture of Reality as a whole. That is, it is therefore the sake of Philosophy and as a means to Philosophical knowledge. If and so long as Scientific inquiry does not serves this purpose, its knowledge– value is doubtful, whatever its utilitarian value (cf., e.g., the doctrines of Mach and the Pragmatists).

I now come to consider Philosophy as *(hikmah 'amaliyah)* as Practical Philosophy. As such, Philosophy is the realization of the ultimate End of Man based on Theoretical Philosophy *(hikmah nazariyah)* or the knowledge of the universe and of the End of Man. That it is the realization of our ultimate End itself signifies that it is an End– in– itself. The realizing of my ultimate end is valuable in itself; it is supremely valuable and is not valuable only as a means. Can we say this of any other branch of study? No. Simply because every one of them is only theory even "if it were turned to practice, i.e. if we take action that can be based on it, the object of the action is not this realization of the ultimate end of man. The object in such cases is only to produce something (material sciences) or produce some event (mental sciences). But that, if an end, is only a means to some further end, i.e., it is not an end in itself. Thus we see that as an End– in– itself Philosophy is incomparably more valuable than any other branch of study indeed more valuable than all of them put together. It is of those who combine *(hikmah nazariyah)* with *(hikmah 'amaliyah)*; that the Prophet of Islam said: ( كاد الحكيم ان يكون نبيا) they are Philosophers in the true sense of the word, they are Sages, they are *hakim*. That very few attain to this stage, does not detract from the inherent value of Philosophy. It only shows that the value of Philosophy is very high; that Philosophy is well nigh the "highest stage of Human Perfection."

Now I come down to the "Advantage of Philosophy" in the ordinary sense of the word i.e., to the consideration of Philosophy as a means to other ends.

Gentleman, one who studies Philosophy, develops the habit of thinking for himself– thinking impartially, systematically and comprehensively to get clear on the profoundest problems of man. The study, therefore, develops his distinctively human, i.e., his rational faculties more than any other branch of study. He sees things better than others, his reasoning becomes sounder and his judgment more profound. These qualities certainly help you in the conduct of life and in all its concerns. Further they bring you another and still greater gain, viz, they help you in the conduct of life and in all its concerns. Further they bring you another and still greater gain, viz, they help you to gain the respect of your fellow men, which is one of the biggest and noblest gains man can covet.

Moreover, Philosophy tends to ennoble your character. The contemplation of eternal truths about the nature of the Universe and of Man raises you above the petty concerns of life, creates a desire to get nearer to the world of Eternity and Truth, and prepares the Soul for a higher and spiritual life. Further, the understanding of the nature of Virtue and Vice, which Moral Philosophy promotes, is one of the greatest motives to Virtue– indeed, the only real and tenable motive according to Kant. The insight into the nature of the Beautiful and the Ugly with which the Philosophy of Art (Aesthetics) provides you, improves your Taste and Judgment of Art– it puts you in a better position to determine the truly beautiful and to enjoy it, and to become a better critic (of art). The consideration of the nature of Religion, which is the function of the Philosophy of Religion broadens your horizon– makes you large– hearted and tolerant, qualities of character which betoken greatness of soul, and not indifference, as one is prone to think. Gentlemen, these are spiritual advantages of the highest order; and no branch of study other than Philosophy offers them in their completeness.

Let us now speak of Practical Advantages, i.e., advantages of a more mundane sort– of the sort which people generally have in mind when talking of advantages and disadvantages and with reference to which they are prone to doubt the usefulness of Philosophy. By Practical Advantage they mean

Advantage in Life– Life taken in the ordinary sense of the word. Something is advantageous in this sense if it brings Success in life. Now success in Life is essentially success with your fellow men; and success with men mainly depends on your understanding of men, (i.e., on what is known as common sense)– on your understanding of yourself and of others. Now, Gentlemen, I maintain that Philosophy pre– eminently brings this understanding. It brings this understanding, because it is primarily the study of man in his rational and his empirical nature. The former you have in Metaphysics (Epistemology, Ethics, Aesthetics, etc), and the latter in Psychology. You get accustomed to observe facts of human mind and their interconnections, and you have the proper categories under which to subsume them. This combination of acts and concepts constitutes understanding. All successful men, especially great men possess this faculty of understanding other men. In this consists the secret of their success? A proper training in Philosophy is a discipline in the exercise of this faculty of understanding; and if you will use it in the concerns of life, it will certainly bring you success with your fellow men.

Hence it is, Gentlemen, that a proper training in Philosophy is of the greatest advantage in Statecraft, in Administration, in Law, in Education, even in Medicine and Theology– I shall consider them one by one and give illustrations. Statesmanship and Law– giving deal with men as a society. Therefore success in them depends on knowledge of society– on knowledge it its actual state, its inherent tendencies, and of the goal of Man to which society is to be led. In other words, it depends on psychological observation and metaphysical thought. That is why many a great statesman has been a keen student of Philosophy. To mention a few instances, Alexander the Great was a disciple' of Aristotle, Fredrick the Great a student of Kant (through Kiesewetter). The Great French Minster Richelieu was a philosopher; so was Bismarck, the great German Chancellor. The great Harun al-Rashid and Mamun al-Rashid lived in the company of philosophers; so did Akbar the Great; Nizam al-Mulk Tusi and Abu al-Fadl were great ministers, and both were students of Philosophy. In our own times Asquith and Balfour were graduates in Philosophy. Indeed I am told that the proportion of graduates of Philosophy (of "Great" men) among English ministers has been very large. In the Executive Line, insight into the actual working of human mind, i.e., psychological observation (though not so much into its principles, i.e., metaphysics) is the secret of success; and Criminal

Psychology is of utmost importance for the Police. In the Judicial Line, i.e., for the Judge and the Lawyer, criminal psychology is again of great advantage; while Psychology in general, Ethics and Philosophy of Law are highly conducive to the understanding of men and law. Moreover the capacity to apply law to particular cases, i.e., the capacity to deduce, and the capacity to argue and to detect fallacies in arguments capacities which the study of Logic develops, are of paramount importance for the Judge and the Lawyer both. Gentlemen, the Statesman and the Legislator deal with the citizens *en masse*, the Executive and the Judge with them rather as individuals. Education in the highest sense prepares the individual for it requires insight into the actual working of his mind; in other words it requires Psychology. Hence it is that Child Psychology is becoming so important for the educational line– for the teacher, though unfortunately educational authorities do not yet seem to realize the importance of metaphysical training. But, Gentlemen, there can hardly be any doubt that, other things being equal, a student of Philosophy is more likely to be a successful and a great teacher than a student of any other subject. Even in the medical line, specially the medicine of mental and nervous ailments; training in Philosophy is highly advantageous. You must understand the mentality of your patients and you must be able to analyze their psychological and nerve– complexes. This can hardly be denied after the achievements of Freud, Jung and Adler. The education of a physician in ancient times and among Muslim's bears ample testimony to it. Philosophy was an integral part of their education. The connection of medicine and Philosophy has been so great that the word *(hakim)* has come to mean a physician. Even today when specialization is running amok and destroying the true purpose of education, when it has separated the two, the deep connection of the two is at times realized by, thinking men; and I have seen men passing from Medicine over to Philosophy in German universities. So for Physical Medicine; in Spiritual Medicine (guidance on the spiritual path) the value of Philosophy of Metaphysics and Psychology has never been denied. In the Theological line the importance of Philosophical training has been generally recognized in Europe. It was recognized by Muslims also. But it is not recognized by them today– indeed our Moulvies are apt to frighten people from Philosophy. But I am sure, gentlemen, that there will be no true theologians amongst us unless and until a thorough training in modem philosophy, specially moral philosophy and metaphysics is made compulsory for them. For, in the first

instance, the theologian has to deal with men– he must understand them– he must know psychology. In the second, he has to guide them to the goal of man– he must know moral philosophy. And in the third, he has to meet the sceptic and the Atheist– he must know metaphysic. The study of philosophy is, therefore, absolutely indispensable for him. Thus, Gentlemen, you see that philosophical training is an asset of great value in life and in so many vitally important walks of life (professions) which bring you also money.

If we turn now from individual to mankind, and look at the question from the stand point of culture or improvement of mankind, we find that philosophical thought has given lead in all departments of human life– in all "values". And that lead it must give, because this lies in its very nature. For it is the profoundest thought of the fundamentals of all departments. Take the balance. Sciences all of them begin in Philosophy as special aspects of its problem. They take principles from philosophy, and they return to philosophy as their goal, when they try to rise high or to go deep into their fundamentals. In ancient times it is difficult to distinguish the scientist from philosopher, e.g. the philosopher Thales, Anaxaminder, Anexamines are physicists; Pythagoreans and his school are mathematicians; Democritus is a mechanist and Aristotle gave principles to all sciences for thousands of years and before very modern times, including Muslim times, philosophy was an integral part of the education of a scientist. In modern times too the first and the greatest scientists– those who gave science its principles are philosophers, e.g. Descartes gave the principles that "all physical change is to be explained as quantitative"– as an arrangement of extended particles, that "matter and motion were constant"; Leibniz reduced matter to "force" and announced the principle of "continuity", Kant gave us the principle of "evolution" on which the world process is to be explained. And scientists who have tried to go deep into their subject– to go to the fundamentals of it, have come to philosophy for inspiration, e.g. Newton, Mach, Einstein come from physics to Philosophy– are physical Philosophers; Poincare, Whitehead, Russell came from mathematics; Huxley from biology; Herbert Spencer from mechanics; William James, Jasper from medicine; etc. Take Morals and Politics. Great ideas come from Philosophers and revolutionize the world. The philosophies of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle gave the ideal of life and politics to the world for a long time, and even today is exercising considerable influence. Hobbes' *Leviathan* ruled English Politics long enough and is the origin of some

peculiar political and juristic doctrines of English law. Rousseau by his 'Return to Nature' causes the French revolution, which was in reality a revolution in the concepts of statecraft. Kant gave us the notions of "Eternal Peace" and a "League of Nations" and with Hegel and Hegelians still rules the political thought in Germany and outside. Karl Max and Engel were disciples of Hegel, and given rise to European Communism and Russian Bolshevism. And Nietzsche's "Will-to-power" and concepts of "Superman" and "Aristocratic" Morality are at the basis of Fascism of Mussolini in Italy and Nazism of Hitler in Germany– they are moreover strongly coming to the fore in the world of today in the form of the call for Dictatorship. In Jurisprudence again, philosophers give the fundamental conception, e.g., the thought of Stoics is at the foundation of the great system of Roman Law which is still ruling the world; the thought of Kant gave the constitution of the United States of America, and has been a potent factor in Germany. Take Education. Pedagogy has been regarded as a vital part of Philosophical systems. Nearly all great educationists are philosophers, e.g., Socrates and Plato, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Herbert. Fine Arts again have in all ages been profoundly influenced by Philosophy. Great art is the expression of great philosophic ideas. Idealistic art (in Greece, in Middle Ages, in modern times) has been influenced by philosophic idealism; and Realistic Art inclusive of the Impressionism of today by the "'realistic, "Philosophy, i.e., by Positivism and Empiricism. The great mediaeval poet Dante has the Philosophy of St. Augustine behind him. The greatest of German poets Goethe is inspired b the Philosophy of Spinoza; Schiller and Tennyson by the Philosophy of Kant; while Shakespeare is identified by some with Bacon, the philosopher. The great poets of Islam, Rumi and Hafiiz, Mir and Ghalib etc., have Islamic mysticism, an outcome partly of Greek Philosophy, behind them; Hali is inspired by Sir Syed, one of the greatest philosophic minds of his day; and Iqbal by his own Bergsonian and Nietzschian Philosophy. Turning to a still higher domain of human culture, viz., Religion, we find that in so far as it becomes theology or *Kalam*, it is through and through influenced by Philosophy, e.g., Hindu Philosophy is the philosophizing of the Hindu mind on Hindu scriptures, and takes the place of religion with it. Christianity is in its very foundations influenced by Greek Philosophy (St. John's Gospel, and the Doctrines of St. Paul), by the Philosophy of St. Augustine, of St, Thomas, of Duns Scotus, all philosophers. In Islam there are two Schools of Theology, the Mu'tazilah and Asha'irah. Mu'tazilite

movement was influenced by Greek philosophy. Abu al-Hudhayl and Nazzam are philosophers. Ash'arism is the reaction to Mu'tazilah and naturally all great Ash'arites e.g., Ghazali and Shah Wali Allah are philosophers. And Mysticism or (Sufism) which claims to be the pith of all religion, has always been inspired by philosophy. Plotinus is inspired by Plato, and Plotinus and Plato have inspired Christian and Muslim Mysticism. Indeed the whole of Islamic mysticism is philosophizing on religious experience. Indeed, Gentlemen, the non– Semitic mind is inclined to go further and regards mysticism– the attempt to come in tune with the ultimate Reality, as Philosophy itself. It would claim therefore that all great, Founders of Religions were Philosophers– for they grasped reality and realized the Ultimate End of Life, and therefore instituted religions for the guidance of man e.g. Krishna, Buddha, Tao, Confucius, etc. Hence it is that Plato told Farabi in a dream about mystics that ("They were the real philosophers".)

Gentlemen, you have now seen what Philosophy has done for Mankind and what it does for the Individual– you have seen what are the advantages of Philosophy as an End– in– itself and a as a means to other ends. I believe you will not any more regard it as an idle study and will unhesitatingly take to it. But, Gentlemen, Philosophy is not a matter of choice. Whether you will it or not, you cannot help philosophizing – you cannot help facing the problems of Philosophy. You cannot help reflecting on the nature of the universe and your relation to it. What is it All? What am I? What is my Function Here? Whence I come and where to I go? A rational being cannot help putting these questions. Further, he must have an answer to them. Therefore, every man has a Philosophy is this larger sense of the word. The only difference is how you will have the answers: (1) by hearsay? As the general run of man seems to do, or (2) by self-thought? as an educated man will have it. If by self– thought, then will you have it (a) by random, spasmodic and crude thinking? or (b) by careful, systematic and clear thinking? The ordinary man of education takes the first course; the student of Philosophy the second.

The former has only the opinion, the latter the knowledge—knowledge as far as man can have it. You can, Gentlemen, make your own choice, now which course to follow about these gigantic problems of man with which Philosophy deals. The problems are unavoidable. That is why in Germany

they are making Philosophy compulsory in schools; in Germany School Final is equivalent to our B. A. ordinary. For no education is complete without this knowledge, and therefore, no educated man must be left without it. The Germans always had Philosophy as a compulsory subject in Universities; German Universities correspond to our research classes. It is why they are at the head of all nations in all disciplines and all sciences– they are at the head simply because a German scholar as a man of philosophical training has a broader outlook and go deeper into the subject and consider it more comprehensively than others.

We have so far considered philosophy as a branch of study in itself. Its advantages are, we have found, great. Let us now compare it with other branches of study briefly.

Physical sciences and the economics are the two characteristically modern branches of knowledge. Both are highly conducive to civilization, i.e. to the physical and material comfort of man.

Who can, at this time of the day, deny the astounding utility of physical sciences– of the conquest of nature and the consequent use of its powers for the ease and comfort of man, which they have brought about? Because of the development of physical sciences the modem age has become the age of Industry. Economics consequently goes with it, for it is the science of wealth which is the condition as well as the result of industry; it is, as the Germans call it, the science of goods that are wealth. And wealth is the only means which brings us comfort and ease.

Indeed, when you think of the usefulness of a branch of knowledge, you have mainly the physical sciences in mind. They open up a number of professions for you e.g. medicine, engineering and mechanics of so many kinds; while economics is helpful in banking and trade. It is here that we Orientals are backward, especially we Muslims and it is mainly because of physical sciences and economics that Europe is ruling the world. And that is why our illustrious vice chancellor has so emphatically directed his attention to the development of the study of physical science in our university, and that is why the hearts of us all are with him in his efforts. But mark, a need may be a pressing need of the time being; that does not make it the greatest

or the highest need of man.

But the forces of physical nature as well as wealth are after all valuable only as means to the comfort of man. Gentlemen, they are means – they are not in themselves his end. And they are means to his comfort– and clearly comfort is not his highest end. And, gentlemen, they are means which do not really seem to achieve this end i.e. comfort or happiness! The modern age is the unhappiest of ages. The application of science to practical life has multiplied the material needs of man– needs which never know satisfaction, needs which leave no time for him for his spiritual development. The world was happier when it had fewer needs; it had more time to attend to its soul. That is why it produced greater souls– philosophers, reformers, poets, artists than the modern industrialized world has done. We had more culture, more development of higher faculties then; we have more civilization, i.e. more means of material comfort today which also not even increase our happiness. In contrast to these branches of knowledge philosophy tells you not these means, but the End of which you ought to realize in yourself; and it tells you not a low end, viz, Comfort, but the highest end, the realization of which brings you peace and internal happiness, which is the essence of comfort also thus from the standpoint of higher utility for man, there is really no comparison between philosophy on the one side, and physical science and economics on the other. Further, physical science studies nature and not man; while economics considers man only on a lower level, viz., as to his material needs and material aspirations. Physical science and economics do not give you a proper understanding of man. Philosophy gives it. A student of philosophy is therefore more likely to have success with his fellow human beings, than a student of physical science or economics. Gentlemen, even where, on the face of it, physical sciences seem to be of paramount importance in human concerns, e.g., in modern warfare, it has been found in great war that the students of faculty of arts– of which philosophy is such a prominent member– have proved more successful than the students of the faculty of science. The reason is clear. War is in the first instance a human concern. The object with which you have to deal in it are men and material; and the material is to be used by men. On success with men will therefore your success primarily depends. So also the disastrous after-effect of the great war, viz., the huge financial and economical crisis of the world today, will not be solved by calculating financiers and money– grabbing merchants

who are following the exact law of economics, but by strokes of statesmanship i.e., by men who understand human nature and can consequently give it a turning in the right direction. They have begun their work.

Excluding economics, the two main branches of study that need to be considered in the faculty of arts, are history and language and literature– as the Arabs called them *(tarikh wa al-adab)*.

History is certainly the study of man in his empirical existence and hence it tends to increase your understanding of your fellowmen. It is therefore, greatly conducive to success in life.

Therein history is akin to psychology. I won't say, as is commonly said, that history is not a science, that it cannot be a science– that it is not a scientific study, as it does ascertain general laws of human nature and its development. The eminent new Kantian philosophers, Wideband and Racket have put the point to rest. Philosophy in them has gone to fundamentals– to the fundamental nature of history and brought out its distinctive feature over against natural sciences and justified it. *Naturwissenschaft* (psychology included) gives laws because it deals with the phenomena in their individuality, in their full concreteness, i.e., as unrepeatable and unique. Hence the function of history is to describe individual phenomena and to determine their individual causes. And this it has been doing since the great Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun gave the lead and changed mere chronicle to history proper.

Gentlemen, I would only point out that history, though it is study of man, is not the study of man in his fundamental nature; and therefore the understanding of man it brings, is essentially defective so at least in higher departments of practical life i.e. statecraft, legislature, justice, art, theology, the utility of history is less than philosophy; while its utility with reference to the highest end of man is hardly any. That is also why when a historian aspires to profoundness he invariably becomes a philosopher– he passes over from history to philosophy of history. The cases of Lord Bryce and Montesquieu the author of "spirit of laws" are evident. The other day, our distinguished pro–vice chancellor, though basing all his contentions on history, was, in his thoughtful address becoming so philosophic.

The study of language is the study of modes of expression. It certainly helps you in expressing yourself to others well, which power easily passes for brilliance and becomes a source of admiration and advantage. Literature, moreover, enlarges and deepens your understanding of man and thereby may become a means of success in life. All this is true in general. But clearly the understanding of human nature which language and literature bring is not the clearness of insight into its fundamental constitution and empirical, completeness, metaphysics and psychology afford. The understanding of human nature which literature brings consists in the accessional peeps of the poet into the realm of truth which, comes before the eye of his mind in the guise, rather the disguise, of imagination and figurative (symbolic) thought.

From 'the standpoint of material advantage which the study of language and literature brings, clearly neither Arabic nor Persian nor Sanskrit, nor even Urdu, is of much importance today. English, indeed, is of the greatest importance – of use in India for earning a livelihood. But that is merely, a historical accident. It is not the nature of English. Only because it happens to be, for the time being, the language of ruling race, it is useful to learn English and to attain to efficiency in it. It is for this reason that we have English as the medium of instruction in our schools and universities but because English is the medium of instruction therefore, the study of philosophy today includes the study of English. The comparison between English and philosophy therefore restricts itself only to postgraduate study where only one subject can be taken. And there the advantages of special study of English do not seem to be so venomous. Indeed the higher study is of no special help in any of the lucrative professions– i.e. in statecraft and administration, in law and justice, in theology, medicine and engineering. Even in the teaching profession, an Indian who takes the M.A. or doctors degree in English is not, on the whole, in a better position that one who takes the same degree in philosophy or history or economics.

Thus gentlemen, you see that philosophy is not so very useless a subject as those ignorant of are so very prone to give it out to be. Indeed, as I have brought out in detail, its cultural value is greater than that of any other single subject I feel tempted to say, it is greater than all other subjects combined. And in utilitarian value too is considerable and compares favourably with that of other subjects as you might have realized by this time.

And, gentlemen, philosophy is a subject for which the Muslims in particular have shown a great predilection. In it they brought light to the then benighted world and thereby prepared the ground for renaissance and for modern philosophy and science– to, which we owe the existence of modern Europe. They were teachers of Europe for centuries and Europe still remembers though grudgingly, the debt it owes to them. Again it was philosophy which the Muslims of India in particular specially cultivated. The late savant, professor Horoviz was of the opinion that no nation in the world has studied philosophy more than the Muslims of India. Why then should we lag behind our ancestors? The Muslims as a nation are specially gifted for the subject. They possess exactly the qualities of mind which made Greeks so fit for it– qualities which today are making Germans and others so fit for it– I mean the qualities of careful observation and active logical thought. That is why Muslims are called, like Europeans, a practical people. And, gentlemen, philosophy is not passive thought or day dreaming. It is active, consistent and rigorous thinking.

Gentlemen, gifted with adequate powers of mind, blessed with such a glorious tradition in philosophy, why should you lag behind other nations less gifted for the subject, and lag behind your noble ancestors? Was the ancient philosophy more valuable than the modern? I assure you, on the authority of personal knowledge, that that is not the case. Indeed the modern philosophy is immensely more valuable than the ancient. I know this, come and study with me, and you will realize for yourself.

Gentlemen of the Philosophical Society, you have come, I welcome you heartily. I will do, with the help of my learned colleagues, all we can to initiate you in this great subject. Do you realize the duties you have thereby taken upon yourself? Firstly you, ought to draw as much advantage from the subject with my colleagues and myself as you possibly can. This society which I have the honour of addressing tonight and to which you belong, gives you an appropriate field for the development of the power of thinking for yourself, thinking for yourself which makes essence of philosophy. Take part in it, take a genuine and serious part in the debates that may be held and in the papers that will be read. Try to make your society a success, and that will be taken to your success in co– operative life. In doing so you will also have the advantage to my mind, a very great advantage– of coming in closer

contact with riper philosophical minds, especially with your teachers in philosophy.

Secondly, you ought to try, by example and by percept, to revive the philosophical spirit among the Muslim students. Try to dispel those confusions about philosophy which are beclouding the soul of Muslims of India today and which are keeping them behind other people in the race for philosophic culture– the race in which are for long they used to be ahead of all others. – And remember, the Quranic verse:– "One to whom *(hikmah)* (philosophy) has been given, verily, to him great good has been given."

# THEORETICAL GNOSIS AND DOCTRINAL SUFISM AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE TODAY

**Seyyed Hossein Nasr**

## INTRODUCTION

There is a body of knowledge in the Islamic tradition which, while highly intellectual in the original sense of this term, is neither theology (*kalām*) nor philosophy (*falsafah*) while dealing with many subjects of their concern although from another perspective. This body of knowledge is called doctrinal Sufism, *al-tasawwuf al-'ilmī* in Arabic, to be contrasted to practical Sufism, *al-tasawwuf al-'amalī*, or theoretical (and sometimes speculative) gnosis (this term being understood in its original and not sectarian sense), especially in the Persian-speaking world, where it is referred to as *'irfān-i nazarī*. The seekers and masters of this body of knowledge have always considered it to be the Supreme Science, *al-'ilm al-a'lā*, and it corresponds in the Islamic context to what we have called elsewhere *scientia sacra*.[23] This corpus of knowledge is implicit in the Qur'an, *Hadīth*, and the writings of early Sufis. It becomes somewhat more explicit from the 4th/10th century onward in works of such masters as Hakīm Tirmidhī, Abū Hāmid Muhammad and Ahmad Ghazzālī, and 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī and receives its full elaboration in the 7th/13th century in the hands of Ibn 'Arabī, not all of whose writings are, however, concerned with this Supreme Science. This corpus is distinct from other genres of Sufi writing such as manuals for the practice of Sufism, works on spiritual virtues, Sufi hagiographies, Sufi poetry, etc. but during the past seven centuries this body of knowledge has exercised great influence on most other aspects of Sufism and also on later Islamic philosophy and even *kalām*.

Despite its immense influence in many parts of the Islamic world during the last centuries, doctrinal Sufism or theoretical gnosis has also had its

[23] We use this Latin term to distinguish it from "sacred science" which possesses a more general meaning and includes also traditional cosmological sciences.

opponents since its inception, including certain scholars of the Qur'an and *Hadīth*, some of the more exoterist jurists, many of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), some of the more rationalistic philosophers and even some Sufis associated with Sufi centers (*khānqāh* or *zāwiyah*) and established orders. The latter have opposed the theoretical exposition of truths which they believe should be kept hidden and which they consider to be associated closely with spiritual practice and inward unveiling (*kashf*).[24] Still, this body of knowledge has been preserved and has continued to flourish over all these centuries, exercising immense influence in many domains of Islamic thought while remaining for many the crown of all knowledge.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRADITION OF THEORETICAL GNOSIS THE EARLIEST FOUNDATION

Before turning to theoretical gnosis itself and its significance today, it is necessary to provide a brief history over the ages in the Islamic tradition of the expressions of this Supreme Science which itself stands beyond history and temporal development, being at the heart of the *philosophia perennis* as understood by traditional authorities,[25] and not being bound in its essence by the local coloring of various epochs and places. Of course, the wisdom with which this Supreme Science deals has always been and will always be, but it has received distinct formulations in the framework of various traditions at whose heart is to be found this wisdom concerning the nature of reality. In the Islamic tradition this knowledge was handed down in a principal manner by the Prophet to a number of his companions, chief among them 'Alī, and in later generations to the Sufi masters and of course the Shi'ite Imams, many of whom were in fact also poles of Sufism of their day.[26] Besides being

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[24] As far as opposition to Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines are concerned, see for example, Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition– The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[25] On the traditional understanding of the perennial philosophy see Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 68ff. See also Frithjof Schuon, "Tracing the Notion of Philosophy," in his *Sufism—Veil and Quintessence*, trans. William Stoddart (Bloomington (IN): World Wisdom Books, 1981), Chap. 5, pp. 115-128.

[26] The relation between Shi'ite gnosis and Sufism is a fascinating and at the same time crucially important subject with which we cannot deal here. A number of Western scholars, chief among them Henry Corbin, have treated this issue metaphysically and historically. See for example his *En Islam iranien*, Vol. III, *Les Fidèles d'amour—Shi'ism et soufisme* (Paris:

transmitted orally, this knowledge was often expressed in the form of allusions, elliptical expressions, symbolic poems and the like.

Gradually from the 4th/10th century onward some Sufis such as Hakīm Abū ʻAbd Allāh Tirmidhī (d. circa 320/938) began to write more systematically on certain aspects of Sufi doctrine. For example, Tirmidhī wrote on the central Sufi doctrine of *walāyah*/*wilāyah*, that is, initiatic and spiritual power as well as sanctity. During the century after him, Abū Hāmid Muhammad Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) wrote on divine knowledge itself in both the *Ihyā'* and such shorter treatises as *al-Risālat al-ladunīyyah* (only attributed to him according to some scholars) as well as writing an esoteric commentary on the Light Verse of the Qur'an in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*. His brother Ahmad (d. 520/1126) expounded gnosis and metaphysics in the language of love in his *Sawānih*. Shortly afterwards, ʻAyn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) dealt with the subject of divine knowledge and a philosophical exposition of certain Sufi teachings in his *Maktūbāt* and *Tamhīdāt* while in his *Zubdah* he criticized the existing rationalistic currents in the thought of some philosophers and pointed to another way of knowing which is none other than gnosis. These figures in turn prepared the ground for Ibn ʻArabī, although he is a colossal and providential figure whose writings cannot be reduced to simply historical influences of his predecessors.[27]

Many have quite rightly considered Ibn ʻArabī as the father of theoretical gnosis or doctrinal Sufism.[28] His writings as already mentioned are not,

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Gallimard, 1972), especially pp. 149ff. See also Mohammad Ali Amir Moʻezzi and David Streight, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʻism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994); and S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1999), pp. 104-120.

[27] Unfortunately there is no complete or even nearly complete history of either Sufism itself doctrinal Sufism. Even the details of the School of Ibn ʻArabī are far from being known. At the present stage of scholarship we know but a few major peaks of this majestic range and much remains to be discussed and brought to light concerning this subject in the arena of international scholarship.

[28] As an example of the relation between Ibn ʻArabī and earlier gnostics one can compare his treatment of *walāyah*/*wilāyah* discussed by many scholars such as Michel Chodkiewicz and William Chittick (see for example works cited below) and the writings of Hakīm Tirmidhī. For the views of the latter see Tirmidhī, *Kitāb khatm al-awliyā'*, ed. Osman Yahya (Beirut:

however, concerned only with pure metaphysics and gnosis. They also deal extensively with Qur'anic and *Hadīth* commentary, the meaning of religious rites, various traditional sciences including the science of the symbolic significance of letters of the Arabic alphabet, ethics, law and many other matters, including poetry, all of which bear, nevertheless, an esoteric and gnostic colour. As far as the subject of this essay is concerned, it will be confined to works devoted completely to theoretical gnosis and metaphysics, works which deal directly with the Supreme Science of the Real. Otherwise, every work of Ibn 'Arabī and his School is related in one way or another to gnosis or *ma'rifah* as are writings of many other Sufis. The seminal work of Ibn 'Arabī on the subject of gnosis and one which is foundational to the whole tradition of theoretical gnosis in Islam is the *Fusūs al-hikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom")[29] along with certain sections of his magnum opus *al-Futūhāt al-*

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Imprimerie Catholique, 1965); also Bernd Radtke, *Drei Schriften des Theosophen Tirmid* (Beirut: In Kommissein bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1992).

There is now a substantial body of works in European languages on Ibn 'Arabī as well as translations of many of his writings especially in French. On Ibn 'Arabī's life and works see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge (UK): Islamic Texts Society, 1993); and Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999). For an introduction to his teachings see William Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabī: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). For his works see Osman Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964). For Ibn 'Arabī's gnostic teachings see W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989); his *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998; Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn 'Arabī, the Book and the Law*, trans. David Streight, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); *idem*. *Seal of the Saints—Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), Part I, pp. 7-283.

[29] See *The Wisdom of the Prophets* of Ibn 'Arabī, trans. from the Arabic to French with notes by Titus Burchkhardt, trans. from French to English by Angela Culme-Seymour (Aldsworth (UK): Beshara Publications, 1975). This work has penetrating comments on the metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī by Burckhardt. The latest and the most successful translation of the *Fusūs* in English is by Caner Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (*Fusūs al-hikam*) (Chicago: Kazi Publications, Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004). See also Charles-André Gilis, *Le Livre des chatons des sagesse* (Beirut: Al-Bouraq Éditions, 1997).

*makkiyyah*, ("The Meccan Illuminations),[30] and a few of his shorter treatises including *Naqsh al-fusūs* which is Ibn 'Arabī's own commentary upon the *Fusūs*.

In any case the *Fusūs* was taken by later commentators as the central text of the tradition of theoretical gnosis or doctrinal Sufism. Many of the major later works of this tradition are in fact commentaries upon this inspired text. The history of these commentaries, many of which are "original" works themselves, stretching from the 7th/13th century to this day, is itself of great import for the understanding of this tradition and also reveals the widespread nature of the influence of this tradition from Morocco to the Malay world and China. Unfortunately, despite so much scholarship carried out in this field during the past few decades, there is still no thorough history of commentaries upon the *Fusūs* any more than there is a detailed history of the tradition of theoretical gnosis and/or Sufi metaphysics itself.

Ibn 'Arabī died in Damascus in 638/1240 and it was from there that his teachings were disseminated. Some of his immediate students, who were particularly drawn to pure metaphysics and gnosis, with a number also having had training in Islamic philosophy, began to interpret the master's teachings and especially his *Fusūs* in a more systematic and philosophical fashion thereby laying the ground for the systematic formulation of that Supreme Science of the Real with which the tradition of theoretical gnosis is concerned. The first commentator upon the *Fusūs* was Ibn 'Arabī's immediate student and Qūnawī's close companion, 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (690/1291) who commented upon the whole text but in summary fashion.[31]

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[30] See Ibn 'Arabī, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque—The Meccan Illuminations*, trans. under the direction of Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Sindbad, 1988).

[31] On the history of the School of Ibn 'Arabī and theoretical gnosis see W. Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 510-523; S. H. Nasr, "Seventh Century Sufism and the School of Ibn 'Arabī," in his *Sufi Essays* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1999), pp. 97-103; and Annemarie Schimmel, "Theosophical Sufism" in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 259-286. There are also important references to this School in several introductions of Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī to various philosophical and Sufi works edited by himself such as his edition of *Sharh fusūs al-hikam* of Qaysarī (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1375 [A.H. solar]). See also A. Knysh, *op. cit.*

But the most influential propagator of the master's teachings in the domain of gnosis and metaphysics and the person who gave the systematic exposition that characterizes later expressions of theoretical gnosis is Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274).[32] This most important student of Ibn 'Arabī did not write a commentary on the text of the *Fusūs*, but he did write a work entitled *al-Fukūk* which explains the titles of the chapters of the *Fusūs* and was considered by many a later Sufi and gnostic as a key for the understanding of the mysteries of Ibn 'Arabī's text.[33] Qūnawī is also the author of a number of other works of a gnostic (*'irfānī*) nature, chief among them the *Miftāh al-ghayb*, a monumental work of theoretical gnosis which, along with its commentary by Shams al-Dīn Fanārī known as *Misbāh al-uns*, became one of the premier texts for the teaching of theoretical gnosis especially in Turkey and Persia.[34]

Qūnawī trained a number of students who themselves became major figures in the tradition of theoretical gnosis. But before turning to them it is necessary to mention a poet who was a contemporary of Ibn 'Arabī and who was to play an exceptional role in the later history of this tradition. This poet is 'Umar ibn al-Fārid (d. 632/1235), perhaps the greatest Sufi poet of the Arabic language, whose *al-Tā'iyyah* is considered as a complete exposition of the doctrines of *'irfān* expressed in sublime poetry, and the subject of several commentaries which are themselves seminal texts of *'irfān*.[35] There were also

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[32] See W. Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al- Qaysarī," *Muslim World*, vol. 72, 1982, pp. 107-128; and Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament of Ibn 'Arabī's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author," *Sophia perennis*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 43-58. See also Muhammad Khwājawī, *Daw Sadr al-Dīn* (Tehran, Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1378 [A.H. solar]), pp. 17-114, containing one of the best summaries of the life, works and thought of Qūnawī.

[33] See *Kitab al-fukuk*, ed. by M. Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1371 [A.H. solar]).

[34] See the edition of M. Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1374 [A.H. solar]). This large volume includes, besides the texts of Qūnawī and Fanārī, glosses by later members of the school of theoretical gnosis in Persia from Āqā Muhammad Ridā Qumsha'ī, Mīrzā Hāshim Ashkiwarī, and Sayyid Muhammad Qummī to Ayatollah Rūh Allāh Khumaynī (Khomeini) and Hassan-zādah Āmulī. There are also numerous commentaries on this text by Turkish authors.

[35] This work was studied and translated by Arthur J. Arberry along with other poems of Ibn al-Fārid in *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al- Farid* (London: E. Walker, 1952 and Dublin: E. Walker,

many important Persian poets such as Fakhr al-Dīn ʻIrāqī (d. 688/1289), Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238), Shams al-Dīn Maghribī (d. 809/1406-07), Mahmūd Shabistarī (d. circa 718/1318), and ʻAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), not to speak of Turkish poets and those of the Subcontinent who expressed Ibn ʻArabian teachings in the medium of poetry but their poems do not belong strictly to doctrinal texts of the tradition of theoretical gnosis with which we are concerned here although some of the commentaries on their poetry do, such as *Sharh-i gulshan-i rāz* of Shams al-Dīn Lāhījī (d. before 900/1494) as do some poetic texts such as *Ashi"at al-lamaʻāt* and *Lawā'ih* of Jāmī.

Returning to Qūnawī's students, as far as the subject of this essay is concerned the most notable and influential for the later tradition was first of all Saʻīd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 695/1296) who collected the commentaries of his master in Persian on the *Tā'iyyah* and on their basis composed a major work in both Persian and Arabic (which contains certain additions) with the title *Mashāriq al-darārī* and *Muntaha'l-madārik*, respectively.[36] Secondly, one must mention Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. 700/1300), the author of the first extensive commentary upon the *Fusūs*[37] which also influenced the very popular commentary of his student ʻAbd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 730/1330).[38] Both of these men also wrote other notable works on theoretical gnosis such as the Persian treatise *Nafhat al-rūh wa tuhfat al-futūh* of Jandī and the Arabic *Ta'wīl al-qur'ān* of Kāshānī which has been also mistakenly attributed to Ibn ʻArabī. This work is illustrative of a whole genre of writings which explain the principles of gnosis and metaphysics on the basis of commentary upon the inner levels of meaning of the Qur'an. During this early period, when the school of theoretical gnosis was taking shape, there were other figures of importance associated with the circle of Ibn ʻArabī and Qūnawī although not the students of the latter such as Saʻd al-Dīn Hamūyah (d. 649/1252) and his

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1956). See also Emil Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[36] See S. J. Āshtiyānī's edition with commentary and introduction upon *Mashāriq al-darārī* (Mashhad: Chāpkhāna-yi Dānishgāh-i Firdawsī, 1398 [A.H. solar]).

[37] See his *Sharh fusūs al-hikam* (Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb, 2002).

[38] See Kashānī, *Sharh fusūs al-hikam*, (Cairo: Mustafā al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1966); also his *Majmūʻat al-rasā'il wa'l-musannafāt*, ed. Majīd Hādī-zādah (Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2000); and his *Traité sur la prédestination et le libre arbitre*, trans. Omar Guyard (Beirut: Al-Bouraq, 2005).

student ʻAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. before 700/1300) who wrote several popular works in Persian based on the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *al-insān al-kāmil*. It is only possible, however, in this short historical review to simply point to the existence of such figures.

## THE ARAB WORLD

From this early foundation located in Syria and Anatolia the teachings of the School of Ibn ʻArabī and theoretical gnosis spread to different regions of the Islamic world. In summary fashion we shall try to deal with some of the most important figures in each region. Let us commence with the Arab world. In the Maghrib a very strong Sufi tradition has been preserved over the centuries but Maghribī Sufism, although devoted to gnosis in its purest form as we see in such figures as Abū Madyan, Ibn Mashīsh and Abū'l-Hasan al-Shādhilī, was not given to long theoretical expositions of gnosis as we see in the East.[39] Most works from this region were concerned with the practice of the Sufi path and explanation of practical Sufi teachings. One had to wait for the 12th/18th century to find in the works of Ahmad ibn ʻAjībah (d. 1224/1809-10) treatises which belong to the genre of theoretical gnosis. But the oral tradition based on Ibn ʻArabian teachings was kept alive as we see in the personal instructions and also written works of such celebrated 14th/20th century Sufi masters of the Maghrib as Shaykh al-ʻAlawī (d. 1353/1934) and Shaykh Muhammad al-Tādilī (d. 1371/1952).[40] Maghribī works on gnosis tended, however, to be usually less systematic and philosophical in their exposition of gnosis than those of the East.

A supreme example of Ibn ʻArabian teachings emanating from the Maghrib is to be found in the writings of the celebrated Algerian *amīr* and Sufi master ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1300/1883), who taught the works of Ibn ʻArabī when in exile in Damascus. Amīr ʻAbd al-Qādir also composed a

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[39] On Maghribī Sufism see Vincent Cornell, *The Realm of the Saint—Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998).

[40] When Titus Burckhardt was in Morocco in the 1930's, he experienced directly the presence of these teachings. We shall turn to this matter later in this essay.

number of independent works on gnosis such as the *Kitāb al-mawāqif*.[41] To this day the text of the *Fusūs* and the *Futūhāt* are taught in certain Sufi enters of the Maghrib especially those associated with the Shādhiliyyah Order which has continued to produce over the centuries its own distinct genre of Sufi literature going back to the prayers of Abū'l-Hasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) and especially the treatises of the third pole of the Order, Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d.709/1309). In later centuries these two currents, the first issuing from early Shādhilism and the second from Ibn 'Arabian gnosis were to meet in many notable figures of Sufism from that as well as other regions.

There was greater interest in theoretical gnosis in the eastern part of the Arab world as far as the production of written texts is concerned. Strangely enough, however, Egypt, which has always been a major center of Sufism, is an exception. In that ancient land there has always been more interest in practical Sufism and Sufi ethics than in speculative thought and doctrinal Sufism although Akbarian teachings had spread to Mamluk Egypt in the 7th/13th century. There were also some popularizers of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings in Egypt, perhaps chief among them 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), whose well known works present a more popular version of the *Futūhāt* and *Fusūs*.[42] He tried also to link Shādhilī teachings with those of Ibn 'Arabī. There are, however, few notable commentaries on classical texts of gnosis in Egypt in comparison with those one finds in many other lands. Theoretical gnosis was, nevertheless, taught and studied by many Egyptian figures. In this context it is interesting to note that even the modernist reformer Muhammad 'Abduh turned to the study of Ibn 'Arabī later in life. Opposition to these writings has remained, however, strong to this day in many circles in that land as one sees in the demonstrations in front of the Egyptian Parliament some years ago on the occasion of the publication of the *Futūhāt* by Osman Yahya who had edited the text critically.

In the Yemen there was great interest in Ibn 'Arabian gnosis in the School of Zabīd especially under the Rasūlids up to the 9th/15th century. Ismā'īl al-

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[41] See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Spiritual Writings of Amir 'Abd al-Kader*, trans. by a team under James Chrestensen and Tom Manning (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); and *Le Livre des haltes*, edited and trans. by Michel Lagande (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[42] See Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982).

Jabartī (d. 806/1403), Ahmad ibn al-Raddād (d. 821/1417-18) and ʻAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) were particularly significant figures of this School in the Yemen.[43] Al-Jīlī, who was originally Persian but resided in the Yemen, is particularly important because of his magnum opus, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, a primary work of gnosis that is used as a text for the instruction of theoretical gnosis from Morocco to India to this day. It is a more systematic exposition of the teaching of Ibn ʻArabī.[44]

In the eastern Arab world it was especially in greater Palestine and Syria that one sees continuous interest in theoretical gnosis and the writing of important commentaries on Ibn ʻArabī such as that of ʻAbd al-Ghanyī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731) on the *Fusūs*.[45] Also, the defense by Ibrāhīm ibn Hasan al-Kurānī (d. 1101/1690), a Kurdish scholar who resided in Mecca, of the gnosis of Ibn ʻArabī had much influence in Syria and adjoining areas. Although, as in Egypt and elsewhere, many jurists and theologians in Syria going back to Ibn Taymiyyah and students of Saʻd al-Dīn al-Taftāzanī, opposed the doctrines of Ibn ʻArabian gnosis, this School remained very much alive and continues to survive to this day in that region. One of the most remarkable contemporary Sufis who died in Beirut just a few years ago, the woman saint, Sayyidah Fātimah al-Yashrutiyyah, gave the title *al-Rihlah ila'l-Haqq* to her major work on Sufism on the basis of a dream of Ibn ʻArabī.[46]

## OTTOMAN TURKEY

Turning to the Turkish part of the Ottoman world, we find a continuous and strong tradition in the study of theoretical gnosis going back to al-Qūnawī himself and his circle in Konya. Foremost among these figures after the

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[43] See A. Knysh, *op.cit.*, pp. 225ff.

[44] See al-Jīlī, *Universal Man*, extracts translated with commentary by Titus Burckhardt, English. English translation from the French by Angela Culme-Seymour (Sherborne, Glos: Beshara Press, 1983); and Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1978), Chapter II, pp. 77ff.

[45] See Nābulusī, *Sharh dīwān ibn al-Fārid* (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 196?); and Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: ʻAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, 1641-1731* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

[46] See Leslie Cadavid (ed. and trans.), *Two Who Attained* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005).

founding of this School are Dā'ūd Qaysarī (d. 751/1350) and Shams al-Dīn Fanārī (d. 834/1431). A student of Kāshānī, Qaysarī wrote a number of works on gnosis, including his commentary on the *Tā'iyyah* of Ibn al-Fārid, but chief among them is his commentary upon the *Fusūs*, which is one of the most thorough and remains popular to this day.[47] He also wrote an introduction to this work called *al-Muqaddimah* which summarizes the whole cycle of gnostic doctrines in a masterly fashion and has been itself the subject of many commentaries including important glosses by Ayatollah Khomeini to which we shall turn shortly and a magisterial one by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (d. 1426/2005).[48] As for Fanārī, besides being a chief *qādī* in the Ottoman Empire and a major authority on Islamic Law, he was the author of what many Turkish and Persian students of gnosis consider as the most advanced text of *'irfān*, namely the *Misbāh al-uns*.[49] It is strange that today in Bursa where he is buried, as elsewhere in Turkey, he is known primarily as a jurist and in Persia as a gnostic. In addition to these two major figures, one can mention Bālī Effendi (d. 960/1553), well known commentator of Ibn 'Arabī, and many other Sufis who left behind notable works on theoretical gnosis up the 14th/20th century. In fact the influence of this School in the Ottoman world was very extensive including in such areas as Bosnia and is to be found in many different types of Turkish thinkers into the contemporary period. Among the most famous among them one can name Ahmed Avni Konuk (d. 1357/1938) who wrote a four volume commentary on the *Fusūs*; his contemporary Ferid Ram (d. 1363/1944), who was at the same time a gnostic, philosopher and political figure and the author of several works on Ibn

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[47] In light of our discussion of the significance of theoretical gnosis it is important to note that this master of *'irfān* was the first rector of a university, to use a contemporary term, in the Ottoman Empire. On Qaysarī see the introduction of S. J. Āshtiyānī to *Rasā'il-i Qaysarī* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1357 [A.H. solar]); Mehmet Bayraktar (ed.), *Dāwūd Qaysarī—Rasā'il* (Kayseri: Metroplitan Municipality, 1997); and also Emil Homerin, *op. cit*.

Many glosses have been written to this day on Qaysarī's commentary including that of Ayatollah Khomeini. See Āyat Allāh al-'Uzmā al-Imām al-Khumaynī, *Ta'līqāt 'alā sharh fusūs al-hikam wa misbāh al-uns* (Qom: Daftar-i Tablīghāt-i Islāmī. 1410 [A.H. lunar]). There were also numerous Ottoman glosses and commentaries on Qaysarī.

[48] See his *Commentary upon the Introduction of Qaysarī to the Fusūs al-Hikam of Ibn Arabī*, with introductions in French and English by Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Mashhad: Meshed University Press, 1966).

[49] See ft. nt. 12.

'Arabian gnosis; and Ismail Fenni Ertugrul (d. 1359/1940), a philosopher who used the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī to refute the errors of modern Western philosophy, especially materialism. His writings contributed greatly to the revival of interest in metaphysics in 14th/20th century Turkey.[50]

## MUSLIM INDIA

We have been moving eastward in this brief historical survey and logically we should now turn to Persia and adjacent areas including Shi'ite Iraq, which has been closely associated with Persia intellectually since the Safavid period and Afghanistan which also belongs to the same intellectual world as Persia. Because, however, of the central role played in Persia in the cultivation of *'irfān-i nazarī* during the past few centuries, we shall turn to it at the end of this survey and first direct our attention farther east to India, Southeast Asia and China.

Although a thorough study has never been made of all the important figures associated with the School of Ibn 'Arabī and theoretical gnosis in the Indian Subcontinent, the research that has been carried out so far reveals a very widespread influence of this School in that area. Already in the 8th/14th century Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī, the Persian Sufi who migrated to Kashmir (d. 786/1385), helped to spread Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in India. He not only wrote a Persian commentary on the *Fusūs*, but also composed a number of independent treatises on *'irfān*.[51] A century later 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Ahmad Mahā'imī (d. 835/1432) not only commented upon the *Fusūs* and Qūnāwī's *Nusūs*, but also wrote several independent expositions of gnosis of a more philosophical nature in Arabic. These works are related in many ways in approach to later works on gnosis written in Persia. He also wrote an Arabic commentary upon Shams al-Dīn Maghribī's *Jām-i jahānnamāy* which some believe received much of its inspiration from the *Mashāriq al-darārī* of

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[50] See Ibrahim Kalin's entries to these figures in Oliver Leaman (ed.), *Dictionary of Islamic Philosophy* (forthcoming).

[51] See W. Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," in S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 520.
On the history of this School in India in general see W. Chittick, "Notes on Ibn 'Arabī's Influence in the Subcontinent," in *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXII, no. 3-4, July-October, 1992, pp. 218-241; and Sayyid 'Alī 'Abbās Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (2 vols.) (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), *in passim*.

Farghānī. It is interesting to note that Maghribī's poetry, which like that of many other poets such as Kirmānī, 'Irāqī, Shabistarī, Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī (d. 834/1431) and Jāmī were based on basic gnostic theses such as *wahdat al-wujūd*, was especially appreciated by those followers of the School of Ibn 'Arabī who were acquainted with the Persian language as was the poetry of Ibn al-Fārid among Arab, Persian, Turkish and Indian followers of that School.

Notable exponents of theoretical gnosis in India are numerous and even the better known ones cannot be mentioned here.[52] But it is necessary to mention one figure who is probably the most profound master of this School in the Subcontinent. He is Muhibb Allāh Ilāhābādī (also known as Allāhābādī) (d. 1058/1648).[53] Author of an Arabic and even longer Persian commentary on the *Fusūs* and also an authoritative commentary on the *Futūhāt*, Ilāhābādī also wrote independent treatises on *'irfān*. His writings emphasize intellection and sapience rather than just spiritual states which many Sufis in India as elsewhere claimed as the sole source of divine knowledge. The significance of the works of Muhibb Allāh Ilāhābādī in the tradition of theoretical gnosis under consideration in this essay and his later influence in India are immense. He marks one of the major peaks of the School not only in India, but in the whole of the Islamic world.

The central thesis of Ibn 'Arabian gnosis, that is, *wahdat al-wujūd* had a life of its own in India. While certain Sufis, such as Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī, opposed its usual interpretations, it was embraced by many Sufis including such great saints as Gīsū Dirāz and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' and many of their disciples. One can hardly imagine the history of Sufism in the Subcontinent without the central role played by *'irfān-i nazarī*. Even notable Indian philosophers and theologians such as Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) of Delhi wrote works highly inspired by this School whose influence continued into the 14th/20th century as we see in some of the works of Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanwī (d. 1362/1943).[54] Moreover,

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[52] Chittick discusses many of these figures in his "Notes on Ibn 'Arabī's Influence…"

[53] See Chittick, "Notes on Ibn 'Arabī's Influence …," pp. 233ff.

[54] See for example, Shah Waliullah of Delhi, *Sufism and the Islamic Tradition*, trans. G. N. Jalbani, ed. D. B. Fry (London: Octagon Press, 1980). This work contains the translation of both the *Lamahāt*, one of Shāh Walī Allāh's main philosophical texts, and the *Sata'āt*. Both

once the philosophical School of Illumination (*ishrāq*) and the Transcendent Theosophy or Philosophy (*al-hikmat al-muta'āliyah*) reached India, there were many interactions between these Schools and the School of *'irfān* as we also see in Persia itself.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

Turning to Southeast Asia and the Malay world, here we encounter a unique phenomenon, namely the role of the School of Ibn 'Arabī, sometimes called *wujūdiyyah*, in the very formation of Malay as an intellectual language suitable for Islamic discourse. Hamzah Fansūrī (d. 1000/1592), the most important figure of this School, was a major Malay poet and played a central role in the development of Malay as an Islamic language while he also had a command of Arabic and Persian. He was, moreover, a master of the doctrines of the School of Ibn 'Arabī.[55] He was followed in his attachment to this School by Shams al-Dīn Sumātrānī (d. 1040/1630). Although this School was opposed by certain other Malay Sufis such as Nūr al-Dīn Rānirī and most Malays paid more attention to the operative rather than the doctrinal aspect of Sufism, the School of theoretical gnosis continued to be studied in certain places and even today there are circles in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia where the teachings of this School are followed and many of the classical texts continue to be studied.[56]

## CHINA

A word must also be said about China. Until the 11th/17th century Chinese Muslims who dealt with intellectual matters did so on the basis of Arabic and Persian texts. It was only in the 11th/17th century that they began to use

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texts, and especially the first, reveal the influence of theoretical gnosis on this major intellectual figure.

On Thanvi see Fuad Nadeem, "A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism," in Joseph Lumbard (ed.), *Islam Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 2004), pp. 79-116.

[55] See Syed Muhaammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970).

[56] See Zailan Moris, "South-east Asia," in Nasr and Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 1134ff.

classical Chinese and to seek to express Islamic metaphysics and philosophy in the language of Neo-Confucianism. Henceforth, there developed a significant body of Islamic thought in Chinese that is being systematically studied only now. It is interesting to note that two of the classical Islamic works to be rendered the earliest into Chinese are firstly the *Lawā'ih* of Jāmī, which is a masterly summary of *'irfān* in Persian, translated by Liu Chih (d. circa 1670) as *Chen-chao-wei* ("Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm"); and secondly the *Ashi"at al-lama'āt* also by Jāmī and again, as already mentioned, dealing with *'irfān*, translated by P'o Na-chih (d. after 1697) as *Chao-yüan pi-chüeh* ("The Mysterious Secret of the Original Display").[57] Also the first Chinese Muslim thinker to expound Islamic teachings in Chinese, that is, Wang Taiyü (d. 1657 or 1658), who wrote his *Real Commentary on the True Teaching* in 1642 to be followed by several other works, was steeped in the same *'irfānī* tradition. The School of theoretical gnosis was therefore destined to play a major role in the encounter on the highest level between the Chinese and the Islamic intellectual traditions during the past few centuries.

## PERSIA

Persia was destined to become one of the main centers, if not the central arena, for the later development of theoretical gnosis. The circle of Qūnawī was already closely connected to the Persian cultural world and many of its members, including Qūnawī himself, wrote in Persian as well as Arabic. Qūnawī's student, Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī is considered one of the greatest poets of the Persian language. Among other early members of the School one can mention Sa'd al-Dīn Hamūyah, his disciple 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, who wrote on gnosis in readily accessible Persian, Awhad al-Dīn Balyānī (d. 686/1288) from Shiraz, whose famous *Risālat al-ahadiyyah* was for a long time attributed to Ibn 'Arabī,[58] and 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī who, as already mentioned, is a major figure of the School of theoretical gnosis and a prominent

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[57] Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-Yü's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 32ff. See also Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[58] See Balyānī, *Épître sur l'Unicité absolue*, trans. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1982).

commentator upon the *Fusūs*. From the 8th/14th century onward in Persia we see on the one hand the continuation of the School of theoretical gnosis through the appearance of prose works in both Arabic and Persian either in the form of commentary upon the *Fusūs* and other seminal texts of this School or as independent treatises. On the other hand we observe the deep influence of this School in Persian Sufi literature, especially poetry. A supreme example is the *Gulshan-i rāz* of Mahmūd Shabistarī, one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi poetry which summarizes the principles of Ibn ʿArabian gnosis in verses of celestial beauty. That is why its commentary by Muhammad Lāhījī in the 9th/15th century is such a major text of theoretical gnosis. Here, however, we are only concerned with the prose and systematic works of theoretical gnosis and not the poetical tradition but the nexus between the two should not be forgotten as we see in the works of ʿIrāqī, Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī, Jāmī and many others.

Another important event that took place in the 8th/14th century and left its deep influence upon the history of the School during the Safavid, Qajar and Pahlavi periods was the integration of Ibn ʿArabian gnosis into Shiʿism which possesses its own gnostic teachings to which scholars refer as *ʿirfān-i shiʿī*. These two outwardly distinct schools are inwardly connected and go back to the original esoteric and gnostic dimension of the Islamic revelation. It was most of all Sayyid Haydar Āmulī (d. 787/1385) who brought about a synthesis of these two branches of the tree of gnosis, although he also did make certain criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī, especially concerning the question of *walāyah/wilāyah*. Many others walked later in his footsteps. Āmulī was at once a major Twelve-Imam Shiʿite theologian and a Sufi devoted to the School of Ibn ʿArabī. His *Jāmiʿ al-asrār* is a pivotal text for the gnosis of Ibn ʿArabī in a Shiʿite context.[59] He was also the author of a major commentary upon the *Fusūs* as well as independent metaphysical treatises. The later development of theoretical gnosis in Persia, as well as the School of Transcendent Theosophy of Mullā Sadrā cannot be fully understood without consideration of Āmulī's works.

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[59] See Henry Corbin and Osman Yahya, *La Philosophie shiʿite* (Paris-Tehran: Andrien-Maisonneuve and Departement d'Iranologie, 1969); and (same authors) *Le Texte des textes* (Paris-Tehran: Andrien-Maisonneuve and Departement d'Iranologie, 1975). This work contains Āmulī's commentary on the *Fusūs*. See also Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, Vol. III, pp. 149ff.

The 8th/14th to the 10th/15th century marks a period of intense activity in the field of theoretical gnosis and the School of Ibn ʿArabī in Persia. Commentaries upon the *Fusūs* continued to appear. The first in Persian was most likely that of Rukn al-Dīn Masʿūd Shīrāzī, known as Bāhā Ruknā (d. 769/1367).[60] But there were many others by such figures as Tāj al-Dīn Khwārazmī (d. circa 838/1435),[61] Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī, Ibn Turkah (d. 830/1437) and Jāmī, who in a sense brings this period to an end. This extensive activity in the domain of gnosis associated specifically with the School of Ibn ʿArabī was in addition to the flowering of the Sufism of the School of Khurasan and Central Asia and profound gnostic teachings, mostly in poetic form, of figures such as ʿAttār and Rūmī on the one hand and the Kubrawiyyah School founded by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā on the other. We can hardly overemphasize the importance of the Khurasānī and Central Asian Schools and their profound metaphysical teachings, but in this essay we shall not deal with them, being only concerned with *ʿirfān-i naẓarī* in its association with the School of Ibn ʿArabī.

Among the gnostic figures of this period, Sā'in al-Dīn ibn Turkah Isfahānī stands out as far as his later influence is concerned. The author of many independent treatises on metaphysics and the traditional sciences, he also wrote a commentary upon the *Fusūs* which became popular.[62] But the work that made him one of the pillars of the school of theoretical gnosis in Persia during later centuries is his *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*.[63] This masterly treatment of the cycle of gnosis became a popular textbook for the teaching of the subject in Persia especially during the Qajar period and has remained so to this day as

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[60] Edited by Rajab ʿAlī Mazlūmī (Tehran: McGill University and Tehran University Press, 1980).

[61] This long work has been studied and edited by Māyil Hirawī as *Sharh fusūs al-hikam* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1368 [A.H. solar]).

[62] Edited by Muhsin Bīdādfar (Qom: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1378 [A. H. solar]).

[63] Edited with introduction and commentary by S. J. Āshtiyānī (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976). On Ibn Turkah see H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. III, pp. 233ff.; and S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy—From Its Origin to Today—Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, forthcoming), Chapter 10.

one sees in the extensive recension of it by the contemporary Persian philosopher and gnostic, ʻAbd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī.[64]

The figure, who was given the title of the "Seal of Persian Poets", that is, ʻAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī from Herat, was also in a sense the seal of this period in the history of theoretical gnosis in Persia. One of the greatest poets of the Persian language, he was also a master of Ibn ʻArabian gnosis and in a sense synthesized within his works the two distinct currents of Islamic spirituality that flowed from Ibn ʻArabī and Rūmī. Jāmī is the author of a number of commentaries upon the works of Ibn ʻArabī such as the famous *Naqd al-nusūs fī sharh naqsh al-fusūs*.[65] He also authored summaries of the teachings of this School in works already mentioned such as the *Lawā'ih* and *Ashi"at al-lama'āt*, both literary masterpieces which are used as texts for the teaching of *'irfān* to this day.[66]

The spread of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism in Persia during the Safavid period transformed the scene as far as the study and teaching of *'irfān* was concerned. During the earlier part of Safavid rule, many Sufi orders flourished in Persia whereas from the 11th/17th century onward opposition grew against Sufism especially among the class of Shi'ite scholars who henceforth chose to speak of *'irfān* rather than *tasawwuf*.[67] Although other types of Sufi and gnostic writings appeared during this period by members of various Sufi orders such as the Dhahabīs and *'irfān-i shī'ī* also flourished in certain circles, few new works on the subject of theoretical gnosis appeared during this period in comparison to the previous era. The main influence of the School of Ibn ʻArabī came to be felt through the writings of Mullā Sadrā (d. 1050/1640/41), who was deeply influenced by Shaykh al-Akbar and

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64 See Āmulī, *Tahrīr tamhīd al-qawā'id* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i al-Zahrā', 1372 [A.H. solar]). This voluminous text is one of the major works on theoretical gnosis to appear in recent times.

65 Edited by W. Chittick (Tehran: The Imperial Academy of Philosophy, 1977). This edition contains a major introduction by Āshtiyānī dealing with some of the most delicate issues of *'irfān*.

66 We were privileged to study the *Ashi"at al-lama'āt* over a several year period with Sayyid Muhammad Kāzim ʻAssār who expounded the major themes of gnosis through this beautifully written text.

67 On Shi'ism in Safavid Persia see, S. H. Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: KPI, 1987), Chapter 4, pp. 59-72.

quoted from him extensively in his *Asfār* and elsewhere.[68] But technically speaking the School of Mullā Sadrā is associated with *hikmat* and not *'irfān*, although Mullā Sadrā was also a gnostic and deeply versed in Ibn 'Arabian teachings. But he integrated elements of this teaching into his *al-hikmat al-muta'āliyah* (Transcendent Theosophy or Philosophy) and did not write separate treatises on pure gnosis in the manner of an Ibn 'Arabī or Qūnawī. It is highly significant that Mullā Sadrā did not leave behind a commentary on the *Fusūs* like that of Kāshānī or Qaysarī nor write a treatise like *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* although he was well acquainted with Ibn Turkah. Nor do we find major works devoted purely to theoretical gnosis or *'irfān-i nazarī* by his students such as Fayd Kāshānī, who was also a gnostic, or Lāhījī. The School of *'irfān-i nazarī* certainly continued during the Safavid era but the major intellectual thrust of the period was in the creation of the School of Transcendent Theosophy, which had incorporated major theses of *'irfān* such as *wahdat al-wujūd* into its philosophical system, but which was distinct in the structure of its doctrines, manner of presentation and method of demonstration from *'irfān*. Furthermore, the subject of *hikmat* is "being conditioned by negation" (*wujūd bi-shart-i lā*) while the subject of *'irfān* is totally non-conditioned being (*wujūd lā bi-shart*).

In any case as far as Persia is concerned, one had to wait for the Qajar period to see a major revival of the teaching of *'irfān-i nazarī* and the appearance of important commentaries on classical texts of this tradition. This revival occurred along with the revivification of the teachings of the School of Mullā Sadrā and many masters of this period were both *hakīm* and *'ārif*, while *'irfān* continued to influence philosophy deeply. The first major figure to mention in the context of the School of *'irfān* during the Qajar period is Sayyid Radī Lārījānī (d. 1270/1853) who was a student of Mullā 'Alī Nūrī in *hikmat* but we know less of his lineage in *'irfān*.[69] He is said to have

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[68] See S. H. Nasr, *Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), Chapter 4, pp. 69-82.

[69] See Yahya Christian Bonaud, *L'Imam Khomeyni, un gnostique méconnu du XX^e siècle* (Beirut: Les Éditions Al-Bouraq, 1997), pp. 80-81. Bonaud mentions in this connection a number of names such as Mullā Hasan Lunbānī (d. 1094/1683) and Muhammad 'Alī Muzaffar (d. 1198/1783-84) as does S. J. Āshtiyānī, but the history of *'irfān-i nazarī* from the Safavid period to Sayyid Radī is far from clear. As far as *'irfān* is concerned, Sayyid Radī possibly studied with Mullā Muhammad Ja'far Ābāda'ī.

possessed exalted spiritual states and was given the title of "Possessor of the States of the Inner (*bātin*) World" by his contemporaries.[70] We know that he taught the *Fusūs* and *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* in Isfahan and was considered as a saint as well as master of *'irfān-i nazarī*.

Sayyid Radī's most important student was Āqā Muhammad Ridā Qumsha'ī (d. 1306/1888-9), whom many Persian experts on *'irfān* consider as a second Ibn 'Arabī and the most prominent commentator upon gnostic texts such as the *Fusūs* since the time of Qūnawī. Āqā Muhammad Ridā studied in Isfahan but later migrated to Tehran which became henceforth perhaps the most important for the teaching of *'irfān-i nazarī* for many decades.[71] There, he taught and trained numerous important students in both *'irfān* and *hikmat*. He also wrote a number of important glosses and commentaries on such works as the *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* and Qaysarī's commentary on the *Fusūs* as well as some of the works of Mullā Sadrā, in addition to independent treatises. Like so many masters of *'irfān-i nazarī*, Āqā Muhammad Ridā was also a fine poet and composed poetry under the pen-name Sahbā. Unfortunately much of his poetry is lost. It is also of great significance to note that Āqā Muhammad Ridā emphasized the importance of spiritual practice and the need for a spiritual master.[72]

One of Āqā Muhammad Ridā's important students was Mīrzā Hāshim Ashkiwarī Rashtī (d. 1332/1914), commentator upon *Misbāh al-uns*, who took over the circle of instruction of *'irfān* in Tehran after Āqā Muhammad Ridā. He was in turn teacher of such famous *hakīms* and *'ārifs* of the past century as Mīrzā Mahdī Āshtiyānī (d. 1362/1953), Mīrzā Ahmad Āshtiyānī (d. 1359/1940), Sayyid Muhammad Kāzim 'Assār (d. 1396/1975) and

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[70] On him see Manūchihr Sadūq Suhā, *Tārikh-i hukamā' wa 'urafā-yi muta'akhkhir* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i hikmat, 1381 [A.H. solar]), pp. 261-262.

[71] On Āqā Muhammad Ridā see Sadūqī Suhā, *op.cit.*, p. 259ff. On him and other major figures of the School of Tehran see also Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to Today*, Chapter 13. See also the introductions of S. J. Āshtiyānī to *Sharh al-mashā'ir* of Lāhījānī (Mashhad: Mashhad University Press, 1964); and to Mullā Sadrā's *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah* (Mashhad: Mashhad University Press, 1967), concerning Āqā Muhammad Ridā and the whole history of *'irfān* in Persia from the end of the Safavid period onward.

[72] See Sadūqī Suhā, *op.cit.*, p. 267.

Muhammad ʻAlī Shāhābādī (d. 1369/1951).[73] The latter is particularly important not only for his own writings on gnosis including his *Rashahāt al-hihār*, but for being the master of Ayatollah Khomeini in *ʻirfān-i naẓarī*, the person with whom the latter studied the *Fusūs* without the presence of any other student.[74] Many of the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini in his *Taʻliqāt*, *Sharh duʻā-i sahar* and *Misbāh al-hidāyah ila'l-khilāfah wa'l-walāyah/wilāyah* reflect the interpretations of Shāhābādī whom he revered highly.

The extensive political fame and influence of Ayatollah Rūh Allāh Khumaynī (Khomeini) (d. 1409/1989) has prevented many people in the West and even within the Islamic world to pay serious attention to his gnostic works,[75] and his place in the long history of theoretical gnosis outlined in a summary fashion above. There is no doubt that he was attracted to the study of *ʻirfān* from an early age and in later years, while he also studied *hikmat*, not to speak of the transmitted sciences, his great love remained *ʻirfān*, although he was also a recognized master of the School of Mullā Sadrā.[76] In his writings he combined the tradition of *ʻirfān-i shiʻi*[77] and that of Ibn ʻArabī. For example his *Sharh duʻā-i sahar* belongs to the world of Shiʻite gnosis; the

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[73] These figures are discussed by Suhā. See also our *Islamic Philosophy* … . For Shahābādī see Bonaud, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-87.

[74] Bonaud, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

[75] The major study of Bonaud, cited above, is an exception. Nothing comparable exists in English.

[76] One day in the 1960's when we were discussing the philosophical ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini with our eminent teacher, ʻAllāmah Tabātabā'ī, who was his friend, we asked the ʻAllāmah what philosophical schools most attracted Ayatollah Khomeini. He answered that Ayatollah Khomeini had little patience (*hawsilah*) for the logical arguments of Peripatetic philosophy but was more interested in Mullā Sadrā and Ibn ʻArabī. The same view is confirmed by Mīrzā Mahdī Hā'irī who studied with Ayatollah Khomeini and who says,

> "He [Imam Khomeini] did not have much interest in Peripatetic philosophy and logic. His teaching of the *Asfār* had more of a gnostic attraction. He had studied *ʻirfān* well with Āqā-yi Shāhābādī and was busy all the time reading the books of Ibn ʻArabī. Therefore, he also looked at the *Asfār* from the point of view of Ibn ʻArabī and not from the perspective of Ibn Sīnā and Fārābī. When he came to the words of Ibn Sīnā and Fārābī, he would become completely uncomfortable and would escape from philosophical constraints through the rich power of *ʻirfān*."
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> *Khirad-nāma-yi hamshahrī*, June 1, 2005, p. 17

[77] On the different gnostic currents in Shiʻism see our foreword to Husaynī Tihrānī, *Kernel of the Kernel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. xiii-xix.

*Ta'līqāt 'alā sharh Fusūs il-hikam wa misbāh il-uns* belong to the tradition of Ibn 'Arabian gnosis as interpreted over the centuries by Shi'ite gnostics and with many new insights into the understanding of these classical texts; and *Misbāh al-hidāyah ila'l-khilāfah wa'l-walāyah/wilāyah* represent a synthesis of the two schools of gnosis. Other mystical works of Ayatollah Khomeini such as *Chihil hadīth*, *Sirr al-salāh*, *Ādāb al-salāh* and *Sharh-i hadīth-i junūd-i 'aql wa jahl* are also works of a gnostic and esoteric quality reminiscent of a Fayd Kāshānī or Qādī Sa'īd Qummī and going back even earlier, classical Sufi works on such subjects, but they do not fall fully under the category of *'irfān-i nazarī* as we have defined it in this essay.[78] Ayatollah Khomeini also composed poems of a mystical and gnostic nature.

For many it is interesting to note and might even appear as perplexing that although later in life he entered fully into the arena of politics, earlier in his life Ayatollah Khomeini was very much interested not only in theoretical gnosis but also in operative Sufism with its ascetic dimension and emphasis on detachment from the world. The key to this riddle should perhaps be sought first of all in the stages of man's journeys (*asfār*) to God mentioned by Mullā Sadrā at the beginning of the *Asfār*, stages which include both the journey from creation (*al-khalq*) to God (*al-Haqq*) and return to creation with God and secondly in Ayatollah Khomeini's understanding of the stages of this journey as they applied to him and to what he considered to be his mission in life. In any case although the later part of his life differed greatly outwardly from that of Āqā Muhammad Ridā, his early life was much like that of the figure whom he called "the master of our masters". Also like Āqā Muhammad Ridā, Ayatollah Khomeini was poetically gifted and deeply immersed in the tradition of Persian Sufi poetry.

There is need in the future to study more closely the relation between the contemplative and active dimensions of life in the case of Ayatollah Khomeini in relation to the teachings of *'irfān*, and more generally in the lives of several other major Muslim political figures of the 14th/20th century such

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[78] On the gnostic works of Ayatollah Khomeini see Bonaud, *op.cit.*, Chapter 2, pp. 103ff. The institution called Mu'assisa-yi Tanzīm wa Nashr-i Athār-i al-Imām al-Khumaynī in Tehran has published all of his works including those concerned with gnosis as well as the *dīwān* of his poetry.

as Hasan al-Bannā', the founder of the Ikhwān al-muslimīn, and Mawlānā Mawdūdī, the founder of Jamā'at-i islāmī of Pakistan, both of whom were deeply immersed in politics while being earlier in life devoted in one way or another to Sufism. In the case of none of the major Muslim political figures of the 14th/20th century, however, is there such a close relationship with Sufism and *'irfān* as one finds in the case of Ayatollah Khomeini. Such matters raise issues of central concern for the understanding of the relation between Sufism and *'irfān* on the one hand and external political action on the other. These issues are not, however, our concern here. What is important to note is that irrespective of his political views and actions, and his particular interpretation of *walāyah/wilāyah*, Ayatollah Khomeini remains an important figure in the long history of theoretical gnosis in the Islamic world.

The tradition of *'irfān-i nazarī* continues to this day in Persia.[79] After the generation of such figures as Ayatollah Khomeini, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī (d. 1404/1983), who was a major gnostic without writing any commentaries on Ibn 'Arabī, and also one of the important masters of *'irfān*, Sayyid Muhammad Kāzim 'Assār, notable figures have appeared upon the scene such as Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyanī, Hasan-zādah Āmulī, and Jawād Āmulī, of whom the latter two still teach at Qom. Āshtiyanī's commentary upon the introduction of Qaysarī to the *Fusūs* mentioned above, as well as a number of his other commentaries such as those on *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* and *Naqd al-nusūs*, are major contemporary texts of theoretical gnosis, while the recent commentary by Hasan-zādah Āmulī on the *Fusūs* entitled *Mumidd al-himam dar sharh-i Fusūs al-hikam*[80] reveals the living nature of this School in Persia as does Jawād Āmulī's recension of *Tamhīd al-qawā'id*.

## WITH WHAT DOES THEORETICAL GNOSIS DEAL?

[79] This is not only true of Persia but also of Shi'ite circles in Iraq such as the one in Najaf, at least until a few years ago. During the Qajar and early Pahlavi periods, Tehran was better known for *'irfān-i nazarī* and Najaf for operative *'irfān*, although texts such as the *Fusūs* were also taught in Najaf by remarkable masters with whom such luminaries as 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī studied this seminal text.

[80] Tehran, Sāzimān-i chāp wa intishārāt-i Wizārāt-i Farhang wa Irshād-i Islāmī, 1378 [A.H. solar].

Before turning to the significance of theoretical gnosis and doctrinal Sufism, it is necessary to mention a few words about what subjects this Supreme Science treats. And before delineating the subjects made known through theoretical gnosis, one needs to know how one can gain such a knowledge. The knowledge of the Supreme Reality or the Supreme Substance is itself the highest knowledge and constitutes the very substance of principial knowledge. As Frithjof Schuon, one of the foremost contemporary expositors of gnosis and metaphysics has said, "The substance of knowledge is Knowledge of the Substance."[81] This knowledge is contained deep within the heart/intellect and gaining it is more of a recovery than a discovery. It is ultimately remembrance, the Platonic *anamnesis*. The faculty associated with this knowledge is the intellect (*al-'aql*), the *nous*, not to be confused with reason. The correct functioning of the intellect within man is in most cases in need of that objective manifestation of the Intellect that is revelation.[82] In any case its attainment always requires intellectual intuition, which is ultimately a Divine gift, and the ability to "taste" the truth. In the Islamic tradition this supreme knowledge or gnosis is associated with such qualities as *dhawq* (taste), *hads* (intuition), *ishrāq* (illumination) and *hudūr* (presence). Those who are able to understand gnosis must possess certain intellective gifts not to be confused with powers of mere ratiocination. Also in Islam gnosis has always been related to the inner meaning of the revelation and its attainment of the initiatic and esoteric power of *walāyah/wilāyah* which issues from the fountain of prophecy and about which so many Muslim gnostics from Ibn 'Arabī to Sayyid Haydar Āmulī and from Āqā Muhammad Ridā Qumsha'ī to Muhammad 'Alī Shāhābādī to Ayatollah Khomeini have written with differing interpretations.

Turning now to the subjects with which theoretical gnosis and doctrinal Sufism deal, we must mention that it is not our intention here to expound its teachings, but only the subjects which are of concern to this School.[83] The

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[81] To quote the original French, "*La substance de la connaissance est la Connaissance de la Substance*." F. Schuon, *Formes et substance dans les religions* (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1975, p. 35).

[82] We have dealt with this issue extensively in our *Knowledge and the Sacred*; see also F. Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1995), pp. 1-42.

[83] We have dealt with the teachings of this Supreme Science in our *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Chapter 4, pp. 130ff. This Supreme Science is of course also metaphysics as traditionally understood. See René Guénon, "Oriental Metaphysics," in Jacob Needleman (ed.), *The Sword*

supreme subject of gnosis may be said to be the Supreme Principle or Reality which is absolute and infinite and not even bound by the condition of being absolute and infinite. The gnostics often write that it is Absolute Being without even the "limitation" of absoluteness. It is therefore the Reality which is both Beyond-Being and Absolute Being. Later gnostics called this supreme subject *wujūd-i lā bi-shart-i maqsamī*, the totally unconditioned Being which is the ground for all divisions and distinctions. Gnosis, therefore, deals not only with ontology but with a metaphysics that is grounded beyond Being in the Supreme Reality of which Being usually understood is the first determination. It begins with the Divine Ipseity or *Dhāt* that is above all limits and determinations and that is sometimes referred to as *al-Haqq* (the Truth). It also deals with multiplicity within the Divine Order, that is, the Divine Names and Qualities which are so many Self-Determinations and Self-Disclosures of the Supreme Essence.

This Supreme Science (*al-'ilm al-a'lā*) that is gnosis also deals with manifestations of the Principle, with all the levels of universal existence from the archangelic to the material but views all that exists in the cosmic order in light of the Principle. It descends from the Principle to manifestation and deals with cosmology as a science of the cosmos in relation to the Principle, as a form of knowledge that provides maps to guide and orient human beings who are situated in the confines of cosmic existence to the Metacosmic Reality. This Supreme Science also deals of necessity with the human state in all its width, breadth, depth and height. It contains a most profound "science of man", which one could call an anthropology if this term were to be understood in its traditional and not modern sense, as well as a "science of the spirit" within man or pneumatology which is absent from the worldview of the modern world. Finally, gnosis deals with the Principle and all the levels of manifestation from the point of view of the unity which dominates over all that exists and which is especially central to the Islamic perspective. One might say that Islamic metaphysics or gnosis is dominated by the two basic doctrines of the "transcendent oneness of Being" (*wahdat al-*

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*of Gnosis* (Boston: Arkana, 1986), pp. 40-56. Schuon has also written many illuminating pages on this subject including his book *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1986). See also S. H. Nasr (ed.), *The Essential Frithjof Schuon* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 2005), especially pp. 309ff.

*wujūd*) and the universal man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) which includes not only a gnostic anthropology but also a symbolic cosmology on the basis of the correspondence between the microcosm and macrocosm.

Theoretical gnosis is also concerned in the deepest sense with the reality of revelation and religion. The question of the relation between gnosis and esoterism on the one hand and the formal and exoteric aspect of religion on the other is a complicated one into which we cannot enter here. What is clear is that in every traditional society gnosis and esoterism have been inextricably tied to the religious climate in which they have existed. This is as true of Luria and Jewish esoterism as it is of Śankara and Hindu gnosis as well as everything in between. In any case in this essay, which deals with gnosis in the Islamic tradition, we need to mention the deepest concern of the gnostics with the realities of religion and explanation of its teachings on the most profound level as we observe in many Sufi treatises on the inner meaning of the Islamic rites.[84]

Theoretical gnosis is concerned not only with the practical aspects of religion, but also with basic Islamic doctrines such as creation, prophecy, eschatology, etc. Islamic masters of gnosis speak of both the why and the how of creation. They speak of "creation *in* God" as well as creation *by* God.[85] They expound the doctrine of the immutable archetypes (*al-a'yān al-thābitah*) and the breathing of existence upon them associated with the Divine Mercy which brings about the created order. They see creation itself as the Self-Disclosure of God.[86] They also discuss the renewal of creation (*tajdīd al-khalq*) at every moment.[87] Furthermore, theoretical gnosis speaks extensively about the end as well as the beginning of things. The deepest explanation of

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[84] See for example, Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), Chapter X, pp. 176ff; and Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. Philip and Liadain Sherrard (London: KPI, 1986), pp. 183ff.

[85] Metaphysically speaking, creation must take place in God before the external act of creation takes place. On this important doctrine across many religious boundaries see Leo Schaya, *La Création en Dieu* (Paris, Dervy-Livres, 1983).

[86] See W. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[87] See Toshihiko Tzutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1984).

Islamic eschatology based on the Qur'an and *Hadīth* is found in such writings as the *Futūhāt al-makkiyyah* of Ibn 'Arabī.

In all traditional religions and cultural climes gnosis also provides the basis for the science of forms including artistic forms and makes comprehensible the language of symbolism. Although dealing at the highest level with the Formless, it is gnosis and metaphysics that provide the basis for the science of symbols especially in a world where the "symbolist spirit" has been lost.[88] In Islam treatises on theoretical gnosis do not usually deal explicitly in a separate section with forms and symbols but expound the principles of this science which are then applied when necessary. The writings of Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī are replete with such examples. Such masters provide the science of spiritual hermenetics (*ta'wīl*) as well as apply it to diverse religious and artistic forms, symbols and myths including of course those found in the Qur'an itself.

Gnosis is illuminative and unitive knowledge and therefore it is natural that theoretical gnosis be concerned with knowledge as such, primarily sacred knowledge and knowledge of the sacred but also with the grades and the hierarchy of knowledge.[89] It is true that most traditional philosophies, including the Islamic, also deal with this issue, but it is only in works on theoretical gnosis that one finds the most universal treatment of this subject including of course supreme knowledge that is gnosis itself. Theoretical gnosis or *scientia sacra* is also the metaphysics that lies at the heart of perennial philosophy understood traditionally. It has been sometimes called theosophy, as this term was understood before its modern distortion, and is also related to what is called mystical theology and mystical philosophy in Western languages. In the Islamic tradition it has provided the ultimate criteria for the judgment of what constitutes *philosophia vera*. It has been foundational in the development of both traditional philosophy and the traditional sciences and is key to the deepest understanding of all traditional cosmological sciences including the "hidden sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-khafiyyah* or *gharībah*). The later

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[88] For outstanding examples of this function of metaphysics and gnosis see René Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*, trans. Alvin Moore, ed. Martin Lings (Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia, 1995); and Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence* (Cambridge (UK): Quinta Essentia, 1991).

[89] We have dealt with this issue extensively in our *Knowledge and the Sacred*.

traditional schools of philosophy that have persisted in the Islamic world to this day, chief among the School of Illumination founded by Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and the Transcendent Theosophy/Philosophy established by Mullā Sadrā, are closely associated with *'irfān*. One might in fact say that while after the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the West philosophy became more and more wedded and also subservient to modern science, as we see so clearly in Kant, in the Islamic world philosophy became ever more closely associated with *'irfān* from which it drew its sustenance and whose vision of reality served as basis for its philosophizing. One needs only read the works of Mullā Sadrā such as his *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah* or the treatises of Āqā 'Alī Mudarris such as his *Badāyi' al-hikam* to ascertain the truth of this assertion. Many of the works of the later Islamic philosophers are at the borderline between *hikmat* and *'irfān* although the two disciplines remain quite distinct from one another.

## THE PRESENT DAY SIGNIFICANCE OF THEORETICAL GNOSIS

Today the Islamic world suffers greatly from the neglect of its own intellectual tradition and yet there are some contemporary modernized Muslim philosophers, especially in the Arab world and to some extent Turkey, who dismiss later Islamic philosophy precisely because of its association with *'irfān* which they criticize pejoratively as mere mysticism. At the other end of the spectrum there are those so-called fundamentalists who are opposed to both reason and gnosis and turn their backs on and moreover criticize the Islamic intellectual tradition, at whose heart stands gnosis, on the pretext of wanting to save Islam. They are blind to the fact that it is precisely this intellectual tradition of which Islam is in the direst need today, faced as it is with the challenges of the modern world that are primarily intellectual.

Some of the greatest problems facing Islam on an intellectual level today are the invasion of a secularist worldview and secular philosophies; the spread of a science and technology based on a secular view of nature and of knowledge of nature; the environmental crisis which is closely related to the spread of modern technology; religious pluralism and the need to comprehend in depth other religions; the need to defend Islam itself against all the secularist or exclusivist Christian attacks against it emanating primarily from the West; the need to understand the principles of Islamic art and

architecture and to apply these principles to creating authentic Islamic art and architecture today; to provide an authentic Islamic answer to the relation between religion and science; to formulate an Islamic science of the soul or psychology; and to establish a firm foundation for the harmony between faith and reason. The role of *'irfān* is central to the solution of all of these as well as many other problems. It is only in gnosis that the unifying principle of faith and reason can be found. If one were only to understand *'irfān*, one would realize its supreme significance for Muslims today. Furthermore, *'irfān* is not enmeshed in the syllogistic form of reasoning to be found in Islamic philosophy, a form of reasoning that is alien to many contemporary people. Paradoxically, therefore, it is in a sense more accessible to those possessing intellectual intuition than traditional schools of Islamic philosophy which can also play and in fact must play an important role in the contemporary intellectual life of the Islamic world.

As already mentioned, in the traditional Islamic world theoretical gnosis was not only opposed by certain, but certainly not all, jurists, theologians and philosophers; it was also opposed by certain Sufis who claimed that gnosis is the result of what is attained through spiritual states and not through reading books on gnosis. Titus Burckhardt once told us that when he first went to Fez as a young man, one day he took the *Fusūs* with him to a great teacher to study this basic text of *ma'rifah* or *'irfān* with him. The teacher asked him what book he was carrying under his arm. He said it was the *Fusūs*. The teacher smiled and said, "Those who are intelligent enough to understand the *Fusūs* do not need to study it, and those who are not intelligent enough are not competent to study it anyway." The master nevertheless went on to teach the young S. Ibrāhīm (Titus Burckhardt) the *Fusūs* but he was alluding to the significance of realized gnosis and not only its theoretical understanding, a knowledge that once realized delivers man from the bondage of ignorance, being by definition salvific knowledge. Burckhardt went on to translate a summary of the *Fusūs* into French, a translation which played a seminal role in the introduction of the School of theoretical gnosis and Ibn 'Arabī to the West. In fact, although the magisterial exposition of gnosis and metaphysics by traditional masters such as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Burckhardt himself and others were directly related to inner inspiration and intellection as well as teachings of non-Islamic origin, they were also inextricably linked with the tradition of *'irfān* discussed in this essay.

Of course, one does not become a saint simply by reading texts of *'irfān* or even understanding them mentally. One has to realize their truths and "be" what one knows. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge contained in works of theoretical gnosis and doctrinal Sufism are a most precious science which Muslims must cherish as a gift from Heaven. This vast body of writings from Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī to Āqā Muhammad Ridā Qumsha'ī and Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir and in the contemporary period from Mawlānā Thanwī, Muhammad 'Alī Shāhābādī and Ayatollah Khomeini to Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī and Hasan-zādah Āmulī contain a body of knowledge of vast richness, a knowledge which alone can provide the deepest answers to many of the most acute contemporary intellectual, spiritual and even practical questions. But above all this tradition alone can provide for those Muslims capable of understanding it the Supreme Science of the Real, the science whose realization is the highest goal of human existence.[90]

[90] See our *In the Garden of Truth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, forthcoming).

# COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

**Peter Ochs**

By now, you may feel, as I do, that discussions about "religious studies vs. theology" are beginning to look like those interminable academic debates that stimulated the classical pragmatists to be pragmatists.[91] I am thinking of

[91] Since at least the 1970's, a great number of such debates have been displayed in journal articles, conferences, and books. For example:

***Sample Essays***

Charles W. Kegley, "Theology and Religious Studies: Friends or Enemies?" in *Theology Today* 35/3 (Oct. 1978): pp. 273-284; Robert Wilken, "Who Will Speak For The Religious Traditions," AAR 1989 Presidential Address, in *JAAR* 57/4: pp. 699-717. Here is a classic statement of the debate within the AAR. Speaking the religious studies side, Wilken expresses concerns about Enlightenment models of what I will call "colonialism writ small." Speaking to the theology side, he draws attention to the place of critical intelligence within medieval theological discourses.

Ishmael Law, "The Politics o Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy," in *Theology Today* (Oct 2001). A critical review of the book by Donald Wiebe (see below).

***Sample Books***

Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies*, New York, Palgrave-MacMillan 2000. An argument against the persistence of confessional theology as a primary orientation of the AAR; Linell Cady and Delwin Brown, *Introduction to Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain*, SUNY Press, 2002; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Oxford University Press (new edition) 2003. Fitzgerald argues that the theology-religious studies debates are circular, since they are defined by a priori categories that are imposed on the empirical phenomena. The category of "religion" itself lacks empirical warrant and represents the interests only of a form of liberal Protestant thought. He believes that, when freed from these imposed categories, religious studies shows itself to be a form of anthropology; Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton University Press, 2004. Stout's pragmatic alternative to both anti-religious liberalism and what he calls the "new traditionalism" is a resource for this essay's effort to locate a pragmatic alternative to the conflict between mutually delegitimating versions of religious studies and theology. Some differences may be detected in the difference between an "Emersonian" pragmatism and this essay's reliance on Peirce's more relational, realist, and textual variety of pragmatism; *Fields of*

the arguments of Peirce, James, and Dewey– most readably presented by James– that interminable debates go nowhere because they mask and fail to address the actual, societal conflicts that have given rise to them. This is not the Kantian claim that we are dealing here with metaphysical antinomies that arise out of error: the mistake of mixing characteristics of things in themselves with those of phenomenal appearances. The error here is not to have thought errantly, but to have gotten confused about the relation of thinking to everyday practice. And the consequence of the error is not some illusion about ideas, but actual suffering: not that it hurts to debate on and on (to the contrary, academics may enjoy this too much), but that the time and effort fine minds put into such debates deflect their and a broader public's attention away from something really amiss in the underlying, inter-personal world.

The (classical) pragmatic method for resolving interminable debates was to re-read them as symptoms of societal-behavioral crises that call for immediate attention. This is to read their interminability as a formal sign that

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*Faith: theology and religious studies for the twenty-first century*, eds. David F. Ford, Ben Quash and Janet Martin Soskice Cambridge University Press 2005. Offered in honor of Nicholas Lasch and emerging out of a conference held at Cambridge University in 2000 (see below); *What is Religious Studies? A Reader in Disciplinary Formation, Critical Categories in the Study of Religion*, ed., Steven J. Sutcliffe, Equinox, 2006. Of particular interest are such chapters as: James Thrower, "Teaching Theology and Religious Studies: Is there a problem?", Gavin D' Costa, "The End of 'Theology' and 'Religious Studies'," and Linell E. Cady, "Territorial Disputes: Religious Studies and Theology in Transition."

***Sample Conferences***

2000. "'It Has Been Taught,' A Consultation on the Future of the Study of Theology and Religions in Honor of Nicholas Lasch," Cambridge University, September. The focus was on how to avoid reductionist approaches to theological and religious studies.

2002: "Convergences and Divergences: Theology and Religious Studies in Asian Pacific America: Pacific School of Religion." "This panel [was] a discussion on how the "theology vs. religious studies" debate plays out for Asian American religious life/experience/studies."

2006. "Theology and Religious Studies and Theology vs. Religious Studies." July 6-7. St Anne's College, Oxford University. Sponsored by the School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, and featuring Gavin D' Costa (Bristol) and Kim Knott (Leeds) as keynote speakers. "This two-day conference sponsored by the Subject Centre offers participants the opportunity to explore the evolving relationship between Theology and Religious Studies and to consider the challenges of, and strategies for, teaching both."

the debates point beyond themselves to a crisis of a different order, and to read their detailed content as indirect evidence about what the crisis may be. To read that evidence is to reason genealogically, from the debate back to what are no more than educated guesses about what the crisis may be. It is then, per hypothesis, to propose some line of action that might resolve the crisis. Without taking time to display the genealogical reasoning that has led to it, I'd like to offer this recommendation: that we read the general form of our debates as pointing to the still unresolved relation of the western academy to the civilization(s) it ought to serve and that we read the specific content of our debates as pointing to the academy's still-colonialist relation to our civilization(s)' folk-or-wisdom traditions, "religious" traditions in particular. This second point means that, still echoing colonialist behaviors we otherwise disavow, our religious studies disciplines may still tend to remove "religious phenomena" from the contexts of their societal embodiments and resituate them within conceptual universes of our own devising. In the present decade, this colonialist tendency is also displayed in relation to biblically based traditions– perhaps because we tend to see these as competing sources of interpretive theory rather than as the kinds of folk practice we are in the business of studying.

Let me clarify some of what I mean by the academy's "colonialist" tendencies and how they may be illustrated in academic inquiries and debates about religion. With justification, the contemporary university (late 20th century and after) may credit itself with having articulated the errors of modern western colonialism, of political and economic imperialism, and of a variety of more subtle ways of imposing its conception of the "all" (or *totalité*) on others.[92] Often, however, these errors are attributed to "them," as if the totalizing tendencies of the west were reified in some isolable, albeit very widespread, aggregations of power, rather than some characteristic of the culture in general, including therefore the discourses of the critics. Without presuming to defend the choice in such short space, I would rather assume the latter: that we who are nurtured in the modern west bear some totalizing "gene," so that the objects of criticism ought, reflexively, to include the critics as well. At the same time, following Charles Peirce, John Dewey and

[92] Many cultural criticisms come to mind, such E. Levinas' critique of totalizing thinking, to F. Lyotard's critique of "master narratives, and so on.

their pragmatic ilk, I'll suppose that critics can at least distinguish between two dimensions of their own reasoning: the problematic one (here, the totalizing one) and the one they hope will prove reparative, so that academic critics may include themselves in their criticisms. If so, we might ask what "colonialism" would look like when "writ small" in our critical intellects. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein– whose *Investigations* is, in many ways, a logic of pragmatism[93]– I believe it would look like our modern tendency to assume that the subjects and predicates of standard propositional logic correspond to elemental features of our natural and social worlds: so that, for example, we have good reason to expect that the world really is peopled with the kinds of entities we name "they" or "we" or "it" and that they may really have the kinds of attribute we identify as "good" or " troublesome" or "interesting." We may read Wittgenstein's move from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* as a sign of his having– not only on logical and epistemological but also on ethical grounds– rejected any presumption that the elements of our propositions mirror elements of the world. We may, furthermore, read his critique as anticipating Levinas' critique of the "logic of the same": that is, of our modern tendency to impose categories of our own language (and society and personality) onto others who enter our field of vision rather than allowing those categories to be shaped by our experiences of, or dialogues with, these others. For Levinas, the logic of the same is the logic of unselfconsciously and un-self-critically reading our habits of knowing onto the world, so that the world becomes just more of us.

In these terms, I suggest we identify the logic of the same with "colonialism writ small," since, writ large, this would be the logic of imposing the institutions as well as epistemic categories of our social, political and economic orders on others around us, transforming them, should we succeed, into instruments of who we are and what we want. This sort of colonialism would extend the logic of propositions into an instrument of world-ordering, since it not only re-reads but also institutionally re-defines what we encounter in the world into the "subjects" we believe we see, bearing the traits we predicate of such subjects. If applied in this way as a

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[93] Gilbert Ryle has suggested that Wittgenstein spent at least some of those years after the *Tractatus* reading Peirce's "pragmaticism," which teaches a realist version of the lesson that "meaning is use."

model of the actual world, propositional logic would breed three other tell-tale traits of a "logic of the same": binarism, over-generalization, and intellectualization or spiritualization. It would breed binarism, because what is the same "knows" only two values: what is, because it is more of the same, and what is not, because it either negates or falls outside the categories of the same. It would breed over-generalization, because its fundamental method of knowing the world is to generalize its own categories of knowing into categories of being itself. It would breed intellectualization, because the same exists only in idea (in the sense of *eidola* and *doxa*, not *eidos*), that is, only in what we perceive and imagine the other to be rather than in the actual consequences of our lived interactions with the other. To preserve the same therefore requires continually re-imagining these consequences according to what we want to see or, in this sense, what belongs only to our own intellects and spirits rather than to the other. In the case of colonialism writ large, we may recognize these traits in colonialist Manicheanism (dividing the world between the intrinsically good and sacred, or what belongs to us, and the profane, or what does not yet belong to us), imperialism (seeking to extend what is ours and, thus, what is good), and re-narration of the world (continually re-describing the world in the terms we desire).

In the case of colonialism writ small, we may, somewhat more controversially, see these traits in what might be dubbed "modern academic colonialism," or the modern academy's tendency, unselfconsciously and un-self-critically, to impose its own propositional calculi onto the world around it. Such a tendency would hard to detect, since the academy is more likely to advertise its dominant practices as forms of cultural criticism and as aimed, in particular, against colonialism writ large. But if, for the sake of argument, we imagined that the academy did, in this way, "sin" against its own dominant ethos, then we might expect the sin to appear as colonialism writ small: that is, as an unselfconscious tendency to apply its cultural criticisms according to a propositional logic, and thus a logic of the same. Do any academic critics actually show this tendency? Readers interested in finding out could apply the following tests[94]:

[94] A more technical test would be to diagram samples of the authors' writings to see if their arguments reduce to standard propositional calculi.

- See if the critics apply subject-object distinctions to what they criticize: Are they, as authors, the undesignated subjects of their writings, so that they offer, as it were, an intellectualized or disembodied "view from nowhere" and so that they remain outside the reach of their own criticisms? Do they reify the objects of their criticism, as "those people" and "those institutions" out there, so that, once again, these objects are wholly independent of the critics themselves? In this way, do they divide the world pretty sharply into the good and the bad?
- See if the critics tend to over-generalize: See if you can restate their argument as the application of a certain, finite set of ideas as grounds for criticizing any practice whatsoever (or overly large domains of practice). These might include such models of the good as "the self-disclosure of Christ as gift" and "equality," or such models of evil as "the error of secularism," and "the error of capitalism," or even the pragmatists' pet mottos, such as "it is true if it works" or "meaning is use" (for, yes, pragmatists can also be guilty of overgeneralization, unless they are careful to present their criticisms as context specific applications of a civilization's self-criticism.)

Authors who test "positive" may be guilty of criticizing colonialism in one explicit place and re-asserting it, unconsciously, in another.

The center of my thesis is that the modern academic disciplines of both "religious studies" and "theology" may nurture tendencies like these. If so, debates between proponents of "religious studies" and of "theology" may prove to be interminable, since each side may (consciously or unconsciously) tend to enter the debate simply as a means of extending its logic of the same onto the other: not to open its normative and epistemological categories to change-through-dialogue, but only to perceive and judge its opponent in terms of fixed categories.[95] In typical debates, for example, one side may

[95] These tendencies may be difficult to discern, let alone to repair, because they may, in fact, be strengthened rather than ameliorated through efforts to "do the good" when such efforts are, themselves, advanced through a logic of the same. If, for example, I desire *not* to over-generalize my pragmatic values, I may, without knowing it, simply replace a single, binary tendency by a pair of them, now operating dialectically: so that, one moment I over-assert my pragmatic values and the next moment I either over-inhibit them or over-assert whatever I take to be non-pragmatic. The problem is that, in either case, my action affirms the

argue that theology is confessional and therefore inappropriate in the academy, while the other side may argue that religious studies applies foreign, western epistemic categories to the analysis of religious traditions that are informed by other sorts of categories. These arguments may be valid if they applied to specific cases, rather than as general rules. Certain theologians may indeed use the classroom as an instrument for extending their religious logic of the same into the lives of their students, and certain religious studies scholars may indeed prosecute their science of religion as a way of measuring all religions by the single grid of some modern western practice of reasoning. There is, however, no *prima facie* warrant for presuming, in general, that theology must be practiced according to the alternatives "either confessional (subjective) *or* academic (objective)" nor that religious studies lacks the capacity to study religious traditions in their own terms. Critics who make such presumptions display their own commitments to a "logic of the same," which means that they share in the same logical errors they attribute to their opponents.

I doubt that I am the only member of AAR who has, at one time or another, worked in a religious studies program or a seminary whose faculty tended to divide itself in general into competing camps of more confessionally oriented theologians and more scientifically oriented religious studies scholars; or, for the matter, where theologians were themselves divided into comparably warring camps, and religious studies scholars as well. And I doubt that I am the only one who finds this kind of binarism intolerable, not because, in each case, we need to find some mushy middle ground, but because each case introduces "colonialism writ small" into our programs, which is, independently of the contents of theological or religious studies, to make our programs agents of an outmoded and destructive feature of modern western civilization. Following the pragmatic arguments introduced earlier, I believe that, when practiced according to the binary logic of the same, scriptural theology is as much an agent of the logical form of western colonialism as is, say, Marxist criticism or what we might call "old

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underlying logic of the same (here, "I think X' and therefore "X is Y"), rather than, at the very least, opening my assertions of the same to being reshaped in relation to whatever I encounter.

style phenomenology of religion" (the kind that used a few categories of modern philosophy as instruments for comparing "universal" and "non-universal" features of "religious experience"). When over-generalized as tools for identifying and measuring the indigenous categories of any religious practice whatsoever, then the epistemic categories implicit in "rabbinic Judaism" or in "the Gospel of John" are as "colonialist" in their employ as are the categories of old style phenomenology or, for that matter, of any modern European nationalism. I am not, therefore, recommending any old "return to indigenous religious categories (including scriptural categories)" as a self-evident solution to the problem of modern western binarism, since this binarism can also live a very vigorous and destructive life *inside* those indigenous categories. But, drawing on the pragmatic arguments offered above, I admit that I am particularly worried about the way scriptural religions may be treated in the AAR today and in the near future. Is the AAR entering an epoch in which reactions against "scriptural fundamentalism" or "scriptural colonialism" in the world today breeds a comparably colonialist prejudice against studies of scriptural texts and traditions? Or a tendency to legitimate only certain styles of scriptural studies, such as those self-described as "critical studies?" And I am equally worried about how to ask this question without having it play into yet another round of mutually delegitimating debates.

*What to do?* The easy answer to my worries is that the AAR should help nurture logics of religious studies inquiry *other than* the modern logic of the same. It is not too difficult to frame these alternatives in an abstract way. We might recommend, for example, that any perennial debates in our field– including but not limited to the theology/religious studies debate– will succeed only if advocates from either side are prepared to loosen their conscious or unconscious reliance on logics of the same and, thus, on what they presume the "same" to be, both in their own practice and in that of their opponent. Without loosening their commitments to what they believe (academic commitments entail belief as much as religious commitments), they might come to such debates less cock-sure about how their beliefs get defined and clarified in the academic and social worlds and, therefore, more open to surprises about what may happen on the borders between their beliefs and those of their apparent opponents. We may find that different beliefs have their own ways of entering into dialogue, one with the other, as

long as we sit back and let them work a little more on their own. And we may find that dialogues of this kind are not extra-logical: that is, that the alternative to propositional logics is not non-logic, but other kinds of logic and that these other logics may emerge from *out* of social exchanges rather than appearing to us, *a priori*, as weapons or safety-nets to carry with us into debate. With more space, it would be easy to talk about alternative logics like these, or alternative philosophies and methods of communication. The hard part would be figuring out how to institutionalize such practices in our academic programs and in our work together at the AAR.

*One practical proposal.* I'll close with a practical proposal for one way to institutionalize one alternative to "colonialism writ small" in our programs of religious studies-and-theology. It is to imitate one of our major practices at the University of Virginia– to be labeled, for this occasion, "comparative religious traditions." This is to teach a variety of religious traditions, side by side, by examining how they are practiced and how they tend to describe and account for their practices. (The biblical traditions "count" here as much as all the others. This means, for example, that "Patristic theology" is as appropriate a topic of indigenous practice as "Tantric yoga.") This is also to offer several different contexts for "comparing" traditions: Jewish Kabbalism and Islamic Sufism, for example, or Ghanaian and Korean Methodism.

The paradigmatic context is dialogue**:** to offer, on occasion, single, co-taught courses that ask how each of two traditions characterizes the other and to develop a vocabulary for comparison from out of the terms of dialogue. If no dialogue has in fact taken place, then two options are either to provide an environment for such a dialogue or to desist from comparison (without a dialogue, what is the reason for comparison?). For example, I co-taught a graduate seminar with Gavin Flood (now Director of the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies) on "Scriptural Reasoning: Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) and Hindu." We began with plain-sense studies of selected texts from each scriptural tradition, illuminated by way of traditional commentaries, historical-critical scholarship, and then by other methods of interpretation emphasized by each tradition. To begin the second half of the course, we introduced students to some methods of semiotic and of phenomenological analysis used in the academy today. Under the rubric of "nurturing an environment for dialogue," we structured the final third of the

semester as a doubled set of exercises in comparison. On one level, we sought to bring one scriptural discourse at a time into epistemic "dialogue" with at least one interpretive discourse (semiotics or phenomenology). This led us (students and teachers) to the surprising hypothesis that Abrahamic scriptures tended to "speak" more effectively by way of semiotic analyses, while the Upanishads spoke more effectively by way of phenomenological analysis. On a second level, we then hosted a formal "dialogue" between what the class dubbed "Abrahamic semiotics" and "Hindu phenomenology." Our last step was to release the formal dimension of this dialogue and see if we had, in some ways, been able to "hear" the Abrahamic scriptural texts in terms of the Upanishads and the Upanishads in terms of the Abrahamic scriptures.

Another context for comparing religions is pragmatic: to offer courses that examine religious communities in conflict, asking what each one appears to contribute to the conflict and what each might contribute to a resolution. One illustration is a course on "Abrahamic Religions in Conflict" that we developed with a committee of undergraduates (supported by a grant by UVA's *Center on Religion and Democracy*). Enriched by visits from colleagues in politics, international relations, and the history of religions, the course addressed several case studies in conflict: including Christian-Muslim relations in the former Yugoslavia, Jewish-Muslim-Christian relations in Israel/Palestine, Catholic-Protestant relations in Ireland, and so on. The first half of the course offered introductions to the Abrahamic religions and to the relation between recent political theory and the study of religions. The second half of the course focused on the students' individual research papers, each one on one aspect of one regional conflict. The course concluded with rather dramatic panel discussions, in which groups of students shared conclusions about "sources of peace and war in the Abrahamic traditions" with guest scholars in international relations.

A third context for comparison is to offer theory-driven courses that examine how academic inquiry may serve as host to these first two contexts. One component of such courses is a history of religious and theological studies. How does any tradition of belief and practice come to *reflect on itself?* How does it, for example, come to narrate histories of itself, or stories about its practitioners, or descriptions of its beliefs (or "theologies"), or registers of

its practices, customs, and laws? Another component is a history of the "academic" study of religions and theologies. To what traditions of belief and practice do our academic studies belong? How are *these* traditions narrated, described, and regulated? This component may make a double-edged contribution to theology/religious studies debates. This component should show, on the one hand, how our discipline is itself a collection of several traditions of belief and practice in the West and, on the other hand, how both theological and religious studies are indebted to such traditions, as long as we practice such studies in the university. A third component– one that I, for one, would consider pivotal– is a study of how academic and religious traditions relate, one to the other. "Comparative religious traditions" appears, here, as the claim that their relationship ought to be seen as "dialogic." This means that each study of religious traditions emerges as a particular dialogue between the epistemic categories implicit in some sub-tradition(s) of academic inquiry and in some sub-tradition(s) of religious belief and practice. Each set of categories bleeds a little bit toward the other. As an additional component, some scholars might want to re-evaluate recent philosophies of religion and of theology in light of the preceding reflections. Addressing discussions about "God," "virtue and the good," or "evil," for example– or perhaps about the relations of Karl Barth's hermeneutic to that of Franz Rosenzweig– they might want to ask what sub-traditions of the academy in relation to what sub-traditions of religious belief and practice have given rise to and warrant such discussions.

*In sum:* Our proposal is to nurture programs in "comparative religious traditions" that feature three elements: thick descriptions of the religious beliefs and practices (including textual practices) that characterize specific religious traditions; actual or imagined dialogues among these religious traditions (so that the dialogues, themselves, generate terms for comparing these traditions); and theoretical reflections on the academic inquiries that nourish such studies and on how these inquiries interact with the religious traditions themselves. Our hypothesis is that these programs would help

transform unhappy debates between theology and religious studies into constructive dialogues between two complementary poles of "religious and theological studies": the traditions of religious practice that we study (a.k.a.

"theology") and the way we study, slightly reconceived as a practice of thick-description, comparison, and self-reflection (a.k.a. "religious studies).

Against certain polemical assumptions, these programs should show, on the one hand, how "theology" can be practiced as a form of ethnography (disclosing emic categories of major religious traditions) and, on the other hand, how "religious studies" can be practiced as way of bringing theologies and other accounts of belief and practice into dialogue. Against certain prejudices, these programs should, moreover, show how practices like Patristic theology or rabbinic scriptural interpretation or Persian Sufism or Caribbean womanism or Tibetan Tantric yoga are all worthy subjects of ethnographic-like thick description and comparative study. This suggests that, in some cases, the theology/religious studies distinction should vanish altogether, since a careful reading of Barth's Church Dogmatics may illustrate studies in indigenous religious practice (here, in 20th century Protestant scriptural theology) as much as participant-observer studies of synagogue worship in the American South.

Stated in the terms of anthropological studies in "ethnoscience," ethnographic materials may also be re-examined according to the "etic" or cross-cultural categories of interpretive science. This essential feature of religious and theological studies is also the most dangerous, since it may be the most likely way that "colonialism writ small" enters our disciplines. As noted earlier, the typical route of entry is to identify etic categories with some view from nowhere, which is to mask the civilizational particularity of our categories of comparison. Our proposal mitigates the dangers by centering our etic studies in "comparative religious traditions." As suggested above, this can be conducted in several different ways, all of which seek out terms of comparison that emerge from out of "dialogues" among the traditions being compared. Often, such dialogues will be feigned for the sake of study: that is, classroom discussion and readings will serve as laboratories for introducing the epistemic categories of each tradition one to the other. There are several ways to do this, and the rule for all of them is to be flexible, self-corrective, and open to the unpredictable impress of each tradition and each community of students and scholars on one another. One may, for example, introduce formal academic discourses -- such as semiotics, phenomenology or literary analysis --- not as rigidly defined terms of comparison, but as "alphabets" for

articulating such terms. Earlier in the 20th century, the rabbinic scholar Max Kadushin followed this approach, adopting languages of process philosophy and semiotics to give voice to what he believed were indigenous categories of rabbinic scriptural interpretation. While imperfect, his efforts have, for example, enabled groups of Jewish and Christian and Muslim scholars to debate otherwise inexplicit units of meaning and reasoning in rabbinic, Patristic, and Qur'anic exegesis. The debates reshape Kadushin's terms, but his terms enable the debates to begin. Another approach would be to adopt the thicker discourses of historical studies as pathways of comparison among the "salvation histories" or "sacred narratives" of several traditions. When possible, of course, one may also host and have students observe actual dialogues among religious practitioners, and these may include other religious studies scholars who happen also to practice some religion and give voice to some of its indigenous vocabularies.

# EDUCATION FOR CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND AUTHENTIC LIVING[96]

**Dr. Javid Iqbal**

Your Excellency Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmad, Hon'ble President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dr. M. Osman Farruk, Hon'ble Education Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Mr. Md. Rezaul Karim, Hon'ble Chairman, Southeast University and South Asia Foundation, Prof. Dr. M. Shamsher Ali, Vice-Chancellor, Southeast University, Deans, Faculty members, Your Excellencies, dear graduates, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to be with you and specially to address the young graduates of Southeast University at its first convocation. I am profoundly impressed to learn that this new University provides facilities to the students to specialize in Management Sciences, Computer Sciences, Electronics and Information Sciences, Pharmacy, Textile Engineering, Law, English and Islamic Studies. It provides education not only on its campus but also caters for distance instruction.

On an occasion like the present one, one is expected to give some advice to young men and women who are about to cross the threshold from a protected life to a world full of numerous challenges. However, I do realize that ever since the dissemination of the doctrine of GG i.e. Generation Gap between the seniors and the new generation, the technique of giving advice has become obsolete and instead, in this highly individualistic and competitive modern world, every one is inclined to learn through his/her own mistakes.

But there may be consensus on this point that owing to globalization no nation-state in the third world today can survive without acquisition of the

[96] Convocation address 2006 Southeast University Dhaka (Bangladesh).

knowledge of Science, Technology and Economics. Studies of Science and Technology reveal that through creativity and the development of innovative way of thinking, the working of things and the quality of life can be improved.

It is difficult to define creativity, but any attempt to do so must include innovative and inventive bent of mind along with the elements of wonder and novelty. Generally speaking, in the fields of Science and Technology, the human mind, which has many potentialities, manipulates the existing ideas or external objects and as a result something unusual is produced. Creativity therefore breaks the conventional mode and thereby expands the limits of reason and perception. In fact human creativity, unlike God's creativity, does not create anything out of nothing but it is a result of the assessment and rearrangement of the existing things and knowledge within our environments. But it is sad to observe that the reward of originality is usually received in the farm of hostility of our conformist fellow-beings, probably because the conventionalists prefer the maintenance of status quo and are inclined to disapprove anyone who has something new to say.

Usually a challenge in the collective life of a community demands the performance of a creative act for its resolution. Therefore, such a creative act is not only novel but it provides an appropriate solution to a given problem. However, the creative idea in its nature remains not only innovative but it is also exploratory and an adventure into the realm of the unknown. On the other hand, the conformist idea, as it avoids disturbing the status quo, is cautious and methodical. Thus, to quote my respected philosopher friend Professor Khawaia Masud, creativity is iconoclastic whereas conformity is dogmatic. The dictum of the conformist is "why change"? But the principle on which the creative operates is "why not"?

Creativity involves the ability to change one's attitude, approach or prospect in regard to a given problem. We must not forget that every human being is endowed with numerous mental potentialities and happens to be creative in different fields and to different degrees. Consequently the difference between a genius and a common man is not of quality but is essentially of quantity i.e. the imagination, energy or persistence of the genius may be a little more developed than that of the ordinary man. There is

however, another difference which is more important. Agreeing with Prof. Masud, the innovative man starts from doubting the value of the generally accepted paradigm, and his skepticism liberates him from the shackles of conventional belief, while his urge for the new, prepares him for courageously undertaking the responsibility of his creative discovery. Therefore, creativity implies non-conformity. A conformist is less intelligent as compared to a liberated mind. He is less confident of himself and therefore more dependant on others, more rigid and certainly more self-righteous and authoritarian.

I note that this illustrious University offers Islamic Studies as one of its courses. I trust this subject includes the causes of the collapse of Islamic polity and culture in modern times. According to all the eminent Muslim thinkers of South Asia there are three reasons for this decline: arbitrary Monarchy, sterile Mullaism and decadent Sufism. They have proposed that for the renaissance of Islamic polity and culture, Monarchy should be replaced in the world of Islam by democracy, equality for all, respect for Human Rights and Rule of Law as these values are not repugnant to Islamic Injunctions; Mullaism to be replaced by reinterpretation of Islamic laws pertaining to mundane affairs by the elected assemblies of Muslim countries through the process of *Ijtihad*; and the spirit of true Sufism to be revived through the dissemination of liberal modern education among the illiterate masses of Islam. But all such reformist thinkers like Shah Wali Ullah, Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduhu, Rashid. Reza, Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were declared "Kafirs" by the dogmatic conformists because they dared to say something new.

It is necessary for the progress of the new education method to bid farewell to the medieval system of learning. The times have passed when prescribed text books were expected to be committed to memory and poured out during the examination. Now only that education system will succeed which draws out the creative potential of a student, for creativity comes as naturally to the average student as it comes to the clever and brilliant one. Therefore it is the responsibility of the teachers to encourage the development of original and innovative ideas among the students.

I am so pleased to learn that Southeast University has ventured to adopt a dual mode of education i.e. campus mode and distance mode. This new experiment of imparting distance education should be adopted by all the universities in the third world countries. Owing to the advancement in technology, it is now possible to make use of web-based modules, CD, email besides face to face tuition. It is a technology through which education could be provided and spread to a large number of people, as anyone who desires to be educated in any specific field of studies can learn by joining a campus or while sitting at home. I trust Southeast University takes a further step to establish contacts or affiliation with foreign centers of excellence.

Creativity in fact is self-direction; it is to learn at one's own initiative.' One cannot deny that this is an era of explosion of knowledge. In the modern world, knowledge is developing at such high speed that by the time cur dear graduates leave this grand University, what they have learnt so far, will become obsolete. Therefore after leaving your alma mater, it is only through self-education that you can keep pace with the latest developments in your field of studies. I am sure that the creative teachers of this University have launched the graduates on a new voyage of discovery by giving them an understanding of the basic structure of their subjects. This is not an advice but remember, to be creative is to fulfill yourself as a person. Consider this as this has to be, as this is your destiny.

What is authentic living? This is essentially a question of philosophy although it concerns itself with certain moral values which may be permanent in nature or may not be permanent but subject to the law of change in accordance with the changing needs of a person. The conformist's view is that authentic living is not achievable in this world and that by observing religious obligations one should prepare himself for realizing authentic living in the hereafter. The generally accepted view is that education only informs and this is not sufficient; because a student has to be "formed" besides being "informed". It has also been held that what you have gained through your studies so far is not genuinely relevant. Your life at the university has merely been an exercise of a warrior equipped with certain tools. The real battle or trial shall now commence when your skill to handle the tools shall be put to a test and you would be judged also on the grounds whether as a person you are good or bad.

Once upon a time it was believed that authentic living is realized when one becomes "cultured" in the real sense through developing a good understanding of literature, fine arts, philosophy, history etc. Then came a stage when some moralists formulated the view that it was irrelevant to involve oneself in the futile discussion as to how authentic or unauthentic living can be associated with "culture". The argument proceeded, why one should bother to establish a connection between the Greek versions of the tragedy called "Electra" (written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) with that of Eugene O' Nielle's "Mourning Becomes Electra". No one is interested to find out who among Marlowe, Kyd and Shakespeare originally conceived or actually wrote "Hamlet"; or which out of the three proofs i.e. teleological, ontological or cosmological establishes the existence of God. Who cares whether or not you approve the cosmology of Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton or Einstein. The study of literature, philosophy, history etc. or mastering of the classical languages may make one knowledgeable or may even make one cultured, but what has such specialization to do with authentic living?

There is also a view that "Peace" leads to the realization of authentic living. "Peace" is a laudable ideal for which one should aspire although it appears very difficult to achieve. One of my learned colleagues in the Supreme Court once informed me that the Chinese word for "Peace" is pictorially depicted by a roof with one woman under it. On the other hand, "War" is depicted by a roof with two women under it. The wisdom of the Chinese in these picturesque linguistic expressions is obviously indisputable so far as domestic peace and harmony is concerned.

There is another way of evaluating "Peace" as a concept. Ali Hajwari, better known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, the patron-saint of Lahore, in his *Kashf al Mahjub* (Lifting of the Veil) narrates that a young student from Merv once came to him and pleaded that he desired "Peace" for authentic living but since he was surrounded by enemies who wanted to exterminate the saint should pray for their destruction. The saint replied: "you should be grateful to your enemy for he is your best friend in the sense that he always keeps you awake and in a state of preparedness. Authentic living means awareness and alertness, and if conflict or competition is eliminated from your life the result will be apathy and death".

In South Asia the Muslim poet-philosopher Iqbal's contribution to the cultural renaissance of Islam is his philosophy of the "Self' which is reflected in his poetic and prose works. He believes that man is potentially a creative activity and has a capability to become co-worker with God in the process of progressive change if he takes the initiative. Iqbal desires the rebirth of the spirit of inquisitiveness and defiance among the modern Muslim youth so that their lost station in the field of Science could be recovered.

He demonstrates through an analysis of history that in the sphere of human knowledge the Western civilization is a further extension of Islamic civilization. Everything in the Western thought that led to human progress is an elaboration of those very ideas, theories and debates which were initiated by Muslim thinkers and scientists. Therefore, if we learn those sciences and equip ourselves with that technology in a more developed form today, we will not be receiving something from an alien culture, but taking back what we originally gave to the West. In this way, he attempts to create a bridge between Islam and the West.

The values, on the basis of which Iqbal elaborates his concept of authentic living, are the adoption of such moral attributes as love, freedom, courage, high ambition, and indifference towards the acquisition of material comforts. The cultivation of these attributes in one's character, according to him, is likely to result in the fortification of man's "ego" and the acts of such a person may become creative and innovative. He is of the view that the factors which destroy man's "ego" or "self' arise out of stagnation. Stagnation disseminates passive virtues like humility, submission or obedience as well as fear, cowardice, corruption, begging or asking not only for the means of livelihood but also for ideas from others, imitating and finally servitude.

Iqbal also highlights the symbol of "Eagle" to illustrate his concept of authentic living and advices the Muslim youth to adopt the five qualities which he notes in this regal bird:

(i) it soars high in the sky; (ii) has keen eyesight; (iii) enjoys loneliness; (iv) does not make a nest; and lastly; (v) abhors to eat the "prey" killed by someone other than itself.

In this modern age, since everyone is expected to learn at one's own initiative. My young friends! You are free to choose your own pattern of moral values for determining what is going to be your personal ideal of authentic living. I conclude by most sincerely wishing all of v u the best of luck as you leave the portals of this illustrious institution and give you this parting message through the verses of Iqbal.

*The passive meandering of the stream,*

*Creeping slowly within its muddy banks,*

*Is a sight unpleasant to my eye!*

*Do not look at it my dear youth!*

*Turn yourself to the other side and behold*

*The fountain surging magnificently upwards*

*By its own inner force.*

# IBN RUSHD'S DEFENCE OF PHILOSOPHY AS A RESPONSE TO GHAZALI'S CHALLENGE IN THE NAME OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

**Catherine Perry**

In 11th century Persia, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, an Islamic jurist and theologian who had at one time professed a deep interest in philosophy, set about attacking the Greek-inspired philosophers, particularly Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, some of whose tenets he judged to be contrary to the teachings contained in the Qur'anic Revelation and thus to have a pernicious influence on Islamic thought and faith. In his book *Tahafah al-Falasifah* ("The Incoherence of the Philosophers"), written in 1095,[97] he attempted– as the title suggests– to refute what he considered to be the errors of these philosophers, using their own demonstrative methods and argumentation. Because of his profound learning and his knowledge of the art of argumentation, his work had such a profound impact on the world of his time that the philosophical tradition of Eastern Islam underwent a severe decline and eventually died.

Philosophy continued in the West, however; and some eighty years later, Abu 'l-Walid Ibn Rushd,[98] a Peripatetic philosopher, who also combined the functions of judge in Cordova and of personal physician to the Almohad sovereigns, responded to Ghazali's attacks in a book entitled *Tahafah al-Tahafah* ("The Incoherence of the Incoherence"), where he alternately cited Ghazali's views and his own. Ibn Rushd's reply was the ultimate endeavour of this philosophical system to reassert itself in the midst of growing opposition and to prove its legitimacy within the Islamic religion; for at that time philosophers were under the accusation of heresy, an accusation which threatened them with the penalty of death. Ibn Rushd himself went through a period of disgrace, and many of his original works were publicly burned.

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[97] This was before Ghazali turned to Sufism.

[98] Better known in the western world under his latinized name Averroes.

With him, the great philosophical tradition which had come to full bloom in the 11th and 12th centuries, is generally considered to have reached its end.[99] Nonetheless, it left a legacy which was absorbed and moulded by the science of *Kalam*– the predominant school of thought from then on, and by some of the most eminent Sufis, such as Ibn 'Arabi. As an illustration of Ghazali's contention against philosophy, it will be interesting to look at certain of the specific arguments to which Ibn Rushd replied. A comparison of their respective claims may well show that each is right in his own domain and that their disagreements are not so great as might appear at first sight. Firstly, however, let us place philosophy in general and Ibn Rushd in particular within the context of the Islamic tradition.

In its highest reaches, Islamic philosophy deals with the dimension of *al-Haqiqah*, or essential truth, and thus the source of all other truth. Taking certainty for their point of departure, the philosophers aim to achieve through reasoning a greater understanding of God, the Revelation, and the nature of the universe. Their intention is not to create doubt and confusion but to acquire mental enlightenment through discovery of the truth; and, ideally, philosophy becomes the wisdom of the sages in the sense that it is as much practical as theoretical knowledge, involving the totality of man and not only his rational faculty:

> Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within man's possibility, because the philosopher's end in his theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in his practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth.[100]

What made it possible for philosophy to develop as a science was the Qur'an's commendation of wisdom, *hikmah*, and the prophet's injunctions to seek it:

> He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and unto him to whom wisdom

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[99] Although it did see a resurgence in Eastern Islam through the Ishraqi school of Illuminationism, with Suhrawardi.

[100] Al-Kindi, in his "On First Philosophy," quoted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in "The Meaning and Role of 'Philosophy' in Islam," in *Islamic Philosophy —From its Origin to the Present*, Albany, 2006.

is given, much good hath been given.[101]

The acquisition of *hikmah* is incumbent upon thee: verily the good resides in *hikmah*.[102]

However, theologians took *hikmah* to mean the science of *Kalam*, whose supremacy they wished to assert over any other form of knowledge, and this brought them into frequent conflict with the philosophers.[103] As for Ibn Rushd, they could blame him not only for being a philosopher but also for being too rationalistic in a strict Aristotelian sense, and thus too remote from the tenets of Islamic faith, since pure rationalism seems not to rely on any power outside itself; this was perceived as a threat to the Muslim community since believers might eventually be induced thereby to reject revealed truth. Perhaps Ibn Rushd was overly given to reason; but in all fairness, it should be mentioned that such a judgement is no doubt largely based on his commentaries on Aristotle's works, which are not his spontaneous teachings but rather writings produced at the bidding of the Almohad Caliph, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf, who was himself fond of philosophy.

Furthermore, one of Ibn Rushd's greatest concerns was to reconcile philosophy with religion, for he was convinced that both dealt with the same and only truth; he devoted a whole treatise, the *Fasl al-Maqal* ("On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy"), to this purpose. "Philosophy is the friend and milk–sister of religion,"[104] he says, while attempting to demonstrate the legitimacy of, and even the necessity for, philosophy as a science commanded by divine Law:

That the Law summons to reflection on beings, and to the pursuit of knowledge about them by the intellect, is clear from several verses of

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[101] Qur'an 11: 269.

[102] Al-Darimi, *Muqaddimah*, p. 34.

[103] Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 167; *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 293.

[104] Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. by George F. Hourani (London: Luzac & Co., 1961), p. 70.

> the Book of God, Blessed and Exalted, such as the saying of the Exalted, 'Reflect, ye who have vision:' this is textual authority for the obligation to use intellectual reasoning.[105]

However, when the preceding Qur'anic phrase is examined, it is found to be cited out of context;[106] Ibn Rushd was probably unable to resist turning some verses of the Qur'an to the advantage of philosophy, but he was certainly neither the first nor the last to use such a stratagem in defence of his arguments. Be that as it may, such examples should not detract from the validity of his conclusion on the intrinsic worth of philosophy:[107]

> Now since this religion is true and summons to the study which leads to knowledge of the Truth, we the Muslim community know definitely that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.

According to Ibn Rushd, however, this science is not for everyone; it must not be divulged to the common people, whose intelligence cannot apprehend the higher truths of philosophy, but should be strictly reserved to the elite, to men of learning who tread "the path of study," seeking "to know the truth,"[108] who are "versed in profound knowledge and to whom God has permitted the sight of the true realities,"[109] and who have the "obligation to make a thorough study of the principles of

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[105] *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5. As a jurist, Ibn Rushd holds the view that rational speculation, which reaches its perfection with demonstrative syllogism, is fully legitimate according to the methods used in law.

[106] Qur'an: LIX, 2. Pickthall translates it: "So learn a lesson, O ye who have eyes." it belongs to a chapter which refers to "the exile of the Banu Nadir, a Jewish tribe of Madinah (for treason and projected murder of the Prophet) and the confiscation of their property". Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (New York: New American Library), p.392. Certainly, Ibn Rushd's conclusion here was derived by means other than deductive reasoning.

[107] Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 50.

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[109] Averroes' *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), trans. by Simon van den Bergh (Oxford: University Press, 1954), I, p. 215.

religion."[110] Moreover, no one can enter the philosophers' circle without first receiving a sound intellectual education and acquiring a solid basis of virtue to guard against the pitfall of heresy: "One can attain knowledge only after the attainment of virtue."[111] By introducing such measures, Ibn Rushd shows that he wants to protect the community, thereby offering reassurance to his opponents. Further–more, he does not argue that philosophy has answers to everything, for he is well aware of the limits of reasoning, when it comes to knowledge conferred by revelation:

> We have to refer to the Law of God everything which the human mind is unable to grasp. For the knowledge which results from revelation comes only as a perfection of the sciences of the intellect; that is, any knowledge which the weakness of the human mind is unable to grasp is bestowed upon man by God through revelation.[112]

Finally, he deplores the fact, that instead of mutual understanding between philosophers and theologians, there should have been so much dissension, and bitter opposition to philosophy by theologians, since both are:

> companions by nature and lovers by essence and instinct ... But God directs all men aright and helps everyone to love Him; He unites their hearts in the fear of Him, and removes from them hatred and loathing by His grace and His mercy![113]

These words can only come from a believer; there is no reason to question the sincerity of Ibn Rushd's Islamic faith, even if some scholars have stated that in his "exoteric" treatises he is veiling his real thoughts; philosophy in a traditional world, such as that of 12th century

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[110] Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 71.
[111] Averroes' *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, p. 315.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[113] Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 70.

Cordova, was not divorced from religion in the manner of modern philosophy.[114]

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After these preliminaries, which are essential for understanding the standpoint from which Ibn Rushd will argue against Ghazali, let us briefly examine a problem of cause and effect, as brought up by Ghazali in his *Tahafah al-Falasifah*. Although he intended this work to refute Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, whose quasi–Platonic philosophy Ibn Rushd himself rejected in part, the argument here concerns an Aristotelian view of the world held by these two philosophers, and which Ibn Rushd also expounded.

Basing himself on the orthodox Ash'arite thesis in this matter, Ghazali states that God is the sole Agent responsible for the existence of all things in the world; by "agent" he means one who is capable of acting voluntarily, and concludes that only an "act which proceeds from the will is a proper act."[115] According to Ghazali, not only has the world been created *ex nihilo* at the beginning of time, but the natural events that occur in the world at any moment are also a direct consequence of God's continuous creative act. This view raises the critical question of how to address reason with a statement that pertains to faith; in order to be convincing, Ghazali is obliged to explain rationally what he observes as pertaining to divine causality in the world's phenomena. Ghazali has no trouble admitting that material events are connected but he denies that there need be any causal link between them. To illustrate his assertion, he gives the example of a piece of cotton brought into contact with fire. If the cotton burns as a result of this contact it is not through any action of the fire, which is inanimate and thus incapable of voluntary action, but through God's intervention:

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[114] Renan was one of the scholars who argued against Ibn Rushd's sincerity. Cf. Arnaldez, in his article on Ibn Rushd, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (London: Luzac & Co., 1971), III, p.911.

[115] Averroes' *Tahnfut al-Tahafut*, p. 95. Henceforth, all references to this work will be cited in the body of the article.

> The agent of the burning is God, through His creating the black in the cotton and the disconnection of its parts, and it is God who made the cotton burn and made it ashes either through the intermediation of angels or without intermediation. For fire is a dead body which has no action, and what is the proof that it is the agent?" (pp. 316–7)

Therefore, when we talk of natural causes, it can only be figuratively, since inanimate things cannot be real agents:

> If the inanimate is called an agent, it is by metaphor, in the same way as it is spoken of metaphorically as tending and willing. (p. 92)

If we think in terms of causes and effects with respect to a natural phenomenon such as fire, it is only through habit since we are accustomed to observing the coexistence of fire and burning. It is our experience which tells us that a piece of cotton will ignite as a consequence of its contact with fire, but in reality no natural antecedent is implied in this object's disintegration, or in any other supposed effect:

> These thing are not necessary, but ... they are possible and may or may not happen, and protracted habit time after time fixes their occurrence in our minds. (p. 324)

> Observation proves only simultaneity, not causation, and in reality, there is no other cause but God. (p. 317)

Now if we acknowledge the soundness of this premise, then we can also understand that cotton might not burn when brought into contact with fire; as God determines the fate of this object through His will, He can just as well cause it not to burn as to burn:

> If it is established that the Agent creates the burning through His will when the piece of cotton is brought into contact with the fire. He can equally well omit to create it when the contact takes place. (p. 323)

Ghazali's aim in raising these arguments is essentially two–fold.[116] First he wishes to confront the philosophers with their implicit denial that God is the Agent responsible for the world's existence; according to him, "the philosophers do not regard God as endowed with will and choice," therefore He "is not a true agent, nor is the world truly His act." (p. 95) Since for the philosophers the world is eternal, God cannot be the Agent because an act implies a beginning, and consequently the *creatio ex nihilo* of the theologians. It follows that the philosophers hold views that are contrary to the dogmas of Islam and should be considered heretical:

> Declare therefore openly that God has no act, so that it becomes clear that your belief is in opposition to the religion of Islam. (p. 96)

On the other hand, Ghazali's discussion of cause and effect is intended to prove that miracles are possible as a result of God's direct intervention in the world, disrupting what one falsely assumes to be its natural order; if no natural cause is necessary, then miracles are no more miraculous than nature itself:[117]

> On its negation [natural causality] depends the possibility of affirming the existence of miracles which interrupt the usual course of nature . . . and those who consider the ordinary course of nature a logical necessity regard all this as impossible. (p. 313)

As a specific example, he brings up the Qur'anic account of Abraham's being supernaturally protected from harm when he was plunged into fire.[118] Here again, he accuses the philosophers of holding views contrary to Islam, since they deny the possibility that Abraham could be untouched by the fire so long as it kept its quality,of burning. According to Ghazali, since the agent of burning is God, in the case of Abraham He simply abstained from the act of burning, this act depending on His will

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[116] Although Ghazali is also concerned with man's freedom of will and the body's resurrection, the discussion here will not cover these issues.

[117] Here it could be asked what distinguishes the miraculous from the natural, because the word "miracle" would then be devoid of meaning.

[118] Qur'an: XXI, 68-9.

as much as any other act.

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As a philosopher, Ibn Rushd cannot accept the assertions of the theologian, and he replies by directing scathing attacks against Ghazali; at the same time, he rises in defence of what he considers to be true philosophy, so as to clear it from any suspicion of heterodoxy.

Evidently and according to common sense, there are occurrences in the natural world which bring about others; nature follows physical laws which make it possible for the human mind to attain a knowledge of the world. Therefore, Ghazali's claim cannot be valid, because "to deny the existence of efficient causes which are observed in sensible things is sophistry." (p. 318) Moreover, referring to the example of fire, Ibn Rushd contends that if this element's specific function is denied, this amounts to denying the definition contained in the word "fire;" in that case, fire would lose its name and have no reality by which it could be recognized:

> If a thing had not its specific nature, it would not have a special name nor a definition . . . One need not therefore deny fire its burning power so long as fire keeps its name and definition. (pp. 318-9)

According to this demonstration, Ghazali's denial of cause and effect results logically in the denial of his own affirmation, because if reason is not allowed to deduce causal relationships between two successive events, then it cannot operate according to its nature and so loses its power of forming valid concepts and hence any chance of attaining knowledge. If it is denied its function, it will no longer have either its definition or its reality; therefore, Ibn Rushd maintains that Ghazali's claim has no foundation:

> Now intelligence is nothing but the perception of things with their causes, and in this it distinguishes itself from all the other faculties of apprehension, and he who denies causes must deny the intellect. Logic implies the existence of causes and effects, and knowledge of

> these effects can only be rendered perfect through knowledge of their causes. Denial of cause implies the denial of knowledge, and denial of knowledge implies that nothing in this world can be really known, and that what is supposed to be known is nothing but opinion, that neither proof nor definition exist, and that the essential attributes which compose definitions are void. The man who denies the necessity of any item of knowledge must admit that even this, his own affirmation, is not necessary knowledge. (p. 319)

The existence of voluntary agents is of course self-evident; but for Ibn Rushd an agent is anything that can exert an influence on an object, even without intervention of the will, as is the case with an inanimate body such as fire. Therefore, to affirm that natural causes can only be considered natural in a figurative sense is an egregious error or, as he puts it, "fallacy on fallacy". (p. 95) If a man were to die in a fire, he pertinently points out, no one would think of saying that the fire burned him "metaphorically".

Moreover, if it were indeed true that we form judgements from habit alone and not from reasonable deduction, we could never be certain of anything, concerning either this world or the divine realm; constant doubt would thus be our lot since we should have no means of discernment:

> Everything would be the case only by supposition, and there would be no wisdom in the world from which it might be inferred that its agent was wise. (p. 320)

For Ibn Rushd it is essential to perceive that the world has a logical structure, because he believes that knowledge of God can be attained through the observation of nature; the existence of order and harmony in the world and its laws bears witness to the perfect nature of the Being who manifested it. Therefore, if all natural events were caused by an unpredictable and arbitrary divine will,

> there would no longer, even for the twinkling of an eye, be any permanent knowledge of anything, since we suppose such an agent to

rule existents like a tyrannical prince who has the highest power ... of whom no standard or custom is known to which reference might be made. (p. 325)

At the same time as responding systematically to each of Ghazali's arguments, Ibn Rushd is attempting to reassure his readers of the essential orthodoxy of philosophy. He claims that Ghazali misjudges it and "ascribes to the philosophers theories which they do not hold." (p. 96) It is wrong for instance to think that philosophy sees the world as eternal and uncreated, for in reality it is undergoing "everlasting production:"

The philosopher's theory, indeed, is that the world has an agent acting from eternity and everlasting, i.e. converting the world eternally from non-being into being.

This concept of "non-being" is very close to the theologians' "*nihil*," from which, according to them, the world was created; moreover, the eternal transformation of the world out of non–being into being sounds very much like Ghazali's assertion that God intervenes constantly in nature. Nonetheless, one important difference remains with respect to the dogma on creation, namely, that Ibn Rushd does not state that the world came into existence at a definite point in time. Therefore, his theory is one of emanation rather than of creation, and this cannot find acceptance by the theologians. However, he affirms elsewhere that the world was indeed created, not through any arbitrariness of the Divine Will, but rather as a necessary act:

Creation is an act of God. He created the world providentially, not by chance. The world is well ordered and is in a state of the most perfect regularity, which proves the existence of a wise Creator. Causality is presupposed.[119]

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[119] From "Al-Kashf 'an Manahij al-Adillah," as quoted by Ahmed Fouad EI-Ehwany, in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, M. M. Sharif ed. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), I, p. 549.

On the question of miracles, Ibn Rushd is more emphatic; for him these are events which cannot be apprehended by reason but which must be acknowledged as authentically divine in origin, and for him the greatest of miracles is the Qur'an,

> the existence of which is not an interruption of the course of nature assumed by tradition . . . but its miraculous nature is established by way of perception and consideration for every man ... This miracle is far superior to all others. (p. 315)

In another treatise, he explains his reason for believing that the Qur'an is miraculous:

> The Laws of doctrine and practice contained in it are not of a sort that could possibly be discovered by a learning process, but only by inspiration.[120]

Since the Qur'an does not interfere with natural laws, Ibn Rushd has no trouble explaining its miraculous nature; but he confesses himself impotent in the face of other kinds of miracles, and he relinquishes reason as he passes in at the door of Revelation, for there are barriers which he admits it cannot cross:

> As to the objection which Ghazali ascribes to the philosophers over the miracle of Abraham, such things are only asserted by heretical Muslims. The learned among the philosophers do not permit discussion or disputation about the principles of religion, and he who does such a thing, according to them, needs a severe lesson ... Of religious principles it must be said that they are divine things which surpass human understanding, but must be acknowledged although their causes are unknown. (p. 322)

With respect to the miracle of Abraham, it seems that Ibn Rushd could have argued convincingly that if it were not in fire's nature to burn, God

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[120] From "Manahij," p. 100, 8-9, as quoted by Hourani in *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 115, note 192.

would not have ordered it to be "coolness and peace for Abraham;"[121] by such an example, taken directly from the Qur'an, he could have refuted Ghazali. Now it is perhaps over the question of miracles more than any other problem that the philosopher's weakness becomes apparent. Since reason is unable to demonstrate miraculous occurrences, it simply abandons any attempt to explain them; but in fact the extra–ordinary nature of miracles does not necessarily preclude knowledge of their causes.

Finally, although the argumentation on either side is more complex than has been presented here, the foregoing debate between Ghazali and Ibn Rushd could be reduced to a simple question of difference in perspectives, or rather in approaches, each of which is valid in its own domain. In order to affirm the absolute Oneness and Incomparability of God, as manifested in the Qur'an, Ghazali stresses the discontinuity of all that is "other" than Him; this accounts for his rejection of natural causality as necessary, since to accept it would allow the world to have an existence seemingly independent from God. Given His attribute of Omnipotence, God cannot logically be prevented from intervening in the world at every instant: "There is no objection to admitting that anything may be possible for God", (p. 324) therefore the world's organization is not inherent to it but is divinely ordained.

If Ghazali's arguments reach the threshold of absurdity at times, it is because he is attempting to demonstrate the indemonstrable, with the inevitable result that logic is to some extent sacrificed in the process. As a theologian, moreover, he is bound by dogmatic restrictions, since he has to expound the orthodox views of Islam, as strictly defined by tradition, and which must be accessible to the majority of believers. Yet it cannot be denied that he succeeds in making a forceful point inasmuch as he' sees beyond the apparent reality of the physical world to the profound reality lying at its origin, whereas Ibn Rushd considers the physical world to be as real as the divine realm.

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[121] Qur'an: XXI, 69.

Ghazali's reasoning takes for its point of departure the highest order of reality, while on the contrary Ibn Rushd– as an Aristotelian philosopher– takes his starting point in the material world. Believing that the nature of God can be demonstrated according to physical laws, he seeks to attain knowledge of the Divine by firmly grasping material reality, then by reasoning through analogy, with the assumption that the same types of connexion are to be found in higher levels of existence. Despite the justifications he offers for his method, it is understandable that this way of proceeding should have appeared dangerous to the theologians. In fact, Ibn Rushd's views have led some scholars to the erroneous view that he was undertaking to defend science against religion;[122] but he could not have had this in mind, since his whole purpose was to attain to knowledge of God through knowledge of nature. As he himself admitted, the art of philosophy could be a threat to right belief if it were put into the wrong hands and pursued inadequately; but for the wise, it could only be a door opening onto a greater knowledge of reality, and hence of truth. Therefore, philosophy could not really be in conflict with theology, since both expounded the same truth seen in different lights, the Islamic revelation being vast enough to allow for several visions of a reality which is ultimately one.

[122] EI-Ehwany, p. 557.

# CREATIVITY AND THE MICROCOSM

**Dr. Ayesha Leghari Saeed**

Muhyil-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. al-'Arabi al-Hatimi al-Ta'i, known as al-Sheikh al-Akbar, is described in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as, 'one of the greatest Sufis of Islam.'[123] The importance of his thought lies in the fact that his metaphysical, cosmological and psychological formulations went a long way in articulating the vast body of knowledge that had accumulated in the tradition of Sufism since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Whereas, before Ibn al-'Arabi's time, the theoretical exposition of metaphysical, cosmological and psychological realities was found in the sayings of different saints, Ibn al-'Arabi was the first Sufi to formulate these realities in a complete and comprehensive multifaceted doctrine.[124] In the words of Nasr, 'He thus became the expositor *par excellence* of gnosis in Islam.'[125] One of the most renowned students of Ibn al-'Arabi in the West, Michel Chodkiewicz, has described Ibn al-'Arabi and his philosophy as being an 'ocean without shore.'[126] Ibn al-'Arabi synthesized many of the doctrines that were prevalent in his times via his own unique

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

[123] A. Ates, "Ibn al'Arabi" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM, Edition v. 1.0. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999.

[124] Mention can be made of Sufi saints such as Hakim al-Tirmidhi and Bayazid al-Bastami, who deal with metaphysical themes, and Farid ud-din Attar and Ibn Masarrah, who deal with cosmological doctrines. For more details, see Seyyed H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999), 90.

[125] Ibid.

[126] For details regarding Ibn al-'Arabi's influence in both the Eastern and Western lands of Islam, see Michel Chodkiewiez, "Introduction," in *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn 'Arabi, The Book and the Law* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 1-18.

way of perceiving and experiencing reality. The importance of Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy for the contemporary world is explained by Chodkiewicz:

He who claimed the function of "seal of the Muhammadan sainthood," according to all the evidence, deliberately assumed the title; he tirelessly enclosed in his work, for the use of those who would live in ages darker than his own, the *amana* [trust], the sacred repository of which he considered himself the guardian.[127]

Ibn al-'Arabi is able to express the esoteric dimension of Islam in such a way that seekers can gain insight into the metaphysical dimension of the path that they are following. Ibn al-'Arabi's formulations regarding the concept of God's unity (*al-tawhid*), God's names and attributes, the perfect human being, the theory of creation and cosmology, the role of the creative Imagination, and the creativity inherent in the interaction of the masculine principle of the spirit and the feminine principle of the soul, are a treasure house of knowledge for gaining an in depth understanding of divine and human creativity. Getting a glimpse into Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy is like viewing reality in the form of a multidimensional hologram. The sight of even one aspect of the hologram is enough to grasp the unity that Ibn al-'Arabi focuses on, and which is the basis of the correspondence between various realms of reality.

One of the most important contributions of Ibn al-'Arabi in the field of Islamic thought has been his belief in the unity, correspondence and interconnection between the macrocosmic and microcosmic realms of reality.[128]

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127 Ibid., 18.

128 For further details regarding the unity and correspondence between various realms of reality, see Ibn 'Arabi, "The Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu'aib," in Ibn al-Arabi. *The Bezels of Wisdom: Fusus al-Hikam*. Translated by Ralph W. J. Austin. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999,145.

This great Muslim thinker believed that God's attributes are reflected in both the macrocosm and the microcosm.[129] The human body (*al-jism*), soul (*al-nafs*) and spirit (*al-ruh*) reflect the three basic realms of the macrocosm; i.e. the physical, the imaginal and the spiritual. One of the verses of the Qur'an, which Ibn al-'Arabi quotes to support his view, is 'We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that it/He is the Real' (Qur'an, 41:53).[130] *Hu* can be translated as both, 'it' or 'He,' as the pronoun's use is ambiguous. It can be a reference to everything in the cosmos or it can be referring to God, who is the ultimate reality behind all things. Ibn al-'Arabi interprets this pronoun both ways, depending on the context of what he is explaining.[131] He understands this verse as referring to how God's signs become intelligible for the people of insight, both within the macrocosm and the inner human microcosm, where God chooses to manifest Himself in new self-disclosures: "Your signifier of the Real is yourself and the cosmos."[132]

In this way, the 'self' and 'horizons' stand for the 'microcosm' and the 'macrocosm' respectively. These two terms are also interpreted as *al-'alam al-saghir* (the microcosm: the small world) and *al-'alam al-kabir* (macrocosm: the great world) and the correspondence between these two realms is clearly elucidated in the following:

The Lawgiver turned you over to knowledge of yourself in knowledge of God through His words, *We shall show them Our signs,* which are the signifiers, *upon the horizons and in themselves.* Hence He did not leave aside anything of the cosmos, for everything of the cosmos that is outside of you is identical with

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[129] For an introduction to Ibn al-'Arabi's life and works see: William C. Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabi," in *History of Islamic Philosophy.* Edited by Seyyed H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 115-48. London: Routledge, 1996 and the article on "Ibn 'Arabi." in the same book by the same author, 497-509.

[130] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat,*III 275.32, quoted in William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-Arabi's Cosmology.* Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000., 6.

[131] Chittick, ibid, 6.

[132] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, IV 307.1, quoted in Chittick, ibid.

the *horizons,* which are the regions around you. *Until it is clear to them that it is the Real, nothing else,* because there is nothing else.[133]

For Ibn al-'Arabi, those who practice spiritual retreat or 'seclusion' are able to discern the signs of the cosmos first, and the signs within themselves are made manifest afterwards.

God says, *We shall show them our signs upon the horizons and in themselves* so that they will know that the human being is the microcosm of the cosmos containing the signs that are within the cosmos.[134]

The belief that God created human beings in His form signifies that the microcosm and the macrocosm reflect both all the attributes of God in a correspondence, which can be viewed as a circle.

I saw in [this way station] the knowledge of mutual interpenetration and the vicious circle. In His acts the Real can only be in the form of creation and in its acts creation can only be in the form of the Real. Hence we have a vicious circle, but this does not give rise to the impossibility of occurrence. On the contrary, this is what occurs in the actual situation.[135]

God is the Origin of all the attributes in existence, even though those whom he calls the 'considerative thinkers' declare Him incomparable with many of the attributes. This knowledge that God is the source and origin of all attributes points to the fact that the attributes manifested in human existence are corresponding reflections of the attributes of God. Ibn al-'Arabi's asserted that all attributes, such as laughter, thirst, hunger, illness, wrath, anger, joy, wonder, are in fact attributes of God and not of creation because the reports of these attributes have been brought down through the scriptures and on the tongues of the messengers.[136]

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[133] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, III 275.32, quoted in Chittick, ibid.
[134] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, II 150.33, quoted in Chittick, ibid.
[135] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, III 352.11, quoted in Chittick, ibid., 28.
[136] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, III 538.9, quoted in Chittick, ibid.

However, He created the cosmos in His form, so it accepts to be named by His names. What is ascribed to the Real-in respect of what the Real has ascribed to Himself - is ascribed to the cosmos. Thus we know that He is the root in His names, not we. He has not taken anything that belongs to us, nor are we worthy of anything. On the contrary, all of it belongs to Him.[137]

Another method that Ibn al-'Arabi uses to explain this correspondence between God's form and the macrocosm is through God's name 'the Beautiful.' The saying of the Prophet, 'God is beautiful and He loves Beauty,'[138] means that, in reality, everything that God created is a reflection of God's beauty for He created everything in His own form. 'There is nothing but beauty, for God created the cosmos only in His form, and He is beautiful. Hence all the cosmos is beautiful.'[139]

The macrocosm and the microcosm are the two forms that manifest God. Ibn al-'Arabi emphasizes the Qur'anic doctrine of the duality (*zawjan*) found in creation. This duality is better translated as coupleness.[140] Of everything in existence, there is a couple, and their relationship depends on activity and receptivity, one displaying masculine, and the other feminine characteristics.

Of everything in *wujud* there is a couple, for the perfect human being, and the cosmos through the perfect human being, are in the form of the Real. The couples are the male and the female, hence an actor and the one acted upon.[141]

Although both the macrocosm and the microcosm are made in the form of God, the macrocosm was created to serve the microcosm. All that are in the 'horizons' are created specifically for the human 'selves' mentioned in the above quoted Qur'anic verse. God created the universe, the totality of the divine names, the totality of the wisdom, all revelations; in fact, all the blessings of heaven and earth are especially for the human microcosm.[142]

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137 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, III 538.9, quoted in Chittick, ibid., 29.
138 Muslim, Iman 147; Ibn Maja, Du'a 10.
139 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, II 542.19, quoted in Chittick, ibid., 28.
140 Chittick, ibid., 175.
141 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, IV 132.17, quoted in Chittick, ibid.
142 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, IV 132.17, quoted in Chittick, ibid., 189.

Human beings have been assigned all the qualities by which they can choose to follow God's Law or by which they are compelled in their choice. The roots of all the qualities in human beings are divine.

The eminence of the human state is proven by the fact that, out of the whole cosmos, it is the human being that is chosen by God for His self-disclosures in the most comprehensive manner. Ibn al-'Arabi explains the significance of the microcosmic human state explicitly, as follows:

To him the Real discloses Himself through judgement, decree, and decision. Around him the whole cosmos revolves, for his sake the resurrection occurs, through him the jinn are called to account, and for him is 'subjected what is in the heavens and what is in the earth' [Qur'an 31:20]. The whole cosmos moves out of need for him, in both the high and the low realms, in this world and the last.[143]

The correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm is obvious through the inter-relationship between the spirit and the body in the human realm and the cosmic realm. The spirit is the origin, the source, the very being and life, of the human body. Similarly, the Universal Spirit permeates the body of the universe. This relationship between the spirit and the body in turn reflects the relationship between God and everything He has created, or between the Speaker and the words that are articulated through the breath of the All-Merciful One.[144] God governs everything in the universe due to the fact that 'creativity belongs to the Essence of the Creator.'[145] There is an essential connection between God, the macrocosm and the microcosm through God's Essence and His Spirit.

God blew His own spirit into the model of clay so that the human being came into existence containing the spirit, the soul and the body. The spirit within the human being is connected to the Spirit of God, the body is connected to the corporeal world, and the soul is connected to the imaginal realm, which lies as an intermediate realm between the spirit and the body.

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143 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, III 417.24, quoted in Chittick, ibid.
144 Chittick, ibid., 274.
145 Ibid.

The realm of the soul also corresponds to the realm of Nature in the macrocosm. The spirit is light, the body dark, and the soul or nature is the shadowy world of creative Imagination where both light and darkness play an essentially creative role. If the attributes of God were manifested in their purity they would be blinding in their intensity. The cosmos is unable to sustain such purity; therefore the attributes are manifested in the realm of the soul as 'corporeous qualities and forces.'[146] The spirit pulls the soul upwards, towards the realms of unity and light, while the body pulls the soul downwards, towards the realms of darkness and dispersion.

Another proof of the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm is found in God's knowledge of His own Essence through the cosmos. In knowing Himself God knows all the marks (*'alama*) of existence (*wujud*) in all their various manifestations. Through His breath, God articulates the word 'Be!' and brings into creation that which was only a hidden possibility. God has knowledge of all the hidden possibilities. It is through this knowledge and the desire to manifest and bring into existence these hidden possibilities that He creates the macrocosm and the microcosm. Therefore, to know God, human beings have been exhorted to know themselves. They are one of the hidden possibilities in the knowledge of God that were made manifest by His creative Command.

This is indicated by the Prophet's words, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Hence He made you your signifier of Him, and you come to know Him. Likewise His Essence is His signifier of you, so He knew you and then brought you into existence. [147]

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146 Ibid., 339.

147 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat* II 479.3, Chittick, ibid., 20-1.

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To know God, human beings need to know themselves, and in order to know themselves they need to know the spirit, the heart, the intellect and the soul that make up their inner beings. Moreover, for the purpose of realizing their true potentiality, human beings need to understand how they are 'marked' by God and how they themselves are a 'mark' of God while they exist on this earthly plane. As the Qur'an mentions, one of the ways to achieve this end is to become aware of how the attributes of God are manifested within the 'horizons' and within their inner 'selves.'

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# IQBAL, THE POET

Dr. Thomas Stemmer

*"Poetry 'has something to say' which 'cannot be said'." (Muhammad Suheyl Umar)*[148]

* * *

I have always considered Muhammad Iqbal as a *poet*.

Yes, I know that the correct way of referring oneself to him is to call him a *poet-philosopher*. Furthermore, I am very well aware, that Iqbal himself understood poetry as a means to an end, not as a value in itself. Not as *l'art pour l'art*. But since a closer look at his philosophy shows that he has not established a system and therefore is not a classic philosopher, but a deeply inspired thinker, going beyond narrow restrictions, this might also serve as a hint at the fact, that his poetry is also not 'ordinary' poetry. It is poetry in a deeper sense.

So in which way is Iqbal a poet?

I came across the name *Muhammad Iqbal* in a very poetic way. The year was 1985 and I had just celebrated my 22nd birthday. My parents had driven me to Heidelberg so that I could start my studies at the South Asia Institute and at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Heidelberg. I was new to the city, and therefore I enjoyed late evening walks through the streets trying to catch the atmosphere. While strolling through the dawn I developed the habit of reading the names of the streets trying to put them to memory. One evening I felt a strong attraction to the river Neckar. Readily I gave in to that urge, since walking alongside a river surely is an uplifting experience.

It was there that I followed a noisy street at the river known as B 37. I already knew this B 37 as *Vangerowstraße*, but here, close to the city's centre,

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148 Umar, Muhammad Suheyl: "*That I may see and Tell*". *Significance of Iqbal's Wisdom Poetry*, Iqbal Academy Brochure Series № 2, Lahore, Pakistan, 2002, p. 12

the name was different: *Iqbal-Ufer*. That struck me as odd. Who was Iqbal? I pondered. While walking around I even discovered some sort of a memorial stone with the very same name on it: *Iqbal*.

I have always had a love for unknown things and I thought *I've got to find out more about this*... However, I might have forgotten about it, since my mind was absorbed in getting accustomed to university life. But the name *Iqbal* would show up a second time. While selecting the courses I came to know that at the South Asia Institute there was an Iqbal Chair, held by a visiting guest professor from Pakistan. Since the name *Iqbal* had now presented itself *again*, I quickly enrolled in the course on Sufi poetry offered by Prof. Malik, who held the Iqbal Chair in those days.

That was the beginning.

Very soon, I found out that Iqbal was the poet-philosopher of Pakistan, in fact, the person who– in a way– founded Pakistan. I read translations of his poetry, both German (by Annemarie Schimmel) and English. Interestingly enough, I was soon to discover one of Muhammad Iqbal's most famous poems depicting an idyllic evening scenery alongside the river Neckar. In my native German it was translated as *Ein Abend am Neckar* [*An Evening by the River Neckar*]. In it, Muhammad Iqbal expressed a vision of quietness along the river: *(...) Zieht der stumme Strom der Sterne / Ohne Glockenklang zur Ferne, / Berg und Strom und Feld in Stille, / In sich ruht der ew'ge Wille. (...)* [(...) *The caravan of the stars moves on / In silence, without bells. / Silent are hill and forest and river; / Nature seems lost in contemplation. (...)*][149]. In 1985 the Iqbal-Ufer does not specifically evoke a vision of silence at first sight; the B37 (of which the Iqbal-Ufer is a part) is full of noisy cars. *Silence*? Yes: silence! Even nowadays. I am convinced that Iqbal caught a glimpse of inner silence.

I suppose there is a word to describe this ability to catch inner silence: poetry.

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[149] Quoted after the *Preface* (for the English translation, p. 5) and after the *Geleitwort* (for the German translation, p. 9 – 10) of: Koehler, Wolfgang (Hrsg. / ed.): Muhammad Iqbal und die drei Reiche des Geistes. *Muhammad Iqbal and the Three Realms of the Spirit*. Band 3 der Schriftenreihe des Deutsch-Pakistanischen Forums e. V., Vol. 3 in the series by the German-Pakistan Forum, Hamburg, 1977

From that experience(s) on, I kept digging into the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal.

It seems that Iqbal's poetry "as a means to an end" represents only an outer layer of words covering inner silence, and behind this layer his silent poetry flavours his writings, even his prose with a certain fragrance. From here, it might become clear *why* for example his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*– itself being a philosophical work!– rings such a familiar *poetic* bell.

I will go one step further. Maybe this silent, inner poetry within Muhammad Iqbal's "poetry & prose in words" is that specific *universal* character in his works turning him into a great spiritual personality. And maybe this is an explanation why so many people can benefit from his books– Muslims and non-Muslims like myself alike– pretty much in the same way as Muhammad Iqbal himself discovered the Western poets such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Or as Dr. Ahmet Albayrak recently wrote about Iqbal: *His words are epigrams*.[150]

Yes, I have to admit: My efforts in digging into Iqbal's poetry displayed here are just a *starting point*.

There will be more to come.

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[150] Dr. Albayrak, Ahmet: The Status of Iqbal Studies in Turkey," in: *Almas*, Vol. 7, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan, 2004, pp. 1-16 (quote on p. 14)

# BOOK REVIEW

LEE PENN, *Religious Universalism*, *False Dawn: The United Religions Initiative, Globalism and the Quest for a One-World Religion*. Sophia Perennis, NY, 2005.

REVIEWED BY CHARLES UPTON.

The United Religions Initiative, founded in 1995 by William E. Swing, Episcopal Bishop of California, is the most ambitious interfaith organization presently operating in the world, the most "ecumenical" in outlook, and the one which seems to have the closest ties to various "globalist" figures and organizations. In *False Dawn: The United Religions Imitative, Globalism and the Quest for a One World Religion,* Lee Penn provides us with a detailed history of the movement, its predecessors, its ideological confederates, its allied organizations both religious and secular, its stated goals and its implicit agendas. He has taken a penetrating look at the dynamics of globalization through the lens of contemporary religion— both the established, organized religions and the new religious movements— the picture he presents to us is both rarely illuminating and deeply chilling.

Religious universalism is not what it used to be. When René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon were making their profound contributions to the doctrine which has come to be known (in Schuon's phrase) as the "Transcendent Unity of Religions", the idea that all world religions were the providentially various dialects of a single language of Truth was fairly novel, shocking to many, and easily dismissed. Today it is a cliché. This is not to say that the religions are not still vigorously defending their boundaries. As globalization and a fast shrinking world throw them into ever more violent confrontation, suspicion of universalists on the part of various religious "fundamentalists" is growing. On the other hand, religious universalism is a much more established doctrine, in worldly terms, than it was when Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon were doing their groundbreaking work. And as inter-religious violence increases, it is swiftly becoming the "obvious" alternative to such violence in the minds of many, just as the dream of a One World Government is being increasingly identified with such ideals as "univocal peace" and "global unity"— ideals

which are uncritically accepted as both entirely possible and "quasi-absolutely" desirable by all too many well-intentioned but poorly-informed idealists. In *False Dawn,* Lee Penn demonstrates, with an irresistible tide of documentation, how religious universalism is being co-opted as the "spiritual ideology" of a globalization which is both fundamentally secular (Guénon's "anti-tradition") and busy inventing a One World Religion with pretensions to "mysticism" and "esoterism" (Guénon's "counter tradition"). *In Theosophy, the History of a Pseudo-Religion, The Spiritist Fallacy* and *The Reign of Quantity* (all available through *Sophia Perennis),* René Guénon spoke cryptically of the counter-tradition and counter initiation he saw fomenting in various socially marginal but nonetheless highly influential sects and secret societies, foremost among them being the Theosophical Society. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, Lee Penn has drawn aside the veil covering the activities of such groups, and revealed their growing interaction with the organized globalist elites. And the Theosophical Society, as an intellectual influence if not an organizing cadre, is still there. With entire justification, *False Dawn* could have been sub-titled "The Counter-Initiation Documented."

The author of *False Dawn* has produced an astounding expose of the Interfaith Movement in general, and the United Religions Initiative in particular, which explodes more pre-conceived assumptions than any book I have ever read. The URI numbers among its supporters Ted Turner, George Sores, George W Bush and Sun Myung Moon; in light of this, I defy anyone limited to a left-wing or right-wing ideology to see it as it actually is. The author presents ample evidence that the New Age movement has become what I like to call it a "contingency ideology" of many among the globalist elites, who have adopted and established New Age beliefs just when the movement seems to be waning on a popular level. And it gives a clear picture of how some of the globalists would like to federate all the world's religions under a single authority, as a way of pacifying the religious "tribes" (religious fundamentalists, oppressed ethnic groups, nationalists) in the name of global unity and the New World Order. This is "MacWorld" in the religious field - a "MacWorld" that is busy preparing a "Jihad" of its own (this in allusion to the important book *Jibad vs. MacWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World,* by Benjamin Barber.)

Lee Penn's work is so much more sophisticated, comprehensive and well-documented (over 3000 footnotes!) than the usual conservative Catholic or Evangelical anti-New Age screed that there is simply no comparison. His conservative Catholic friends were in ecstasy over it until they read his *PostScript,* where he warns us against some of the authoritarian, right-wing movements within Catholicism, such as Opus Dei, Tradition, Family and Property, and the Legionaries of Christ. His "authorities" include C. S. Lewis, George Orwell, G. K. Chesterton, Nietzsche (who so clearly declared and celebrated what the "dark side" was up to), Malcolm Muggeridge, Popes Pius X, Pius XI and Pius XII,]. R. R. Tolkien, and René Guénon. He has presented us with a clearly Fascist-leaning Tielhard de Chardin— Chardin the darling of the liberal Catholics!— with a rabid New Age anti-Semitism among highly influential writers both living and dead, with a psychopathic Sun Myung Moon courted (literally!) by members of the U. S. House of Representatives, with a United Religions Initiative spoken highly of by both the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Communist state-run church, funded by both liberal foundations and those with close ties to the U.S. State Department, and which includes one convicted rapist and al-Qaeda connected Muslim, the most ultra-liberal Christians imaginable, anti-Communist Moonies, Anglicans, Wiccans, Neo-Pagans etc.— an "umbrella organization" with a vengeance! The author has been able to articulate this uncommon vision because he has spent a number of years looking in a direction that few others even recognize as existing":' the reason for such incomprehension being (as I like to say) that the Devil now largely defines the sides we are asked to take and the ideologies' we are required to choose from. Reading his book, it's as if we have suddenly discovered that our house has windows not only to the east and west, but to the north as well— and that the view through that north window is every bit as detailed, unified and articulate as our more familiar perspectives. It is not some hermetically-sealed world of the imagination, but a novel and indeed tremendously shocking view of the common world we inhabit— a world whose fate we share.

*False Dawn* is far more than an exhaustively documented history and critique of the United Religions Initiative, though it certainly is that. And it is more than just a history of the interfaith movement. It is, in fact, an analysis of the ideology of globalism with special reference to the religious sphere. Taking the United Religions Initiative as a point of orientation, the, author

analyses not only the explicitly religious ideologies relating to globalization, their major patrons and spokespersons, and the organizations which exist to disseminate such ideas, but also investigates the membership and apparent agendas of highly influential secular organizations whose leaders— such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Maurice Strong (Chairman of the World Bank and close friend of George W Bush)— have spoken well "of the URI, organizations which share a similar ideological outlook. These groups include the State of the World Forum, the Earth Charter Initiative, Green Cross International, the Gorbachev Foundation, the World Future Society, the World Economic Forum, the U.N. Environmental Program, UNESCO, and the United Nations Population Fund. The author clearly demonstrates how a religious universalism with political backing, a universalism seeking political clout on a global scale, is inseparable from the push for a One World Government.

Lee Penn also demonstrates how globalization has given certain New Age teachers a worldwide pulpit, including Robert Muller (former Assistant Secretary General of the U.N.), Barbara Marx Hubbard (whose name was placed in nomination for the vice-presidency of the United States at the 1984 Democratic Convention, and who is presently a director of the World Future Society along with former U.S. Secretary of State Robert McNamara, Maurice Strong, and scholars from Georgetown University, the George Washington University and the University of Maryland), Avon Mattison, Corrine McLaughlin, Gordon Davidson, and probably the best-selling New Age teacher as of this writing, Neale Donald Walsch, author of the absurd and highly popular *Conversations with God* and its sequels. The reader will no doubt be interested to learn that, according to Walsch, Hitler went to heaven (because he didn't really hurt anyone; he just sent all those Jews to a better place, seeing that death is better than life), and that Barbara Marx Hubbard's "spirit guide" (a Jesus impersonator) has called for the extermination of one-third to one-half of the earth's population. And Lee Penn exhaustively traces the history of the New Age movement to H. P. Blavatsky, founder of the 'Theosophical Society, and more directly to mid-20th century Theosophist Alice A. Bailey, founder of the Lucis Trust, who is spoken highly of by many of the New Age teachers listed above and who herself (along with Barbara Marx Hubbard) spoke highly of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a "spiritual initiation" for the earth! He also demonstrates the

seminal influence of heterodox Catholic priest, author and paleontologist Tielhard de Chardin on the same sinister constellation of ideas.

For the most part. *False Dawn* reveals the core beliefs and shared agendas of the globalist interfaith movement in the words of its own spokespersons and publications. The massive amount of data the author has brought together may seem daunting at first to some readers, but it ultimately l-arrives the day by its own weight, its outrageous audacity, and its ominous consistency. It is precisely this relentless documentation which finally convinces.

## TRADITION AND UNIVERSALISM

Given that secular ideologies, whether of the Left or the Right, have lost a great deal of the cultural force they possessed for most of the 20th century—post modernity being notoriously suspicious of "overarching paradigms"—part of the burden of providing us with "the big picture" has fallen, or fallen *back,* on the organized religions, as well as on the myths and aspirations of various new religious movements. And even though religion, in essence, is better able to offer an all-encompassing worldview worth living by than any secular ideology, the partial collapse of secular ideologies in favor of this are that religious perspective has in effect "ideologized" the religions, narrowing their scope, shrinking their ontological vision, and dragging theology and morality (not to mention metaphysics) in the direction of propaganda and social action. (Renegade Traditionalist and Fascist fellow-traveler Baron Julius Evola heralded this degeneration when he falsely claimed that the *kshattiya* initiation is higher than the *Brahmanic* one— in other words, that action is higher than the contemplation.) For this reason, no social analysis that fails to take religious myth and dogma as seriously as it does any secular ideology will be capable of making sense out of the contemporary scene. And for those who understand that religion is not political or historical in essence, that it is a door to higher realities, a way of perfecting the human form and fulfilling the human trust, a clear understanding of the contemporary corruption and cooptation of the religious traditions is of vital importance, since without it they may be led to confuse the eternal form of the revelation they are struggling to live by with its own degenerate caricature. Both secular social analysts working to define the influence of religion on contemporary

events, and religious believers trying to understand what is happening to their traditions, will find in *False Dawn* an indispensable aid— one that has arrived not a day too soon.

Furthermore, I believe that this book has something to say to the Traditionalist School in particular. It is my impression that "Traditionalist social analysis" desperately needs to be updated, now that Ortega Gasset's "revolt of the masses" is largely a thing of the past, having been replaced— in the west at least— by Christopher Larch's "revolt of the elites," the title of his final book, in which Lasch shows how it is now the masses who are relatively traditional, while the elites tend to be anti-traditional and progressive— notwithstanding the skill of people like George W Bush in playing the role of "traditional conservative" and Mercian patriot" when it suits their purposes. We don't really have to be warned, again, against socialism, the "leveling" vulgarity of democracy and the tyranny of the machine, so much as we need to understand how traditional metaphysics and esoterism themselves could be perverted and coopted by the coming globalist regime. Those identified with Traditionalism are familiar with worldly incomprehension and ridicule; they are used to being ignored. But in view of recent developments, one wonders how ready they are to deal with worldly acceptance, enthusiastic incomprehension, and the danger of ultimate cooptation, given that certain key globalist leaders are presently on the lookout for articulate religious Universalists; they are *Now Hiring*. To be validated, to be accepted, to be *heard* by the world of men and affairs, after so long an exile, could prove for some a formidable temptation. This is not to say that the Traditionalist worldview, comprising the Perennial Wisdom plus a critique of the postmodern world in light of this Wisdom, is of no relevance in these times. Indeed, taken in its widest definition, it is possibly the one worldview which allows us to make entire sense of them. But according to its own principles, it cannot be of use to collectively organized humanity in these latter days, at least in uncorrupted form. Its use is and will be to give individuals a conceptual and, God willing, a spiritually practical way out of the Babylon of these latter days: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, that ye receive notified plagues" [*Apocalypse* 18:4]. Thus it can never be a mass movement while maintaining its true nature— God help us if it ever becomes one! It would be better characterized as an "underground railroad," a network of guides and safe

houses designed to lead "freedmen" out of The World and into a quality of both earthly and transcendent human life which is no longer identified with that World. Whether or not those few who are attracted to the Traditionalist worldview constitute a spiritual "elite," it is at least certain that, given their spiritual and intellectual constitution, they cannot be saved without it.

There are, however, forms of religious or "spiritual" universalism that have always had a worldly goal in mind: the supplanting of the revealed religious traditions with a universal, synergetic religion which will be the basis of a new "highly evolved" spiritual culture; this culture will be global in reach, and form the basis of a New Age for humanity. Dreams of a spiritual New Age were foreshadowed in the teachings of such figures as Joachim da Fiore [c. 1135-1202] with his idea of the Age of the Holy Spirit which is to follow the Age of the Father (the Old Testament) and the Age of the Son (the New Testament), as well as in certain worldly interpretations of the Isma'ili Shi'ite doctrine that the Great Resurrection has already taken place, thus abrogating the Muslim *Shari'a.* Similar dreams resurfaced during the Protestant Reformation, when even Jacob Boehme felt that he was living in a new spiritual age for humanity. Lee Penn traces the modem resurgence of such ideas to the Parliament of World Religions in 1893, where Swami Vivekananda preached his own version of religious universalism to a dazzled audience, and shows how they have always been central to the doctrines and aspirations of the Theosophical Society, whose influence on many contemporary New Age teachers he abundantly documents. The Traditionalist School has always taken great care to distinguish itself from the kind of non-traditional universalism preached by Madam Blavatsky, or Aldus Huxley, or Alan Watts. The speed of globalization, however, as well as the difficulty in defining its exact outlines and ideology, have led some writers who are at least sympathetic to the Traditionalist outlook, such as Eyes Caric, to treat it as if it promised to be a "new age" of inter-religious amity and dialogue, like Hellenistic Alexandria or Muslim Andalusia, in which the Traditionalist enterprise could well play a leading part. *False Dawn* demonstrates just how wrong this belief is. Globalization has already been fully infiltrated by the anti-traditional Universalists, one of whose apparent agendas is to limit or actually prohibit religious proselytization, under some future global federation of religions, as a means to prevent inter-religious violence, looking on proselytization as the religious equivalent of one nation

violating the borders of another. In such an atmosphere, the Traditionalists are much more likely to be coopted than understood. URI founder Bishop William Swing, in his book *The Coming United Religions* [Co-Nexus Press, 1998 J, has even quoted from Huston Smith's introduction to Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religions,* drawing from it the "lesson" that those who see all religions as various expression of the One Truth are the "esoterists," while those who hold to the exclusive truth of one religion are the "extremists." According to him, the whole mass of anti-traditional, New Age or neonatal or ultra-liberal religious syncretists, subscribers to the popular cliché version of religious universalism, are "esotericism" in Schuon's sense of the word! He is unaware that Schuon balanced his universalism by teaching that the revealed religions are providential in their uniqueness and variety. Schuon says:

> Every religion by definition wants to be the best, and "must want" to be the best, as a whole and also as regards its constitutive elements; this is only natural, so to speak, or rather "supernaturally natural" religious oppositions not but be, not only because forms exclude one an other….but because in the case of religions, each form vehicles an element of absoluteness that constitutes the justification for its existence; now the absolute does not tolerate otherness nor, with all the more reason, plurality…. To say form is to say exclusion of possibilities, whence the necessary for those excluded to become realized in other forms [*Christianity/Islam: Essays in Esoteric Ecumenism,* p.l5l]

*False Dawn* should alert the Traditionalist School not to be unwittingly led astray by their own cosmopolitanism into making common cause with the agents, no longer clandestine but now publicly visible and active, of Guénon's "counter-initiation." It is much too late in the day for the Traditionalists to imagine they might one day have the power to influence the course of history. Their true role is to *save souls,* to define precisely how those who have seen beyond religious exclusivism can walk the Spiritual Path without betraying Tradition, either by attempting to travel the Path as self-determined freelancers, or by falling in with the anti-traditional Universalists.

The lesson I drew from Traditionalism was to preach the Transcendent Unity of Religions to militant religious exclusivists— not that they are likely

to listen— and the need for commitment to a single religious tradition to promiscuous spiritual ecumenists— not that *they* are likely to listen, either. But I, at least, will be listening. God willing, I will heed the warning not to make an idol either out of my own religious tradition (Islam) or out of the kind of universal "generic" metaphysics some have drawn from the writings of the Traditionalist masters. If God is no' more than "the God of the Christians" or "the God of the Muslims" then He has been degraded from the Absolute Reality to a simple tribal deity. Christianity and Islam and Judaism and Hinduism are true not because the God they worship is the God of Christianity or of Islam or of Judaism or of Hinduism, but because He is the Living God, the Reality Who transcends all of these, His Self-manifestations. But this realization in itself does not constitute an effective spiritual Path. The entire use of the doctrine of the Transcendent Unity of Religions is to help us understand God as transcending all forms, both cultural and natural, while manifesting Himself (in Mercy or in Wrath) by means of them, thus preventing us from worshipping the forms of our chosen religion in the place of God. Any effective spiritual Path, however, must be supported by these very religious forms, seen in their "metaphysical transparency". Though all true and revealed religions spring from the same divine Root, the nourishing fruit of this tree grows on the branches, not the trunk.

In the days of Schuon, Guénon and Coomaraswamy, the times required a concentration on the first of the above two "sermons." But our own time is very different. Only now can we say that the threat of a spurious religious universalism with real social power behind it has begun to equal that of the various militant religious exclusivisms. Alongside the ego of the religious fanatic, we must now place the ego of the religious Universalist, who takes the Transcendent Unity of Religions, whether or not he calls it by that name, in an entirely horizontal manner as if it meant no more than "since all religions are expressions of the same Truth, one religion is just as good as another— and an amalgam of the religions is even better, because each religion has *part* of the truth; when they are all united, then we will have the *whole* truth." As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has written:

> …people search in these ecumenical movements for a common denominator which, in certain instances, sacrifices divinely ordained

> qualitative differences for the sake of a purely human and often quantitative egalitarianism. In such cases the so-called "ecumenical" forces in question are no more than a concealed form of the secularism and humanism which gripped the West at the time of the Renaissance and which in their own turn caused religious divisions within Christianity. This type of ecumenism, whose hidden motive is much more worldly than religious, goes hand in hand with the kind of charity that is willing to forego the love of God for the love of the neighbor and in fact insists upon the love of the neighbor in spite of a total lack of love for God and the Transcendent. The mentality which advocates this kind of "charity" affords one more example of the loss of the transcendent dimension and the reduction of all things to the purely worldly. It is yet another manifestation of the secular character of modernism which in this case has penetrated into the supreme Christian venue of charity and, to the extent that it has been successful, has deprived this venue of unspiritual significance…. It would be less harmful to oppose other religions, as has been done by so many religious authorities throughout history, than to be willing to destroy essential aspects of one's own religion in order to reach a common denominator with another group of men who are asked to undergo the same losses. To say the least, a league of religions could not guarantee religious peace, any more than the League of Nations guaranteed political peace. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, preface to *Shi'ite Islam* by Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, pp. 5-6)

Closely allied to this kind of false "exoteric" universalist who espouses a worldly ecumenism is the false "esoteric" universalist who believes that metaphysics can be a spiritual Path in itself, independent of any commitment to a traditional religious way, and whose non-traditional metaphysics (which may have been *abstracted* from the revealed religions, but are no longer effectively connected with any' of them) are a great source of pride to him. He sees these generic metaphysics as transcending and superseding the religious traditions themselves, which he views as "good enough for simple believers" or "good enough for mere *bhaktas,"* but in no way good enough for metaphysically sophisticated *jnanis* such as himself. He forgets both that true *jnana* is as far beyond the mental understanding of metaphysical principles as it is beyond religious sentimentality, and that the Transcendent Unity of Religions, once grasped, is actually a fairly elementary concept, for

all the difficulty it presents to religious literalists; it in no way constitutes the final or even the penultimate content of *jnanic* realization.

## UNIFICATION AND COUNTER-INITIATION

The author of *False Dawn* was a serious Marxist in the 70's, and is now a conservative Catholic following the Byzantine rite. Like many exMarxists, he embraced a basically right-wing ideology for a while, after seeing the evils and shortcomings of his former worldview, and he continues to be essentially conservative. Over the past few years, however, he seems to have come to the conclusion that to see the world in terms of either left-wing or right-wing ideology— or any ideology— is to seriously hamper one's vision. The Left has located certain evils on its radar screen, and possesses the sort of theory that can dearly analyze them and warn us against them. The same goes for the Right. Both, however, have their ideological blind-spots, and both— insofar as they are ignorant of metaphysics— tend to espouse what can only be called clear violations of the human form. Though the author has certainly been critical of the Left, he sees the "ultimate evil" as more likely coming from a right-wing direction. A colleague of the author who wishes to be known as Miguel de Portugal,' a Catholic follower of the Virgin of Fatima, a mystic who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy in the face of what he considers to be the growing apostasy of the Catholic Church, has come to the conclusion that the era in which tradition is weakened and destroyed by left-wing ideologies is giving way to one in which a right-wing reaction against the formless promiscuity of religious liberalism will succeed in setting up a counterfeit "tradition" to replace the real one, just as Hitler profited from the moral degeneracy of the Weimar Republic to establish his religion of blood, soil and the *fuehrerprinzip.* This is Lee Penn's prediction as well. What is striking is that both reached substantially the same conclusion as René Guénon in *The Reign of Quantity* before having read him. In Guénon's words, which Lee Penn quotes (Lee discovered him in the course of writing *False Dawn):*

> The reign of the "counter-tradition" is in fact precisely what is known as "the reign of Antichrist".... His time will certainly no longer be the "reign of quantity," which was itself only the end-point of the "anti-tradition"; it will on the contrary be marked, under the pretext of a false "spiritual

> restoration", by a sort of reintroduction of quality in all things, but of quality inverted with respect to its normal and legitimate significance. After the "egalitarianism" of our times there will again be a visibly established hierarchy, but an inverted hierarchy, indeed a real "counter-hierarchy", the summit of which will be occupied by the being who will in reality be situated nearer than any other being to the bottom of the "pit of Hell".

It is to such developments as these that Traditionalist social criticism now needs to address itself. Basing his analysis on the changeless principles of traditional metaphysics, Guénon was able to see much further than most into the "dialectic" of the End Times. And due to the decline of secular ideologies, traditional metaphysics may in fact be the only vantage point from which the chaos and contradiction of the End Times may be clearly discerned. The internal contradiction of Marxism— and, in fact, of any "progressivist" ideology— is that it claims to provide an objective vantage point from which historical change can be, viewed, while itself being subject to historical change; the yardstick by which we are to measure how high the water has risen is unreliable, since it itself is growing and/or shrinking at the same time. Those who have begun to understand how relative standards cannot objectively measure relative situations will be pushed either toward post-modernist nihilism, or toward acceptance of objective standards which do not and cannot change, standards which can only be theological, and ultimately metaphysical. Yet the very need to embrace changeless standards in a world of immense and chaotic change can itself lead to great dangers, particularly the danger of falsely situating the Absolute in the embrace of the conditional— the root source of all fanaticism. The proper use of metaphysical principles in social criticism is emphatically *not* as a way of establishing a changeless kingdom of Truth on the shifting sands of conditional, worldly life. Its purpose is rather to discern that Truth beyond the veils of this conditional life, as a "kingdom not of This World." This created universe is both a veil over the Face of Truth and a tapestry of signs emanating from that Truth, and also leading back to it. This World, perceived as such, is God's creation seen through the veil of the ego; it is a veil pure and simple; there is no substantial reality, in it. The ever-changing forms in which This World clothes the same basic set of temptations must be constantly tracked— not in order to *control* This World, but in order— God

willing— to become and remain *free* of it. Those who fail to understand this may be shocked to find themselves branded as agents of the "counter-initiation" when the final judgment arrives— like certain groups today who claim to be following Guénon, but who in reality are no more than right-wing political extremists with no understanding of metaphysics and little real interest in it. The falsehood of the month must be investigated and analyzed, until it is precisely revealed as a novel incarnation of the same perennial falsehood; only the liberated soul, the *jivanmukhta* is free from this duty. If we are unwilling to undertake this kind of critical work, we may be tricked into the service of the very worldly masters we believe we have firmly repudiated, simply because they have presented themselves to us with unfamiliar faces and names. Freedom's price, as the saying goes, is eternal vigilance; *False Dawn* powerfully serves the kind of vigilance without which no true freedom is possible.

When my wife and I first met him, Lee was 'writing almost exclusively for a conservative Christian audience, in the kind of language they would readily accept. But as we shared with him our Traditionalist perspective over a period of years, it's as if we heard him breathe an almost audible sigh of relief. It's my impression that our presentation of Traditionalist ideas supported him in consciously accepting and expressing what he already essentially knew, and helped free him from the limitations of his conservative ideology, just as that ideology had freed him from his earlier leftist worldview— and all this without his "becoming a Traditionalist." He remains firmly within his traditional Christian world view and sees no need to adopt another. But certain ideological (*not* theological) constrictions accidental to that worldview now seem to have dropped away. I submit that this is a service the ideas of Coomaraswamy, Guénon and Schuon can perform for a certain class of intellectual in these times. Not everyone is a metaphysician, or should be, but the *breath* of metaphysics may still quicken and liberate the mind of a scientist, or a social critic, or an investigative reporter. Metaphysical principles may transcend "mere facts," but facts are still the concrete *presence* of metaphysical principles in earthly life; anyone who disparages facts can in no way remain faithful to principles. The work of establishing facts, like the work of discerning principles, is in service to the One Truth.

In his *Speculative Postscript,* Lee Penn comes closer to producing a plausible socio-political scenario for the Apocalypse— which clearly must have an historical, socio-political aspect to it, even though, in essence, it is the definitive breakthrough of Eternity into time— than any writer I know; in this concluding section he brings prophecy and social criticism together in a way that is probably only possible in extremely late times. He is wise enough, however, to understand that this scenario is entirely speculative, and that the reality of the end of the age will transcend all our images and expectations. He writes:

I now begin to look over the horizon, and to speculate about the implications and sequelae of the current push for a political, social and religious New World Order.

> It is not my intent to say, as a certainty, that the Apocalypse is upon us *now*. Still less do I Intend the absurd exercise of setting the date for the Second Coming of Christ. Rather, I am arguing that if a New World Order is established (and various powerful forces are attempting to do this), the outcome will be far more complicated— with unexpected political and spiritual perils for the unwary— than most present-day traditionalists and conservative activists, commentators, visionaries, and novelists now expect.
>
> Let's begin by stipulating that we are in abnormal times, and have been since at least 1914. In normal times, Anglican bishops (William Swing) would uphold the doctrine and discipline of their church, and would not raise their hands during a Wiccan-led Invocation of Hekate and Hermes. In normal times, billionaires [Ted Turner] would not declare themselves to be "socialists at heart," and would not fund movements that undermine the society with in which they prospered. In normal times, the ravings of Helena Blavatsky, Alice Bailey and their New Age followers would be of interest only to the physicians and ministers involved in healing the psyches and souls of these deluded people.
>
> These are not normal times. Therefore, it is possible that, on the heels of a social, economic, or military disaster, the proponents of the New World Order— the URI and its interfaith associates, the globalize movements,

and the devotees of Theosophy and the New Age movement— will have an opportunity to rebuild a shattered, disoriented world. Since some of our present-day political and spiritual leaders see themselves as midwives of radical change, we may be very close to such a forced-draft, global version of the Cultural Revolution. Abnormal times, indeed.

If there ever was a book capable of throwing light on some of the central developments of our time in both religion and politics, developments which our inadequate ideologies, as well as our simple factual ignorance, do not let most of us see, it is *False Dawn.* In this indispensable book, Lee Penn has taken investigative journalism and social critique to the threshold of prophecy. In the words of Miguel de Portugal, "Once God has *False Dawn* out, whether one individual or a billion read it, it will not matter. He will not be able to be accused that such [a] soul destructive trap was not aptly covered, exposed and wisely published in a manner that would be available to one and all." Never has there been a clearer exposition of how both worldly and religious idealism can lead to the most horrendous unintended consequences, and how the false dream of *total unification* on the plane of earthly life is nothing but a misapprehension and misapplication of the Unity of God; and thus the most dangerous idol ever conceived by the mind of man— the one called *al-dajjal* in Islam, and in Christianity, *antichrist.* Nearly eight hundred years ago, Jalaluddin Rumi already well understood the futility of it:

> When has religion ever been one? It has always been two or three, and war has always raged among coreligionists. How are you going to unify religion? On the Day of Resurrection it will be unified, but here in this world that is impossible because everybody has a different desire and want. Unification is not possible here. At the Resurrection, however, when all will be united, everyone will look to one thing, everyone will hear and speak one thing. *(Signs of the Unseen (fi hi ma-Fihi),* Threshold Books, p. 29].