

Aristotle: A Bridge between East and West

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All praise is due to God the all-wise, who ordained great goodness in wisdom. Salutations are in order upon God’s holy prophets—particularly his Eminence, the Seal of prophethood—who are the teachers of the Book and wisdom. Greetings are owing upon the immaculate family—especially his Eminence, the Seal of sainthood, the extant and promised Mahdi—who by proliferating the teaching give the gift of wisdom to the intellectuals of society; we wish to near ourselves in friendship to these sacred souls and distance ourselves from their nefarious foes.

I would like to honour the presence here of all guest scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts of philosophy. I would like to thank the conveners and sponsors of the conference on “Aristotle: A Bridge between East and West”: Panteion University, Goethe Institute of Athens, and the Cultural Centre of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Greece. It is my hope that all men of letters and adepts of rhetoric are successful in the acquisition of pure wisdom and efficacious in its exposition. In consideration of the suggested topics of the Conference, the material that will be presented in this concise epistle covers in some of its parts Aristotle’s exceptional personality, in others his goals, and yet in other portions subjects that need to be looked into. Now on to the sections that make up this epistle.

Section I

Inwardly, Aristotle’s personality was made up of ingenuity of thought and purity of intention— intellectual certainty and practical resoluteness. Outwardly, it was composed of the guidance of a masterful teacher such as Plato, companionship of the illuminati, and the teaching of able students in a potent subject such as philosophy. He founded his famous doctrine of the Prime Mover, and the fact that all motion requires a mover, on the contrast between the inner and the outer.

Aristotle observed transformations and motion within himself. He noticed that in a certain period he was a normal student of a teacher, at the next stage he became equal to him, and then a

time came that, seeing himself to be superior to him, he opposed the views of his teacher on certain important points and critiqued the Platonic Ideas or Forms. All this led him to acknowledge the necessity of an inward and outward mover for intellectual and practical movements or changes. Inwardly, Aristotle came upon the origin of man and the world and he went on from there to recount and expound his “esoteric” findings to others. Hence, he held the knowledge of the soul to be the “mother of wisdom,” and the soul to be the carrier of the body. The opposite, that the body is the carrier of the soul, could not be true because the soul has an existential continuity and expanse (*al-si‘a al-wujūdiyya*) and could never “fit” into a body; but a limited body could fit into the vast realm of the soul.

Knowing men who have changed the course of history, just like knowing the quiddities of substances, calls for a perfect definition. But one is a “what-is-it”ⁱ definition in which all of the genera and differentiae—proximate and non-proximate—of the thing defined are taken into account, while the other is a “who-is-it”ⁱⁱ definition in which all of the ontological and existential changes—from start to finish—of the person defined are included. Just as sufficing oneself with only some of the essential parts of a quiddity is tantamount to an imperfect definition, drawing upon only some of the existential particularities of a person leads to an imperfect description. Hence, a study of Aristotle’s early years or middle period, keeps the researcher in the dark with respect to the remarkable accomplishments of his maturity and later years; just as investigations into the original innovations of his final period leaves the scholar ignorant of his inner journey from being intellectually raw to a state of maturity and being “cooked”—and from there to being burnt and consumed by the truth. Paraphrasing a well known Persian poem, Aristotle could well have written,

My life accomplishment is no more than three words:

I was raw, became cooked, then burnt,

but the scholar in question would imagine that he said,

My life accomplishment is no more than a single saying:

I became burnt, burnt, burnt.

ⁱ *Quiddity*

ⁱⁱ Perhaps the term *Quissity* could be applied here.

What this means is that it is a mistake to take Aristotle's changing personality as constant and always perfect—just as it is erroneous to see it as being continuously imperfect, and neither of these cases result in a perfect definition. This implies that his extant works, addressed to different audiences—weak, mediocre, and elite—cannot in themselves alone constitute a perfect description of his personality.

A memorabilia on Aristotle and arriving at a full knowledge of the man, it must be admitted, is no easy task. For on the one hand, trying to reach the depths of profundity of a soul so original always leaves one short of the mark, and on the other hand, over two millenniums of historical dust and linguistic obfuscation make navigation of the terrain very difficult at best.

The title “the First Teacher” (*al-mu'allim al-awwal*) given to Aristotle was undisputed by one and all, and it is to be hoped that if the author of this epistle were to name him “the great gate of Athens”—in effect taking the famous statement that “Athens is the city of philosophers,” and adding to it “and Aristotle is its gate”—that this would be accepted (even though in this case any protest on the part of Plato would not be without grounds).

We come to know of Aristotle's intellectual aspect from the fact that Plato called him the “Intellect of the Academy,” and his philosophical dimension becomes clear from the fact that his inner and outer life, as well as his enduring tradition, gives evidence to the presence of a substantial theoretical and practical wisdom. Let us end this section with a poem by Khaqani:

Know that Heaven's Gate is but through love;
Know that the Key to Paradise is but by negation.

Section II – Islamic Philosophy

Pure Islam is that very unique and incomparable tradition which was revealed to God's prophets from the inception of the cycle of prophecy to its termination in different and varying forms. By the dictates of Divine wisdom and pleasure, canons and creeds particular to every age and locale accompanied this perennial tradition until it reached its final completion. This is because the original principle behind Islam is Divine decree. Divine decree is founded in God's eternal will—which is itself founded in His essential knowledge. Hence the most fundamental proof of Islam rests on two pillars: First, the decisive proofs or apodictic demonstrations of reason; second, the authentic or valid evidences of authority and tradition.¹

Each one of these two pillars is given to certain other primary divisions. The rational demonstrative modality, for instance, when it pertains to the realm of nature amounts to sense perception and verifiable experimentation; in mathematics it is conclusive mathematical proofs; in philosophy and speculative theology it is the deductive proofs of reason; and in theoretical mysticism it is a experiential witnessing of the heart. The traditional authoritative modality, on the other hand, when it applies to the realm of doctrine and beliefs calls for textual evidence which is authentic and of certain signification; in ethics as well as the field of jurisprudence and the law it translates into textual evidence which is either categorically or probably authentic [and gives at least a probable signification].

Rational proofs that are demonstrable—free of analogies, logical fallacies, and any irreconcilable opposition to valid proofs on the basis of authority and tradition—have full applicability in all religious disciplines. Employing such proofs, it is possible to determine God’s decree and to give legal rulings on its basis—setting up paradigms of obedience and sin, praise and blame, reward and punishment, and even heaven and hell, similar to the ones stemming from authority and tradition.

Hence the discovery and ascertainment of Islam is not the exclusive prerogative of traditional and transmitted texts. Rather, conclusive rational proofs—just like their traditional counterparts—are also authoritative arguments in the affirmation of God’s religion. It is reason which proves God’s existence by way of its conclusive proofs, explains the Divine attributes, establishes the identity of the essential Divine attributes with one another and with the Divine Essence, posits a purposeful created order and affirms an endⁱ for creation and the inevitability of the return and resurrection. The intellect also gives credence to revelation, prophethood, and sees Divine law as the sine qua non of human civilisation. In all these matters the intellect works in coordination with—or even in subservience to—prophetic revelation which is the lord of all knowledge and science.

Any ruling and judgement that such an intellect, based on these unshakable principles, makes is bound to be Islamic. If these rulings are in the realm of philosophy and speculative theology, they will lead to Islamic philosophy or Islamic theology; in the field of law, they will produce an Islamic law; and so on. That is to say, based on the authority of reason or authentic tradition, various different types of rulings and judgements are passed: In jurisprudence and law it is ruled

that it is obligatory to do such and such, or it is prohibited to do a certain act; in philosophy and theology it is held that God has created such and such a thing and has not created this or that; in theoretical mysticism it is deemed that God has manifested Himself with a certain Name or Attribute and that He has not done so by some other Name.

Hence, whether it is in philosophy and theology—which revolve around the existence and non-existence of things (that is to say, what things exist and what things do not exist), or in theoretical mysticism—which centres itself on being and manifestation (that is, what things became manifest and what things remained unmanifest during the Divine epiphany), or in practical wisdom—which bases itself on musts and must-nots, rational proofs have a utility similar to that of their traditional equivalents.

It is precisely in this sense that any given science can be held to be “Islamic,” and the consequent division of knowledge into “Islamic” and “non-Islamic” can be said to be correct. This is because knowledge is not just an investigation into the internal makeup of the known. True knowledge of any thing, rather, lies in determining its internal constitution—giving details of its essential and constituting internal parts, and in ascertaining its efficient and teleological structure—finding the source of its creation and the purpose or final end for which it was given existence.

This awareness of efficiency and teleology affords a proverbial third dimension to knowledge that is otherwise planar, grounded, and unable to fly—giving it purpose and meaning. In such an approach, the moral and ethical character of knowledge comes to light. In this regard Aristotle’s valiant efforts in trying to protect scholars of all fields of human knowledge from moral debasement are as remarkable as they are famous.

The criterion of the “Islamicity” of knowledge—taken to be the sum total of the propositions of a particular discipline—is not derived from the fact Islam has enjoined people to acquire knowledge; nor is it due to the scholars of a special field being Muslim; neither is it a consequence of the fact that the science in question has “Islamic” uses or that it is applied in a way that is considered commendable by Islam; nor yet is it because the knowledge came to light during the period of the advent of Islam, or in an Islamic city or government. While all the matters mentioned here are in themselves of some import, no single one of them can claim to be the basic most central criterion of any given field of knowledge being “Islamic”—whether it be

ⁱ τέλος

philosophy or anything else. This central and quintessential element that makes philosophy or any other science “Islamic,” is the ability to prove—by certain and not suppositionalⁱ arguments, by logical and not fantastic methods—that God manifested Himself in this way, or that He created these things, or that He issued a particular decree. In following this principle, if what results pertains to being and its manifestation or emanation then it will be known as Islamic mysticism; if it concerns existence and non-existence then it will become Islamic philosophy; if it speaks of dos and don’ts then it will be Islamic jurisprudence and law.

It is clear from the above that for any proposition or subject of inquiry composed of a multitude of propositions to be Islamic, reference to sacred traditional texts is not a condition, and not referring to them is not an obstacle. Similarly, referral to conclusive rational proofs is also not an obstacle, and refraining from them is not a condition. This is because conclusive rational demonstrations are the complement of authentic traditional proofs and the end result of either of these two is a statement as regards to God’s words and acts. Hence, any knowledge that sheds light on matters pertaining to God, His attributes, and His acts and effects, will be considered “Islamic.” Needless to say, such a creative intellectual [who is able to acquire and promulgate this Islamic knowledge], must be a Muslim and must direct his pursuit of knowledge in any given field according to the dictates of Islam.

From the above, it is clear that demonstrative rationality is collateral with valid narrative tradition, not with canonical law; and the conclusive proofs of reason are to be juxtaposed against the reliable evidence from oral tradition, not against religion per se. That is to say, it must be accepted and said that such-and-such a matter is rational or traditional, rational or narrative and oral, and not rational or legal, and rational or religious. This is because a valid proof— whether rational or traditional— is not limited by the constraints of time and space, or even by language. Defying all temporal and spatial boundaries, it is not bound to any particular culture or race. It is not Arab or non-Arab, neither eastern nor western; not Jewish in nature, nor Christian or Islamic. For valid rational proofs are the result of Divine grace and effusion that is given to men capable of receiving it, as per the verse, “[Your Lord] taught man what he did not know;”ⁱⁱ and valid traditional proofs are the consequence of Divine revelation and inspiration, as per the verse, “We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after

ⁱ κριτικόν estimative or delusional

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 96:5

him....”ⁱ It is God’s prophets that receive such revelation and hence the entire contents of their sacred scriptures—in the case that they have not been altered and before the abrogation of their corresponding canons—are valid and authoritative proofs.

Verses from the Qur’ān can be quoted in support of some of the issues touched upon above. For instance, the fact that evidence derived from narrations and oral traditions is to be counterpoised with rational demonstrations can be understood from the following verse, “And they will say, ‘Had we listened or applied reason, we would not have been among inmates of the Blaze.’”ⁱⁱ In another verse it is said, “Say, ‘Tell me about what you invoke besides God. Show me what [part] of the earth have they created. Do they have any share in the heavens? Bring me a scripture [revealed] before this, or some vestige of [divine] knowledge, should you be truthful.’”ⁱ To paraphrase, this verse, speaking to the polytheists, challenges them to prove their case by bringing forth either a rational or traditional proof to show that anybody other than God (i.e. their idols) has either independently or in association with God created something in the heavens or the earth—and hence become worthy of worship. It further asks them to bring valid textual evidence of their claims from heavenly scriptures prior to the Qur’ān, such as the original Torah or the unaltered Bible. Failing this, it defies them to at least bring to the fore an authentic statement or tradition from saints and divines of the past, or, in the way of a valid rational argument, it calls on them to produce evidence from the vestiges of the wisdom of the ancients.

Up until this point it has been established and made clear that Islam definitely has a philosophical tradition and that knowledge can be divided into the two categories of “Islamic” and “non-Islamic.” The particularities of this “Islamic philosophy” will be explained in their proper place.

Section III – An Overview of Islamic Philosophy

Though it is true that what might be termed as “essential Islam” has a general and comprehensive meaning which includes the deposits of all the prophets of God, and that which relates to ideology or worldview in the sacred scriptures has a definitely Islamic character, “Islamic philosophy” in this section refers to something more specific. What is meant by “Islamic philosophy” here pertains to a special science that is found in Islamic texts—“Islam”

ⁱ Qur’ān 4:163

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 67:10

being taken here in its particular sense, based on the Qur’ān and Tradition of the Infallibles—and in the rational arguments of Islamic thinkers after taking into consideration the valid traditional evidence at hand.

Sometimes the term “philosophy” is used in a general sense to include experimental sciences, mathematics, and some social sciences, even though these disciplines are not philosophical in the strict sense of the word. Such usage is readily seen in the writings of the ancient scholars such as Aristotle. For it was Aristotle himself who divided philosophy into the three divisions of: Poetical Philosophyⁱⁱ, Practical Philosophyⁱⁱⁱ, and Theoretical Philosophy^{iv}. It was common to add an adjective to “philosophy,” and it was said: natural philosophy, mathematical philosophy, etc. The same rule applied to “philosopher,” and it was said of so-and-so that he is a “natural philosopher,” or a “mathematical philosopher.” On other occasions the term “philosophy” was used in its special sense to refer to that science which is not only counterpoised to natural sciences and mathematics, but indeed maintains a superior vantage point with respect to them and provides them with their first principles and fundamental bases of assertion.^v

Philosophy in its particular meaning is a science which applies itself to being and reality *as such*. Such philosophy, untarnished by natural phenomena and not mixed with mathematical, logical, or ethical issues—things which are below the sublime horizons of pure “Divine” philosophy—is a knowledge which is demonstrable (affirmatively or negatively) and which draws upon purely immaterial or abstract first principles. Because the immaterial intellect is beyond the reaches of the faculties of analogy, imagination, conjecture, and estimation, adepts of the experimental sciences, masters of mathematics, and connoisseurs of conventional sciences such as the literati, all find philosophy to be difficult and insuperable.

This ingrained difficulty with philosophy in its specific sense is on two counts. First, the faculty of discursive reason is no match for higher intellectual concepts; for instance, when the rational philosopher attempts to comprehend God pre-eternal, the eternal Divine attributes, the reality of revelation, prophethood, apostleship, sainthood, and the infallibility of prophets, he

ⁱ Qur’ān 46:4

ⁱⁱ Also called Productive and having to do with production rather than action as such; the theory of art. *Metaphysics*, 1025b25.

ⁱⁱⁱ πρακτικη has to do mainly with political science or ethics in the widest sense, and subsidiary disciplines such as strategy, economics, and rhetoric.

^{iv} Including mathematics, physics, and metaphysics.

^v πίστις

falls short of the mark. Second, lower material or sensorial concepts do not match the immaterial and abstract intellect of the reasoning philosopher; for instance, before this philosopher can intellect the meanings of motion (in an absolute manner), matter, time, and all other gradational realities which do not have stability and are continuously in flux, they must become fixed and immaterial—because it is not until motion “stops” and takes on a collective or universal modality of existence that it can become the object of reason, but as soon as it does this and, leaving the realm of change and fluctuation, enters the immaterial domain of fixity, it is no longer “motion” or “matter.”

Now of course Islamic philosophy in its specific sense—by relying upon the conclusions of Transcendental Philosophy—has presented a scheme whereby both the difficulty of the incapacity of reason in reaching its [supra-rational] object and the problem of the incongruence existing between reason and its [subliminal or sub-rational] object are resolved. The main points of this scheme are as follows:

1. The human soul is corporeal in its emergence from non-existence into existence and is spiritual (or incorporeal) in its continuity.ⁱ
2. Existence is what is fundamental [and principial], not quiddity.
3. The reality of existence, which is fundamental and non-derivative, is one and not a disparate multiplicity.
4. The unity of the reality of existence is gradational and not individuated (as is held in mysticism).
5. Substantial motion within the degrees of gradational existence is permissible, rather it is for certain. (To explain, according to the fourth point stated above, existence is one reality with various degrees differentiated by intensity and weakness, and according to the fifth point existence calls for intensification, whereby an existing substance rises from the degree of weakness to the degree of intensity).
6. Substantial motion is akin to “a donning after donning” and not a “stripping and donning.” A concrete example for this immaterial reality—if not taken to its final limits—can be useful here. The example is the difference between the motion and change of a moving vehicle, which consists of leaving a place and arriving at another

ⁱ *jismaniat al-huduth wa ruhaniat al-baqa*. The soul being composed of body and spirit is created and emerged from non-existence into existence as per its body, and will last forever as per its spirit.

place, and that of a tree, which does not leave anything behind itself, and in fact all that it has “traversed” accompanies it and forms the base upon which it stands.

7. The existential motion of the wayfarer on the spiritual Path is not limited, meaning that all the stages and levels of the contingent world—which is the plane of Divine manifestation and emanation—are open to him. He has the potential to traverse these stages and reach the station of annihilation (*fanā*). It is at this point that the work of philosophy comes to an end and the sublime splendour of mysticism makes its appearance. Here there is no longer talk of acquired and discursive knowledge, concepts, assertions, propositions or syllogism, and hence no room for abstract rational proofs—which depend on conceptualisation and assertion.
8. The reality of the human soul—from its bodily inception to the summit of its substantial motion—is one single reality. This single reality has a unity which is manifested in multiple states and stages, and it has a multiplicity which is prefigured in the sublime station of unity. Hence the soul, with the aid of its lower levels is able to perceive instances of motion and the like, and by virtue of the supervision of its higher levels is able to conceive of the universal concept of motion; and by a further ascent to the apex of the hierarchy of being, the soul is able to partake of the beatific vision and achieve a faithful witnessing of some of the Divine names, and even translate this experience into concepts and notions.

In the first chapter of Book Two of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*—a book that took shape from the translation into Arabic by Ishāq b. Hunayn and commentaries by Yahyā b. ‘Uday and Ibn Rushd (Averroës)²—the author addresses some of the obstacles encountered in the study of Truth and alludes to the difficulties involved in perceiving some [immaterial] realities by comparing the researches of human intelligence to “bats’ eyes in respect of daylight.”ⁱ He goes on to thank all those who played a part in our understanding in the following words:

It is just that we should be grateful, not only to those with whose views we may agree, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the powers of thought. It is true that if there had

ⁱ He says, “For as the eyes of bats are to the blaze of day, so is the reason in our soul to the things which are by nature most evident of all”. *Metaphysics*, Book Beta, 993b5

been no Timotheus we should have been without much of our lyric poetry; but if there had been no Phrynus there would have been no Timotheus.ⁱ

Predecessors with respect to contemporaries are as fathers with respect to their children. Or one could even say that they are superior to fathers, as fathers have bred our physical bodies while they, the teachers of yesteryear, have cultivated our souls.

Strictly speaking, philosophy taken in its general sense—like jurisprudence—is not qualifiable by any attributive. In its aspect as a universal and unadulterated study of being, no conditions can be set upon it. But when philosophy leaves the world of mind and enters the concrete world, it endeavours to “see” what is and what is not. It withdraws into itself and in perfect independence, heedless of the opinions and positions of this or that philosopher and using only first principles and self-evident truths, it delves into the depths of thought. Like a fathomless ocean that suffices unto itself, it traverses the stages of contemplation, going deeper and deeper until it hits rock bottom. It is now that it begins to speak and even pontificate. Its message is either in the affirmative or in the negative. It either says, “I have discovered that the existential order has a pre-eternal origin and that it follows a definite end and purpose,” or it states, “I have not come to this conclusion—that is the world has neither an origin or an end, there is no God in the works and no Return”.

It is precisely at this point that philosophy takes on attributives. The positive and free philosophy acquires the adjective, “theistic” or “divine”, while the negative and unbridled philosophy gets the attribute of “atheistic”. The first philosopher is in all honour called “visionary”, while the other is disparaged with the title “benighted”. Having passed this point and having put the two groups of philosophy and philosophers in their place we go on to separate the positive and free divine philosophy from the negative and unbridled atheistic philosophy, and as per the verse, “And ‘Get apart today, you guilty ones!’”ⁱⁱ we distance the two groups from one another. Now it is time to dive yet again and the free divine philosopher in total independence, not needing any truths that are not self-evident and not requiring other than what he has acquired previously by his own well-paid efforts—that is the truth of the existence in principle of a pre-eternal origin—plunges into the depths of his thoughts to see what precious pearl he will find this time.

ⁱ *Metaphysics*, Book Beta, 993b10

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 36:59

When this diver returns successfully from the depths of discursive demonstration and argumentation, he concludes that the pre-eternal Origin and Prime Moverⁱ of man and the world is also his Lord and Nurturer. He further understands that this Divine nurturing and cultivation extends to human society by way of Revelation and Prophethood—manifested by inviolable sacred scriptures and infallible saintly menⁱⁱ—and that the caravan of humanity can not reach its destination without them; for though rational discourse is necessary, it is not sufficient. It is such a penetrating, enlightened, and free philosophy that has been taken on the colours of Islam and has become celebrated with the sublime name of “Islam.”

If the diver returns unsuccessfully from the abyss of imaginal fancy, delusional fallacy, and sensorial complacency, he presumptuously proclaims the sufficiency of human reason in the legislation and administration of man’s individual and social existence. He supposes that the efficacy of the eternal Origin is limited to the ontological realm and that it has no place in the moral or legal order; and goes on to maintain that there is no such thing as a final Return or Resurrection. It is this philosophy which is in reality unfettered, blind, atheistic, and non-Islamic, and like other pagan sects, it proliferates and gives rise to different currents and groups.

Up until now, two points have been made clear: first, the meaning of a philosophy in its general and universal sense; second, the meaning of Islamic philosophy in the universal and general meaning of Islam, as per the verse, “Indeed, with God religion is Islam.”ⁱⁱⁱ At this second stage, free Islamic philosophy was distinguished from unfettered non-Islamic philosophy and the visionary Islamic philosopher was given honour and precedence over and beyond the benighted non-Islamic philosopher. The time is now ripe for the free philosopher to make his third foray into the depths and with complete independence—not needing any truths that are not self-evident or those that are not one of the proven theoretical principles called for in the affirmation of the eternal Origin, Revelation, and Prophethood—to dive yet again into the ocean of wisdom and reach the unseen depths. If now, after due deliberation and deep contemplation, he surfaces giving credence to the Seal of prophethoodⁱ and the Qur’ān as the final revelation—the fact that the general cycle of prophecy is borne out by the particular prophethood of his Eminence Muhammad b. ‘Abdullah (upon whom be Peace) and that the Qur’ān is infallible and

ⁱ *to proton kinoun akineton*

ⁱⁱ *insān al-kāmil*, the Perfect Man or Logos.

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān 3:19

immaculate—thereby believing in the Divine mandate of all of God’s prophets, in particular the Greater Prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, then he will have made the transformation from Islamic philosophy in its general sense to Islamic philosophy in its specific sense. Such a transformation is the most fitting and appropriate one possible for such a lover of wisdom. But it must be noted that we have not come to the final meaning of Islamic philosophy in its specific sense as of yet. Please bear patiently.

Having gone past the third stage, we come upon the fourth. In this stage we find ourselves within the matrix of Islamic philosophy in its specific sense. Here the intellectual realm of demonstrative reason becomes very vast indeed. For over and beyond first principles such as the axiom of non-contradiction, this realm includes many self-evident propositions as well as those propositions that have come to light after much research and that hold demonstrative potential. For at this stage the philosopher thoroughly investigates the issues related to Revelation. He begins by separating matters of reason from matters of faith and worship. He puts to one side those things which do not fall within the scope of rational demonstration: particulars such as the quality and quantity of worship, the time and place of certain ritual acts, and hundreds of other details from the law and personal morality which are beyond the range of demonstrations and proofs. He does this here because he has already full heartedly accepted them and with perfect humility feels bound to practice them. The reason for this is that the founding principle of all of these particulars of faith and worship is the infallibility of Revelation—whatever Revelation tells him is truth and affirmation. So now, having distinguished those things that are capable of conceptual analysis and causal determination, he proceeds with his free intellectual and philosophical inquiries. What makes them “free” is that he himself gave shape to his thoughts and did not depend or rely on the constrictive paradigms of others. Being his own engineer, he is able to establish a firm foundation and erect a complete structure which he then goes on to embellish and adorn with the fine strokes of refined thought.

Still at this stage, the recipient of Revelation and Divine law whose infallibility and knowledge is established by conclusive rational proofs, cultivates and enlivens the intellectual potentials of the philosopher, awakening him in some respects to the hidden treasures embedded in his Intellect. He shows him the way as has been deposited in his own heart so that the awakened intellect of the philosopher can find the Path and, by traversing it, can reach the Goal

ⁱ Prophet Muhammad.

which in its own turn informs his most inner self. This is just a small part of the greater reality that Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib (upon whom be Peace)³ referred to when he wisely said that one of the blessings of the coming of the prophets is that they unearth deposits in the mind and intellect of man.

Some of these hidden intellectual treasures are as follows:

1. Something that is not innately and essentially impossible, is possible, but its actuality in the concrete world requires a valid positive assertion. Just as a conclusive rational proof can carry out this affirmation, so too a valid traditional proof whose certificate of authority is foolproof and text unambiguous. Hence the direct statement of an Infallible can be the middle term of a syllogism or apodictic demonstration—being functionally no different from similar middle terms used in mathematical proofs. Mullā Sadrā⁴, who was famous for his far-reaching efforts towards protecting philosophy from the damaging infiltration of ambiguous or inconclusive arguments, admitted the validity of such demonstration and himself practiced it.¹
2. By using the traditions of the Infallibles as middle terms, the philosophical intellect is at first able to know [new] things. Thereafter a process of unfolding and disclosure occurs whereby it becomes aware of their corollaries, consequences, implications, and ramifications. Placing all or some of these in their proper context leads to its further blossoming and enrichment.
3. When the philosophical intellect affirms something without the help of traditional proofs and arguments, there is the possibility that it has remained ignorant of some of its necessary but mediated implications. The use in this case of valid traditional arguments helps it to uncover these necessary implications. The intellect which has now been reminded engages in its researches and eventually finds the middle term in the affirmation of the hidden necessary implication.
4. Due to its limited ontological scope, the philosophical intellect is totally oblivious of certain unseen or immaterial realities. But when it hears of those realities in the context of the Qur’ān or Tradition of the Infallibles, it becomes engrossed in thought and the matter presents itself as a bona fide theoretical question. After deep contemplation and differentiation between valid and invalid, it becomes conscious of

the level and amount of correctness and error. It accepts those things whose existence has been demonstrated and withholds judgement on those matters which remain unproven or delegates inquiry into them to their specialists.

5. Just as the philosophical intellect is enriched and blossoms by the act of critiquing, defending, and comparing rational arguments with one another, an appraisal of traditional arguments and a tallying of them with their rational counterparts by way of criticism, prioritisation, invalidation, and reconciliation is also instrumental in disclosing the hidden deposits of the intellect.

These were some examples of the decrees and judgements of the philosophical intellect which take shape in a very real way during a purview of Islamic matters. If someone was to object that they pertain to speculative theology and not to philosophy, then he must be reminded that one of the greatest theologians of the past few centuries and one of the most influential students of Mullā Sadrā—namely ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī—was quoted as having said:

Opposition to philosophy started with the Ash’arite theologians, not the Mu’tazilah and not hence, with even greater reason, by the Imāmiyyahⁱⁱ How could the Imāmiyyah have opposed philosophy when we see that the majority of their established principles, which have been acquired from the Infallibles (upon them be Peace), are in complete agreement with those that have been cited by the great philosophers and are based on true philosophical precepts. It is also important to note that the fact that the theology of the Imāmiyyah agrees with that of the Mu’tazilah on many counts is due to the latter’s use of philosophical methodology and not due to a superficial borrowing from them. The principles of faith of the Imāmiyyah are taken from their infallible Imams and they, the Imams, would actually not allow their followers to dabble in speculative theology unless it was expounded by the Imams themselves. This matter is glaringly clear for anybody who is steeped in the principles of the Imāmiyyah.ⁱⁱⁱ

Hence many theological issues of the school of the followers of the Qur’ān and the Infallibles (upon them be Peace)—that is, the Imāmiyyah Ithnā’ashariyyah—are philosophical issues which are the result of the disclosure of the hidden deposits of the free and independent intellect. In fact it could be said that the revelation of the hidden potentials and treasures of the Intellect became the special prerogative of Islam and went by the name of Islamic philosophy in its

ⁱ Mullā Sadrā, *Al-Asfār al-Arb’ah*, Vol. 9, p. 167.

ⁱⁱ The Shi’ites.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Shwāriq al-Ilhām*, p. 5

specific sense. Indeed, it is the [intellects of the] Muslims that can take carry the gift of Islamic philosophy.

‘Tis the lover in imagining the Beloved’s face who downs the cup of wine;
Other than the robust steed, who could bear the stirrups of Rustum.ⁱ

Of course the intellects are able to do this only with the help and graces of the Infallibles.

Your love is as a mountain on high, my self but a single hair;
Never can a hair draw an entire mountain.ⁱⁱ

Notes:

- A. Jurisprudence and law in its general meaning, that is the personal and social code of human behaviour, is essentially neither Islamic nor non-Islamic. When this code is derived from Islamic sources such as the Qur’ān and Tradition of the Infallibles, it is considered as “Islamic.” And when its sources are non-Islamic, such things as culture, parochial rituals and habits, and matters bound to a special geography or history, then it is deemed as “non-Islamic.”
- B. All that has been said with regards to Islamic philosophy in its specific sense (and not general sense) is true in the case of the philosophies of the original and undeviated religion of Moses (upon whom be Peace), as well as that of Jesus (upon whom be Peace).
- C. Demonstrative reason and authoritative tradition are interrelated and interact with one another, in such a manner that each has a significant role in the invigoration and augmentation of the other. In the same way that valid traditional arguments—as was previously shown—enliven the stagnant mind, awaken the oblivious reason, and strengthen the intellect to be able to discover certain hidden realities, valid rational proofs on their part also perform a similar function. Under the category of *Ijtihād* (the

ⁱ Sana’i, *Diwan*, p.536. Rustam was the principal hero of Iranian epic poems, especially in the *Shah Nameh* of Firdawsi. Tr.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 970

derivation and deduction of precepts from available traditional sources)ⁱ they are able to deduce many precepts from the general and universal principles mentioned in sacred texts. This is done by recourse to the rational corollaries and consequences of a universal principle and their application, without analogy, to doctrines and matters of faith. This type of interaction is also observed in the case of two valid traditional proofs or evidences. For example, one verse of the Qur'ān develops and enriches the meaning of another verse; an authentic tradition from an Infallible augments and throws light on another tradition; a Qur'ānic verse explains a tradition and a tradition sometimes expounds the meaning of a verse. All of these are instances of the disclosure of deposits.

Section IV – Islam and Rationality

For the intellectual discernment of truth—that is God and His beautiful names and attributes, and the profession of faith in it—through the mediacy of grace and a virtuous life free of sin, the sacred religious texts of Islam (the Qur'ān and the canonical collections of the traditions of the Infallibles) have set before the spiritual seeker of truth many paths. These paths differ according to how near or how far their goals are, the level of their difficulty, and whether the path is to be traversed individually or with companions—these companions themselves are either few or many, acquaintances or strangers. The way of the mystics for instance involves witnessing and vision of the inner heart; that of the traditionalists comprises hearing and soundness of other's reports; and that of the philosophers consists of thinking and contemplation of the notions of being.

The mystics are the people of the heart and plunge wholeheartedly into the inner oceans. Traditionalists are narrators who go the land route and see their progress to be indebted to things heard and honestly judged. Philosophers and speculative theologians are given to flights of thought and see their ascent to lie in a pure intellection of rational and traditional sources.

The specialists from each of these fields are dedicated to their own field but use the conclusions of the other fields to endorse their own. But there do exist those exceptional souls who are able to reconcile and masterfully combine the rational, the traditional, and the mystical.

ⁱ Or alternatively, the skilful correlation and application of general Islamic principles to transient and changing particulars. Tr.

They are able to coordinate what is heard, thought, and envisioned and see the Qur’ān, demonstration, and mysticism to be a tripartite whole and a triune unity.

Silk does not become three if you call it: Silk, tussore, and tussah.ⁱ

An Overview of the Reasons for Intellectuality in Islam

1. Irrational concepts such as pure immanence, identity, incarnation, embodiment, duality, or trinity are not to be found in the sacred scriptures of Islam. Instead a pure monotheism or *tawhīd*⁵ is witnessed in Islam and there is no trace whatsoever of Divine incarnation or His identity with creation, whether it is the case of a normal created being or a holy one. If certain expressions seem to imply these ideas in the least, their true meaning and intention can be found after recourse to conclusive contextual evidence. It must be noted here that when it is said that the Qur’ān is simple, it does not go to mean that it is weak and simplistic. For when the Qur’ān itself says, “Certainly We have made the Qur’ān simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished?”ⁱⁱ, it does not mean that it lacks substance and that it is for commoners. This is why alongside its being easy for human nature to accept, there is mention of its great import and weight—not difficulty. For the Qur’ān also says, “Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word”ⁱⁱⁱ so that it becomes obvious that Revelation contains and combines these two characteristics in a miraculous manner. Hence the Qur’ān holds the theory of the trinity, or being the “third of three,” to be invalid. It says, “They are certainly faithless who say, ‘God is the third [person] of a trinity,’”^{iv} Where as His being the fourth of three is counted as pure monotheism: “There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth [companion], nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be.”ⁱ These verses are a case in point for the material presented in Section III, for they emphasize how the mind is philosophically deepened

ⁱ Hatif Isfahani, *Diwan*

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 54:17

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān 73:5

^{iv} Qur’ān 5:73

upon hearing their message and of how the heart becomes aware of profound mystical realities during their contemplation.

2. Some other traits that are readily seen in the sacred texts of Islam are as follows: enjoining the acquisition of knowledge and the achievement of the station of Intellect, honouring scholars, respecting intellectuals, and venerating intellectual scholars, discouraging ignorance—whether theoretical or practical, disparaging ignorant persons, and destroying places where such ignorance is practiced. Monotheists who possess knowledge are praised alongside the angels and the Qur’ān states, “God bears witness that there is no god except Him—and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge—maintainer of justice, there is no god but Him, the Almighty, the All-wise.”ⁱⁱ The highest and most noble fear or awe is that which occurs in reference to God, and this too is an inner perfection of the souls of those who know. As the Qur’ān says, “Only those of God’s servants having knowledge fear Him”.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, the thing which made the Perfect Man to become the vicegerent of God on earth and the object of veneration by the angels was his knowledge of God’s names and attributes: “And He taught Adam the Names, all of them”.^{iv} While it is true that every man of faith is of noble stature, the station of the believer who knows is higher. For the verse says, “God will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in rank”.^v The one thing that the final Prophet asked more of from his omniscient Lord, is knowledge; for God commanded him thus, “and say, ‘My Lord! Increase me in knowledge’”.^{vi} What’s more, all human societies that esteem the Prophet are commanded to follow his example, “In the Apostle of God there is certainly for you a good exemplar”.^{vii} Hence from start to finish, the Qur’ān is steeped in intellectuality, knowledge, thought, and contemplation. According to it, the ignorant are sullied and polluted due to their ignorance. To quote: “and turn away

ⁱ Qur’ān 58:7

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 3:18

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān 35:28

^{iv} Qur’ān 2:31

^v Qur’ān 58:11

^{vi} Qur’ān 20:114

^{vii} Qur’ān 33:21

from the ignorant”;ⁱ “So leave them alone. They are indeed filth”;ⁱⁱ “And He lays defilement on those who do not apply reason”ⁱⁱⁱ.

3. According to sacred religious texts, any type of assertion, whether positive or negative, and any kind of behavioural imperative, whether prescriptive or proscriptive, that pertains to the social or political sphere, must needs be preceded by intellectual research, rational demonstration and deliberation. The Qur’ān says, “Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart—all of these are accountable”.^{iv} Moreover, the affirmation of anything without sufficient grounds, or the execution of a law without the certainty of its correctness, are both errors which God will hold accountable: “Rather, they deny that whose knowledge they do not comprehend, and whose explanation has not yet come to them. Those who were before them denied likewise. So observe how was the fate of the wrongdoers!”^v Likewise, the denial without proper grounds of something, or the baseless recalcitrance of a law which is manifestly true and correct, is an intellectual error and an incident of practical injustice. Now it is because the responsible and proper course of human society is secured by the affirmations and negations of reason and the prescriptions and proscriptions of will, that the culture of Islam insists all of these things must be thought or enacted with full knowledge. Hence there is no alternative to taking an intellectual approach and engaging in scientificⁱ research.
4. According to the sacred scriptures of Islam, which are for all intents and purposes the permanent constitution of the Muslim nation, every ordered society has leaders and those that are lead—both of these are called to the straight path; the path is God’s religion and the guiding torch of the journey is the intellect. Neither is the leader allowed to call the people to follow him without having the necessary knowledge and intellectual credentials, nor is the community permitted to follow someone without having a rational knowledge of him. The reality which gives a socio-religious form to the political order of a people and allows their civil life to be under the auspices of

ⁱ Qur’ān 7:199

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 9:95

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān 10:100

^{iv} Qur’ān 17:36

^v Qur’ān 10:39

religion is none other than correct knowledge, sincere reason, and good actions. These must be obtained before the republic or polis of Plato and Aristotle—both of whom were true followers of Abrahamic faiths—can be realised. The Qur’ānic decree regarding the knowledge and intellectual credentials of would be leaders of human society can be seen from this verse, “Among the people are those who dispute concerning God without any knowledge or guidance, or an enlightening Book, turning aside disdainfully to lead [others] astray from the way of God. For such there is disgrace in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of the burning”.ⁱⁱ It is clear from this verse that the leaders of society must necessarily be men of reason and knowledge so that they do not lead others astray. With regards to the rationality and knowledge of the followers and normal citizens of human societies, the Qur’ān has this to say, “Among the people are those who dispute about God without any knowledge, and follow every froward devil”.ⁱⁱⁱ It is only the ignorant person who will follow such a human fiend. This is because he does not have the necessary knowledge to discern the angelic from the satanic. Ignorant followers will accept an ignorant leader. So even though such a political order [chosen by the ignorant] is popular, it is, strictly speaking not, illicit—for it lacks the conditions of true knowledge and pure intellection, and in their place takes recourse to a shadowy illusion and tainted imagination for its legitimacy.

5. According to the sacred texts of the Islamic tradition, social solidarity is one of the most important steps that a society can take towards success and prosperity. Social division and strife on the other hand, is one of the worst deviations and leads the people towards the proverbial abyss. In the same way that upright reason discerns the straight path of Divine unity and facilitates its traversal, it shows the way to social solidarity and eases the road to it by emphasising collective unity and warning against disunity. To explain, the ultimate source of disunity and multiplicity, which subsists through the feelings and emotions of estrangement, rancour, and revengefulness between members of society, is the [base] desires of those who worship their fancies.

ⁱ Scientific in its general sense of the word and not limited to modern experimental science. Tr.

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān 22:8-9

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān 22:3

The upright reason and intellect destroys such base desires and warns against giving in to them. “You suppose them to be a body, but their hearts are disunited. That is because they are a lot who do not apply reason”.ⁱ The fact that divisiveness and discord result from insipience and a lack of rationality, implies that rational thought and intellectual prowess must have a positive effect on social unity. This truth, that the mastering of base desires and removal of baseless fantasies is due to pure reason—the faculty which after expounding the unity of God, guides society to a political unity—is one of the blessed deposits of Islam in its general meaning. In this meaning, the religion of God is one and one only. The general parameters of this universal Islam took shape in the traditions of the prophets descended from Abraham. Now because the great figures of Greece, just like the wise men of any and all civilised and religious regions, were the followers of these prophets, they would retain and pass on the advices of these prophets to others. This is why the above mentioned principles and truths are to be found in both the moral counsels of Plato as well as in the recommendations of Aristotle.

After due study of the central elements of Islam in the general sense and an analysis of the common traditions of the Abrahamic prophets and prophet Muhammad (upon them be Peace), the roots of the cultural commonalities between Iran and Greece and the monotheistic philosophers of these two lands become apparent. The most important element of the alliance between the Middle East and the West is the sending of official letters on the part of the Prophet of Islam (upon whom be Peace) to the emperors and rulers of Western lands. In these letters he asked them to not be obstacles to the voice of prophecy and the call, addressed to the people of their realms, to faith in the ultimate Origin and End. For mankind is thirsty for freedom from the shackles of base desires and for independence from the binds of carnal fancies. It wants to be free of all forms of slavery, servility, and servitude to anything or anybody other than God. The Prophet’s letter to the lands east of Arabia, such as Iran, was also of similar import and was a breath of life to that realm.

It is from this perspective that the apostleship of Prophet Muhammad can be seen to be the most important factor and element in the cultural connection and alliance between the East and West of that time. For the crux of his message was to accept *tawhīd*, or the doctrine of Unity,

ⁱ Qur’ān 59:14

and to negate any and all forms of excessive brutishness and passive subjectedness and acceptance of oppression—that is, all forms of domination and being dominated. He wrote the following verse to both the King of Persia and the Caesar of Rome, “Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but God, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides God”.ⁱ

The wise philosophers and sages of Islam consider the Prophet to be the “First Teacher” and Imam ‘Alī is known to them as the “Second Teacher”.

Born of one another, in meaning and appearance;
Adam is from Muhammad and Muhammad is from Adam.ⁱⁱ

Now of course, the wisdom of the Prophet must be acquired by a pure contemplation of the Qur’ān and human constructs and conceptual straightjackets must not be imposed on it.

Is not any less than the Paradise of Pleasure
The bounty of the Qur’ān for its true reader.

Hear the Word of the Creator, from the Creator;
As is nothing but a veil, the chant of the Book reader.ⁱⁱⁱ

To note, the deposits of Moses and Jesus (upon them be Peace) must also be taken from the true Torah and the original Bible.

Section V – An Overview of the Aristotelian School and its Critique

I The central element of philosophy is the knowledge of being; that is, the knowledge of what exists and what does not exist in an absolute sense, and without taking any particular aspect into consideration. As was previously stated, whatever name or attributive is attached to philosophy or any of its divisions must coincide with the methodology of knowledge in question and the

ⁱ Qur’ān 3:64

ⁱⁱ Sanai’, *Hadiqah al-Haqiqah*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

different types of objects of knowledge. Hence anything that is outside the epistemological realm and its offshoots is to be considered as outside of philosophy and not directly pertinent to it.

It can thus be concluded that the naming of the philosophy of Plato as “Academic”, that of Aristotle as “Peripatetic”, and that of Zeno of Citium as “Stoic” does not have cognitive content. For the fact that a teacher such as Plato happened to hold his informal classes in a public garden outside of Athens that was called the “Academy” is no reason to call his philosophical system or his students by that name. Similarly, the historical reality that a teacher such as Aristotle chose to teach while walking about in the Lyceum of Athens should never lead one to name his teachings after that state of “walking” or “*peripatein*” and his students as “Peripatetics.” Likewise, if an instructor such as Zeno opened his school in a colonnade known as the *Stoa Poikile* (painted porch), it is misleading to name his philosophical ideas after that colonnade and to call his followers “Stoics.”

What is meant here is that none of these three names or attributives correctly explains the methodology or particularity of the philosophies of these three great figures, Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno. Similarly, calling certain schools of theology by the names of “Ash’arite” and “Mu’tazilah”, which indicate the founders of these schools, does not throw any light on the intellectual methodology or the objects of study purviewed by these schools. On the other hand, the naming of some schools of philosophy as “Ishrāqi” (Illuminationist)⁶ and “Hikmat e Muta’aliyah” (Transcendental Philosophy) is pertinent and appropriate because it says something about the special type of knowing and the particularities of the known involved in them.

Intellectual investigation, and not a systematic review or overview of opinions on the subject at hand, is the true mark of philosophy. Simulation of others, lingering on the past, and fear of innovation are the kiss of death of philosophy. Like other innovative divine sages and by making use of natural reason and the revelations of the prophets, Aristotle strove to cleanse philosophy of bad habits and habituation itself. He made valiant efforts to separate habitual errors from demonstrated truths, and this precedent of his was later honoured and protected by Islamic philosophy. So as to those who frequent the lower levels of estimation and imagination and do not accept any rational conclusion until it is not approved of by deficient men—not believing it to be true until a group bears witness or a poet concurs to it, and those who deem discussions to be akin to haggling in the market, these have no stature or respect in the eyes of

Aristotle.ⁱ Ibn Rushd (Averroës) in his Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, holds that the very desire and yearning for the truth was evidence to the fact that truth was knowable, because, he argued, nothing in the existential order is void and meaningless, and if truth was unperceivable, then desire for it would also not have existed.ⁱⁱ

II The knowledge of being (reality), which is the most fundamental aspect of philosophy, is not possible without the tools of knowledge, namely logic and its various secondary branches. Without an instrument of discernment and scale of appraisal to be able to tell truth from falsehood, any judgement regarding the existence or non-existence of the things of this world would be futile and in vain.

The ancient philosophers had realised the importance of the knowledge of truth and the necessity of the appropriate tools in its quest. They had thus, to some extent, covered the initial ground in this respect but the lot of its completion, composition, systemisation, and innovation in some of its more sensitive parts fell to Aristotle. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)⁷, the pre-eminent Islamic philosopher, has said with regard to this subject:

Aristotle said that for proper demonstration it is necessary to know the art of dialectic and fallacy. His predecessors did not leave us with anything of great import on this subject, though they would also advise against sophistry. Their story is like that of the person who advises travellers to protect their feet by using leather shoes but does not tell them what type of leather is good for making shoes, and how it should be cut, and how sewn, (i.e. a general advice to protect ones feet without a thought out scientific plan to accompany it). Aristotle said, “I have spent a part of my life taking the trouble to derive the figures of syllogisms, I ask to be forgiven for any failings in this regard and would be obliged if the matter was developed and added to...”. This is a summary of Aristotle’s words, but I (Ibn Sīnā) say: O you meticulous students! Pay attention. In these one thousand three hundred and thirty years that have passed since the time of Aristotle, has anyone been able to find fault with him or add things to what he came up with? No, never! I, with my own extensive investigations during the period when I was totally engrossed in this field, made far-reaching researches, but was not able to find anything pertaining to sophistry in addition to what Aristotle had already found—other than adding details to some of his general principles... and that which his teacher (Plato) wrote, called *Sophist*, also falls short of the mark. By confusing matters of logic for those of the natural or the divine realm, he went out of bounds.ⁱ

III Just as existence is the fundamental basis and reality of all things, the knowledge of existence is the fundamental basis of all sciences and knowledge. The mandate of philosophy in

ⁱ *Alif Sughra*, Tafsir Ibn Rushd, Introduction by Meshkat, pp. 44 & 45.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 5.

this real sense (and not in its general meaning where it includes many non-philosophical sciences and disciplines) is to afford knowledge of existence by a study of its causes. According to Aristotle, the best way of knowing anything was to trace its causes.

Acquiring knowledge of the subjects of other sciences and coming to know their bases of assertion, such as have a key and defining roles in these sciences, is accomplished within the confines of philosophy. Hence any development in these sciences that is based upon abstract and not experimental principles is due to developments in philosophy in general. Even logic, which is an instrumental discipline and is the “ladder” or “scales” of philosophy, like other particular sciences, owes it central and essential elements to philosophy.

Aristotle’s logic is a like a balance, albeit a limited one, which is useful for gauging matters of the Peripatetic school. But the weightier issues of higher philosophies, such as the topics discussed in Transcendental Philosophy or theoretical mysticism, which give access to realities belonging properly to the immaterial and unseen realm, are outside the parameters of Aristotelian logic and can not be measured by it. For instance, the categories that are used in logic, as have been mentioned by both Ibn Sīnā in his *Shifa* and by Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī⁸ in his *Tajrīd*, are based upon the quiddities of contingent beings. The fact that possible and contingent existents have a quiddity follows from the belief of the Peripatetics that every contingent existent has a quiddity (or essence) and an existence. But according to Transcendental Philosophy, the reality of all being has no more than two modalities: one is independent and necessary and the other is relational or copulative and possible. The copulative existent is like a prepositional clause of grammar whose substantive is God the all-independent. Prepositional clauses do not have quiddities, they have, rather, concepts and notions which signify them. This is because quiddity is something which is able to come to mind in an independent fashion, but this is not the case for concepts akin to prepositional clauses and they do not have conceptual independence.

In changing the subject of discussion from quiddity to concept, there is no longer talk of categories and instead primary and secondary intelligibles are spoken of. Genus and differentia, proximate and non-proximate, perfect definition and imperfect definition, and all other topics that pertain to the five universals and are discussed in philosophy, are transformed and take on the demeanour of concepts and notions. This transformation is not limited to logic and its scope extends to philosophical issues as well.

⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Mantiq e Shifā*, vol. 7, p. 110-140

Another example is the predication of a predicate for a subject and the issue of their identity in the school of Aristotle and that of the other Peripatetic philosophers. According to them, predication is of two types: Primary essential predication (or intensional predication), and common technical predication (or extensional predication). Aristotelian logic could comprehend only these two types and was not able to go beyond them. But Transcendental Philosophy went further and introduced real (*haqiqah*) and gradational (*raqiqah*) predication. Theoretical mysticism went even further and spoke of predications of manifest (*zahir*) manifestation (*mazhar*). These types of predication could not be accommodated by Aristotle's logic or philosophy. Hence it can be said that Aristotelian logic is useful for speculative theology and Peripatetic philosophy, but beyond this it fails to yield results. Another case in point is the type of contrariety known as "the relation between privation and possession". Before the advent of Transcendental Philosophy, it was thought that the opposition of poverty and superfluity (or richness, self-sufficiency) was of the type of privation and possession. The meaning of privation and possession was that though the existent represented by "privation" was undergoing a privation of the existential quality signified by the "possession", it could potentially—by virtue of itself, its species, proximate genus, non-proximate genus, etc.—possess that quality.

The ruling of Transcendental Philosophy on this issue took inspiration from the Qur'ān, which sees all things other than God to be poor and dependent—God being the only truly rich and independent being. The Qur'ān says, "O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable".ⁱ It is true that no contingent existent of any level whatsoever—whether individual, species, class, or genus—can ever be of the order of God, who is All-sufficient, so as to "possess" Him. But if the aspect of possession, and not privation, is explained as follows then any seeming contradiction is removed. For if it is said that the privation does not have the capacity to accept the existential intensity of the possession, but it does at least have the ability to accept some of its levels; then the response is that all things other than God with respect to those levels which they have a capacity for, actually possess and have them and are not void of them, and it is God who gives these possible levels to other than Himself. Hence the contrariety involved in poverty and self-sufficiency is actually a proper

ⁱ Qur'ān 35:15

contradiction—[where existence and non-existence are opposed]—and not a relation of privation and possession.ⁱ

IV What is apparent from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (as commented upon by Ibn Rushd), is that he believes in the existence of an essential origin with respect to the agency and also with respect to the end. His famous proof of the unmoved mover proves the existence of a perfect immaterial being which is pure intellect. What he means by “intellect” and the universal mover is a contingent immaterial existent which is named “intellect”. It is thus because the contingent immaterial intellect acquired its accidentally necessary existence by moving from the state of existential ambivalence to that of contingency. Such motion and change is known in Transcendental Philosophy as essential motion.ⁱⁱ What’s more, in the neo-Platonic text named *Uthulujiya*,ⁱⁱⁱ essential necessity is known as stillness and non-motion, and accidental necessity is known as motion.

According to this then, the only mover which is free of motion itself is the Necessary Being, and not a contingent immaterial intellect. The major component of the process by which the Necessary Being causes motion is through love: lovers are moved to approach their beloved. In such a situation the mover does not accompany the agent of motion. Aristotle also holds the component elements of things to be finite, for if this were not the case then they would not be knowable, and we see that man does have access to their knowledge.

Aristotle has always been honoured by the great philosophers of the East, to such an extent that they have quite often applied themselves to commenting on his works and have attempted to reconcile his opinions with that of his esteemed teacher, Plato. An enduring classic in this regard is the book titled *al-Jam’ bayn al-Ra’yayn*⁹. What these philosophers have contributed to Greek philosophy is many times greater than what they obtained from it. Aristotle gave much importance to ethics, a forgotten virtue which is the most important factor in the salvation of the present world. The inscription on Aristotle’s octagonal tomb is a fragment taken from the counsels of Divinely inspired leaders and can rightly secure all truths and establish the true rights of all humanity.

ⁱ The eminent philosopher Aqā ‘Ali Mudarris Zanuzi held this position.

ⁱⁱ Mullā Sadrā, *Mabda’ wa Ma’ād*, p. 16-17.

ⁱⁱⁱ θεολογία

In closing, I wish once again to honour all the scholars and friends of philosophy, and to thank the conveners of the conference on “Aristotle: Bridge between East and West.” This epistle is being sent from Islamic Iran to the cradle of philosophy that Athens is, with this hope that the intelligentsia of that land become somewhat familiar with the philosophical giants of Islamic lands and acquainted with the common sources and bases of transcendental sages the world over.

I thank the translators who took great pains to convey and translate this epistle.

At first, with much ardour, we wrote books,
In the end, with all perplexity, our pens we broke.

The mounts [of the journey] become idols when we don the garb of sanctity;
Such as requires that we worship not idols.ⁱ

May the Peace and Blessings of God be upon you.

April, 2004

ⁱ Sana'i, *Diwan*, p. 801

Translator's Endnotes

¹ The word “tradition” comes from the Latin *trāditio*, *trādition-*, from *trāditus*, past participle of *trādere*, to hand over, deliver, entrust. Its use in religious contexts follows more the Greek word *paradosis*, which implies the organ or mode of the transmission (*kerigma ekklesiastikon, predicatio ecclesiastica*). In this meaning, it is not just the case of “human speech being passed on from generation to generation”, but rather, sacred deposits transmitted mainly in an oral fashion and founded primarily on Revelation, and secondarily on the authority of the *magisterium*, which in the case of Islam is equivalent to the Infallibles. The Arabic word *naql* also means to pass on, report, relate, transmit; but in its religious context it is inextricably bound to the Qur’ānic revelation and the ideas of *sunnah* or *‘itrah*. Hence, “tradition” will be used in this paper to include textual references to the Qur’ān as well as to the entire corpus of sayings attributed to the Infallibles.

² Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known in the West as Averroës, Islamic religious philosopher who attempted to integrate Islamic traditions with ancient Greek thought. At the behest of the Almohad caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf, he produced a series of summaries and commentaries on most of Aristotle's works (1169–95) and on Plato's Republic, which were widely used in the Islamic world and influential in Europe for centuries.

³ ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (600-661), upon him be Peace, the first man to believe in the Prophet, upon him and his Progeny be Peace. The Prophet called him the gate of knowledge and chose him to be his trustee. Ibn ‘Arabi held that the Imām was the closet of all people to the Prophet, the pinnacle of the universe and the esoteric reality of all the prophets of God. Ibn Sina wrote about him saying that he was amidst the companions of the Prophet just as the intellect is amongst sensible things. Ibn Abī al-Hadīd traces all the fields of knowledge in the Islamic world back to the Imām. The book, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, contains some of the Imām’s letters, speeches and words of wisdom. This book, being a great source of knowledge of the Unicity of God as well as of sociological matters, comes second to only the Qur’ān in its effects upon Islamic culture. All Muslims are united in acknowledging the Imām’s position and worthiness as a Caliph and successor to the Prophet; they are not united however in the case of others and are divided into the two main sects of Sunni and Shi’ah.

⁴ Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (1571-1641), known as Mullā Sadrā, philosopher, *muhaddith* (transmitter of traditions), and exegete who, drawing upon the Peripatetic and Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophical traditions and making full use of the mystical heritage of the Islamic world, inaugurated a synthesis and a new point of convergence in the history of Islamic philosophy. At a time when philosophy in the West strayed farther away from discussions on ontology and metaphysics (*mabāhith e wujūdī*) and, by so doing, laid the foundations of modern civilisation, Mullā Sadrā intensified Islamic philosophy’s connection with these fields. He was the originator of the doctrine of transsubstantial motion (*harakat al-jawharī*) and the belief that the soul was contingent in body and eternal in spirit. His school of philosophy came to be distinguished from the Peripatetic and the Illuminationist schools and, under the name of “Transcendental Philosophy” (*Hikmat al-Mutālīyyah*), it slowly but surely gained wide acceptance. This school was particularly effectual in shaping the social and cultural movements inside Iran during the latter’s initial contacts with the West. He was the author of more than fifty books. His *Asfār al-Arba’ah* and *Shawāhid al-Rubūbīyah* have become standard texts of philosophy. His other works include *Sharh Usūl al-Kāfī* and *Tafsīr al-Qurān*.

⁵ *Tawhīd* is the fundamental principle and forte of the Islamic tradition. It includes the idea of the unicity of the Godhead as well as the principal unity of all Being in both its transcendental and immanent modal-

ities. There is no exact equivalent for this term in English. “Monotheism” will be used to refer to *tawhīd* in some cases but in general the word will be left in its transliterated form.

⁶ School of Islamic philosophy founded by Shahāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (1154-1191), who is commonly known as Shaykh al-Ishrāq and is one of the most famous Muslim philosophers. Despite his short life he introduced many novel ideas that starkly contrasted Avicennian doctrines. He kept to logical methods but, like Plato, also emphasized the role of intuition, inspiration and the direct vision of realities. Suhrawardī spent much effort in trying to prove the existence of the Imaginal world – a world that is situated between the world of intellects (i.e. the Platonic Ideas or Forms) and the natural order. His most important work is *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.

⁷ Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā (980-1037), known in the West as Avicenna, was the foremost philosopher in the Islamic world. In his philosophical methodology he was greatly influenced by Fārābī and though he mainly commented on the Aristotelian tradition, his penetrating inquiries led to new conclusions. While Ibn Sīnā’s fame is mostly due to his achievements in philosophy and medicine, he was also a master in such fields as methodology, formal logic, mathematics and astronomy. His written works include *Kitāb al-Shifā*, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, and *Qānūn fi al-Tibb*.

⁸ Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī (1201-1274), well-known philosopher, theologian, mathematician and astronomer who expounded and revived philosophy at a time when it was under attack by Ash’arī theologians. In his commentary on the *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, he aptly responded to Fakhr al-Rāzī’s criticism of philosophical thought and went on to accept most of Shaykh al-Ishrāq’s original ideas. He was instrumental in the establishment and progress of the observatory at Maragha. His works include *AwSāf al-Ashrāf*, which was written in the style of the mystics, and *Tajrīd al-I’tiqād*, which expounded the theological doctrine of the Shī’ah and became the theological text *par excellence* of the entire Muslim world. Al-Tūsī was also active in the political realm. At the time of the Mongol invasion of Iran, he played a prominent role in the defence and promulgation of Islamic thought and culture.

⁹ A seminal work by Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Fārābī (870?-950), who is considered the founder of Islamic philosophy. Among the Peripatetic philosophers of the Islamic world he became known as the "Second Teacher", the first being Aristotle. Though he figured prominently in the choice of the intellectual elements of Hellenic thought that Islam would adopt, he was not just a transmitter of Greek philosophy. By way of original thought and penetrating metaphysical insights he attempted a synthesis of the opinions of Plato and Aristotle. In working out his own philosophical system, Fārābī attempted to detail the status of Revelation and explain its relation to the different levels of Intellect. In “practical philosophy” – or what might be called social science – he formulated the perfect state and wrote *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. His philosophical writings were usually short treatises on chosen topics. The Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and Transcendental schools of philosophy in Islam can be said to be elaborations and developments of Fārābī’s philosophy.