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Chapter 2

The Decline of Knowledge and the Rise of Ideology in the Modern Islamic World

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Throughout the twentieth century, Muslim scholars called for a revival of the Islamic intellectual tradition in order to address the moral and spiritual malaise which has too long afflicted Muslim peoples the world over. Both Sunnīs and Shīʿites, from the heartland of medieval Islamic civilization such as Syria, Egypt, and Iran, to its later lands such as Malaysia and West Africa, to its most recent penetrations into Europe and America, have long decried the intellectual decrepitude of modern Islamic civilization. To many scholars of Islam, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the rise of violence, punctuated by the events of September 11, 2001, are the latest symptoms of an underlying illness, a cancer which has been eating at the collective moral and intellectual body of the international Islamic community. In retrospect, such events were not a surprise but a painful indication of how deep this crisis has become. Unfortunately, the solutions sought by the American-led coalition involve significant risks, and to the minds of many condone senseless violence and wanton killing as a just response to senseless violence and wanton killing.[1] Critics of the policy maintain that such a response rarely does more than beget the same violence from whence it was begotten. If this is correct, removing one or two more heads from the hydra of religious extremism will only succeed in breeding more of the same. In any case, what is needed is to strike a fatal blow to the heart of this beast, a beast whose name is ignorance.

From an Islamic perspective, it could be said that ignorance is our only true foe and that knowledge is our only true need, for when applied and lived, knowledge provides all that is necessary to overcome our spiritual, moral, emotional, and even physical decrepitude. Viewed in this light, the myriad social, economic, and political problems which have given rise to extremist reactions are in part the symptoms of an underlying intellectual crisis. The role of European and American influence in contributing to this is discussed in Ibrahim Kalin's and Ejaz Akram's contributions to this volume. In this essay we will discuss the role of modern ideological trends within Islam itself. But as these are relatively recent developments, which

for the most part represent deviations from the traditional Islamic sciences, we must delve into Islamic intellectual history in order to fully address these issues. Historical contextualization of movements in the Islamic world is important for non-Muslims because an inability to appreciate the subtleties and complexities of the Islamic intellectual tradition leads to egregious misunderstandings, which can in turn lead to devastating political miscalculations, as is demonstrated by Walid El-Ansary in his essay "The Economics of Terrorism." It is also of central importance for Muslims because much of the thought now produced in the Islamic world is not in fact Islamic. Western ideologies are presented by both dogmatic literalists and modern "liberal" secularists with a thin veneer of Islamic terms and sayings, while the voice of traditional Islamic thought is often muted and ignored. But through the work of scholars such as S. H. Nasr and Hamza Yusuf Hanson in America, A. K. Brohi and Suheyl Umar in Pakistan, ʿAbd al-Halīm Maḥmūd in Egypt, Naquib al-Attas in Malaysia, and Martin Lings, Ḥassan Gai Eaton, and T. J. Winter in England, it can continue to be heard.

Many of the most influential modern Muslim thinkers, such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898), Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (d. 1897) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935),[2] were so awed by the technological achievements of Western civilization that they freely surrendered the ground of intellectuality to the secular humanistic and scientistic (as opposed to scientific)[3] world-view that gave rise to them. While, as Fuad Naeem has demonstrated,[4] the secularism and modernism of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and his followers in India is immediately evident, that of ʿAbduh and Afghānī has been more insidious. They tried to be modernist without being secularist, not realizing that the former opened the door to the latter. In adopting foreign theories and analytical models without fully evaluating them, both modernist and puritanical reformist (to avoid the amoeba-word "fundamentalist") Muslims have abandoned the guidance of their own intellectual heritage. But in order to be effectively assimilated into the Islamic world, such modes of thought must first be evaluated. Then what is found to be of value can be incorporated organically through a genuine intellectual and civilizational discourse, as happened in the encounter between Islam and Greek thought in the ninth and tenth centuries. When, however, one intellectual tradition is abandoned outright, there is no basis for the evaluation of another intellectual tradition and none of the fertile ground that is necessary for effective assimilation. Recovering the Islamic intellectual tradition is thus an essential, if not the essential, step to ameliorating the malaise which Muslims and non-Muslims alike have long bemoaned and decried. When this has occurred, Muslim peoples will be better prepared to engage Western civilization without surrendering to it altogether or opposing it outwardly while capitulating inwardly.

Indications of Islam's intellectual decline can be found in all the traditional Islamic sciences. On the one hand, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) has been abused by extremists so as to excuse and even promote suicide killings. On the other, it has been abandoned by modernists because they believe it is rooted in a medieval code of life which is not applicable in the "new world order." Puritanical reformists have distorted theology so as to deny the immanence and closeness of God, affirming only the transcendence and remoteness of the Divine. Modernists, such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and Chirāgh ʿAlī of India, have rejected every facet of theology and philosophy which does not accord with an Enlightenment and positivist notion of reason. Doctrinal literalists have decontextualized the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad so as to deny women rights that were granted to them from the beginning of Islam, whereas many modernists have rejected the authenticity of the sayings of the Prophet, and even the Qur´ān. Both have almost completely abandoned the principles of Islamic thought. Puritanical reformists do so because they favor an opaque literalism which denies the efficacy of our speculative, intuitive, and imaginal faculties. Modernists do so because they have capitulated to the mental habits of their conquerors, conditioned as they are by relativism, scientism, and secular humanism. Each side continues to advance its position, but there is no dialogue; for in the absence of the traditional Islamic modes of interpretation, there is no basis for a common discourse among Muslims.[5]

All of the dimensions of this intellectual decline cannot be covered in one essay, or even one book. Here we will focus on one dimension of the Islamic intellectual heritage whose true nature has been abandoned, rejected, and forgotten for much of the modern period. In this essay it is referred to as the "*iḥsānī* intellectual tradition." *Iḥsān* is an Arabic word which comes from the root *ḥasana*, meaning to be beautiful, good, fine, or lovely. The word *iḥsān* is the noun form of the verb *aḥsana*, which means to make beautiful, good, fine, or lovely. *Iḥsān* thus means making beautiful or good, or doing what is beautiful or good. The *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition begins with the teachings of the Qur´ān and the Prophet Muḥammad, who told his companions that "God has ordained *iḥsān* for everything."[6] In perhaps his most famous teaching on the subject he said: "*Iḥsān* is to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you."[7] The central manifestation of the practice of *iḥsān* took form in what is traditionally known as Sufism (Islamic mysticism), where the emphasis is on making one's heart and soul beautiful so that beauty will arise naturally from within. But the *iḥsānī* tradition has taken on many forms, under many names, throughout Islamic history. Wherever there has been a vibrant Islamic civilization, be it Sunnī or Shīʿī, the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition has been present in one form or another. Though it is not absent from the modern world, its political, social, and intellectual influence has decreased dramatically.

Like the philosophy of Plotinus, Meister Eckhart or Shankaracharya, the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition comprises a science of Ultimate Reality in which metaphysics, cosmology, epistemology, psychology, and ethics are elaborated in terms of the attachment of all things to their one true origin, which is also their ultimate end. From this perspective, philosophy is not simply ratiocinative deduction and speculation; rather, it is the science of the Real. But to truly see the Real without the obfuscations of passional predilections and mental constructs, one must first perfect the organ of thought and perception—i.e., the intellect, which according to most traditional Islamic thinkers, resides in the heart. As Mullā Ṣadrā, a preeminent representative of this tradition, writes: "Know that philosophy is the perfection of the human soul to the extent of human possibility through perception of the realities of existent things as they are in themselves and judgment of their existence verified through demonstrations, not derived from opinion and tradition."[8] From the perspective of the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition, perception and understanding are not merely a way of knowing, they are moreover a way of being, and any form of perception or understanding which is not informed by the awareness of God's omnipotence and omnipresence is not in keeping with the ultimate purpose of being human. Not all the solutions to the malaise of Islamdom lie within this dimension of the Islamic tradition. Nonetheless, its absence from contemporary discourse is among the most severe of the symptoms indicating the illness of the whole. But before we examine some teachings of the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition, we must first look to the Islamic view of the human being; for all of the Islamic sciences, from philosophy to jurisprudence, are designed to address the one shortcoming of man from whence all other shortcomings stem—ignorance.

From one perspective, the message of Islam is one of knowledge having come to cure ignorance, truth having come to abolish error. The conception of the human being expounded in the Qur´ān and the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad is not of a fallen being in need of redemption, but of a forgetful being in need of remembrance, an ignorant being in need of knowledge and thus of instruction. Where a Christian may see the ills of the human condition as a result of original sin, a Muslim will see these same ills as the result of ignorance or forgetfulness. In Islamic anthropology, the human is believed to have been created according to a norm (*fiṭra*) in which he knows that there is no god but God, that God is the only source of truth and reality, that God is the Origin of all things, that all things continually exist through God, and that all things will return to God. This is the vision of *tawḥīd*, which literally means "making one" and can best be expressed as "asserting the unity of God." Throughout the centuries this vision of *tawḥīd* is the one thing which has been agreed upon by all Muslim scholars, of

whatever sect or creed. Arguments have never centered on the veracity of *tawḥīd* itself, but upon the best means of recognizing and averring it.

As humankind has exhibited a tendency to be heedless of *tawḥīd*, and to forget and ignore its implications, the Qur´ān states that God has sent messengers to remind them of this essential truth. It is in this spirit that the Qur´ān tells us, "Verily this is a reminder" (73:19, 76:29). This reminder is the truth of *tawḥīd*, a truth expressed in the first testimony of the faith, "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illā Llāh*). It is to remind humankind of this truth that every prophet has been sent. In the Qur´ān, God specifically addresses Moses: "I am God! There is no god but I. So worship Me ...." (20:14). The seventh chapter of the Qur´ān tells us that the Prophets Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuʿayb all said to their people in different lands and in different ages, "O my people! Worship God! You have no other god but Him" (7:59, 7:65, 7:73, 7:85). In another passage we are told, "Ask those of Our messengers We sent before thee: Have We appointed gods to be worshiped apart from the Merciful?" (43:45). But the answer to this has already been given: "And We never sent a messenger before thee except that We revealed to him, saying, 'There is no god but I, so serve Me'" (21:25). It is a fundamental principle of the Qur´ān that every human collectivity has been sent a prophet: "And We have sent to every people a messenger, that they may worship God" (16:36). Every human collectivity has thus been sent a reminder of *tawḥīd*, of God's oneness and its consequences. From this perspective, the purpose of revelation is not to bring a new truth, but to reaffirm the one truth, the only truth that is, the only truth that has ever been.

From another perspective, the central message of the Qur´ān is expressed in this verse: "Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Falsehood is ever bound to vanish!" (18:81). In this spirit the text reads, "And we have made the book descend as a clarification for all things" (16:89). The emphasis of Islam is to experience this clarification and thus to know. As is revealed, "We have made it descend as an Arabic Qur´ān, that you may know" (12:2). Such verses do not refer to a knowledge experienced through transmission from one generation to the next; rather, they call humankind to an immediate knowledge of things *as they are in themselves* (*kamā hiya*). To possess such knowledge is the human norm, the *fiṭra*. The function of the Islamic intellectual tradition is therefore not only to transmit and preserve textual authorities which clarify *tawḥīd* from one generation to the next, but moreover to cultivate the intellect through which one is able to aver this basic truth through one's own experience and consciousness. Through the intellect all things are known as signs of God. As the Qur´ān says: "We shall show them our signs on the horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth" (41:53). The specific trait which distinguishes man from all else in creation is his ability to read

all of God's signs. The human intellect is in a sense the ultimate decoder, which when refined and polished can witness the face of the Divine in all of Its many modes in all of creation; for as the Qur´ān says: "Wheresoever you turn there is the face of God" (2:115). To see all things as signs of God and be called to the remembrance of God in all modes of knowing is thus the human norm. Islam understands such knowledge to be the goal of all religions. This is not knowledge of facts and information, but knowledge of things as they are in themselves, a knowledge in which everything is given its proper place because everything is seen in relation to God, and the relations between things are understood on the basis of their relationship to God. From this point of view, to know things outside of God is not to truly know them, for nothing can exist outside of its relationship to God; no existent exists outside of its dependence upon Absolute Existence. It is for this reason that the Prophet Muḥammad would often pray: "Oh God show me things as they are in themselves. Show me truth as truth and give me the strength to follow it. Show me falsehood as falsehood and give me the strength to avoid it."[9]

The Early Intellectual Tradition

Based upon the centrality of knowledge in the Islamic understanding of man, the quest for knowledge is a religious duty. As the Qur´ān reads, "He who has been given wisdom has been given a great good" (2:269). For generations Muslims have sought to comply with the command of the Prophet Muḥammad: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim."[10] Such knowledge does not have as its end the utilitarian goals which we associate with modern scientific and rational pursuits; rather, it has as its end the remembrance of God. As the great scientific tradition of Islam attests, knowledge pertaining to worldly endeavors is not outside the scope of Islam. It is in fact incumbent upon every Muslim to seek such knowledge when the exigencies of life demand it. But the first obligation for every Muslim is to learn the principles of both the practices and beliefs of the religion. All subsequent knowledge should then be understood in light of the principles of the religion. What does not support that does not support one's final end—salvation. The pursuit of such knowledge is therefore believed to be deleterious. As such the Prophet would often pray, "I seek refuge in God from knowledge which has no benefit."[11] He further said, "The world is accursed, accursed is what is in it, save the remembrance of God and what supports it, and the teacher and the student."[12] The injunction to seek knowledge must thus be understood as an injunction to seek knowledge which inculcates remembrance, for all else is accursed. It is for this reason that Islamic scientists never discovered many of the technologi-

cal applications of modern science, applications which allow us to perform fundamental tasks more rapidly, but do not necessarily increase the quality of life and may distract us from what is most important. By and large the fundamental concern of Muslim scientists was not control of the material realm for worldly pursuits. Rather, they wished to understand the signs of God's creation so as to better understand the Divine.

Throughout Islamic history, Muslims have traveled extensively in the quest for knowledge. To understand the nature of this knowledge we need, therefore, to investigate some aspects of the historical development of the Islamic sciences and the Islamic pedagogical tradition. The first centuries of Islam (ca. 700 to 900 C.E.) were a time of small diverse communities of scholars often seen to be part of a larger movement known as the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, meaning those devoted to the study, preservation, and application of the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad.[13] The scholars now known as the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* exhibited many tendencies and would often focus their efforts on divergent, though complementary, aspects of the tradition bequeathed by the Prophet Muḥammad. Although they agreed on several basic tenets, they would often have contentious disagreements over others. What identifies them with a single educational and intellectual movement is their common belief that the Qur´ān and the *sunna*, or wont, of the Prophet Muḥammad were the primary, if not the only, appropriate sources of religious knowledge.[14] Not only was the content of their teachings based upon words transmitted from the Prophet, so too was their mode of teaching modeled upon that of the Prophet and his community. Thus the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement was not based so much upon a single method or doctrine as it was an expression of the widely held belief that the guarantee of authenticity, and therefore of orthodoxy, was not only the verbal and written transmission of the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad, but the conveyance of the authority contained therein through adherence to his *sunna* in the very manner of transmission.[15] Not only was the content of the Islamic message preserved in the sayings of the Prophet, so too was the manner of instruction preserved in detail. The widespread *ḥadīth* movement thus worked to preserve the *sunna* of the Prophet in the actions, minds, and hearts of the Islamic community. It is important to understand the contours of this movement because modern Islamic revivalist movements also claim close adherence to the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad. The nature of their dedication is, however, quite different. There were those among the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* who took recourse to a literalist interpretation of scripture while suspending the speculative and intuitive capabilities, and stressing the saving nature of faith alone. But this was never the whole of the Islamic tradition. It was always balanced by other modes of interpretation. To understand the true nature of the early community, and how much it differs

from the current situation, we would thus do well to examine some of the subtleties of this movement.

Because they based themselves upon the Prophetic model, a central component of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement was the training of the soul (*tarbiyat al-nafs*) and the purification of the heart. Emphasis on the purification of the heart follows directly from the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad, such as: "There is in man a clump of flesh. If it is pure, the whole body is pure. If it is polluted the whole body is polluted. It is the heart";[16] and "God does not look at your bodies, nor at your forms. He looks at your hearts."[17] As the Qur´ān tells us, the day of judgment is "a day when neither wealth nor sons shall profit, except for one who comes to God with a sound heart" (26:88-89). While the health of the heart has always been a concern for traditional Islamic scholars of every discipline, as for all serious Muslims, the individuals most dedicated to the purification of the heart are those historically identified as Sufis, usually defined as the mystics of Islam. But as the impetus for inner purification stems directly from the Prophet, most Sufis of the early Islamic community were in some way aligned with the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement. Sufis sat with non-Sufis in circles where both jurisprudence and *ḥadīth* were taught, and there is no evidence that they were isolated from the social and intellectual influence of the populist movement of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*. What distinguishes Sufis from other representatives of this movement is not that they sought inner purification, for this is a concern of all Muslims. They were, however, singularly devoted to purification and believed that it cultivated an unadulterated mode of perception.

Many Sufis not officially recognized as *ḥadīth* scholars also had some knowledge of both *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *ḥadīth*. The biographical dictionaries of the Sufis, in which are recorded the companions and sayings of many famous Sufis, also serve as repositories of *ḥadīth* known to have been transmitted by famous Sufi figures. Having observed this trend, Marshall Hodgson, one of the foremost scholars of Islamic history, argues that Sufism was closely associated with the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement. As he observes: "In some cases it is hard to draw a line between what was Sufi mystical self-examination and what was Ḥadīthī moralism."[18] Nonetheless, there has been a tendency among Western scholars and modern Muslims to see Sufism as an esoteric, mystical movement disengaged from the rest of the Islamic community, rather than an integral part of it,[19] even though the primary historical sources do not support this view.

The tendency to separate Sufism from other forms of Islamic scholarship and practice arises from a theoretical dichotomy which juxtaposes free esoteric spirituality with restrictive exoteric conformism. Events such as the hanging of the famous Sufi Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj in 922 C.E. and the execution of

the jurist and Sufi teacher ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī in 1132 C.E. are viewed in isolation, as evidence of an irreconcilable antagonism between a stultified nomo-centric interpretation of the religion and an inspired personal experience of the Divine. But as Omid Safi has observed, this understanding derives from conceptualizing Islamic civilization through post-Enlightenment theories of religion.[20] When subject to scrutiny, such simplistic bifurcations often tell us more about the theoreticians who pose them than about their subject matter.

The idea of mysticism as a special category of non-rational or supra-rational spiritual consciousness received one of its first articulations in the nineteenth century in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, wherein mysticism is portrayed as an emotional, trans-rational experience akin to drug-induced hallucinations. Spiritual methods were interpreted by James as the methodical cultivation of ecstatic moments of cosmic consciousness, and the entire enterprise was seen to be private and individualistic.[21] But Sufis have long decried those who would only seek ecstatic experiences. The goal has been simply to remember God constantly and to see things as they are in themselves. Any experiences, visions, or ecstatic states were seen as accidental, and novices were even warned not to be deluded by visions and delights, for in relation to the ultimate quest, they are as smoke to fire. As the famous Sufi Shaykh Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234) explains in his Sufi manual *Gifts of the Gnostic Sciences* (*ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*), to seek wondrous experiences through spiritual exercises is "… pretension itself and sheer folly." Though such rigors may lead to supernatural experiences that help one to better understand divine mysteries, people are only to engage in such practices "for the soundness of religion, inspecting the states of the soul and sincerity of action towards God."[22]

Following upon the trend begun by James, mysticism was described by the tremendously influential Evelyn Underhill as a movement "whose aims are wholly transcendent and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging or improving anything in the visible universe."[23] Such notions prompted some critics to chastise mysticism for "… its tendency to flee the responsibilities of history and engage in premature adventures into eternity."[24] But the idea that being ever-mindful of the transcendental and the spiritual would necessarily turn one away from the affairs of this world is rarely found in Sufism. Sufis speak of turning away from the world with the meaning of cutting the internal entanglements that come through greed, lust, and pride. It is not that the Sufi is not in the world, but that the world is not in him or her. As Abū ´l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), author of one of the most important handbooks of early Sufism, writes: "The sign of the sincere Sufi is that he feels poor when he has wealth, is humble when he has power, and is hidden when he has

fame."[25] Any licit act, even war, is open to the saint, so long as he acts from the inner peace to which he has attained and remains in that peace. As Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309), a Shaykh of the Shādhiliyya Sufi order who was also an accomplished jurisprudent, writes in the second line of his famous book of Sufi aphorisms, *al-Ḥikam*, "Your desire to disengage, even though God has put you in the world to earn a living, is hidden passion. And your desire to earn a living in the world, even though God has disengaged you, is a fall from supreme aspiration."[26] From this perspective, Sufism, like the religion of Islam of which it is a fundamental expression, is a middle way in which everything is to be given its proper due. The world is not to be shunned outright, but it is not to be sought in itself. Though representatives of the Sufi tradition sought inner purification, stillness, and unmediated knowledge of the Divine, many—such as Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221), who perished in battle against the Mongols, Amīr ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1883), whose struggle against the French occupation of Algeria has been examined in Reza Shah-Kazemi's "Recollecting the Spirit of *Jihād*," and ʿUthmān Dan Fodio (d. 1817), who transformed the religious life of Hausaland—sought to have the affairs of this world arranged in accord with transcendent principles, seeing this as one of the meanings of being God's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfat Allāh fīʾl-arḍ*).

Sufism has almost never been a matter of personal religious expression which stood in contradistinction to communal institutional religion. Rather, those who we now identify as Sufis were a group that sought to live both their personal and communal lives in constant awareness of the Divine. They sought to find their true center and act from that center. As the famous Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) writes:

> Sufism belongs to the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam. It is based on the assumption that the practice of its adherents had always been considered by the important early Muslims, the men around Muḥammad and the men of the second generation, as well as those who came after them, as the path of truth and right guidance. The Sufi approach is based upon constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, aversion to the false splendor of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, property, and position to which the great mass aspire, and retirement from the world into solitude for divine worship. These things were general among the men around Muḥammad and the early Muslims.[27]

Thus the place of Sufism, as understood by both its champions and its traditional analysts, is very different from the notions advanced in most modes of modern discourse, be they Islamic or non-Islamic.

In their contributions to this volume, Waleed El-Ansary and Ibrahim Kalin have observed how religious polemicists, orientalists, and political sci-

entists among others have long interpreted and represented Islam through simplistic cultural essentialisms which are usually more problematic than useful. This, too, is the case with Sufism. For years scholars and laymen, both Western and Muslim, have been guilty of assuming that the divisions and juxtapositions which modern man employs to analyze the world are reflections of age-old dichotomies. On the one hand, it is assumed that Islam is a rigid, desert religion of the sword whose most native expression is found in rigid reformist movements (what many like to call "Islamic fundamentalism"). On the other hand, Sufism is seen as a free, even supra-Islamic, expression of individual spirituality. In the early nineteenth century, many scholars looked for its origins in Hinduism and some in Christianity. Perhaps the best example of the tendency to view Sufism as an extra-Islamic phenomenon is found in one of the earliest treatises of orientalist studies of Sufism, an essay by Lt. James William Graham entitled "A Treatise on Sufism, or Mahomedan Mysticism":

> With regard to the religion (if it can be so termed in the general acceptation of that word) or rather doctrine and tenets of Sufis, it is requisite to observe, first, that any person, or a person of any religion or sect, may be a Sufi: the mystery lies in this: — a total disengagement of the mind from all temporal concerns and worldly pursuits; an entire throwing off not only of every superstition, doubt, or the like, but of the practical mode of worship, ceremonies, &c. laid down in every religion, which the Mahomedans term *Sheryat*, being the law or canonical law; and entertaining solely mental abstraction, and contemplation of the soul and Deity, their affinity, and the correlative situation in which they stand: in fine, it is that spiritual intercourse of the soul with its Maker, that disregards and disclaims all ordinances and outward forms….[28]

Developments in recent scholarship have provided many corrections to these errors, but such notions persist. An example of this is found in Julian Baldick's *Mystical Islam*, where he writes that Islam developed more slowly than is usually believed, "… and that in the slow process of development Christian materials were used to build the mystical side of the religion, the side which was to become Sufism."[29] But a close examination of the original sources reveals that the proponents of Sufism drew upon the same materials as other scholars and were an integral component of the scholarly community as a whole. The *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement, the jurisprudents and the Sufis comprised intertwining circles whose methods, interests, and members overlapped. Whereas the jurisprudents, the Qur´anic exegetes and the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* transmitted knowledge in a way which could properly be called teaching (*taʿlīm*), the Sufis put more emphasis on inner training (*tarbiya*) for the sake of purification (*tazkiya*). But *taʿlīm* and *tarbiya* are by no means mutually exclusive. They are in fact complimentary parts of a greater whole. By observing how closely connected the Sufis were with

the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, we can see that *tarbiya* and *tazkiya* were not just individual spiritual practices, but an important aspect of early Islamic pedagogy and thus intellectuality.

A study of the biographies of early Sufis demonstrates that the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad were an intricate component of their discourse and thus of their self-understanding. Well-established Sufis also reached a high degree of competency in other fields. A noted *ḥadīth* scholar and one of the foremost authorities of early Sufism, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021) compiled the biographies and teachings of over one hundred Sufis from the early Islamic period in a book entitled *Generations of the Sufis* (*Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*). Among those he recorded as companions of the Sufis and of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* are men such as Abu´l-ʿAbbās al-Sayyārī (d. 953-4), a Sufi Shaykh, a jurist, and a noted *ḥadīth* scholar. According to Sulamī, all the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* were Sayyārī's companions.[30] Ruwaym b. Aḥmad al-Baghdādī (d. 915) was among the most revered Sufi Shaykhs of Baghdad. He is recorded by Sulamī as a practicing jurist, a noted reciter of Qur´ān, and a scholar of Qur´ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*).[31] The most famous of the early Sufis, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 910), known as the Shaykh of Shaykhs, was also a practicing jurist who studied with many scholars known to be directly aligned with the *Ahl al-ḥadīth.* Foremost among his teachers were Abū Thawr (d. 855), the pre-eminent jurist of his day in Baghdad, and Ibn Surayj (d. 918), heralded by many as the leading scholar of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence) in his day. It is said of Junayd, "His words were connected to the texts (i.e., the Qur´ān and the *ḥadīth*)."[32]

In addition to these points of convergence, there were also points of divergence. But the importance of *ḥadīth* and the *sunna* was never disputed. Many Sufis entered the path of Sufism because they found that the sciences of jurisprudence and *ḥadīth* did not offer sufficient knowledge of God. But in such cases one does not always find condemnations of the jurists and the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* themselves; rather, a belief that their sciences are limited in scope and function when not complemented by the inner training which cultivates those very actions that the jurist can only regulate. The goal of the Sufi community was not to toss aside the transmitted knowledge of the jurists and the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, but to recognize its proper place in the scope of all knowledge. As another famous Sufi, Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 942), said in a commentary on the *ḥadīth*, "Question the scholars, befriend the wise, and sit with the great ones":[33] "Question the scholars with regard to what is lawful and unlawful. Befriend the wise who wayfare by means of it (i. e., wisdom) on the path of truthfulness, clarity [and sincerity]. Sit with the great ones who speak of God, allude to His lordship, and see by the light of His nearness."[34] Although he is calling others to seek more than the knowledge obtained from scholars, even the injunction to go beyond the transmitted

wisdom of the Islamic tradition in order to "see by the light of God" is believed to have a foundation in transmitted knowledge.

Given these observations, the Sufis of the early Islamic period should be viewed as one of the many groups among the broad based *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement. Not only were many trained in the sciences with which this movement is commonly associated, more importantly, they shared with them in the common understanding that the Qur´ān and *sunna* of the Prophet are the criteria of all knowledge. As the famous Sufi Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 849 or 875) is reported to have said: "The *sunna* is abandoning this world, and religious obligation (*al-farīḍa*) is companionship with the Master (i. e., the Prophet), because the whole of the *sunna* points to abandoning this world, and all of the Book points to companionship with the Master. So who has learned the *sunna* and the obligation has become complete."[35] Indeed, the path of Sufism is defined by the foremost Qur´ān commentator of the early Sufis, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), in a manner that emphasizes the centrality of the *sunna*: "Our principles (*uṣūl*) are seven: holding fast to the Book, emulating the Messenger of God through the *sunna*, eating what is permissible, desisting from doing harm, avoiding misdeeds, repentance, and fulfilling the rights [of God and all things]."[36] Moreover, those who inclined to the Sufi way often saw the Qur´ān and the *sunna* as the instruments by which to measure the validity of their insights and inspirations, the validity of what is seen "through the light of God." Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 830) said, "Whenever one of the subtle teachings of the Tribe (i.e., the Sufis) descends into my heart for a few days, I do not yield to it unless it is with two just witnesses, the Book and the *sunna*."[37] Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysabūrī goes further, making the Qur´ān and the *sunna* the criteria not only for the validity of one's knowledge, insights, and inspirations, but for the purity of one's state at every moment: "Whoever does not weigh his actions and states in every moment by the Book and the *sunna* and is not attentive to his incoming thoughts (*khawāṭir*), he will not be counted in the book of men (*dīwān al-rijāl*) (i.e., he will not be counted among the Sufis)."[38] The most influential of the early Sufis, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, said, "All paths (*ṭuruq*) are blocked to mankind, save he who imitates the Messenger, follows his *sunna*, and adheres to his path. Then the path of all good things is opened to him."[39] His students report, "We heard Junayd say more than once, 'We teach what is determined by the Book and the *sunna*.' Whoever does not memorize the Qur´ān, record *ḥadīth* or study jurisprudence does not emulate him."[40]

While all the subtleties of the early Sufi movement and its interconnections with the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement cannot be examined here, this short survey should be enough to indicate the extensive personal, methodological, and theological affiliations between the two movements. The funda-

mental methodological distinction is that the Sufis believed that "the wisdom which derives from the impressions upon the heart of one of God's friends" should accompany the Qur´ān and *sunna* as legitimate sources of religious knowledge.[41] Their substantiation for this was derived from the *sunna* itself. As another compiler of Sufi teachings, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988) writes in his *Kitāb al-Luma*ʿ (*The Book of Illumination*), one of the most important handbooks of early Sufism:

> The source of that is the tradition regarding faith when Gabriel asked the Prophet about the three roots: about *islām* (surrender), *īmān* (faith) and *iḥsān* (doing beautiful), the outer, the inner, and the reality. *Islām* is the outer, *īmān* is the inner and the outer, and *iḥsān* is the reality of the outer and the inner. That is the saying of the Prophet, "*Iḥsān* is to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you." And Gabriel corroborated that for him.[42]

Sufis such as Sarrāj and Junayd saw themselves as the transmitters of the living prophetic *sunna* pertaining to the cultivation of praiseworthy states (*aḥwāl*) and noble character traits (*akhlāq*), and believed that jurisprudence and knowledge of *ḥadīth* in and of themselves were limited to the transmitted *sunna*, which pertains more to actions and beliefs. This is not to say that they had contempt for scholars who limited their concerns to these domains. Many of the Sufis saw themselves as part of the larger community of scholars all of whom were "the inheritors of the Prophets."[43] The Sufis saw their way as a science among the Islamic sciences which is superior because it cultivates not only external obedience to the teachings of the Qur´ān and the *sunna*, but also the character traits and states of soul from which such actions arise. As Sarrāj writes:

> The Sufis also have a special place among the people of knowledge regarding the observance of verses from the book of God, and reports from the Messenger of God. What a verse has annulled and the decree of something which a report has abolished calls to the noble character traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*). It encourages the excellence of states and the exquisiteness of deeds (*aʿmāl*), and imparts high stations in the religion and sublime way-stations particular to a group among the believers. A group of the companions [of the Prophet Muḥammad] and the generation after them adhered to that. That is modes of comportment from the Messenger of God and character traits from his character traits, since he said: "God taught me comportment and made beautiful my comportment."[44] And God said: "Verily you are (fashioned) upon a great character" (68:4). That is found in the records of the scholars and the jurisprudents, but they do not have a comprehension and understanding of that like their comprehension in the other sciences. Other than the Sufis, none of the possessors of knowledge who are abiding in justice have a share in that, other than consenting to it and believing that it is true.[45]

Like any group, the Sufis were sometimes loved and sometimes hated, at times supported and at times persecuted; but they were part and parcel of the early intellectual tradition, and thus an important component of the overall pedagogical effort to establish a society based upon the Qur´ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad, a society based upon submission, faith, and "doing beautiful"—*islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān*. The efforts of figures such as Seyyed Aḥmad Khān, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, the Wahhābīs, and some factions among the Muslim Brotherhood to curtail their influence, if not abolish them altogether, is thus an indication of how far Muslims have strayed from their own traditions.

The *Iḥsānī* Tradition

As is evident from Sarrāj, the Sufis saw themselves as that group among the scholars who were especially devoted to the science of doing beautiful or doing good (*iḥsān*). To understand the central thrust of the Sufi movement, we must therefore examine the Qur´ānic roots of *iḥsān*. The verb "to make beautiful" (*aḥsana*) and its derivatives occur over fifty times in the text and it is often found in the *ḥadīth*. According to these sources, the first to make beautiful is God Himself, "Who made beautiful everything which He created" (32:6). It is God who "formed you, made your forms beautiful, and provided you with pleasant things" (40:64). "He created the heavens and the earth through truth, formed you and made your forms beautiful, and to Him is the homecoming" (64:3). God is thus the first to make beautiful (*muḥsin*), and to do beautiful is to imitate the Creator as best a human can. This is fundamentally important for understanding the place of *iḥsān*, for while *islām* and *īmān* are important Qur´ānic concepts, neither pertains to, nor can pertain directly to God. God cannot submit, He can only be submitted to, and God does not believe or have faith, He knows. *Iḥsān* is thus the dimension of the religion wherein one draws closest to God by being as God-like as one can be: "Do what is beautiful as God has done what is beautiful to you" (28:77). In this vein, the Prophet Muḥammad would pray, "Oh God, You have made beautiful my creation (*khalq*), make beautiful my character (*khuluq*)."[46] From this perspective, doing beautiful is not only a way of performing specific actions, it is a way of being. Only when God has beautified one's character is the human servant then able to do beautiful, for only the like comes from the like. This in turn leads to the continued beautification of one's self. As the Qur´ān says: "Is not the recompense of doing beautiful, other than doing beautiful?" (55:60). So just as God has beautified man's form, so too He may then beautify his character, and when the character is beautified, the servant performs acts of beauty by which he participates in the inner beautification of his soul and moves towards his

Lord: "Those who do what is beautiful will receive the most beautiful and more" (10:26). Indeed, God "will recompense those who do what is beautiful with the most beautiful" (53:31). And what is most beautiful is God Himself: "God is beautiful and He loves beauty,"[47] "and to Him belong the most beautiful Names" (18:110, 20:8, 59:24).

The Prophet Muḥammad said to his companions: "God has ordained doing beautiful for everything. So when you kill, make the killing beautiful, and when you sacrifice, make the sacrificing beautiful. You should sharpen your blade so that the sacrificial animal is relieved."[48] While the first part of this *ḥadīth* is a re-affirmation of the general principle expounded in the Qur´ān, the second demonstrates that even acts which seem ugly can and must be done with beauty. Doing things with beauty is thus obligatory in all licit acts. As a Muslim, one should therefore do all things as if one sees God, for as observed above, "*Iḥsān* is to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you."[49] It is thus to do all things as an act of worship, for as God says, "I did not create jinn and man, except to worship Me" (51:56).

This, however, requires an initial understanding of beauty. On the intellectual level, the Sufis saw themselves as those who developed the science by which the beauty which has been ordained for everything is discerned and properly observed. This, however, was not a science which could be cultivated through transmission, like the sciences of *ḥadīth* and of law, but through discipline and inner purification; in order to do what is beautiful one must train oneself to be beautiful. As Abu ´l-Ḥasan an-Nūrī (d. 908), one of the most famous of the early Sufis said, "Sufism is neither regulations nor sciences, rather it is character traits."[50] This emphasis on inner cultivation is such that some Sufis identified the entire enterprise of Sufism with the adoption of noble character traits in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad: "I was only sent to complete the beautiful character traits";[51] and "Among the best of you is the most beautiful in character traits."[52] Without this active inner purification, Sufism would be but another science among the transmitted sciences. Thus, without Sufism or some form of the *iḥsānī* tradition, Islam is liable to become an ideology devoid of spiritual efficacy, and its central teaching—*lā ilāha illā Llāh*—is reduced to a slogan.

The Place of Sufism in the Middle Period

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that in the early period Sufis did not see themselves as a group completely separate from the *ʿulamā´* and the *fuqahā´*, and were not aloof from the corresponding intellectual disciplines. Nonetheless, they saw their science, the science of character

traits (*akhlāq*) and of doing beautiful (*iḥsān*), as the means by which the fullness and depth of the other sciences was to be realized. In the fifth and sixth Islamic centuries both Sufism and the more standard intellectual disciplines came to be identified with particular institutional manifestations. *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *kalām* (theology) came to be taught in the *madrasa* (college), while many Sufis began to congregate in *khānqāhs* or *ribāṭs*, where they could study and dedicate themselves to private and collective spiritual practices. Both institutes were funded by a variety of sources, from well-wishing individual patrons to power-brokering Sultans and viziers. Unfortunately, the facile bifurcation between jurisprudence and Sufism employed by many scholars has caused the relationship between these institutions to be misunderstood and thus misrepresented. In analyzing tenth century Iranian politics, one scholar describes an antagonism between Sufis and jurisprudents which he calls:

> … a reflection of two fundamentally opposed interpretations of the Koranic revelation and the Muḥammadan legacy. The positive nomocentricity of Islamic law found the language of Islamic mysticism as quintessentially flawed in nature and disposition. The feeling was mutual. The Sufis, too, rejected the rigid and perfunctory nomocentricity of the jurists as quintessentially misguided and a stultification of the Koranic message and the Prophetic traditions.[53]

As in the early period, there are too many convergences between the Sufis, the jurists, and their supporters to provide any evidence that such a dichotomy existed. The most influential political figure of this time period, the Saljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (1063-1092), was renowned for his support of both Sufis and *ʿulamāʾ*. He established both *madrasas* and Sufi *khānqāhs*, as did relatively unknown individuals such as Abū Saʿd al-Astarābādī (d. 1048-9)[54] and Abū Saʿd al-Kharkūshī (d. 1013 or 1016).[55] Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 1015), renowned as a Sufi master, is also said to have founded a *madrasa* in the city of Nasā.[56] He and his more famous son-in-law, Abu ʾl-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), author of one of the most influential handbooks of Sufism, are said to have taught in a *madrasa* which later became known as the Qushayriyya *madrasa*.[57] Shaykh Abū ʿAlī al-Fārmadī (d. 1084), known as the Shaykh of Shaykhs in the city of Nishapur, is said to have professed a love for his Shaykh which soon inspired him to move from the *madrasa* to the *khānqāh*.[58] Al-Fārmadī was in turn a teacher of both Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126), two brothers who are known to have traveled freely between *madrasa* and *khānqāh* and were revered for having reached the highest levels in *fiqh*, *kalām*, and Sufism. The more famous and influential of the two, Abū Ḥāmid, rose to the highest level of the *madrasa* system and was appointed chair of Shāfiʿī law at the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* in Baghdad, the most influential educational institution of its day. After leaving his teaching position

for over ten years he returned to his homeland of Khurāsān, where he spent his last days providing instruction in a "*khānqāh* for the Sufis, and in a *madrasa* for the sake of those who seek knowledge."[59]

Though only a handful of figures have been mentioned, the free movement of such intellectuals between the *khānqāh* and the *madrasa* demonstrates that in medieval Islamdom there was no hard line between the Sufis and the *ʿulamāʾ*, nor between the *madrasa* and the *khānqāh*. The lines which have been drawn by secularist and revivalist Muslim interpreters, as well as orientalists, are more a result of the modern mind, which imposes Enlightenment and Protestant Christian notions of mysticism upon the medieval Islamic world: a world in which most intellectuals, though they frequently criticized one another's predilections (as in any healthy intellectual environment), participated in the same discourse. Their particular interests and resulting identities often differed, but still overlapped. Failure to admit this basic historical reality has led generations of Muslims to discard an integral part of their faith and has blocked many more from understanding and experiencing the fullness of their tradition. When this occurs, the religion is reduced to an ideology, and when it is reduced to an ideology it no longer functions to purify hearts, but rather to justify individual aspirations and political ambitions.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

Though the aforementioned Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī was the most accomplished scholar in both jurisprudence and theology of his day, in his later years he became a chief proponent of the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition. His later writings argue for the primacy of Sufi knowledge received through inner purification and the actualization of one's inherent noble character traits, a knowledge which he and others referred to as "knowledge by presence" (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī* or *al-ʿilm al-ladunī*). His belief in the primacy of "knowledge by presence" did not take hold among all Muslim scholars and many disputed his claims. But his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* became the most popular book in the history of Islam and his writings exercised an influence in all fields of scholarship throughout the Islamic world, from his native Iran to India, Morocco, Indonesia, and even Muslim China. His view of knowledge and the relation between the Islamic sciences is therefore one which has been widely contemplated and which did much to shape medieval Islamic civilization. Even if a scholar was vehemently opposed to the primacy of Sufi knowledge, or knowledge by presence, he would have been influenced by this notion because he had to account for it as an important player in the intellectual dialogue of his day. To understand the manner in which the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition continued in the middle period, and

to see more clearly what some of the central concerns of most Muslim intellectuals until the modern period were, we would thus do well to examine the contours of Ghazālī's thought.

Ghazālī left a vast corpus of writings which dramatically changed the direction of philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism. But due to his attack on the philosophers in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), several Western scholars and modernist Muslims have held him responsible for the intellectual decline of Islamic civilization. He is often seen as the implacable adversary of philosophy and the fundamental cause for the demise of philosophy, and thus intellectuality, in the Islamic world. This is a lamentable misunderstanding, for although Ghazālī's intention in the *Tahāfut* was clearly to deconstruct, in many other works it was to reconstruct. In works such as *The Niche of Lights* and even Ghazālī's magnum opus, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, one finds a recurrent implementation of philosophical terminology and philosophical modes of discourse.

As T. J. Winter, one of the leading authorities on the teachings of Ghazālī, has demonstrated, Ghazālī's presentation of the soul and its virtues in the twenty-second book of *The Revival*, "On Breaking the Two Desires" is borrowed directly from the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (*The Refinement of Character Traits*) of the Neoplatonic Islamic philosopher Abū ʿAlī ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030), a follower of the Islamic peripatetic tradition, whose primary representatives are al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037).[60] Like Ibn Miskawayh, Ghazālī begins with the three faculties of the soul: the rational, the irascible, and the appetitive, and the four Platonic virtues, or "principles of virtue": Wisdom (*al-ḥikma*), Courage (*al-shujāʿa*), Temperance (*al-ʿiffa*) and Justice (*al-ʿadl*) from which derive all secondary virtues. As with Ibn Miskawayh and others before him, Ghazālī believes that the human objective is to maintain the four cardinal virtues in perfect equilibrium (*iʿtidāl*). But he differs from Ibn Miskawayh in two fundamental ways. First, he argues that the good deeds which result from equilibrium are not only recognized by the intellect, but also confirmed by the revealed law (*sharīʿa*). Secondly, he believes that the Prophet Muḥammad is the only person to have attained complete equilibrium. Stylistically, Ghazālī differs in that he precedes the discussion with selections from Qur´ān, *ḥadīth*, and the sayings of Sufis, such as the aforementioned Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and Sahl al-Tustarī. Thus, although this is clearly a Neoplatonic discussion of virtue, Ghazālī introduces it in a manner which thoroughly Islamicizes it, and then employs it to support fundamental assertions of the Islamic faith.

A far more complex issue is Ghazālī's use of emanationist vocabulary and concepts in the *Niche of Lights*, where he presents the relationship between God and the many levels of creation as a hierarchy of lights by which subsequent degrees of creation become manifest:

> The low lights flow forth from one another just as light flows forth from a lamp. The lamp is the holy prophetic spirit. The holy prophetic spirits are kindled from the high spirits just as a lamp is kindled from a light. Some of the high things kindle each other, and their hierarchy is a hierarchy of stations. Then all of them climb to the Light of lights, their Origin, their First Source. This is God alone, who has no partner.[61]

Ghazālī's presentation is distinguished from that of earlier Islamic philosophers in that at every turn he is careful to couch his discussion in language which preserves the integrity of Divine oneness and omnipotence, precisely what he accuses the philosophers of failing to do. As he writes, "The only true light is His light. Everything is His light—or, rather, He is everything. Or, rather, nothing possesses selfhood other than He, except in a metaphorical sense. Therefore, there is no light except His light."[62] In other words, for Ghazālī, God as light is the true light of everything and nothing has any light in and of itself; it is God's light within it that allows it to be. It is God's light within it that is its very being. This is something which can be found in Ibn Sīnā's discussion of existence insofar as all that is other than God is not truly existent in itself, but is a possible existent (*mumkin al-wujūd*) deriving its existence from absolute existence (*al-wājib al-wujūd*). But for Ghazālī this does not suffice to preserve the complete integrity of God's oneness and singularity. His view of existence is much closer to the Sufi understanding of the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) than to that of the early Islamic peripatetics, which, although it opens towards the oneness of existence, does not express it outright.

Following upon the well-known saying of the Sufi master Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 815), "There is nothing in existence except God," Ghazālī sees all of creation as having two faces: a face towards itself and a face towards its Lord. Viewed in terms of the face of itself it is non-existent; but viewed in terms of the face of God, it exists:

> "Everything is perishing save His face" (28:88), not that each thing is perishing at one time or at other times, but it is perishing from beginninglessness to endlessness. It can only be so conceived since, when the essence of anything other than He is considered in respect of its own essence, it is sheer non-existence. But when it is viewed in respect of the "face" to which existence flows forth from the First, the Real, then it is seen as existing not in itself but through the face turned to its Giver of Existence. Hence the only existence is the Face of God.[63]

Here the tools of philosophy are used to unpack the meaning within one of the terse sayings of early Sufism in order to give a particular Sufi doctrine a more dialectical architecture.

These two examples clearly indicate that Ghazālī found value in the intellectual contributions of philosophy. The potential benefit of philosophy is alluded to in his autobiographical treatise, *The Deliverer from Error*,

where he argues that one must not reject philosophy out of hand, but must develop a strong mind in order to discern what is of value within it:

> Those with weak minds know truth by men, not men by truth. The intelligent person follows the saying of ʿAlī, "Do not know truth through men. Know truth and then you will know its people." So the intelligent person knows truth then looks at the claim itself. If it is truth he accepts it.…[64]

For Ghazālī this means that one "must be zealous to extract the truth from the claims of those who are misguided, knowing that the gold mine is dust and gravel."[65] He thus advises his readers to sift truth from falsehood. He likens this process to that of a money changer who does not reject everything a counterfeiter brings to him, but instead uses his knowledge of true currency and false currency to sort the good from the bad and make use of the good. This is in fact what Ghazālī does with philosophy. He rejects the arguments and conclusions of philosophy which he finds are non-Islamic, but then incorporates many aspects of philosophy into an Islamic, that is a Qur´ānic, world view.

In the philosophy of the early Islamic peripatetics, Ghazālī found powerful tools, which if not tempered by the light of revelation, could lead to a syllogistically imprisoned vision of the truth; that is to say, a vision of the truth which is confined to the mind such that it does not open the heart. Like the money changer, he extracted the good aspects of peripatetic philosophy and incorporated them into an intellectual economy which was fully Islamic. Rather than being a Muslim who is a philosopher, as in the case of Ibn Sīnā, al-Farābī, and Ibn Miskawayh, Ghazālī can be seen as perhaps the first to be a fully Islamic philosopher.[66] Rather than converting Muslims to philosophy, he formed a crucial step in the conversion of philosophy to Islam, a trend which was to unfold in the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) and the philosophy of Suhrawardī (d. 1191), and which came to full fruition in the seventeenth century through the writings of the Iranian philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640).

To understand what is meant by an "Islamic philosopher," we must look deeper into Ghazālī's epistemology. In a short treatise composed for a disciple, Ghazālī begins by criticizing one who seeks knowledge out of "… preoccupation for the grace of the soul and the paths of the world. For he thinks that knowledge in itself will be his deliverance, that his salvation lies within it and that he has no need for work, and this is the belief of philosophy."[67] Instead he enjoins a combination of knowledge and action in which action is always based upon sound knowledge. As the Prophet Muḥammad has said in a *ḥadīth* often cited by Ghazālī: "He who acts according to what he knows, God teaches him what he did not know."[68] Developing upon this teaching, Ghazālī writes, "Knowledge without action is madness, ac-

tion without knowledge is non-existent."[69] This does not, however, refer to the mere outer actions of the body. It refers to inner actions whereby one disciplines oneself by "severing the passions of the lower soul and killing its caprice with the sword of spiritual exercises …"[70] For Ghazālī, this knowledge is indeed the most important form of knowledge:

> If you study and examine knowledge, your knowledge must rectify your heart and purify your soul, as if you know your life span will not last more than a week. It is necessary that you not busy that time with the knowledge of jurisprudence, character traits, the principles [of religion and jurisprudence], theology and the like because you know that these sciences will not benefit you. Rather, you should occupy yourself with observing the heart and recognizing the qualities of the soul and the accidents resulting from its attachment to the world. You should purify your soul of blameworthy character traits and occupy yourself with the love of God and servitude to Him, and with being characterized by beautiful characteristics. Not a day or night passes, but the death of the servant may come.[71]

Through this one opens the eye of the heart whereby one may reach the knowledge of unveiling which Ghazālī describes as "the very end of knowledge" from which all other forms of knowledge derive.[72]

According to his own account, the understanding of the proper relation between the Islamic sciences, which Ghazālī developed in his later writings, is based entirely upon the clarity of understanding he obtained by devoting himself to the discipline of Sufism, which for him:

> … is composed of both knowledge and action. The outcome of their action is cutting off the obstacles of the soul, refraining from blameworthy character traits and their depraved attributes, so that the heart may arrive from it to freeing the heart from what is other than God and to adorning it with the remembrance of God.[73]

When this has been achieved, one can attain to immediate witnessing, which Ghazālī believed to be the only true path to certainty, all else being merely confirmation through the imitation of what others have said. But like Sarrāj and other Sufi scholars before him, he believed that most Islamic scholars were not on this path: "This knowledge is not obtained through the types of knowledge with which most people are occupied. Thus, that knowledge does not increase them except in boldness to disobey God."[74] As such, he saw a radical need for a revivification of the Islamic sciences, one based on the preeminence of that knowledge received through inner purification and constant remembrance of God—knowledge by presence.

In both *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and a smaller treatise entitled *The Treatise on Knowledge by Presence*, Ghazālī outlines a hierarchy of knowledge in which all modes of knowledge are subordinate to knowl-

edge by presence.[75] He is indefatigable in promoting his belief that the fundamental objective of all learning is to wipe away ignorance and return to the state of purity which is the human norm—the *fiṭra*: "Learning is not but the return of the soul to its substance and bringing what is within it into actuality, seeking the completion of its essence and the attainment of its joy."[76] For Ghazālī the goal of knowledge is not advancement in the practical affairs of the world, but a wisdom deriving from a living intelligence that is able to see things as they are in themselves, and is able to realize the applications of that wisdom on all planes and in all affairs. Following the Sufi tradition before him, Ghazālī believed that when this is achieved, one realizes that one was a "knower" (*ʿārif*) before, but that attachment to the body and its concomitant desires clouded one from the knowledge for which man is created. As this is a knowledge which corresponds to the human norm, it is not a knowledge obtained through learning, though learning can help to actualize it. Rather, this is a way of knowing which requires no intermediary: "Knowledge by presence is that which has no intermediary between the soul and the Creator for its acquisition. It is like the light from a lamp of the unseen [realm] falling upon a pure, empty, and subtle heart."[77] "Those who arrive at the level of knowledge by presence have no need for much obtaining and toil in instruction. They study little and know much...."[78] This is thus a knowledge obtained through inspiration (*ilhām*); it is to the saints (*awliyāʾ*) what revelation (*waḥy*) is to the prophets.

The seat of this knowledge, according to Ghazālī and many who came before him and followed after him, is the heart or intellect, which is the spirit that God blew into the form of man, a spirit alluded to in the Qurʾānic verse, "And I blew into him from My spirit" (15:29, 38:72). It is through this eternal seat of consciousness that the full awareness of *tawḥīd* is realized. From this point of view, things can only be understood in relation to the Creator, who is the Origin and the End and who sustains all things at every moment. Every branch of knowledge must therefore have this understanding as its end, otherwise it is oriented towards a knowledge which is not grounded in the fullness of *tawḥīd*, and thus a knowledge which does not assist the human being in achieving the perfection and felicity of the human norm. In other words, all true sciences were seen by Ghazālī as applications of *tawḥīd*. All knowledge sought in this way is sought with *iḥsān* because it is sought in order to know God and to attain human perfection. It ennobles the human condition by helping one to understand, emulate, and participate in the *iḥsān* of God and His creation. All aspects of a person's education, from the study of language, grammar, and mathematics, to the study of jurisprudence, ethics, and metaphysics, should thus be integrated into this overarching vision. For if one knows a thing without knowing its relation to God, one does not really know the thing, but rather has com-

pound ignorance (*al-jahl al-murakkab*) because he thinks he knows what he does not know. Is this not the case of so many today?

Ibn al-ʿArabī

There were many other proponents of this view, some with very different emphases than that of Ghazālī and Sarrāj, and Junayd before them, but nonetheless with the same central concern that all knowledge and learning be oriented towards a vibrant actualization of *tawḥīd*, lest it become a dead letter. Though the transmission of the religious texts which affirm *tawḥīd* was emphasized, this was joined to the inculcation of active and free remembrance of God. For true faith cannot be taught; it must arise from within. Foremost among the later scholars to write of the knowledge by presence, or knowledge by tasting (*dhawq*) as it is also known, is the great Shaykh of Murcia, Muḥyi ´d-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). The writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his disciples came to be the most influential expression of the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition until and into the modern period. To know the form in which this tradition continued we must therefore look to him.

Ibn al-ʿArabī did not often refer to himself and those of his ilk as Sufis, he preferred the term verifiers (*muḥaqiqqūn*): "I mean by 'our companions' those who possess hearts, witnessings, and unveilings, not the worshipers or ascetics, and not all Sufis, save those among them who are the people of truths and verification (*taḥqīq*)."[79] Nonetheless, in many ways he was the intellectual and spiritual descendant of the early Sufi movement. His writings often unpack the meanings contained within the terse and allusive sayings of earlier luminaries of the Sufi tradition, such as the aforementioned Junayd al-Baghdādī, Bayāzīd al-Biṣṭāmī, and Sahl al-Tustarī, all of whom he considered to be verifiers. Thus many of the teachings attributed to him are in fact teachings which had been within the Islamic community from the beginning, but were now expressed in a new mode. Like his predecessors, he saw Sufism as the perfection of character traits:

> The people of the path of God say Sufism is character, so whoever surpasses you in character surpasses you in Sufism.... Among the conditions of being designated a Sufi is that one be wise, possessing wisdom. If he is not, then he has no share of this heart, for it is entirely wisdom and it is entirely character traits. It necessitates complete gnosis, a superior intellect, and strong control over one's soul, so that selfish desires do not rule over it.[80]

Thus for Ibn al-ʿArabī wisdom, knowledge, or gnosis is intrinsically bound to virtue and character, i.e., to doing beautiful.

The school which developed from Ibn al-ʿArabī's mode of expressing these teachings came to be known as the school of *ʿirfān* or *maʿrifa*,

which can best be translated as the school of gnosis.[81] The word *ʿirfān* derives from the verb *ʿarafa* which means to know, but also means to recognize. *ʿIrfān* thus refers to the recognition and realization of that knowledge which is the birthright of man, the knowledge of things as they are in themselves. From this perspective, to attain to gnosis is to realize the fullness of God and His creation, which is to return to the human norm. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, gnosis is distinct from what is learned through transmission and reflection:

> All knowledge which can only be attained through practice, godfearingness, and wayfaring is gnosis because it derives from a verified unveiling (*kashf muḥaqqaq*) in which there is no obfuscation. In contrast, knowledge obtained through reflective consideration is never free from obfuscation and bewilderment, nor from rejecting that which leads to it.[82]

While Ghazālī argued for the primacy of knowledge by presence, Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote directly from the perception derived through knowledge by presence. Like Ghazālī, he saw it as the defining characteristic of being human. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, only when a human fully experiences knowledge by presence can he truly be called human. To experience such knowledge is to see the truth (*ḥaqq*) of all things, and one who sees these truths is the verifier. Gnosis could thus be seen as the science of verification: "Verification is the gnosis (*maʿrifa*) of truth which is demanded by the essence of each thing. The verifier fulfills that through knowledge."[83] One who has attained to verification witnesses the *ḥaqq* or truth of everything. But *ḥaqq* is a deceptively simple word, for in addition to truth it can also mean true, reality, real, right, or due. It is one of the names of God who is *al-Ḥaqq* or the True, the Real. To verify the truths, rights, or realities of all things is thus to see the self-disclosure of the ultimate Truth within all. As William Chittick, one of the foremost scholars of Ibn al-ʿArabī, writes:

> The goal of *taḥqīq* is to see the face of God wherever you turn, in every creature and in oneself, and then to act according to the *ḥaqq* [truth] of God's face. If we understand anything in the universe without taking the Divine face into account, then we have lost the thing's *ḥaqq*. By losing sight of the thing's *ḥaqq*, we have lost sight of God, and by losing sight of God, we have lost sight of *tawḥīd*.[84]

To verify the truth is a command deriving from the Qur´ānic revelation itself: "Do not dress truth in falsehood and hide the truth, though you know" (2:42). According to the Qur´ān, both the revelation and creation are truth and are brought through truth. The Qur´ān states, "And what We have revealed to you from the book is the truth" (35:31). Several verses affirm that the Qur´ān has descended through truth: "That is because God brought down the book through truth" (2:176); and "We brought down upon you the book through truth, that you may judge between the people in accor-

dance with what God has shown you" (4:105). As regards creation, the text declares, "He is the one who created the heavens and the earth through truth" (6:73). Indeed, humans are challenged to recognize this fundamental reality: "Do you not see that God created the heavens and the earth through truth?" (14:19). Several verses of the Qur´ān respond to this question; one reads: "He did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them except through truth" (30:8). It is in fact through Himself that God has created and revealed, for He Himself is the Truth: "That is your God, the Lord, the Truth" (10:33); and "That is because God is the Truth" (22:62). All that concerns us as humans is thus to be understood by knowing the ultimate Truth directly, and the other truths, which are in fact an unfolding of this one Truth, through creation and revelation. To know things outside of the truth is to be guided by caprice (*hawā´*) and conjecture (*ẓann*), regarding which the Qur´ān cautions: "Do not follow their caprices over what has come to you from the truth" (5:48); and "Verily conjecture is of no avail against the truth" (10:37). The view of verifying the truth or *taḥqīq* advanced by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers thus derives from a thoroughly Qur´ānic understanding of the universe. God is the Truth, truth is from God (18:29), and truth belongs to God (18:44). God reveals through truth, creates through truth, and guides through truth to truth. To see the truth of things is thus the only way to truly see things. It is in fact to see God, for He is the Truth which has made all things descend through truth, i.e. through Himself.

Man is unique in that he is the only being that is able to see all things as they are, the only being able to recognize all of these truths. The Qur´ān teaches that Adam was taught the names of all things (2:31-33). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, these names are the traces of God's own self-disclosure of Himself through Himself. As Chittick explains:

> The traces of God's names and attributes are externalized as the specific and unique characteristics of each thing. Every creature in the universe knows God in a specific differentiated and determined way, defined by the attributes that thing displays, or by the word that it embodies. Each thing displays the signs of God and gives news of Him through occupying its own specific niche in the never repeated speech that is the universe.[85]

The one being who is able to hear this never-ending speech, and thus witness all the traces of God's names and attributes, is man. He cannot know things outside of God because things do not exist outside of God. So his knowledge of all things is in fact his knowledge of God. But it is also knowledge through God, which according to Ibn al-ʿArabī is the only true knowledge there is:

> When one wants to recognize (ʿ*arafa*) things, he cannot recognize them through what his faculties give him. He should endeavor in many acts of obedience until the True (*al-ḥaqq*) is his hearing, his seeing, and all his faculties. Then he will know all affairs through God and will recognize God through God…. When you know God through God and all things through God, no ignorance, obfuscation, doubt, or uncertainty will come upon you.[86]

As such, all knowledge is in fact *tawḥīd*, attesting to unity. If one does not see something as displaying the Truth, he cannot really know that thing, for he is being heedless of God, the Origin and End of that thing. If he thinks he knows it, he actually has compound ignorance, because he thinks he knows what he does not know. To know is thus to remember God, for it is to see God in all things: "Wheresoever you turn there is the face of God" (2:115). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, to not see this face is ignorance, and this is the greatest of sins from which all other sins derive:

> The greatest sin is what kills hearts. They do not die except through the absence of the knowledge of God. This is what is named ignorance. For the heart is the house that God has chosen for Himself in this human configuration. But such a person has usurped the house, coming between it and the owner. He is the one who most wrongs himself because he has deprived himself of the good that would have come to him from the owner of the house had he left the house to Him. This is the deprivation of ignorance.[87]

Ibn al-ʿArabī went on to become the most influential intellectual figure of the next six or seven centuries. A glance at the intellectual landscape of Islam after Ibn al-ʿArabī shows that he had a profound influence on Islamic intellectual discourse in all lands until the middle of the nineteenth century. As Alexander Knysh has demonstrated in his study of the Shaykh's historical influence: "… from the 7th/13th C.E. onward practically every Muslim thinker of note took it upon himself to define his position vis-à-vis the controversial Sufi master."[88] And as Itzchak Weismann has demonstrated, all the responses to modernism in late Ottoman Damascus necessarily had to respond in some way to the thought of this great master. Among such movements, that of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazā´irī saw in the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī the tools for a re-establishment of an intellectual elite able to respond in full to the intellectual and institutional pressures of their times.[89]

As with Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, whether one agreed with them or not, were a force with which any serious intellectual had to reckon. Thus, through the influence of Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the many who followed them, the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition, which developed as a conscious elaboration of the teachings of the early Sufi tradition, was a central component of Islamic intellectual *and* political discourse until the middle of the nineteenth century. The belief that there is a transcendent source of knowledge which can be obtained without the intermediary of

instruction and which is necessary in order to fully understand the knowledge contained in the transmitted sciences thus had an important presence throughout the Islamic world from the time of the earliest scholarly circles of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* until the dawn of the modern period. It has never died out; but in their efforts to keep pace with the modern world, both rigid puritanical and secular liberal reformists have attempted to deny that it was an inherently Islamic phenomenon. In doing so, they have denied their own heritage.

The Modern Period

In the modern period, the intellectual landscape of Islam has undergone dramatic changes due to seismic shifts resulting from the challenges of foreign military, economic, and cultural domination. Though not immediately apparent, the foremost of these challenges are those posed by Western thought and its concomitant methodologies, for it is through our ideologies that our institutions are formed. Yet despite its transformations, the Islamic world remains profoundly Islamic in so far as the culture, social mores, and worldview of the people inhabiting it have been molded by the teachings of Islam. Nonetheless, the most vocal trends of the modern period are in danger of removing even this from the Islamic world, for they do not represent Islamic responses to the challenges of the West, responses based upon *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān*. The solutions to the difficulties of the Muslim world lie not in the complete capitulation or drastic rejectionism which characterize secularist and radicalist movements respectively, but in the interaction with other civilizations on the basis of traditional Islamic teachings. Such a solution is being sought by intellectuals in many parts of the Islamic world. But the loudest voices still belong to those who have in large part rejected or misunderstood their intellectual heritage. For the non-specialist, who has little familiarity with the intellectual tradition of Islam, its voice is easily drowned out by the cries of radicals and the Western bias towards "liberal intellectuals" such as Mohamed Arkoun and Abdul-Karim Soroush. So long as such figures are held up by the West as the leaders of a coming intellectual revolution—the "Martin Luthers of Islam" as is so often said—more Muslim youth will be radicalized by these obvious efforts toward continued intellectual colonization.

The intellectual imbalance and stultification in the modern Islamic world derives not from the failure to modernize and secularize as critics such as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, and Salman Rushdie would have it, but from a widespread rejection of the Islamic intellectual tradition, usually in the name of progress. There are important exceptions, such as Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (d. 1974) of al-Azhar University in Cairo and the late

ʿAllamah Ṭabāṭabā´ī (d. 1981) in Iran, whose *Uṣūl-i falsafa* (*The Principles of Philosophy*) provides a thorough critique of dialectical materialism from the standpoint of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy. Another exception is Maulanā Ashraf ʿAlī Thanvī (d. 1943) in the Indian subcontinent, whose response to modernism has been examined in depth by Fuad Naeem. In addition, the last fifty years has witnessed a resurgence of traditional Islamic teachings in many parts of the Islamic world. But by and large the teachings of Sufism and their subsequent unfolding have been rejected by the most visible and politically active trends of the modern period—be they liberal secularists or religious dogmatists. Unlike earlier opponents of the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition, most modern critics have not seriously studied the works of its representatives. Sufism continues to be practiced on a popular level, but many of the central teachings of such figures as Junayd, Sarrāj, Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and their intellectual descendants are discounted out of hand by their opponents, or presented in a trite and hackneyed manner by many of their supposed proponents. There are notable exceptions, but for most of the liberal and doctrinal reform movements in the Islamic world,

> Sufism became the scapegoat through which Islam's "backwardness" could be explained. In this view Sufism is the religion of the common people and embodies superstition and un-Islamic elements adopted from local cultures; in order for Islam to retain its birthright, which includes modern science and technology, Sufism must be eradicated.[90]

This rejection of Sufi teachings and their later intellectual elaborations is among the most significant losses endured by the Islamic world. It is indeed an essential part of what makes much of the current Islamic world "modern." For in order to be lived in its fullness, every aspect of the Islamic tradition must be present. As C. S. Lewis has observed: once you have rejected a part of a religious tradition, you have *ipso facto* rejected the entire tradition. Not every individual will be fully inclined to each aspect of a particular religious tradition, but every aspect must be present for people of different predilections to work together in weaving a social fabric that allows for the expression and actualization of the full tradition. Law and creed, which could be said to correspond to *islām* and *īmān* respectively, are an integral component of any Islamic society, but without the vivifying presence of a full-fledged *iḥsānī* tradition, they become opaque and are soon bereft of that light by which God guides. It is for this reason that Sarrāj referred to *iḥsān* as the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the religion. The rejection of intellectual Sufism as a major component of the modern intellectual discourse has thus contributed to a catastrophic myopia. Not only have many Muslim thinkers demonstrated a shallow understanding of non-Islamic elements, they have also distorted the religion itself. In attempting to reconstruct and reinterpret the Islamic tradition in light of the perceived achievements of the

times, modernist thinkers of the past, such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī abandoned the rigorous intellectual discernment of traditional Islamic intellectuality—the first outright, the others with more subtlety. They lost sight of their intellectual traditions and unwittingly surrendered the ground of intelligence to a secular humanist tradition, whose ideologies they tried to foist upon others by reading them into their own traditions or simply by adding the adjective "Islamic." Their legacy has been carried through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first by thinkers such as Mamadiou Dia of Senegal, Farid Esack of South Africa, Mohamed Arkoun of Algeria, Abdul-Karim Soroush of Iran, Jawdat Saʿīd of Syria, and Fatima Merinissi of Morocco to name a few. Though such thinkers may call upon the Qur´ān and *ḥadīth* as proof texts for their assertions, they are rooted in mental habits that developed in a secular universe that rejects the centrality of revelation, if not its very veracity.

Though each has different players with different shades of emphasis, both stringent reformism and liberal modernism constitute artificial limitations of traditional Islamic knowledge inspired by the influence of secular ideologies. This has led to the inversion of Islamic thought and the destruction of Islamic civilization. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, "In trying to render back to Islam its power on the stage of history, many of these movements have disfigured the nature of Islam itself."[91]

Stringent reformists, such as the Wahhābīs of Saudi Arabia, the *Jamāʿat-i Islāmī* (Society of Islam) in Pakistan, and the more militant elements among the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, propose strict adherence to the Qur´ān and the *sunna*, but in doing so arrogantly discard thirteen centuries of Islamic intellectual history, claiming that there is no need for help from the great thinkers of the past in order to understand and interpret the texts which they themselves preserved and transmitted. They then seek refuge in religious fervor, while closing the door to analysis and deliberation regarding the problems which confront the Islamic world. This approach stirs deep passions in the hearts of people who yearn to live a pious Islamic life, but denies many of the forms of guidance by which such passions were traditionally channeled towards the Divine. In the absence of such guidance a narrow ideological interpretation of the faith comes to predominate. Those who fail to adopt this interpretation are then seen as unbelievers, or at best as misguided.

Modernism originates from the secularizing and humanistic tendencies which began with the Renaissance and resulted in a scientistic and reductionist understanding of reality. But as this mode of thought did not rise organically from within the Islamic intellectual tradition, its expressions in the Islamic world have consisted largely of warmed-over Western ideologies under a thin veneer of Islamic terminology. Liberalizing modernists

join with doctrinaire reformists in eschewing the great interpreters of the past, but go further, at times arguing for the abandonment of the Qur´ān and *sunna*. Reformists join with modernists in thinking that one can adopt the outward trappings of modern science without evaluating the *weltanschauung* from which it arose. The reformists err in thinking that man can function on the transmitted sciences alone and has no need for developing the critical interpretive skills cultivated through the Islamic intellectual sciences. The modernists err in thinking that one can discard much of the transmitted traditions, such as *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence, or that these must now be interpreted through Western methodologies. Both take recourse to theories and methodologies which are decidedly un-Islamic, if not anti-religious. Rather than calling upon the guidance of scholars of the past, most of the figures who have dominated modern Islamic discourse have joined with many Western thinkers in an ill-conceived movement towards an undefined goal known as progress.

Liberal modernist Muslim thinkers and radical reformist activists are two sides of the same coin. Whereas medieval thinkers like Ghazālī were able to analyze and utilize intellectual tools from outside influences, radical reformists reject them outwardly while submitting inwardly, and modernists attempt to patch them onto the fabric of Islam, some claiming that they have been a part of that fabric all along. Both movements represent a subversion of traditional values and teachings from within the Islamic tradition. In an effort to transform Islamic civilization, each has in fact hastened the onset of the very illnesses they sought to ameliorate. Rather than contemplating and evaluating Western civilization through the Islamic intellectual tradition, modernists have embraced many tenets of Western thought out of a deep sense of inferiority—a sense which results from mistaking the power of Western nations for the truth of Western ideologies. Finding these movements within their midst, the reformists have retreated to fanatical adherence and pietistic sentimentalism. The modernists fail to offer solutions because they begin with intellectual capitulation. The reformists fail because they only provide intermediate solutions which are fideistic and voluntaristic at best. But such a response cannot provide lasting solutions to the challenges posed by the West, because these are at root intellectual challenges which demand an intellectual response.

The diatribes of fanatical rejectionism must be transformed into a logical and objective critique, and the sycophancy of liberalist capitulation must be supplanted by analysis and comprehension. This is what Ghazālī advised when saying that one must become like the moneychanger, who through the power of discernment is able to discern truth from falsehood and thus snatch truth from the words of all, be they of one's own tradition or from another. But in order for this to be achieved, an intellectual universe which

is fully Islamic must first be re-established, that is to say an intellectual universe based upon *tawḥīd*. Through the sciences which developed in the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition, an objective critique of the modern world which is based upon the verities contained in the Islamic revelation can be developed. Nothing that is objectively true can be rejected through the methodologies of this tradition, for it is in the nature of Islam that it accepts all that bears witness to the Divine—every truth cannot but bear witness to the one Truth. But such sciences must be implemented on all levels, for man is not only a mental being, but a spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical being as well. In short, the preservation of the transmitted sciences which has continued to the present day must be combined with a rediscovery of the intellectual sciences and a revitalization of the training of the soul and the methods of cultivating inner discernment. This is the way to which Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj alluded in the introduction to his *Book of Illumination*; it is to combine *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* in a single composite intellectual approach wherein one seeks to know things as they are in themselves. As William Chittick argues:

> The only way to think in Islamic terms is to join thought with the transcendent truths from which Islam draws sustenance. This needs to be done not only by having recourse to the guidelines set down in the Koran and the Hadith, but also by taking guidance from the great Muslim intellectuals of the past, those who employed the Koran and the Hadith to clarify the proper role of thought in human affairs.[92]

The choice of great thinkers from whom one seeks guidance is not limited to a narrow definition of "orthodoxy," but extends to all those Islamic thinkers, Sunnī and Shīʿī, who have tried to lend clarity to the understanding of reality enjoined by the Qur´ān and *ḥadīth*. Those intellectuals who have been chosen for this essay are but a few luminaries from an extensive tradition, one which continues into our own day and is now showing signs of new life. In order for the malaise of the Islamic world to be fully addressed and the radical reform movements to be brought back into the fold of the Islamic tradition, the *iḥsānī* intellectual tradition needs to be accorded its proper place in a way of life that is fully and truly Islamic. In applying the principles of Islam to the modern world, while avoiding the passionate rhetorical battles which rage around them, the representatives of this tradition exemplify this saying of Abū Saʿīd b. Abī ´l-Khayr: "A [true] man is one who sits and rises among others, sleeps and eats, and interacts with others in the bazaar, buying and selling, who mixes with people, yet for one moment is not forgetful of God in his heart."[93] But such a path is not achieved by focusing upon reform of the world, of Islam, or of one's nation. It is first and foremost a reform of one's self. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has written in his seminal analysis of modern Islam, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*:

> … the real reform of the world begins with the reform of oneself. He who conquers himself conquers the world, and he in whom a renewal of the principles of Islam in their full amplitude has taken place has already taken the most fundamental step toward the "renaissance" of Islam itself, for only he who has become resurrected in the Truth can resurrect and revive the world about him, whatever the extent of that "world" might be according to the Will of Heaven.[94]

This fully reformed state of being is that of the *fiṭra*, the human norm. To live in this state is to surrender the house of the heart to its true owner. When this is done, the crispations of the heart are stilled such that one can see the truth of all things, for one sees things as they are in themselves, as discrete manifestations of God's names and qualities. But what has been forgotten and must again be remembered—not only by Muslims but by people the world over—is that to see truth and to know truth one must, as Vaclav Havel has said, "live in truth." To live in truth is the way of Islam. From an Islamic perspective, it is the way of all religions; it is the way of man.

Notes

[1] As journalist Robert Fisk observes: "I'm beginning to suspect that 11 September is turning into a curse far greater than the original bloodbath of that day, that America's absorption with that terrible event is in danger of distorting our morality. Is the anarchy of Afghanistan and the continuing slaughter in the Middle East really to be the memorial for the thousands who died on 11 September?" ("America's Morality Distorted by 11 September," *The Independent*, March 7, 2002).

[2] For the a brief introduction to the views of Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), chs. 5-8; and Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley, 1966).

[3] We have in mind here the distinction made by Wolfgang Smith: "There is a sharp yet oft-overlooked distinction between scientific knowledge and scientistic belief. And the difference is simple: authentic knowledge of a scientific kind refers necessarily to things that are observable in some specific sense, and affirms a verifiable truth; scientistic belief, on the other hand, is distinguished precisely by the absence of these positivistic attributes." Wolfgang Smith, *Cosmos and Transcendence* (Peru, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden & Co., 1984), p. 9. Smith goes on to demonstrate that most of the theories which the common educated person takes at face value as scientific propositions are in fact scientistic beliefs arising from the bias of secular humanism.

[4] See his contribution to this volume, "A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism."

[5] It is not the purpose of this essay to chronicle all the subtleties of various modern trends, but rather to allude to general errors which most of these trends exhibit. For a more nuanced examination see W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); J. O. Voll, *Continuity and Change in the Modern Islamic World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994); J. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and S. H. Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989).

[6] Muslim, *Kitāb aṣ-ṣayd*, 57.

[7] This is part of a famous *ḥadīth*, known as the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel:

> ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: One day when we were with the Messenger of God, a man with very white clothing and jet black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, "Tell me Muḥammad about submission (*islām*)." He replied, "Submission means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramaḍān, and make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to go there." The man said, "You have spoken the truth." We were surprised at his questioning him and then declaring that he had spoken the truth. He said, "Now tell me about faith (*īmān*)." He replied, "Faith means that you have faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the last day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil." Remarking that he had spoken the truth, he then said, "Now tell me about doing

> what is beautiful (*iḥsān*)." He replied, "Doing beautiful means that you should worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you." Then the man said, "Tell me about the Hour." The Prophet replied, "About that he who is questioned knows no more than the questioner." The man said, "Then tell me about its marks." He said, "The slave girl will give birth to her mistress, and you will see the barefoot, the naked, the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in building." Then the man went away. After I had waited for a long time, the Prophet said to me, "Do you know who the questioner was ʿUmar?" I replied, "God and His Messenger know best." He said, "He was Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion" (Muslim, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 1; Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 37).

8 Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿālliyya fī l-asfār al-arbaʿa al-ʿaqliyya* (Tehran, 1387/1958), vol. 1, p. 20.

9 This is an oft-cited saying of the Prophet Muḥammad which is not, however, found in any of the canonical collections.

10 Ibn Māja, *Muqaddima*, 17.

11 Muslim, *Kitāb al-Dhikr*, 73; Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Daʿawāt*, 68.

12 Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 14; Ibn Māja, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 3; Abū Dāwūd, *Muqaddima*, 32.

13 A *ḥadīth* is a saying, action, or description of the Prophet Muḥammad which has been transmitted by his companions and by the generations of Muslims which followed. The word *ḥadīth* is also used to apply to the entire collection of such sayings. Over time an intricate science developed for determining the authenticity of sayings attributed to Muḥammad. In the third and fourth centuries, the most authentic *ḥadīth* were assembled in collections which have been recognized as authoritative since that time. After the Qur´ān, the *ḥadīth* are the most important source of knowledge for the Islamic sciences. But as the body of preserved *ḥadīth* is far more substantial in quantity than the text of the Qur´ān, more of the specific injunctions and teachings of Islam are to be found in the *ḥadīth* than in the Qur´ān.

14 Lauri Silvers-Alario, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meir's Definition of the shaykh al-tarbiya and shaykh al-taʿlīm" (forthcoming), p. 10. I am indebted to many of Professor Silvers-Alario's observations in elucidating the place of Sufism in the early period.

15 Muḥammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early ʿAbbāsids* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pp. 212-213.

16 Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 39.

17 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 2: 285, 2: 539; Muslim, *Kitāb al-birr*, 33; Ibn Māja, *Kitāb az-zuhd*, 9.

18 Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), vol. I, p. 393.

19 As will be demonstrated in the following pages, the arguments of scholars such as Montgomery Watt that the *Ahl al-ḥadīth* were at odds with Sufis are no longer tenable. See Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 1998), p. 264. For an example of a modern Muslim who also takes this approach see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 128-132.

[20] Omid Safi, "Bargaining with Baraka: Persian Sufism, Mysticism, and Pre-Modern Politics," *Muslim World* 3-4 (2001): 259-287.

[21] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 312-14.

[22] Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Hafṣ ʿUmar as-Suhrawardī, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1393/1973), p. 196.

[23] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen, 1911; reprint, New York: Image Books, 1990), p. 81.

[24] Reinhold Niebuhr, from his introduction to William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 7.

[25] Abu ´l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. ash-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1972-4), p. 557.

[26] Ibn ʿAṭā´illāh al-Iskandarī, *Sufi Aphorisms (Kitāb al-Ḥikam)*, trans. Victor Danner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), p. 23. (Translation slightly modified).

[27] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 358.

[28] Lt. James William Graham, "A Treatise on Sufism, or Mahomedan Mysticism," *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* 1 (1819): 90-91.

[29] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1989), p. 9.

[30] Abū ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharība (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1987), p. 440.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 180; Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Kātib al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1966), vol. VII, p. 430-432.

[32] Abū Nuʿaym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyāʾ*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), vol. 10, p. 274.

[33] This *ḥadīth* is not found in any of the canonical collections.

[34] Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Taha ʿAbd az-Zāqī Surūr (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthiyya, 1970), p. 164.

[35] Sulamī, p. 74.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 210. The concept of fulfilling the rights of all things is central to Sufism. It is a fundamental tenet of *tawḥīd*. It is to understand the truth (*ḥaqq*) of each thing as a sign of God, the existence of which originates only from God, belongs only to God, and returns only to God. As such its reality (*ḥaqīqa*) can only be understood through an understanding of God and His attributes, and it is only through such understanding that we can act properly in those matters for which there is not an immediate and evident ruling in the *sharīʿa*. This will be expanded upon in the section on Ibn al-ʿArabī.

[37] Sulamī, p. 78.

[38] al-Isfahānī, vol. X, p. 244.

[39] al-Isfahānī, vol. X, p. 276.

[40] al-Isfahānī, vol. X, p. 274.

41 Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma*ʿ, p. 22.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 22. Here Sarrāj is referring to the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, one of the best known *ḥadīth* of the Islamic tradition. This *ḥadīth* has been used for generations as a key for understanding the different dimensions of the Islamic intellectual tradition. See note 7 (Muslim, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 1; Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 37).

43 This is an allusion to a *ḥadīth*, "The scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) are the inheritors of the Prophets" (Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, 10; Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, 1; Ibn Māja, *Muqaddima*, 17; Dārimī, *Muqaddima*, 32; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 5:196).

44 This saying is cited as a *ḥadīth*, but I have not been able to find it in any of the canonical collections.

45 Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma*ʿ, p. 31.

46 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 1:403.

47 Muslim, *Kitāb al-īmān*, 147; Ibn Māja, *Kitāb al-duʿāʾ*; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 4:133.

48 See note 6.

49 See note 7.

50 Sulamī, p. 167.

51 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 2:381.

52 Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-adab*, 38; Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb as-sunna*, 14; Tirmidhī, *Kitāb ar-riḍāʿ*, 11; *Kitāb al-īmān*, 6; Ibn Māja, *Kitāb az-zuhd*, 31; Dārimī, *Kitāb ar-riqāq*, 74.

53 Hamid Dabashi, "Historical Conditions of Persian Sufism during the Seljuk Period" in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), p. 150.

54 Tāj al-Dīn Abū Nasr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. ʿAlī as-Subkī, *aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā* (Cairo: ʿIsā ʾl-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964-76), vol. 4, pp. 293-4.

55 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 369.

56 Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿĀbidī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Iṭṭilaʿāṭ, 1380 HS), p. 295.

57 Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 151.

58 Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar Mayhanī, *Asrār-i tawḥīd fī maqāmāt Shaykh Abī Saʿīd*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Muʾassisiy-eh Intishārāt-i Āgāh, 1376 HS), vol. 1, p. 119; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, pp. 373-4.

59 Jāmī, p. 376.

60 For these observations we are indebted to T. J. Winter, who has examined the influence of Ibn Miskawayh upon the *Kitāb Riyāḍat an-nafs* of the *Iḥyāʾ* in the introduction to his translation of the latter. See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *On Disciplining the Soul (Kitāb Riyāḍat al-nafs) and On Breaking the Two Desires (Kitāb Kasr al-shahwatayn): Books XXII and XXIII of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), pp. xlv-lviii.

61 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buckman (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), p. 20.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 20 (translation slightly modified).

63 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

64 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Majmūʿa Rasā´il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, n. e. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1416/1996), p. 546.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 546.

66 This is not to say that the early Muslim peripatetics were not Muslims and that the nature of their philosophical inquiry was not shaped by the teachings of Islam. They marked the first stage of Islamic philosophy in which questions that arose from the Islamic context and questions bequeathed by the Greek tradition were analyzed through a methodology learned from Greek philosophy. Nonetheless, it is Islamic philosophy in that *tawḥīd* is at the root of philosophical inquiry, revelation is considered as a reality, and God is understood to be the Origin and End of all things. For elaboration on this point see S. H. Nasr, "The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam" in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21-26 and "The Qur´ān and *Ḥadīth* as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy," *ibid.*, pp. 27-39.

67 Ghazālī, *Majmūʿah*, p. 257.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 262. This *ḥadīth* is not found in any of the canonical collections.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 258.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 552.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 564.

75 For a comprehensive treatment of Ghazālī's classification of the Islamic sciences see Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), chs. 8 & 9.

76 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Majmūʿa*, p. 234.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

79 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futuḥāṭ al-Makkiyya*, n. e. (Cairo: 1911; reprint Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 261.

80 *al-Futuḥāṭ al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, p. 266.

81 The use of the word "gnosis" does not here imply any historical link to the Christian Gnostic movement. It is used with the original meaning of the word, "a special knowledge of spiritual mysteries" (OED vol. 1, p. 1163), p. 248.

82 *al-Futuḥāṭ al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, pp. 297-8.

83 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 267.

84 William Chittick, "Time, Space, and the Objectivity of Ethical Norms: The Teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī," *Islamic Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 585.

85 William Chittick, "The Cosmology of Dhikr" lecture delivered at "Paths to the Heart:

Sufism and the Christian East" conference, University of South Carolina, October 2001. See *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James Cutsinger (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), pp. 48-63.

86 *al-Futuḥāṭ al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, p. 298.

87 *Ibid.,* vol. III, p. 179.

88 Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 1.

89 Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001).

90 William Chittick, "Sufism: Sufi Thought and Practice," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, p. 107.

91 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1987), p. 305.

92 William Chittick, "The Rehabilitation of Islamic Thought," p. 1.

93 Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar, *Asrār-i tawḥīd*, vol. 1, p. 199.

94 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2001), p. 195.

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