



The morning sweep at the Taj Mahal

## Is the Matter of Metaphysics Immaterial? Yes and No

When God wills a thing, God says, “Be,” and it is.

— *Qur’an 36:82*

God was, and there was nothing with God.

— *Prophet Muḥammad* ﷺ

Being is the essence of the Divine Being.

— *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashārī*

It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all the talk about being—but, in this way, he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss.

— *Socrates*

The Greek word *philosophia* is composed of two words: *philo*, which means “love,” and *sophia*, which is the highest of Aristotle’s five intellectual virtues—*speculative* wisdom, as opposed to prudence, or *practical* wisdom. The pursuit of philosophy—essentially a process of asking, and seeking answers to, questions about the most fundamental issues concerning our world and ourselves—has been a universal

quest across time and place. All peoples philosophize to greater or lesser degrees; those who don't either look to others knowingly to philosophize for them, or unwittingly imbibe the philosophies of others. Unfortunately, philosophy, once the honored servant of theology, now barely serves itself. Hence, most religions no longer produce exemplary thinkers who can protect and defend their faiths with the time-tested tools of philosophy, and most believers no longer ask the central questions about our world, let alone seek their answers. Religion is reduced, at best, to "blind faith" and, at worst, to fanatical conformity that often leads to enmity towards those outside their faith and even virulent violence towards those within and without. A revival of philosophy—and, in particular, metaphysics—is crucial for a restoration of genuine faith fortified with reason and genuine civilization that cultivates care for the common good.

"Metaphysics" was a term used in the first century B.C. by Andronicus of Rhodes, the editor of Aristotle's works, to refer to Aristotle's treatise on theology, which Andronicus had placed immediately after Aristotle's book on physics: The term literally means "what follows physics" and simply identified the book's physical location. The label, however, stuck. Over time, it came to mean "the study of what is beyond the physical world." Aristotle himself referred to the subject at times as "theology" and at others as "the first philosophy," given its pursuit of the first causes of things, not to mention its ranking, in his estimation, as the most important human pursuit among our varied intellectual endeavors.

The metaphysician seeks to understand being—or existence—*as being*, unlike the physicist, who wants to understand being as physical objects in motion, or the mathematician, who explores being as abstracted quantities, or the natural scientist, who studies being in all the diversity of its animate and inanimate species. The metaphysician also attempts to understand the various types of being, including the immaterial—in the realm of realities beyond matter, such as God, angels, the human soul, and the experiential world of non-quantifiable quality.

Metaphysics is also the science of abstraction: the attempt to grasp the nature of things in their immaterial and universal essences. (The physical sciences, in this way, have a metaphysical dimension in that their universal laws are statements about essence abstracted from particular instances.) Metaphysics aims to understand first principles, including those of causation itself, its nature, scope, and limits. This invariably means it investigates the contents of our minds, including our presuppositions (all that we assume or take for granted), how it is that we perceive the world, and the effects of those presuppositions on our active life, which are left unexamined by most people—hence, Socrates' famous dictum, "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, then, metaphysics reveals a method of analysis to understand problems from first principles, which then allows the challenges that those problems present to be addressed at their causative levels—at their hidden roots, not just their visible branches. In this way, metaphysics precedes method.

Over a millennium after Aristotle, "the Proof of Islam," Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), perhaps Islam's greatest theoretical jurist, theologian, and intellectual,

concluded that “theology” (meaning metaphysics) is the only universal science, writing in his last and most original and significant work, *al-Mustaśfā*:

*The only universal knowledge among the religious sciences is theology, and all the other sciences, such as law and jurisprudence, prophetic tradition, and exegesis, are particular sciences.... It is the theologian [metaphysician] alone who ponders the most general of things: that is being itself.... Revelation does not present anything that contradicts reason, but it does present matters that are inaccessible to unaided reason. For instance, the intellect alone cannot determine that obedience to divine law is a means to salvation in the afterlife, or that disobedience can result in damnation, but it cannot judge it to be inconceivable either. One can also determine that miracles necessitate the veracity of one who is able to perform a miracle as a proof of his truthfulness. So, if the Messenger ﷺ tells us of such, it is the intellect that verifies this by way of it. This is what theology contains.*

*You should know from the above that one should begin one's intellectual journey in the most universal of things first, and that is being. Then one should move from there by degrees to the particulars that we have mentioned, and, by that, one can establish the first principles of all the other religious sciences, including the Book, the Sunnah, and the veracity of the Messenger ﷺ.... So theology is the most exalted knowledge in rank, given that all other particulars proceed from it.<sup>2</sup>*

Traditionally, metaphysics was studied after one mastered the qualitative arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the quantitative sciences of arithmetic, geometry, harmony, and astronomy, known in the Latin West as the Trivium and the Quadrivium, or the “liberal arts,” as mastering them freed the mind from the fetters of faulty thinking. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 673/1274) states in his *Ethics* that these seven sciences are the foundation of knowledge. Armed with these essential “instruments,” students went on to study theology, law, or medicine, the three advanced studies of the pre-modern world. Theology treated the ills of the spiritual body; law treated the ills of the social body; and medicine treated the ills of the physical body. Theology was the most exalted of these studies in both the Muslim and Christian worlds, and at its foundation was metaphysics: the science of *being qua being*. Given that every science seeks to know the ultimate causes of things, all scientific knowledge is universal; but whereas the natural and mathematical sciences achieve universal knowledge of a particular species or mode of being, metaphysics studies beings from the formality of their existence itself, and therefore is the most universal science. Hence, there is no being or mode of being that falls outside of the proper causes and principles of metaphysics.

## Philosophy in the Islamic Tradition

Philosophy has been part of the Islamic civilization from the start. Within the first century of Islam, Muslims encountered the great peripatetic schools of Egypt, the Levant, and Persia. Many of the early creedal disputes emerged from metaphysical debates about the logos (*kalimah*) with Christians who argued that Christ, identified as the logos in the Qur'an, must be co-eternal with God, given that the Muslims believed

that the Qur'an was the divine logos and, therefore, an eternal attribute of the divine. The nascent Muslim intellectual tradition was greatly influenced by converts to Islam who had prior philosophical training, as well as by Christian Arabs, who were translating the works of Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and others into Arabic, opening up new wellsprings of thought for the intellectually thirsty among the faithful. Muslim scholars, with an insatiable appetite for new knowledge, relished these texts filled with challenging ideas. Even in moral philosophy, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* became the basis for the religion's systematic method of ethical inquiry, while remaining firmly rooted in Qur'anic and prophetic teachings. Increasingly, the writings of Muslim scholars reflected the influence of Hellenistic rigor. Many traditionalists viewed this new influence as a dangerous foreign innovation, but their concerns had little impact on the rapid dissemination of Greek thought among Muslims, especially after certain caliphs succumbed to the appeal of all things philosophical.

In the early period of Islam's rapid spread, philosophy and metaphysics became subjects of great conversations among Muslim scholars. The Persian polymath, Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), arguably one of the most influential men in intellectual history, did more to introduce Hellenistic thought into the Muslim world than any other scholar. In his book, *al-Najāh*, he describes metaphysics as follows:

*[The] subject of metaphysics is the existent... inasmuch as it applies to the principle of existence and inasmuch as something universal attaches to it (such as unity and multiplicity, potentiality and actuality, eternity and coming into being, cause and effect, universality and particularity, completeness and incompleteness, as well as necessity and possibility).<sup>3</sup>*

Imam al-Ghazālī immersed himself in the works of Ibn Sīnā, which resulted initially in a neutral summa of Ibn Sīnā's thought and in a later work containing a scathing critique of those conclusions that Imam al-Ghazālī judged incompatible with orthodox belief. Despite his assault on the philosophers, al-Ghazālī recognized the immense value of many of their metaphysical insights—as well as their rigorous method of material and formal logic—in developing sophisticated defenses of the religion.<sup>4</sup> He cogently argued that the study of logic, as a "grammar of thought," should be required for jurists and theologians. Al-Ghazālī was the first to incorporate term logic into jurisprudence, went on to pen five books on logic, and added a forty-page introduction on the method of demonstrative proof in his magnum opus, *al-Mustaśfā*. In the introduction he writes:

*This prologue [to logic] is not part of jurisprudence; it is not even an introductory part of it. Indeed, it is an introduction to the pursuit of all knowledge. Moreover, someone who has not mastered it is not trustworthy in the sciences he knows.<sup>5</sup>*

Almost a century after al-Ghazālī's well-received criticism of the heterodox beliefs of the philosophers, the peripatetic luminary and consummate jurist, Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), known in the West as Averroes, wrote his caustic critique of al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Western Christians embraced Averroes' thought, but Eastern Muslims rejected his philosophical vision and instead adopted a superficial version of al-Ghazālī's critique without his highly nuanced approach to philosophy and its place in Islam. This

did not serve the scholastic community well, as it failed to profit from Imam al-Ghazālī's understanding of philosophy's power to produce formidable scholars who could provide a muscular defense of Islam against ideological threats. Ironically, Ibn Rushd's philosophical works and magisterial commentaries on Aristotle's often abstruse writings, while withering among Muslims, flourished in the great Catholic universities. This reintroduction of Greek thought through its Arabic sources and Muslim commentaries helped illuminate the so-called Dark Ages and eventually usher in the Renaissance.

Despite philosophy's decline among Sunni scholars, some continued to maintain a robust engagement with philosophy. One such figure is the highly consequential Persian jurist, theologian, and Qur'anic exegete, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), who, despite maintaining his own critical perspective, was deeply influenced by both Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī. In his multi-volume commentary on the Qur'an, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, he takes an unprecedented philosophical approach to unravel the mysteries of revelation through discursive reason. In doing so, he fuses philosophy and religion and represents a historical milestone in the ongoing effort to use both reason and revelation to understand the Creator and His creation. These "innovative" approaches to theology, jurisprudence, and exegesis did not go unnoticed, and major scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), challenged the philosophical tradition, despite, ironically, being steeped in it themselves. Moreover, Ibn Khaldūn, like al-Ghazālī before him, recognized philosophy's power and endorsed the rigor of its method:

*This knowledge [philosophy] does not achieve the aims that it pursues, not to mention those aspects that contradict revelation and its apparent meanings. I don't really see any fruits except for one: It hones and sharpens the intellect's abilities to structure proofs and demonstrate arguments in order to acquire a sound and excellent faculty of demonstration, the reason being that the philosophers stipulate rigor in their reasoning and demand that one reasons with excellence and finesse, just as they have argued in their art of logic. Indeed, they often take this approach in their natural philosophical pursuits of a scientific nature and in their teachings, and other branches of knowledge. The researcher attains mastery of this method due to the constant demands of a demonstrative approach and its conditions of strict methodical rigor and soundness in argumentation and testing. This is due to the fact that, although it does not lead to the aims they desire [due to their speculative nature], it is the soundest method for supplying the rules of human reasoning.<sup>6</sup>*

Ibn Khaldūn, arguably the first philosopher of history, does not deem speculative philosophy of great use *other than in its method of inquiry*. Unlike al-Ghazālī, he does not recognize the importance of the metaphysics that not only produced that method but ultimately both grounds it and determines whether it is valid or not. It is Ibn Khaldūn, though, who identifies the ossification of tradition and the intellectual stagnation that stifled the Muslim world; during his time, philosophy, at least in the Sunni world, is in major decline. Even the dialectical tradition that produced the polemical works of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd, and the great conversation that animated scholars to study the problems of the past and to craft creative responses fitting the unique circumstances of



their time, was all but over.

Philosophy is by now largely reduced to theosophy, and despite an active mystical tradition of sophisticated subtlety found in the works of such scholars as Mullā Śadrā (d. 1050/1640), who continue a metaphysical engagement, the natural sciences all but disappear, something al-Ghazālī warned about in his *Book of Knowledge*, which opens his magnum opus *Îhyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (*Revivification of the Islamic Sciences*). Philosophy has now acquired a pejorative connotation in the Muslim community, often carrying the implication of disbelief. One reason for this is the aforementioned distrust of philosophy certain great scholars had, along with the undeniable fact that some other Muslim philosophers were clearly heretical or heterodox and even beyond the pale of Islam in their beliefs. But a subtler and more pernicious reason is that with the decay of the dynamic scholastic tradition that once pursued all forms of knowledge, college studies became increasingly more focused on strictly religious and devotional subjects. This led to the mistaken assumption among some reformers that one should rely solely on revelation to understand the world and how to live in it. Yet never in our history have Muslim scholars posited that revelation alone (*sola scriptura*) is enough, as opposed to revelation illumined by reason and tradition (*prima scriptura*).<sup>7</sup>

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Given the fallibility of the human intellect on one hand and humanity's propensity for self-delusion on the other, scholars understood that intellectual training—in essence, a spiritual discipline—was a prerequisite to a sound understanding of revelation. The condition of human responsibility vis-à-vis revelation is intellect (*ʿaql* in Arabic); intellect is imperative for faith and moral agency. Hence, enhancing the intellect's ability to receive and realize the gift of revelation has always been at the center of Islamic learning. The scholars also believed that it is training in philosophy, more than in any other discipline, that hones and refines the intellect's ability to reason well, and metaphysics and mathematics were at the heart of that training.

Muslims always recognized that rationality was a major part of faith and aided in its substantiation. This necessary symbiosis between reason and revelation provides a sturdy balance that protects people from both falling away from faith through an unexamined reliance on fallible reason and falling into provincial fanaticism through a faith that fails to employ reason. Faith and reason (*naql* and *ʿaql* in the Islamic tradition) are the two wings on which a believer takes flight; lacking either, he is like a bird with a broken wing, floundering on the ground in purposeless paralysis, agitated and helpless.

The two extremes of prioritizing faith over reason, as in the staunch traditionalist schools, and prioritizing reason over faith, as in the schismatic school of the Muʿtazilah, emerged early in Islamic history as a dialectic that found its resolution in the moderate Sunni tradition, which provided the balance between the two. For example, where a literal reading of a revealed text leads to rational inconceivability or contradicts a scientific certainty, the tradition will place reason over a literalist reading and move to a figurative understanding of the text. One example is the famous tradition, "The Black

Stone is the Hand of God on earth”: A literal reading would lead to an absurdity, as it is inconceivable that God has a physical hand contained in time and space, both creations of God.

Reason was also enlisted in understanding the two revelations of nature and scripture. Muslims understood that God’s self-revelation was twofold: the composed Qur’an (*al-kitāb al-tadwīnī*) and the cosmic Qur’an (*al-kitāb al-takwīnī*). Hence, the natural sciences were pursued with zeal because they were seen as a source of religious knowledge that strengthened one’s faith; Imam al-Ghazālī argues that the study of anatomy and physiology is among the greatest means of fortifying faith. Pre-modern Muslims, unlike their modern counterparts, saw design everywhere, and behind it a Designer (*al-muśawwir*). They knew it was necessary to explore the advances and discoveries of previous civilizations and incorporate them into their own body of knowledge. Like the leading thinkers of Western civilization today, Muslim intellectuals were great syncretists, which gave them an advantage over more provincial civilizations with xenophobic attitudes toward foreign cultures. Robust debates took place between the nascent Muslim culture and the preceding civilizations and their sciences, especially the Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian traditions.

#### The Prophet

ﷺ had instructed his followers to “seek knowledge even in China,” and he taught them that, “Wisdom is the lost vehicle of the believer. Wherever he finds it, he has more right to it.” Thus, after discovering the richness of the Greek and Persian wisdom traditions, they were quick to integrate the best of what each had to offer into their studies.

## The Crisis of Metaphysics

Modern philosophy, by and large, has abandoned the pursuits of earlier metaphysics for a number of reasons. At the heart of the matter is the ancient debate about universals themselves, a conflict between the essentialist approach of the “realists” or “moderate realists” committed to what became known as the *via antiqua* (the “old path”), and the nominalist approach committed to the *via moderna* (the “modern path”), championed by William of Ockham (d. 1347) in the Christian world, and arguably by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) in the Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly in Europe, philosophy and theology parted ways, and the “handmaiden of the queen of sciences,” untethered from theology, was now free to establish her own dominion, with a special emphasis on the empirical sciences; this, of course, failed to recognize that replicable subjective experience is also soundly empirical. Eventually, the overarching project of fortifying faith with reason, which had so preoccupied philosophers in the past, was largely relinquished. Only in the Catholic tradition and Eastern Islam did some vestiges of this project remain.

Unfortunately, the term “metaphysics” has been highly contested for some time now, its meaning ranging from new age occultism to David Hume’s famous assessment:

*If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, "Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?" No. "Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?" No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.*<sup>9</sup>

Today, religious sciences are entirely divorced from "worldly" sciences, and the physical sciences are, in turn, divorced from the ethical considerations of the religious sciences. Here lies the root of our current crisis: In the West, we have elevated a particular type of reason and divorced it entirely from revelation, and, in the Muslim world, Muslims have rightly elevated revelation but largely divorced it from reason, which grants it a sound metaphysical foundation. Muslims long ago abandoned philosophy, both speculative and empirical branches and their concomitant pursuits, and of late have naively adopted Western science and its concomitant technologies, laden as it is with materialistic metaphysical assumptions; little or no thought has been given to the personal and societal upheaval such wholesale importation of these technologies might have on peoples and places. In this, they have failed to grasp something fundamental and consequential: Western science cannot be divorced from its metaphysics. The two are inseparable. It is their metaphysics that produced their science, and if one adopts a civilization's science without understanding that it is the product of a particular worldview, one is unwittingly adopting that civilization with all of its attributes, including its social and spiritual ailments. This is not a critique of science; on the contrary, it is an affirmation that science is worthwhile when it serves a society, and it can only serve a society when its embedded assumptions are spiritually sound, but this can be ascertained only if those assumptions are fully revealed and understood. It is only then that a society can make a conscious choice about those assumptions and whether they are compatible with its own worldview, values, and religious traditions; if they are not compatible, they will suffocate and suppress the pre-existing ones. In many ways, the embrace of Western science and its inherently materialist worldview has taken a toll not just on Muslim societies but on the entire planet and its inhabitants, even its flora and fauna.

The moral concerns of a culture are too often set aside in the current pursuit of scientism and the worship of the idol of progress. Ethics, in particular, is impoverished when metaphysics is ignored. In America and in European countries, and in their satellite societies that have adopted Western science wholesale, we find certain humanistic ethical considerations based mostly upon utilitarian concerns, but their proponents offer no sound rational method of determining what is ethical and what is not. Currently in the West, it is the Catholic Church alone that maintains a rigorous ethical approach that is rooted in metaphysical principles, but that metaphysical foundation is not easily accessible to lay people, and the Church has lost its centrality in the lives of many believers. As such, the results of the Church's rigorous ethical reasoning are often ignored by many of its adherents, who decide for themselves what path to take—which is the essence of heresy (from the Greek, "to choose for oneself").

In the Muslim world, the current ethical concerns are not approached methodically. The philosophical tools that enable scholars to do so are rarely taught, and, when they are, it



is usually without the depth and rigor necessary for crafting creative responses to ethical and other challenges. Even theology, when taught in the major Islamic learning centers, is mostly a truncated version, denuded of the deep metaphysical insights of its earlier practitioners. By the nineteenth century, students at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and other institutions were being handed highly reductive summaries of profoundly complex theological works; most did not have the requisite background to understand the content of such works.

This intellectual, moral, spiritual—and invariably political and economic—decay left Muslims with an utter inability to respond creatively to the current civilizational challenges, something that past generations had been able to do when faced with crisis. In the absence of such effective responses, Muslim societies were overwhelmed by the challenges and increasingly fell into disarray and self-destructive reactionary modes. Invariably, this prompted criticism from unlearned malcontents within the society. New narratives were put forth to explain the malaise of Muslim societies, placing the blame squarely on the abandonment of “worldly” sciences and on the scholars who emphasized spirituality and “otherworldliness,” all of which were seen as having blunted the competitive edge of Muslims vis-à-vis their historical rivals in Europe, culminating in the colonization of Muslim lands. Undeniably, some truth resides in this reasoning, but the primary cause of the decline, it seems, was the drift away from the philosophical method of inquiry in the metaphysical and physical sciences, both of which had flourished in the early period of Muslim dynamism.

This profound decline, and the colonization and subjugation of the Muslim lands at the hands of peoples many previously held in sheer contempt, sired a fateful turn in the late nineteenth century: Muslim societies became obsessed with mastering material sciences, especially engineering and medicine. The best intellects were often encouraged to pursue those fields with utter disregard for the social sciences—not just history and sociology but also the more important sciences of language and philosophy, both natural (using inductive reasoning) and speculative (using mostly the deductive method). All the major branches of learning suffered with this monomaniacal and ultimately quixotic quest, which ironically caused a brain-drain in the Muslim world due to Western universities that aggressively pursued “social sciences” resulting in a dearth of engineers and doctors in their societies. The Muslim and Hindu obsession with those professions filled this void in the West with an influx of immigrants. Again, with a strange twist of irony, the people in the West who often manage and oversee those recruited doctors and engineers usually have backgrounds in subjects such as history, political science, international relations, business management, and philosophy.

## Philosophical End Game

The ancients and their pre-modern inheritors understood reality to be objectively knowable: Mind and matter—the immaterial qualitative and the material quantitative—symbiotically engaged one another in a synthesis called “reality.” The requisite tools to accurately perceive the correspondence of mind and matter were to be found in language and number. But with the advent of the moderns, a new view emerged that

was rooted in ancient notions that had largely been refuted and rejected: Namely, that reality is subjective, and, ultimately, all we can ever really know is the contents of our own minds. Even this latter Humean-Kantian thesis was challenged by post-structuralist philosophers, who argued that the world, while indeed subjective, was governed by power structures artificially constructed through language and culture, and that “discourses of power” determine the “subjective reality” for most people.

This fragmentation of reason has made basic communication and dialogue increasingly frustrated. Sense is overpowered and repressed by sensibility, and feeling now determines meaning. In this post-modern philosophical world, the human being as a triad of appetites, emotions, and reason is replaced with a fluid being whose unstable self, formed in the crucible of destabilized language, is a bundle of experiences with no sustaining source and no essential nature. Instead, our thoroughly post-modern man, woman, or something-in-between is urged to liberate himself, herself, or zerself from the shackles of a socially constructed reality and recreate an “authentic” human being in “its” own absolute and immaculate conception of what it means to be a person: the human as a self-referential work of rebel art, and each person “its” own rebellious artist, with rebellion as a sufficient *raison d’être*. It is no coincidence that the first rebel inspires many of today’s artists, who have always been the antenna of a society’s movement.

The irony of this postmodern project is that even as society disintegrates and communities fragment into echo chambers of increasing insularity, people become less and less individualistic and more and more predictable in their self-expressions. The signs are many and include but are certainly not limited to these: reckless abandon regarding sexuality, tattooed, and even mutilated bodies, escapism via manufactured music and mass entertainment, and angst-ridden youth living in a nature-deprived world of mediated reality, their obsessive-compulsive addictions further alienating them from self and other. Meanwhile, those who cling to any “traditional” sense of the world are also lost and more often than not lack entirely the tools to penetrate the confusion and arrive at clarity about the causes of this contagion. Only a deep understanding, based in first philosophy, can lead us to a sound diagnosis and an efficacious treatment plan. This project demands a cadre of young people willing to devote their lives to the perilous pursuit of knowledge that is both rational and revealed.

Advanced technology and the holy grail of transhumanism (with its utopian promises of a “more perfect” humanoid) are thrust upon us as a solution, yet these are no panacea for what ails us; they bring new problems of their own. The remedy we need is wisdom (*sophia*, hikmah). In the classical world, wisdom stood above two other intellectual virtues: understanding and science. When understanding (true first principles) and science (our body of acquired and accurate knowledge) work in tandem, wisdom is the outcome. Given the vast power for death and destruction that the human hand now wields, our manifold crises demand wise responses rooted in a real understanding of the sources of those crises: their spiritual, moral, and intellectual foundations. Our problems are not material: With our abundance of goods, we have a scarcity of goodness; our miraculous inventions multiply by the day, but our psychological returns diminish by the

hour; we have vast and pervasive means of communication but a tragic breakdown and loss of real community. These problems are rooted in the human heart and nowhere else, and it is only there where solutions reside. But we must first learn to *know* our hearts. Seeking that knowledge was the obsession of sages and saints of previous civilizations, and they bequeathed to us great wisdom, experience, and strategies for its realization.

For Muslims, it should be obvious that our civilization is moribund and beleaguered; and, while it may well be the last theocentric culture in the world, it has undeniably lost its spiritual compass. That compass is imbedded in its revelation but can only be accessed with realized reason. The tools necessary to refine the hearts and minds that can restore that compass lie dormant in our great tradition. They are hidden in plain sight and await an awakening. The way forward is to look back before proceeding. As the sages stated, "Stop where they stopped, and then proceed." In the Qur'anic story of the Seven Sleepers is great wisdom and part of an antidote to the age of the Anti-Christ: They fled persecution to a cave; after a mystical hibernation, they awoke and re-entered a world that was much changed. The Muslim community has slumbered long in a cave of its own creation. It is time to arise, awaken, and rediscover and renew our tradition; it is as authentic and applicable today as it was when it was the envy of the world. That awakening begins with being, simply being.

## Endnotes

- 1 *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 33.
- 2 Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaśfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl* (Cairo: Dār al-Maymān, n.d.), 8.
- 3 *Ibn Sina's Remarks & Admonitions: Physics & Metaphysics*, trans. Shams C. Inati (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 23-4.
- 4 Al-Ghazālī penned critiques of certain conclusions of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), and has been unjustly accused of banishing philosophy from the realm of Islamic sciences. Al-Ghazālī wrestles with Ibn Sīnā's thought in his *The Aims of the Philosophers*, where he presents Ibn Sīnā's works in an adumbrated version, and, again later, in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, where he refutes those points he argues contradict orthodox belief. He numbers only three as removing the one who believes them from Islam: the eternity of the world, God's lack of knowledge of particulars, and the rejection of the bodily resurrection.
- 5 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaśfā*, 8.
- 6 Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah* (Casablanca: Bayt al-Funūn wa al-ʿUlūm wa al-Ādāb, 2005), 185-6.
- 7 This comparison to the Catholic/Protestant debate is highly appropriate given the Prophet's prophecy that his community would follow the Jews and Christians

in their approach to faith to the hyperbolic point of following them "down a lizard's hole."

- 8 Wael B. Hallaq writes, *"Ibn Taymiyya's conception of nominal essences stood squarely in opposition to the philosophical doctrine of real essences and its metaphysical ramifications. The realism of this doctrine was bound to lead to a theory of universals that not only involved metaphysical assumptions unacceptable to such theologians as Ibn Taymiyya, but also resulted in conclusions about God and His existence that these theologians found even more objectionable. The dispute, then, centered around a realist theory of universals that, in the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, proved a God existing merely in the human mind, not in external reality"* (Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, xx.). The irony in Ibn Taymiyyah's rejection of philosophy is that it resulted from a serious engagement with the greatest philosophers on his part, thus enabling him to make use of the very method in his own works that he was critiquing in others. This seems to be lost upon his modern followers. His rejection was based upon his own understanding and his rejection of conformity (*taqlīd*). His followers reject the method based upon conformity (*taqlīd*) to the thoughts of their teacher, who himself rejected *taqlīd*.
- 9 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144.

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