

*Philosophy summons
scholars in its loudest voice
and demands her rights
from them before
the tribunal of reason.**

The Benefits of Philosophy

WHAT is the meaning of philosophy, or *ḥikma*?¹ What is its purpose and what are its benefits? What might be the true cause of its appearance in the human sphere? What was the basic reason for its spread among the Muslims? What is its general prescription and venerated model, and where are its end and goal? Is complete satisfaction to be found in the works of Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Bājja, Shihāb ad-Dīn the Martyr, Mīr Bāqir, Mullā Sadrā,² and the other treatises and notes concerned with philosophy, or is it not?

The ancients defined and described philosophy with pleasing and close-fitting expressions. However, those definitions, because of strange expressions, peculiar coinages, and difficulties in composition (as people find satisfaction in what is strange), caused their very forms of expression to become the essential goal of teachers, the fundamental object of scholars, the focus of the desires of the philosophers, and the field for the thoughts of the logicians. Their meaning and significance were left behind and abandoned to such an extent that it seemed the learned never had any aim or intention with their definitions except to speak of Universality and Exclusion, and to mention the Comprehensive Category and the Exclusive Section.

Therefore, turning my eyes away from them, and abandoning the bonds of tradition, although it is difficult, I say as follows:

* In Arabic.

¹ *Ḥikma* means "philosophy," or "wisdom," in a broader sense than *falsafa*, which is limited to the Greek and Greek-inspired schools of philosophy. In Afghānī's articles the two words are used almost synonymously, however, and both will be translated as "philosophy."

² On these philosophers, see p. 63 n. 31.

Philosophy is the escape from the narrow sensations of animality into the wide arena of human feelings. It is the removal of the darkness of bestial superstitions with the light of natural intelligence; the transformation of blindness and lack of insight into clear-sightedness and insight. It is salvation from savagery and barbarism, ignorance and foolishness, by entry into the virtuous city of knowledge and skillfulness. In general, it is man's becoming man and living the life of sacred rationality. Its aim is human perfection in reason, mind, soul, and way of life. Perfection in one's way of life and welfare in livelihood are the chief preconditions for the perfection of mind and soul. [Philosophy] is the first cause of man's intellectual activity and his emergence from the sphere of animals, and it is the greatest reason for the transfer of tribes and peoples from a state of nomadism and savagery to culture and civilization. It is the foremost cause of the production of knowledge, the creation of sciences, the invention of industries, and the initiation of the crafts.

For man, in order to perfect his way of life, needs to cultivate, to plant trees, preserve fruits, procure animals, protect rivers, bring forth waters, dig canals, dikes, and dams, to spin and weave, in an agreeable and appropriate way. He must also know how to build buildings in such a way as befits human life, to preserve his health, and cure the unforeseen illnesses of his body. All of this is only produced through the use of digging, cutting, breaking, carving, boring, lifting, transporting, leveling, straightening, and weighing. And it is achieved only with knowledge of the times, seasons, and atmospheric phenomena; with a mastery of the nature of soils, climatic features, and atmospheric influences; and knowing the constitution of compound bodies and the action and reaction of the elements, the process of analysis and synthesis and its instruments.

Since the management by a single individual of all these manifold affairs is difficult, if not impossible, naturally, cooperation and exchange will be indispensable in the affairs that are designated as human relationships (*mu'āmalā*). Hence human perfection in life requires innumerable details that have no end or limit. Therefore, it became incumbent upon man to group those details under general rules and universal laws. When he found that the general rules had become numerous, he classified them according to their relation and similarity, and occupied himself with the foundation of sciences and arts. Among these were the arts of husbandry and cultivation, and the sciences of animals, veterinary science, geometry, trigonometry,

surveying, arithmetic, algebra, medicine, surgery, anatomy, physiology, the special features of drugs and the manner of their composition, astronomy, geography, astrolaby, navigation, mineralogy, geology, physics, mechanics, hydraulics, meteorology, and chemistry (which consists of the science of analysis of compounds and the composition of elements and their special properties). [Among them also] were domestic economy, the art of civil legislation, municipal regulations, and governmental policy. Since the basic aim of these arts was the performance of occupations, men made a great effort for conformity and adaptation between knowledge and practice, and to the degree that the numbers of men increased and their needs multiplied, progress was experienced in these arts and the problems relating to them increased and multiplied. It was for this reason that I said the primary cause of the majority of sciences, knowledge, and arts was the perfection of man's way of life.

Man, after achieving some comfort in his life, turns his attention toward his soul. He realizes that perfection of his livelihood and the sources of bodily comfort, when accompanied by the corruption of manners and evil internal habits, is pure deficiency. For what ease and tranquillity will exist, even though all the means of livelihood be present, for the coward upset by imaginary events and disasters, or the hydropic glutton who suffers from insatiable hunger, or the envious man pained by the wealth of others, or the choleric man inflamed over insignificant slips, or the miser barred from pleasures?

Therefore, it was through philosophy that virtuous characteristics were distinguished from vicious habits, so that spiritual perfection might be achieved through man's refinement and purification. Man invented the art of the rectification of morals (*tahdhīb-i akhlāq*) in order to control his soul and safeguard the holy virtues in it. Once reason had arranged for the welfare of the body and its livelihood, and for the rectification and straightening of manners, reason directed its thoughts toward itself, seeking its own anticipated perfection, true life, eternal happiness, and intellectual pleasures.

With the guidance of the philosophical spirit (*ḥikma*), reason began to deal with its own genesis and true nature, and to seek the causes of perceptions, the bases of mental faculties, and their relations with bodily sensations. It began to inquire into the consequences and effects of each of them, wanting to know the reasons for soundness and corruption in each one. It put forth great effort to understand the relation of minds and spirits to bodies. It investi-

gated one by one the reasons for the differences of character among peoples and the cause for the acquisition of each character. It discussed the circumstances of the rise and fall of peoples in civilization, science, learning, and manufactures. It sought the causes of laws and the reasons for legislation. Making the universe the object of its thought and consideration, it reflected on and penetrated, in both a general and particular fashion, the universe's origin, source, and material, its accidents and incidents, and its causes and effects. It investigated the causes of attraction and repulsion, rapprochement and estrangement, and action and reaction, of the parts of the universe, and disclosed their movements and causes. It understood, to the extent that philosophy was able to help, the cause for the formation of the germs of plants and animals, the conditions of their transformation into organized bodies and firm and solid forms, and the aim of their existence.

[Man] reflected minutely on his immortality and felicity. Then, in order to collect the general laws and control the innumerable details that are connected with the above matters, he established several special fields: such as rational philosophy, ethical philosophy, the philosophy of history, the philosophy of law, metaphysical philosophy, and transcendental philosophy.

When the goal of philosophy became evident, it was clear and manifest that the first cause and true occasion for its genesis in the human sphere was, first of all, the necessity and difficulty in man's means of livelihood, and the arduousness of his life, like other animals; and, second, innate reason and natural intellect. For man's life and being depend on the perception of causes and reasons, and his delights and joys consist in the uncovering of unknown things and coming to know the secrets of the world of existence.

As for the reason for [philosophy's] spread among the Muslims, you must know that the higher ideas of every people (*qaum*), or even individual, are in proportion to the basic general capacities of that people or individual. Basic general capacities will be proportional to the particular items of knowledge, and the particular items of knowledge will be proportional to their necessities of existence and their way of life. This subject will become clear from a comparison of a rural child with an urban child. Consequently, a people immersed in nomadism and hardship, plunged in barbarism, and accustomed to hardness, roughness, harshness, and squalor in dress, food, dwelling, and shelter will have very few prerequisites for

existence, necessities of life, and furnishings for living; and the life and existence of that people will be close to the life and existence of animals. When they are at this base degree and move and operate in this narrow sphere, naturally their individual capacities will be proportionally small. And when particular capacities, which are the source of derivation, are extremely small, never will the basic general capacities that spring from them reach the maximum level, nor will that people ever become the holders of lofty ideas. Rather in their intelligence they will also be close to the level of animals.

Whoever has a little acquaintance with the subject of history will know that in past centuries and ancient times no people could be found who were further from civilization, more immersed in nomadism, or more established in barbarism than the Arab people. Therefore, this people in ancient times had no learning besides some poems based on fancies. They were completely deprived of lofty intellectual stirrings, comprehensive rational conceptions, and great philosophical subjects until the time that the First Creator and Absolute Reality by means of His chosen Prophet sent his Precious Book. In that Precious Book, after summoning to Unity [*tauhid*—the absolute unity of God] and then demanding recognition for the prophets, who are the receptacles of divine decree, He in many places condemned as heinous, blameworthy acts, stupidity, blindness, following conjectures and superstitions, and pursuing imitation. On many occasions He eloquently praised knowledge, wisdom, learning, reflection, thought and insight. He explained with decisive phrases the harm of base morals, and revealed with firm examples the benefits of virtuous habits. He provided a description of former peoples, and in conjunction with that He noted the worldly reward to each of them for perseverance and moderation, and the immediate recompense for crookedness and deviation, in order that they should take heed. He explained the bases of the comprehensive laws of domestic and civil relationships so that they should become the cause of total happiness, and clarified the harm of oppression and injustice, which are the result of savagery and barbarism.

He said to man: That which is on earth was created for you; therefore, do not become monks, but take according to your just share of its pleasures and do not deprive yourselves of beauty, which is a divine gift. He promised those perfect in mind and soul, who constituted the virtuous, rule over the whole earth. In sum, in that

Precious Book, with solid verses, He planted the roots of philosophical sciences into purified souls, and opened the road for man to become man.

When the Arab people came to believe in that Precious Book they were transferred from the sphere of ignorance to knowledge, from blindness to vision, from savagery to civilization, and from nomadism to settlement. They understood their needs for intellectual and spiritual accomplishment, and for gaining a living. Those roots and foundations gradually grew up; ideas multiplied; and minds moved into vast spheres of the world in order to acquire perfection, until a group in the time of Maṣṣūr Davānaqī³ noted that going through these stages and traversing these infinite degrees without seeking the aid of their fellow men would be fraught with hardship and difficulty. They realized that to be proud regarding learning is to be satisfied with ignorance.

Therefore, notwithstanding the glory, splendor, and greatness of Islam and the Muslims, in order to exalt and elevate knowledge, they lowered their heads and showed humility before the lowest of their subjects, who were the Christians, Jews, and Magians, until, with their help, they translated the philosophical sciences from Persian, Syriac, and Greek into Arabic.

Hence it becomes clear that that Precious Book was the first teacher of philosophy to the Muslims. It is the comprehensive exemplar of the macrocosm. Each individual is a letter, each species a word, each race a line, and each microcosm a page in it; and each movement and change an elucidation and annotation of it. No end exists for this great Book. Its letters, words, lines, and pages are incapable of being counted by man. In each word, and even in each letter, so many mysteries and secrets are hidden that if all the sages of the past and present had the lifetime of Noah, and each one solved a thousand mysteries and uncovered a thousand secrets each day, nonetheless they would remain incapable of fathoming it, and would confess their inability.

Thus if someone claims that with two or three old sheets that he has in hand he has achieved a perfect comprehension of the world and has understood all its secrets, of course he is suffering from compound ignorance or madness,⁴ and the latter is more likely.

³ A nickname for the Abbasid caliph Maṣṣūr, who ruled A.D. 754-775.

⁴ Arabic, from the Greek, *mālikhūliya*.

Whatever anyone has written is in accord with the strength or weakness of his perception of unity and dissolution, and his insight into the book of the world. Since man's perfection in reason and life is in accord with the extent of his knowledge of the book of the world and his own state, it is clear that human perfection can have no limit or end. Therefore, it is incumbent on each individual separately and on each people collectively to set up for itself that universal exemplar in order to ascend the degrees of intellectual and existential perfection and, penetrating with the eye of insight, to obtain each day a fresh share and new portion of it.

When this became clear, then it was manifest and evident to everyone that philosophy has no limit or end, and that it has no measure. In each one of its degrees, considered in itself, there is perfection, but when one looks at a higher degree the former one would be considered imperfection. Stopping at any one of its degrees is a manifestation of neglect and shortcoming, or of blindness and compound ignorance, or of low endeavor and a base nature.

The works of the Islamic sages are in many respects defective and incomplete, not to mention their multiple insufficiencies in producing human perfection. *The First Respect* is that the subjects contained in those books, in fact and reality, are not clear to us as they were among the Greek philosophers. Rather, the Muslim philosophers showed them to us with the adornment of perfection and the garment of infallibility. They closed the doors of why and wherefore to pure minds. The reason for this was that they believed the Greek and Roman philosophers were all possessors of absolute reason, followers of pious habits, and endowed with celestial powers and true revelations, and that the scope of their senses and mental powers was above the scope of the senses of other men. Therefore, accepting their words like a celestial revelation, they followed them completely. They followed them in arguments and proofs just as the masses follow their leaders in objects and aims. Even Ibn Sīnā, despite the glory of his rank, when he wanted to contradict his teacher, Aristotle the Greek, on the problem of celestial souls, considered this a very great matter. Alarm and dread overcame him, and terror and fear enveloped him. Because of this he first, with great shame and regret, made a slight allusion to his innovation, and after that, in another place, he explained it with extreme helplessness and agitation. Mullā Sadrā had such strong faith in those people that he considered [suspicions of] unbelief, heresy, and irreligion impossible regarding

them. He wished to defend Democritus, Thales, Empedocles, Epicurus, and the others, and taking every one of their sayings that clearly denied the Creator and interpreting them allegorically, he brought weak excuses in their behalf.

Shihāb ad-Dīn the Martyr,⁵ widening the scope of imitation, accepted the sayings of Zoroaster too with complete confidence, without true proof or real arguments, and gave fresh luster to the doctrine of light and darkness. This confidence by the Muslim philosophers arose because of their belief that each one of those ancient philosophers had invented some branches of philosophy with extreme certitude and the utmost solidity, without the help of the ideas of others, notwithstanding the obscurity of their problems and the difficulty of their subjects. They disregarded the fact that the philosophic sciences, like the other sciences and arts, have achieved their aim through the succession of ideas and the progress of beliefs.

India was the first origin of the fundamentals of all these subjects, and from there they moved to Babylonia, and from Babylonia to Egypt. From Egypt they moved to the lands of the Greeks and Romans. In every move they acquired a new form, and in each migration they received fresh adornment. They were transferred from one state to another, just as the germs of plants and animals are transformed from a state of imperfection to perfection. The Greek and Roman philosophers contributed nothing new to those subjects except a few doctrines and some minor opinions; however, since they did not explicitly mention the names of their teachers, the Islamic philosophers believed they had brought these subjects from the concealment of non-existence into the world of existence, and had displayed them to view with no precedent. Some of the Islamic philosophers, operating in that same narrow sphere of imitation, inscribed on pages with great pleasure some types of artificial arguments and decorated discussions. In order to rhyme with Greek philosophy they named it Yamanite philosophy.⁶

⁵ Suhrawardī "the Executed," who was killed in A.D. 1191 for his heretical views. He cited pre-Islamic Persian thinkers in support of his mystical "illuminationist" philosophy.

⁶ The phrases rhyme in Persian. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 151 n. 26: "Some writers like Mīr Dāmād, the influential Safavid sage, contrast *ḥikmat-i yūnānī*, or Greek philosophy—meaning rationalistic philosophy—with *ḥikmat-i yamānī*, or Yamanī wisdom—that is, a wisdom based on illumination."

The Second Aspect [of the imperfection of the Islamic philosophers] is the intrusion into the philosophic subjects in those books of, chiefly, the theological subjects of the Sabaeans.⁷ The reason for that was that the Greeks and Romans were Sabaeans in religion, having faith in celestial bodies and stars, and believing in numerous Gods. Therefore, they inserted their beliefs into the tablets of philosophy with artificial proofs, ornamented words, embellished statements, beautiful explanations, sweet speeches, and agreeable convictions, and imagined them to be the real problems of philosophy. Among these were: belief in the Platonic Idea and in the Gods of particular spheres who constituted their deities; their judgment concerning the impossibility of separation and fusion in the celestial spheres and their [the spheres'] belonging to the fifth element, and the proof of comprehensive minds and souls by way of them; and the glorification of problems connected with celestial bodies. The Muslim philosophers, not understanding this point, accepted all those problems out of trust in their authors and wrote them down in their own works.

If a fair person penetrates those matters somewhat with the light of insight it becomes clear to him that not even one proof is mentioned in order to substantiate them. Rather, as is the custom of the theologians of every religion, they have presented their own opinions for their audience, along with some adornments.

The Third Aspect is that the problems included in those books are in themselves incomplete and fragmentary. As for the problems of algebra and of astronomy, the authors themselves in their own books judged them to be incomplete. Take the *Khulāṣa al-ḥisāb* and the *Tadhkira* of Tūsī.⁸ Even Tūsī, after he added to his predecessors with the power of his thought, and in order to complete the questions of astronomy, gave the celestial universe several new celestial bodies out of the private world of his imagination, nevertheless several times confessed his own inadequacy.

As for the problems of nature, you must know that the whole problem of the composition of bodies from material substance and

⁷ The Sabaeans, a pagan sect in northern Mesopotamia, especially Harrān, followed a religion in which the Creator was to be reached through the intermediary of spirits who activated the stars, planets, and elements. They helped transmit science and philosophy to the early Muslims. Afghānī uses the word in a broad sense that includes Greek and Roman polytheism.

⁸ Naṣīr ad-Dīn Tūsī, A.D. 1201–1274, was a prominent Persian philosopher and scientist of the Avicennan school.

form, and its appurtenances, depends on the fact that a necessary precondition of a body is the supposition of the extension of connected units of measure, and requires a quantity of measurements. As examples [take] the proof of total annihilation from the instance of separation; the coming into being of two things from nothingness; and the combining of union and separation in the same object. Here the authors have passed hastily, although in another place they have stipulated contrary to the bases of this problem, and said that only quantity is in itself capable of being separated. Afterward they became aware [of this] and arbitrarily decided on a division between quantitative separation and separation of dissolution, although the latter is a branch of the former.

They explained that there is no intermediary between potentiality and actuality, and that movement in the absolute sense has no existence. Rather, the existence of movement is in an intermediary sense, and it is instantaneous. After that they decided that movement is the emergence of a thing from potentiality to actuality by degrees, and this is the essence of the incompleteness of their words.

They stipulated that time exists and that it is a quantity of movement. Then they repeated that nothing else exists outside that current, and that is other than time. They said that nature is an extended quantitative thing, and that quantity is an accidental dimension, characterized by extension. They denied pure dimension, despite the fact that the supposed obstacle to the existence of pure dimension can be held true, with slight change, in respect to every corporeal image and quantity. Stranger than this is that, denying the existence of pure dimension, they then do not explain the existence of local movement.

They considered water, air, earth, and fire elements, and set down their inability to decompose them as proof. They noted the restriction of elements with a certain amount of doubt. It apparently was not possible that another doubt would increase that doubt. It was said that each one of them is either flammable or not, that each of them is either malleable or not, and so forth. There is no doubt that if this point had been understood, the number of elements would not have been limited to four from the time of Aristotle until now.

Regarding the transformation of elements, they were satisfied with mere conjectures. On some problems of meteorology, such as the rainbow, the just men among them confessed their helplessness, and

the unjust ones expressed confused doctrines. In some other questions, like thunder, lightning, shooting stars, and winds, they generally followed their fancies, and had no proof at hand. Some questions, like tornadoes and hurricanes, they completely abandoned. Regarding minerals and earthquakes, they were satisfied with fantasies, and regarding plants and animals they spoke incompletely. They were not aware of the causes of growth and life, and the reasons for the differences of shapes and forms, and they did not speak decisive words that were based on proofs or true experiments regarding internal senses. Regarding vision, they mentioned their own imaginings without proof. They remained baffled with regard to colors, tastes, and odors. They were silent about the Milky Way, and the largeness or smallness of the fixed stars. They expressed bewilderment concerning the heat of the sun, the materials that are in the moon, and the various colors that are in the planets.

They judged that the forces inherent in a body embrace the particular meanings whose particularity consists of added incorporeal bodies, the individual lines that terminate at certain points, and the points of convergence of those lines.

After that, because of the perception of simple things consistent with reason which in minds are nothing but suggestive meanings and revealing forms, they accepted the separateness of the soul, and this is an occasion for surprise. They explained the relations of the soul to the body and the manner of its influence with ambiguous words. They considered it legitimate that matter be the place for the rational soul from all eternity. After connecting the soul and the body, and deriving a complete relationship, they [nonetheless] refused that the soul be subject to corruption, assuming that corruption, like accidental attributes, requires a place, despite the fact that corruption means annihilation and nonexistence.

As for the problems of divinity, let it be known that they believed first in the necessity of homogeneity and complete proportionality between the cause and effect (let reference be made to *al-Muḥākamāt*⁹). Afterward they said that God Almighty is the cause of all possibilities—some with no intermediary and some with meditation.

⁹ *Al-Muḥākamāt (Trials)*, a fourteenth-century philosophical work by the Persian Qutb ad-Dīn Rāzī, which discusses the merits of philosophic and theological commentaries on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*. (See Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 47.)

They remained silent in explaining homogeneity and proportionality between the sublime necessary and the possibilities.

Regarding the happiness and unhappiness of the soul, they contented themselves with poetic doctrines. In sum, the majority of problems in those books are incomplete.

As for the books of the moderns, they are all full of discussions of "In the name of God," "Praise God," and "May the blessings and peace of God be upon Him;" and of disputes, quarrels, and a mixture of scientific topics. There is no doubt that the books of the ancients among the Muslim philosophers, with all their defects, from all points of view are better than the works of the moderns, just as the early Muslims were better than the Muslims of today in everything.

Since philosophy, its goal and writers, and the state of the books of the Muslim philosophers have become clear, now, addressing the scholars and learned men of India, I say: "O, possessors of pure talents, holders of good and clean instincts, masters of penetrating minds, and possessors of broad thoughts: Why do you not raise your eyes from those defective books and why do you not cast your glance on this wide world? Why do you not employ your reflection and thought on events and their causes without the veils of those works? Why do you always utilize those exalted minds on trifling problems, such as: Is science among the spontaneous things, not requiring definition? Does science belong to an active category or a passive category? Or, is it a category of addition or a category of condition? Is the subject of logic [one of] the secondary rational sciences or spontaneous concepts or beliefs, and if not, how was it possible that its totality be conceived in the mind and outside? [Since] the universal embraces the species, and the species embraces the universal, then what remedy should be chosen? And what difference is there between kind and matter? Is verification simple or compound? And what is the thing that depends on verification? Is creation simple or compound?

"Yet you spend no thought on this question of great importance, incumbent on every intelligent man, which is: What is the cause of the poverty, indigence, helplessness, and distress of the Muslims, and is there a cure for this important phenomenon and great misfortune or not? And has the First Principle and Absolute Reality established a cause, prerequisite, and motive force for their reform or not? And

is the essence of reform of this community possible or impossible, and if it is possible, can it be realized or is it impracticable? If it is capable of realization, what would be the causes, conditions, and implements of that [realization] and what is its material and formal cause? What is its origin, and what is the name of the last component of its complete cause?"

There is no doubt or question that if someone does not spend his whole life on this great problem, and does not make this grievous phenomenon the pivot of his thought, he has wasted and ruined his life, and it is improper to call him a sage, which means one who knows the essential conditions of beings.

"If this eye was weeping from ardent love for someone other
than Lailā,
Then those were wasted tears."¹⁰

Once more I call: O, ulama of India, O sources of exact views, mines of apposite opinions, and springs of deep thoughts; authors of many works and compositions, composers of beautiful treatises and commentaries: Is your pure nature and pious, divine character really satisfied and content that you expend your bright minds in these discussions of whether, at the time of consideration, verification of the unity of the diverse is necessary or not? And if Zaid says, "What I will say tomorrow will be a lie," and when tomorrow comes, he says, "What I said yesterday was a lie," will his lie involve a truth and his truthfulness involve a lie or not??!! And since what is externally impossible is impossible in the mind, then what will be the judgment regarding the impossibility of impossible things?

And you never once consider the telegraph lines that extend to all regions of India, nor ask about their causes. And you do not make electricity, which is the source of astonishing deeds and wonderful acts, the arena of your thought. Every day you repeat that vision is through the emission of rays. And photography, which has now spread throughout the entire land, does not stimulate your minds in any way, and you do not incline the reins of thought toward it. You do not ask about steam power, which transports loads and burdens from one country to another, moving with great speed on

¹⁰ In Arabic, from one of the poems about the famous lovers Lailā and Majnūn.

iron rails. You do not take as a point and subject of investigation the phonograph,¹¹ the camera, the telescope, the microscope, and such things.

Is it permissible that you abandon investigation of these new things because they are not mentioned in the *Shifā* of Ibn Sīnā or the *Illuminist Philosophy* of Shihāb ad-Dīn?¹² Is it not incumbent upon you to serve those who will follow you with your highest thoughts, just as your revered predecessors served you? Is it not necessary for a philosopher, and even for every intelligent man who is dissatisfied with ignorance, not to be content with heedlessness. Is it not a defect for a person that his thought does not move so as to seek causes?

Is it not a fault for a percipient sage not to learn the entire sphere of new sciences and inventions and fresh creations, when he has no information about their causes and reasons; and when the world has changed from one state to another and he does not raise his hand from the sleep of neglect? Is it worthy of an investigator that he speak in absolute ignorance and not know what is definitely known? He splits hairs over imaginary essences and lags behind in the knowledge of evident matters.

This is a summary of what I wished to set forth in this regard, and, God willing, I will return again to this subject and speak in detail about it. I hope the learned ulama of India will look attentively at this article, and certainly after a true consideration my pure intention will become clear and manifest to them.

¹¹ *Ḥāfiza aṣ-Ṣaut*, an Arabic coinage meaning "preserver of sound," which could refer either to the phonograph or, possibly, the telephone. Since both were invented in the United States in 1876–77, and Afghānī was writing in a princely state in South India in 1880–81, one sees the eagerness with which he followed modern Western inventions.

¹² Reference is to two of the major works of the two philosophers. Afghānī uses the Persian title *Ḥikmat-i ishrāq* for Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's work, although the Arabic form *Ḥikma al-ishrāq* is more correct.

An Islamic Response to Imperialism

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of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn “al-Afghānī”

by N I K K I R . K E D D I E

Including a Translation of
the “*Refutation of the Materialists*”
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