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Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn's Ideas

A Summary of Afghānī's Aims and Methods

THAT Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn's life was full of obscure and complex intrigues has long been known, and if anything, the picture of complication and even confusion in his activities has been reinforced by important new material, such as that unearthed by Elie Kedourie, and the recent publication in Iran of newly discovered sources about his life. Some of the same contradictions that run through his political activity can be found in his ideas and writings, and to a degree the source of these contradictions is the same. Just as he appealed during his life to the most various people to help him fulfill his goals—in the Islamic world to the ulama, to heretics and freethinkers, to rulers and men of government, and sometimes to the masses; and in the Western world to the Russian, English, and possibly French governments at different times, and to both reactionaries and liberals—so his writings seem sometimes to be the work of several different men, differing not only in ideas but even profoundly in style and in type of thought, depending on the audience he was addressing. When speaking to a Western audience, not only in the famous "Answer to Renan," but also in other talks and newspaper articles addressed to a French or British public, Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn could be almost the image of logic, clarity, and rationality, appealing to the liberal sentiments of his audience in a way that would be impossible for a man who had not a fairly sympathetic acquaintance with modern Western ideas. When writing a book or articles intended for mass circulation in the Muslim world, such as "The Refutation of the Materialists" or his *'Urwa al-Wuthqā* articles, his words are often full of such rhetorical exaggeration and factual imprecision as to make Westerners wonder why

intelligent Muslims had such a generally high regard for his intellect.¹ A clue to this question is found, however, in reports of his private teachings and in some of his letters, as well as in a few articles and speeches to Eastern audiences, where once again is found a more rational, scientific mode of argument and a different set of emphases.

Must one conclude, then, that Jamāl ad-Dīn was a pure opportunist, concerned only to say what he thought appropriate to his goals at a given moment, without any clear principles or ideas? This would seem unlikely in view of the strongly positive intellectual impression he made not only on intelligent and sophisticated Easterners like Malkam Khān, but on at least equally intelligent and sophisticated Westerners like Ernest Renan. In fact, quite consistent syntheses of his doctrines, as culled from his major writings, have recently been made, in detail in Sharif al-Mujāhid's McGill University thesis, and with much subtlety and attention to Afghānī's Islamic philosophical background, in Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.² The following discussion owes much to these syntheses, which, however, do not seem adequately to deal with the antireligious implications of such documents as the "Answer to Renan" or the reports and activities recently stressed by Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim.³ To draw a really consistent picture of Afghānī's ideas which takes into account his contradictory statements it seems necessary to posit four fundamental points, which are discussed in more detail below.

1. Afghānī was profoundly influenced by the tradition, particularly strong among the Islamic philosophers, that it was correct and proper to use different levels of discourse according to the level of

¹ The difference between Afghānī's style in Arabic (and Persian) and the reports of his words in Western languages arises in part from the different modes of expression favored by Middle Eastern and Western languages. On the discursiveness of Arabic, as compared to Western languages, see the words of Aḥmad Amīn translated in Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine*, II (Paris, 1965), 91-94.

² Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (London, 1962), chap. v; Sharif al-Mujāhid, "Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī: His Role in the Nineteenth Century Muslim Awakening" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1954).

³ Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), pp. 3-15; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London, 1966), *passim*.

one's audience. Like the philosophers, he believed that the masses, *'amma*, were not open to rational philosophical argument. A literalist scriptural religion that stressed a day of judgment would keep them loyal to the community and moral in their actions, and would discourage the formation of sects that would split the community. As seen below, his attacks on those who spread doubt among the masses and encourage sectarianism virtually echo those of Averroes. Unlike the philosophers, he probably hoped the masses would improve somewhat. On the other hand, it is clear that Afghānī always was surrounded by an elite, the phrase *khāṣṣa* is often used, to whom he suggested ideas very different from literalist orthodoxy, employing the usual method of Islamic philosophers, oral teaching. Although Afghānī particularly stressed the philosophers in his teaching, he was probably also influenced by Sufi and other heterodox traditions of levels of discourse, which were also strong in Iran.⁴

2. When in writings like the "Refutation of the Materialists" Afghānī used the word "Islam" in a strongly positive sense, and praised Islam for its tolerance, scientific spirit, and so forth, he was think of an idealized "Islam," different not only from the Muslim religion or civilization of his own day, but from any he imagined to have existed for more than a millennium. In accord with the first point, he usually did not make this distinction explicit, but he did give enough hints so that those who had eyes to see would see. The positive "Islam" of Afghānī is examined in more detail below. Suffice it to say here that this "Islam" included: (a) An idealized picture of the Age of the Prophet and the first four caliphs, whose appeal to Afghānī was based largely on its aggressive military success, which contrasted so vividly with the recent Western military defeats of Islam; (b) The idea, taken from the Islamic philosophers but also found in many religious modernists, that when scripture apparently contradicted reason or science, scripture must be reinterpreted; this Afghānī extended to include modern science and philosophy; (c) A reopening of the door of interpretation of law and doctrine (*ijtihād*), combined with a return to emphasis on the Koran, which could lead to a Protestant type of reform of Islam. Because of his concern for Islamic strength and unity, however, Afghānī opposed those who broke openly with the ulama or paraded their differences

⁴ For a fuller discussion of these traditions, see Nikki R. Keddie, "Symbol and Sincerity in Islam," *Studia Islamica*, XIX (1963), 27-63.

with orthodoxy, and seems to have hoped that Islam would be reformed from above, without splitting the community. The negative "Muslim religion" of the "Answer to Renan" is Islam as it actually was; the positive "Islam" of other writings is his ideal.⁵

3. Afghānī's concern for unity, arising largely from the weakness of Muslim countries vis-à-vis the West, and the hope of rallying *all* Muslims against the West, involved political propaganda that would appeal differently to the different elements of society, according to their interests and understanding; hence the contradictions noted above. For all his scheming, Afghānī failed to achieve any of his important political goals, and many of his schemes on their face appear most impractical. It would seem he was caught in an unresolved contradiction between (a) the traditional ideas of the Muslim philosophers, who had little hope for the masses and concentrated on influencing the rulers and other elite of the Muslim community, and (b) more modern ideas of political opposition. The latter could have proved practicable only after a long prior organization and propaganda, which hardly suited Afghānī's impatient temperament. When he went in for revolutionary activities, they were generally of the nature of proposed assassinations or depositions rather than of an organized and gradually growing opposition movement. Assassinations are typical both of certain strains of the Islamic tradition and of immature modern revolutionary movements.

4. The fact that Afghānī spent most of his life in political activity, often with some of the most conservative figures of both the Islamic and Western worlds, and less time working for religious reform indicates that *the political unification and strengthening of the Islamic world and the ending of Western incursions there were his primary goals, while the reform of Islam was secondary*. This helps also to explain the third point. While Sultan Abdülhamid, the various conservatives with whom Afghānī made contact in the retinue of the Russian Tsar, and many others whom he tried to in-

⁵ Al-Mujāhid, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-89, makes this terminological distinction a focal point in his argument that Afghānī was a true believer in Islam. He implies that Afghānī deliberately spoke of the "Muslim religion" in the "Answer to Renan," and not of true "Islam." This argument appears dubious, especially since Afghānī's "Answer" was published in French and used standard French terminology; there are no grounds for assuming that his Arabic original used a peculiar term for Islam.

volve in his schemes could not be expected to further the cause of Islamic reform, they might support his pan-Islamic and anti-British goals. The confusion of Afghānī's activities appears here as elsewhere. While he often recognized the importance of Islamic reform as a prerequisite to the acceptance of modern science and technology and the activism needed for self-strengthening, he was diverted by an illusory romantic hope of recreating, via a new caliph, the dynamism of the early caliphate. The rulers with whom Afghānī dealt could not share his vision, and their position was often based on support from the very forces of obscurantism that Afghānī opposed. It is only fair to add that at the very end of his life Afghānī may have seen the errors of his past activities. He apparently wrote a letter in which he recommends working against rulers, organizing to spread enlightenment, and opposing not individuals but the whole prevailing system of government.⁶

Afghānī's life and activity indicate that his main aims were what Westerners would consider political rather than religious; however, his political program, based partly on illusions of using vested religious and political influences for revolutionary ends, could have

⁶ E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (Cambridge, 1910), pp. 28-29, translates this letter from the Persian book in which it first appeared. I would have discussed this most interesting letter in the text, except that Sayyid Hasan Taqizādeh has doubted its authenticity. It appears authentic, however, judging by its style and by its original publication in 1910 along with undoubtedly authentic documents. After noting the failure of his dreams for reform, Afghānī's letter says: "Would that I had sown all the seed of my ideas in the receptive ground of the people's thoughts! Well would it have been had I not wasted this fruitful and beneficent seed of mine in the salt and sterile soil of that effete Sovereignty! For what I sowed in that soil never grew, and what I planted in that brackish earth perished away. During all this time none of my well-intentioned counsels sank into the ears of the rulers of the East, whose selfishness and ignorance prevented them from accepting my words."

Addressing the Persians, he says: "Nature is your friend, and the Creator of Nature your ally. The stream of renovation flows quickly towards the East. The edifice of despotic government totters to its fall. Strive so far as you can to destroy the foundations of this despotism, not to pluck up and cast out its individual agents. Strive so far as in you lies to abolish those practices which stand between the Persians and their happiness, not to annihilate those who employ these practices. If you merely strive to oppose individuals, your time will only be lost. If you seek only to prevail against them, the evil practice will draw to itself others. Endeavor to remove those obstacles which prevent your friendship with other nations."

only infrequent and ephemeral success. Since Islam does not make the Western distinction between religion and politics, it might be more accurate to say that Afghānī stressed the practical, political side of Islam, rather than its speculative or theological side. When religious ideals conflicted with practical goals, it was the former that gave way. It is hard to escape the impression that what really appealed to him both in early Islam and in the modern West was political strength. His stress on holy war and his attempts to prove that the Koran enjoins the acquisition of the most modern and effective armaments support this idea. Even ideas that are usually called "religious," such as reopening the door of interpretation of religious law and doctrine, have as their main goal the introduction of innovations that would allow the Muslim world to progress militarily and politically. Also, there is a constant stress on the power of the state and community. This is not to say that Afghānī was not a reformer, or that he did not really hope for a diminution of absolutism and an increase in equality, justice, and consent of the governed; but when there was a potential conflict between these goals and Afghānī's primary goal of rebuilding a strong Islamic state capable of withstanding Western encroachments, he consistently opted for the latter.

Nor is this surprising, in view of the continual movement of Western Christian powers into Islamic territory, a trend that grew in Afghānī's own lifetime with the occupation of Tunisia, Egypt, and Central Asia and the reduction of Iran to a virtual Western protectorate. This constant advance was not being met by adequate measures within the Islamic states, where both rulers and ulama were often content with either stagnation, or halfhearted reform. Some young Muslim intellectuals, particularly in India, were being won over to a wholehearted endorsement of the West, accompanied by a sense of inferiority about their own community and its past.

To Afghānī, whose writings and speeches often indicate a broader knowledge and acceptance of modern Western ideas than he admitted to a mass Islamic public, the West thus appeared in a contradictory role. On the one hand it was an aggressive conqueror and oppressor, which was renewing its territorial conquests in the Muslim world. Afghānī also seemed to believe that Westerners were bent on undermining the Muslim sense of identity by turning their conquered subjects away from their own proud traditions. Afghānī had a profound dislike of Western rule in Muslim lands, probably

based largely on his own experiences in India, and was apparently convinced that a people could be well-ruled only by men of their own community, traditions, and belief.⁷ He was a strong anti-imperialist, and reserved his deepest hatred for those like Sayyid Ahmad Khān who advised Indian Muslims to cooperate with imperialist rule. Afghānī believed that the efforts of the Muslims should, on the contrary, be turned to ousting the Western conquerors and preventing them from making further conquests.

On the other hand, the West was the seat of the sciences, military technology, modern education, and political institutions that were needed for self-strengthening, so that the Muslims might oust their Western conquerors and once more enter the mainstream of progress. For Afghānī, however, it was important not to lay undue stress on the Western origin of what he was borrowing, as this might encourage the trend of admiration for the West and feelings of Islamic inferiority and helplessness. Thus for Afghānī, as for many other Asian modernists and anti-imperialists, there was good reason not to admit the Western origin of what he was borrowing, but instead to find origins within his own community. We find in Afghānī one of the increasingly popular idealized pictures of the early Islamic community, where there was equality of believers, consent of the governed, encouragement of science and of military strength. In conversations with his followers Afghānī apparently said that the Koran hinted at such things as railroads and the germ theory—an argument later worked out with appropriate, if farfetched, citations by the pan-Arabist Kawākibī.⁸ Whether Afghānī really believed all he said about the early Islamic community seems doubtful, especially when one considers the more limited, evolutionist view of early Islam and the Koran he took in his "Answer to Renan" and elsewhere. There it is implied that early Islam represented an advance over the barbarism of the early Arabs, but would have to change and progress much further, as had Christianity since Luther. The initial period of Islam did have a genuine appeal for Afghānī because of its military strength and successes and the apparent cohesiveness and dynamism of the early Islamic community. Within the Islamic tradition there continued to be strains, notably in the philosophers and to a lesser extent the Sufis, in which he could find

⁷ See the quotation from Afghānī in al-Mujāhid, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁸ See 'Abd ar-Rahmān al-Kawākibī, *Ṭabā'ī' al-istibdād* (Cairo, n.d.), *passim*. Afghānī's words are in Makhzūmī, *Khāṭirāt* (2d. ed.; Damascus, 1965), pp. 100-104.

much genuinely to admire. Afghānī's appeal to the Islamic tradition thus had genuine intellectual and emotional roots, and was strengthened by a desire to avoid identification with the Western oppressors or feelings of inferiority toward them.

Although Afghānī's ideas were not necessarily the same as those of his associates, many of his closest followers were not Muslims at all, but Babis, Christians, Jews, and freethinkers. When they, at least, made appeals to Islamic feeling it was done on political grounds, with little or no basis in personal sentiment. As one of Afghānī's associates, Malkam Khān, pointed out in a frank speech to an English audience, a powerful reason for clothing Western ideas in Islamic terms, and stating that Western institutions had originally been borrowed from Islam, was that only in an Islamic form were new ideas likely to reach the religious Muslim masses. Most Muslims had long believed that Western Christians were enemies out to undermine Islam, enemies from whom nothing doctrinal should be borrowed.⁹ It seems likely that such practical considerations also motivated Afghānī, who was concerned to appeal not only to sophisticated intellectuals who might be open to Western ideas in their original state, but also to the traditionalist ulama and masses.

The conflict between a desire to Westernize and a need to avoid identification with the West was one of the roots of the contradictions in Afghānī's ideas. In addition, there were latent contradictions within his program. For example, pan-Islam and the reform of Islam could seem to him two sides of a program for strengthening the Muslim world and defeating imperialism. But there were contradictions between them, even ignoring for the moment the developing nationalism that was ultimately to render pan-Islam abortive. In Afghānī's time, there were many reasons to appeal to the Islamic community as a whole; there was still a strong sense of community among the Muslims of the world, and religious identification was usually stronger than national. Also, the Arabic-Persian cultural tradition extended to much of the Muslim Middle East, providing even modernists an identification with a supranational community. Even such secularized intellectuals as Akhundov in the Transcaucasus and Malkam Khān of Iran appealed to the whole Islamic Middle Eastern community in their work for political and script reform. Traditional hostilities between the Muslim and Chris-

⁹ Malcom Khan, "Persian Civilization," *Contemporary Review*, LIX (Feb., 1891), 238-244.

tian worlds, and the modern domination of Muslims by Christians, might strengthen a sense of cultural identity vis-à-vis the West. In the face of Western attack, it was natural to call for a further drawing together of the Islamic community, and particularly an abandonment of sectarian differences in a common defensive effort. *But*, and here is the contradiction, the drawing together of all elements of the community meant that one set of enlightened people in that community could not struggle for a definite reform program that might alienate powerful traditionalist and conservative groups. Nor could Afghānī himself ever suggest a consistent and definitive theological reform program. He may have had the capacity to do so, but if he had done it and tried to fight for it, he would have split, not united, the Islamic community; and, as long as he was convinced that the Sultan or ulama might be enlisted to help his self-strengthening aims, he would try not to alienate them too far. It is significant that the religious reform aspect of his program found very little fulfillment, even in oppositional activity, in Afghānī's lifetime, but was forwarded by 'Abduh and other disciples only after they had dropped the pan-Islamic program.

The point is not that there is something *wrong* with Afghānī's concentration on the political and pragmatic aspects of Islam and his vagueness about anything we might regard as religious content in the revived Islam, but, rather, that it is a mistake for either Easterners or Westerners to look to him expecting to find a reconstruction of religious thought. If Afghānī's goals were mainly pragmatic or political, there is no reason to expect from him a well thought-out reconstruction of the Islamic religion.

Indeed, as suggested above, there were for Afghānī positive barriers to such a reconstruction. First of all, Afghānī wanted to reinforce pride in Islam and to use existing Islamic sentiment as an ideological weapon in fighting the Christian Western oppressors. In doing this he was unable to press too openly the point that Islam as the majority of Muslims knew and practiced it was very different from the ideal to which he referred. He clearly did stress this point to his personal followers, many of whom went on to work more successfully for modernization; but he did not press it in his writings, which had to appeal to the nonadept as well as the adept. Second, the desire to unite all branches of the Islamic community in a program of self-strengthening required that theological distinctions be played down and theological disputation rejected in favor of a rather vague belief in the superiority of Islam that could appeal to everyone. This is

seen in his efforts to unite the Shi 'is and Sunnis; in his attacks on the sects in the "Refutation of the Materialists"; and in his refusal, probably prompted by fear of splitting the Islamic community, to imitate the open defiance of religious authorities pursued by his hero, Luther.

In none of his writings does Afghānī appear as a man moved by a truly original religious vision. It is hard to escape the conclusion, in reading Afghānī, that the "Islam" to which he appeals has almost exclusively secular virtues and little positive religious content.

The impression of pragmatic and worldly rather than religious concerns is strengthened by the fact that Afghānī was willing to appear in so many different religious guises to different audiences—to the Shi 'i ulama as a pious Shi 'i, interested in preserving the existing faith against an infidel Shah; to his followers as an excoriator of the backward clergy; to a mass Islamic audience as a defender of Islam against Western-inspired materialism; and to a Western audience as a defender of science and philosophy against religion. Islamic traditions and existing realities that encouraged expediency subordinated religious consistency to practical political goals. By assuming that Afghānī was most concerned about practical political goals, and that he hoped to harness many groups with different interests to his program, one can make sense out of the mass of contradictions between one and another of his works. The only apparent alternative is to postulate a hopeless confusion of thought, which seems unlikely in view of the intelligent men he impressed in both East and West. Those whom he impressed personally were mostly modernists, liberals, and even revolutionaries: hardly those who would be much moved by the pure defense of Islam that some later writers attribute to him.

Afghānī and Islamic Philosophy

IN ADDITION to showing Afghānī's desire not to split the Islamic community, but rather to reinforce its ideological cohesion vis-à-vis the West, the "Refutation of the Materialists" re-

flects Afghānī's background in the Islamic philosophic tradition. Since this has not been stressed enough, it is necessary here to point to Afghānī's high evaluation of philosophy, whose teaching he tried to revive in the Islamic world, and also to some particularly relevant points in that philosophic tradition which are mirrored in Afghānī's writings.

There is no doubt that Afghānī was well trained in Islamic philosophy and that he valued it highly. The revival of philosophic studies and their understanding was one of the central points in his program of Islamic renewal. He wrote that philosophy was the way to bring man from darkness into light, the "integrating soul" of all branches of knowledge. In writings and talks directed to a Muslim audience he tried to prove that philosophical studies were not against Islam or the Koran, but that on the contrary, the spirit of the Koran favored them.¹⁰

Islamic philosophy with a Hellenistic base, or *falsafa*, despite all the variations among its practitioners, can be said to constitute a school with certain common features. The adherents of *falsafa* were heavily influenced by certain major figures and trends of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, particularly by Aristotle and Neoplatonism. The logic and metaphysics of the Muslim philosophers were based on one or more of these Greek traditions. Like their Greek masters, the early Muslim philosophers generally believed in demonstrative, rational proof rather than revealed scriptural authority as the essential explanation of the workings of man and the universe. Living, unlike the Greeks, in a society whose laws and beliefs were based on a revealed scripture, the Muslim philosophers had to develop a means to reconcile their logic and metaphysics with the Prophet's revelations. The means adopted by the great philosophers from Fārābī and Avicenna down through the later Persian philosophers, who also influenced Afghānī, involved the belief that literalist revelation was necessary for the masses, but that the higher truth was to be uncovered by rationalist interpretation of scripture.

The political and ethical theories of the philosophers varied, but they generally involved a certain pessimism about the masses, who could only be kept in line by a revealed law sanctioned by vivid physical rewards and punishments in the afterlife. The philosophical

¹⁰ See the translation of "The Benefits of Philosophy," in pt. 2 of the present work, pp. 113-114.

elite, who could pattern their political and ethical behavior on more rational bases, might dispense with belief in a physical after-life as described by scripture, and might even be led by their rationalist arguments into disbelief in the immortality of the individual soul.¹¹

Some of the post-Avicennan Persian philosophers whom Afghānī cites, such as the influential seventeenth-century philosopher Mullā Sadrā, seem to have believed that the same truths that are accessible through reason and through philosophical interpretation of revelation can also be reached by the mystic path of illumination.¹² And the Neoplatonism of even a philosopher like Avicenna had strongly religious elements involving an intellectualized version of the mystic path of the soul back to reunion with the First Cause. The mixture of rationalist elements, mystic tendencies, and citation of the Koran was not original to Afghānī, but is found frequently in Persian philosophy. Although the Persian philosophers were often considered heretical and were sometimes persecuted, some of their teachings, particularly the versions that stressed the reconciliation of rational philosophy and revelation, continued to be taught in the religious schools in Iran. This Persian tradition gave Afghānī a means unparalleled in the Sunni countries where philosophy was not so taught

¹¹ Regarding the aspects of Islamic philosophy discussed here, see in addition to the works cited in note 12: the article, "Falsafa," and those on individual philosophers in both editions of *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (EI); Soheil M. Afnan, *Avicenna, His Life and Works* (London, 1958); *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut*, trans. and ed. S. van den Bergh (London, 1954); Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1960), and "Confessions extatiques de Mir Dāmād," in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, I (Damascus, 1956), 331-378; Louis Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne* (Paris, 1951), and "Le problème de la 'Philosophie Musulmane,'" in *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson* (Paris, 1959); Nikki R. Keddie, "Symbol and Sincerity in Islam," *Studia Islamica*, XIX (1963), 27-63; Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, eds., *Medieval Political Philosophy* (Toronto, 1963); E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, Eng., 1958); Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952); Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Oxford, 1962); and W. M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1962).

¹² On the later Persian philosophers see chaps. xlvii, xlvi, and lxxviii by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, II (Wiesbaden, 1966); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); and the works referred to therein, particularly those by Henry Corbin.

for suggesting a reconciliation of science, religion, and even mysticism.

This brief summary necessarily skirts the many controversies that continue to exist regarding the exact nature of the beliefs of almost every one of the Muslim philosophers. Intellectuals who believed in apprehending the same truth in more than one way and in expressing themselves in different manners to different audiences have naturally invited a variety of interpretations, as has Afghānī himself. As far as Afghānī's relationship to the Muslim philosophical tradition is concerned, his writings indicate an emphasis on the rationalist and scientific side of Muslim philosophy, and on the means that philosophy provided for new interpretations of religions and for speaking differently to the masses and to the intellectual elite. Afghānī's statement that the Koran is an infinite source of wisdom whose meaning is never exhausted¹³ may have been sincere, but its chief aim was not to glorify the Koran but to introduce Muslims to modern science and technology and to political struggle.

Traditional Islamic philosophy was understood as including science, or the knowledge of the world as it actually was through demonstrative proof; so Afghānī's injunctions to revive philosophy have broader implications than at first appear. In at least one talk Afghānī makes clear that *his* philosophy would include modern science.¹⁴ In essence, Afghānī was reopening in the Sunni world the argument between the philosophers and the theologians and other orthodox as to the proper way to apprehend truth, by authority or by reason. The orthodox victory in this argument had been both a symptom and a cause of the decline of Islamic civilization. The notion that the Koran and Islam give positive injunctions to the use of reason and even to rationalist interpretations of scripture is not original in Afghānī's "Refutation," but is stressed particularly by the philosophers. The argument has some basis,¹⁵ but the philosophers carried it further than did most other Muslims in an attempt to make a place for philosophy within the Islamic community. Much the same could be said of Afghānī: his insistence that Islam is

¹³ See pt. 2, "The Benefits of Philosophy," p. 114.

¹⁴ "Lecture on Teaching and Learning," *Maqālāt-i jamāliyyeh* (Tehran, 1312/1933-34), pp. 88-96; translated below.

¹⁵ For a convincing argument on the rationalism of the Koran as compared with the Old and New Testaments, see the rich and brilliant book of Maxime Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme* (Paris, 1966), chap. iv.

compatible with reason and modern science is not only defensive, but even more an attempt to make Islam conform to his rationalist ideal. This has not been clear, as Afghānī did not say explicitly in his widely publicized writings that he was holding up an ideal rather than describing Islam as it existed. The "Answer to Renan" and other evidence show that he had a much less exalted view of Islam than a superficial reading of the "Refutation" would suggest.

According to the philosophers, only the select few could be persuaded by scientific, demonstrative argument, while for the masses only emotional rhetoric would be persuasive. The common people should be told not to pay any attention to abstract intellectual matters. They should not be told the true interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of revelation, for expedient reasons. The Prophet Muhammad was assumed to have upheld law and revelation with the concrete images and material rewards and punishments that alone would be effective in keeping the masses believing and hence obedient. The Prophet was also supposed to have strewn the Koran with hints of the rational truth, which could only be appreciated by the philosophically minded. This procedure of scattering hints to the elite in texts directed to the masses was also followed by the philosophers themselves.

Avicenna, among several such references, says of the relation of a prophet to the masses:

It is not necessary for him to trouble their minds with any part of the knowledge of God, save the knowledge that He is One, True, and has no like; as for going beyond this doctrine, so as to charge them to believe in God's existence as not to be defined spatially or verbally divisible, as being neither without the world nor within it, or anything of that sort—to do this would impose a great strain upon them and would confuse the religious system which they follow already, bringing them to a pass wherefrom only those rare souls can escape who enjoy especial favour, and they exceedingly uncommon. The generality of mankind cannot imagine these things as they really are except by hard toil; few indeed are they who can conceive the truth of Divine Unity and Sublimity. The rest are soon apt to disbelieve in this sort of Being, or they fall down upon the road and go off into discussions and speculations which prevent them from attending to their bodily acts, and often enough cause

them to fall into opinions contrary to the good of society and inconsistent with the requirements of truth. In such circumstances their doubts and difficulties would multiply, and it would be hard indeed by words to control them: not every man is ready to understand metaphysics, and in any case it would not be proper for any man to disclose that he is in possession of a truth which he conceals from the masses; indeed, he must not allow himself so much as to hint at any such thing. His duty is to teach men to know the Majesty and Might of God by means of symbols and parables drawn from things which they regard as mighty and majestic, imparting to them simply this much, that God has no equal, no like and no partner.

Similarly he must establish in them the belief in an after-life, in a manner that comes within the range of their imagination and will be satisfying to their souls; he will liken the happiness and misery there to be experienced in terms which they can understand and conceive. As for the truth of these matters, he will only adumbrate it to them very briefly, saying that it is something which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard." . . . There is therefore no harm in his discourse being interspersed with sundry hints and allusions, to attract those naturally qualified for speculation to undertake philosophical research. . . .¹⁸

Afghānī's "Refutation" shows a similar concern with the practical virtues of religion for the social order, an idea frequently mentioned by the philosophers. He also follows the philosophers' injunction to intersperse his text with brief hints for the benefit of the more philosophically minded. Avicenna, who made the statement quoted above, was the most influential philosopher in the Iranian tradition, and was one whose books Afghānī owned, annotated, and taught.

The Islamic philosophers were, like Afghānī, opposed to materialism and naturalism, which they thought would corrupt man into following only his base appetites. They said also that any deviation from literalist revelation, even in the direction of philosophy, was dangerous for the masses, as it gave rise to sects and schisms that split the Muslim community. Thus Averroes, in his *Decisive Treatise* on the harmony of religion and philosophy, says:

¹⁸ *Avicenna on Theology*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London, 1951), pp. 44-45.

The reason why we have received a Scripture with both an apparent and an inner meaning lies in the diversity of people's natural capacities and the difference of their innate dispositions with regard to assent. The reason we have received in Scripture texts whose apparent meanings contradict each other is in order to draw the attention of those who are well grounded in science to the interpretation which reconciles them.

. . . There are . . . apparent texts which have to be interpreted allegorically by men of the demonstrative class; for such men to take them in their apparent meaning is unbelief, while for those who are not of the demonstrative class to interpret them allegorically and take them out of their apparent meaning is unbelief or heresy on their part. . . .

It was due to allegorical interpretations—especially the false ones—and the supposition that such interpretations of Scripture ought to be expressed to everyone, that the sects of Islam arose, with the result that each one accused the others of unbelief or heresy. Thus the Mu'tazilites interpreted many verses and Traditions allegorically, and expressed their interpretations to the masses, and the Ash'arites did the same, although they used such interpretations less frequently. In consequence they threw people into hatred, mutual detestation, and wars, tore the Scriptures to shreds, and completely divided people.¹⁷

Summarizing from this and other passages, George Hourani says that two reasons are given by Averroes for the prohibition of allegorical interpretation outside the elite:

One is that to teach allegorical interpretations to people who cannot understand them breaks down their religion, since it undermines their belief in the apparent meaning of scripture and sets nothing in its place. . . . The second reason for the prohibition is that an interest in allegories by people who are unable to understand them properly gives rise to dissensions and strife in Islam through the growth of sects, each with a particular doctrine. . . . In im-

¹⁷ Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. and ed. George F. Hourani, (London, 1961), pp. 51, 59, 68.

posing these restrictions, ibn-Rushd is following a strong philosophic tradition. It is probable that by them he hoped to break the force of criticism of his defence of philosophy. . . .¹⁸

Afghānī's attacks in the "Refutation" on the sects and schisms that arise from weakening the masses' faith in their religion clearly echo those of the philosophers. Like the philosophers he was concerned to defend himself against charges of heresy and to gain for himself a recognized place with Muslim rulers and ulama. Even more than the philosophers he was concerned to foster the unity of the Islamic community and discourage schisms. At most, he could hint to the attentive and philosophically aware reader that he was not indulging in an absolute defense of Islam as it then was, as a surface reading might make it appear.

The methods of the philosophers were useful to Afghānī's position with rulers and ulama, and to encourage Muslim solidarity, but they were hardly appropriate for enlightening the masses and encouraging them to work for reform. True, the "Refutation" might strengthen the masses' confidence in their own culture, which was perhaps important after European cultural and material attacks. On the other hand, by providing a tool to attack reformers as unbelievers and by its ambiguity concerning the need for reform in the Islamic community, the treatise could discourage reform efforts and reinforce the hold of the conservative ulama and of tradition. The "Refutation" is one of many indications that Afghānī, when forced to choose between reform and Muslim solidarity against the West, opted for the latter.¹⁹

¹⁸ George F. Hourani, "Ibn-Rushd's Defence of Philosophy," in *The World of Islam*, ed. James Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder (London, 1960), pp. 155-156.

¹⁹ This is clearly indicated in a rarely cited exchange that took place in 1883 between Afghānī and Khalil Ghānim, a liberal Ottoman Arab whose newspaper criticized the Sultan. Afghānī wrote an open letter in Ghānim's paper taking him to task for criticizing Abdülhamid. In the face of Western encroachments, he said, unity of all Muslims in supporting the Sultan is the most important thing; the reforms Ghānim was seeking could come later, but attacks on the Sultan now could only weaken the primary goal of unity (*Al-Bāṣir*, no. 66, Feb. 8, 1883). The article is briefly summarized in Kedourie, *op. cit.* Thanks to Mrs. Homa Pakdaman of Paris for lending me photocopies of this exchange with Ghānim. The whole exchange is interesting in that it indicates two different approaches to the late nineteenth-century crisis of the Muslim world. It deserves to be translated from the Arabic and published.

In his pragmatic view of the function of revealed religion Afghānī also follows the philosophical tradition. This tradition saw the role of prophecy as chiefly legal and social. The philosophers had a pessimistic view of human nature, and thought that men could be brought to obey laws only if they thought them divinely sanctioned and backed by rewards and punishments in the next world. In some philosophical works, notably those of Ibn Khaldūn, the generally positive social role given religion is extended to include its ideological enforcement for group solidarity. Military conquests, social cohesion, and self-sacrifice are all results of such a firmly believed religion. All these notions are found, at times in somewhat modernized garb, in the works of Afghānī.

The Indian Background

IN ADDITION to its general background in Afghānī's life and in the Muslim philosophical tradition, the "Refutation of the Materialists" should be understood against its immediate background in the Muslim world, and especially India. The most direct and immediate aim of the book was to attack the ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān, the most prominent Indian Muslim reformer of the period. To some who had known Afghānī before he wrote this book it caused surprise, because Afghānī until its appearance had been considered, as was Ahmad Khān, a supporter of unorthodox, heretical, and rationalist ideas.

The Government of India documents, Wilfrid Blunt's reports in *India under Ripon*, and Afghānī's writings from 1880 on all suggest that during his Indian stay of 1880-1882 Afghānī began to try to shake off his heretical reputation and present himself as a defender of orthodoxy. The "Refutation of the Materialists" is the *first* of Afghānī's writings in which he presents himself as a champion of Islamic orthodoxy against heretical and Western-oriented tendencies. From the scanty evidence concerning this Indian stay, what can be suggested about the reasons for this change?

First, Afghānī was following a trend already strong in the Muslim

world, as noted above. Various Western incursions had so strengthened anti-Western and pan-Islamic feelings throughout the Islamic world that even many Muslim liberals were moved in a more pro-Islamic direction.

Second, Afghānī, as he told Blunt, had noticed the rise in positive feeling toward the Ottoman Sultan in India, which is also noted in the Government of India documents as having occurred particularly during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. Blunt records in his diary a conversation with Afghānī in 1883 about Blunt's projected Indian trip:

I asked him about the language I should most prudently hold regarding the Sultan, and he advised me to say nothing against the Sultan in India, or about an Arabian Caliphate; it had been spread about that the English were going to set up a sham Caliphate in Arabia, under a child, whom they would use to make themselves masters of the holy places; the Sultan's name was now venerated in India as it had not formerly been.²⁰

Knowing the Sultan's position as a defender of Islam and the Indian Muslims' positive attitude toward this, Afghānī may have tried to increase his own popularity and influence by presenting himself also as a great defender of Islam. In addition, the "Refutation of the Materialists" may have had as one of its goals to ingratiate Afghānī with the Sultan, particularly as it includes remarks calculated to please him.²¹

Third, Afghānī saw in India that the most strongly Westernizing group among the Indian Muslims, the followers of Sayyid Ahmad Khān, were the partisans of his greatest enemies, the British. Sayyid Ahmad Khān and his followers were at this time exerting a growing influence upon the educated youth of India, but were opposed by the religious conservatives. Ahmad Khān's enemies claimed he believed in nothing but nature, and dubbed his group the *Neicheriyya*, the followers of nature. Afghānī's "Refutation" is specifically directed against this group, and its original Persian title is "The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris." Only

²⁰ Wilfrid Blunt, *India under Ripon*. (London, 1909), p. 13.

²¹ See Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal, 1964), pp. 266-267.

when it was translated into Arabic was the local reference, which was meaningless outside India, dropped from the title and the title "Refutation of the Materialists" given to the work (an abbreviation of the title used by 'Abduh, who did the Arabic version).

The "Refutation of the Materialists" can be better understood in the perspective of a series of articles and talks that Afghānī produced during this Indian stay and in which attacks on Ahmad Khān constitute one of a group of interrelated themes. While in India, Afghānī wrote a number of articles and gave lectures that were published. All were in the Persian language and they have received little publicity among non-Persian readers; yet these articles shed important light on Afghānī's mode of thought and discourse at this crucial transitional period of his life. Six of these articles were written for the first issues of a Hyderabad journal *Mu'allim-i Shafīq*, of which Afghānī may have been the inspirer and main writer. Five additional articles and lectures were published along with these original six in the first edition of the collected articles of Afghānī, *Maqālāt-i jamāliyyeh*, published in Calcutta in 1884.²²

The contents of these articles may be discussed most conveniently according to their major themes. First of all, they are perhaps as interesting for what they omit as for what they contain. There is no mention of pan-Islam or of any scheme to unite the Muslims behind one leader, the ideas with which Afghānī was to become so intimately associated after he left India. On the contrary, there are local nationalist ideas that might seem at variance with pan-Islam. There is no mention of a particular Muslim leader or nation as a source of inspiration or emulation. There is also very little of the Islamic apologetics that were to be associated with Afghānī's style of argument; there is some, but much more defense of science and philosophy than of Islam. The defense of Islam usually comes in only as part of an attack on Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān. These articles thus give a different picture of Afghānī than comes from reading only the "Refutation" and *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*. The articles show Afghānī's line of argument before he became primarily concerned to present himself as a defender of Islam and of pan-Islam.

Three striking themes of Afghānī's Indian articles are: (1) Advocacy of nationalism of a linguistic or territorial variety, meaning

²² Iraj Afshār and Aṣghar Mahdavi, *Documents inédits concernant Seyyed Jamāl-al-Dīn Afghānī* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 26-27.

unity of Indian Hindus and Muslims, with little said about the unity of Indian Muslims with foreign Muslims. (2) Stress on the benefits of philosophy and modern science. (3) Attacks on Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān as a tool of the foreigners.

On the first, nationalistic theme, there are two striking articles, both of which contradict the notion of Afghani as a consistent life-time pan-Islamist. One is an article for *Mu'allim-i Shafiq* entitled, significantly, "The Philosophy of National Unity and the Truth about Unity of Language." This article starts with an Arabic heading: "There is no happiness except in nationality, and there is no nationality except in language, and a language cannot be called a language except if it embraces all affairs that those in manufacture and trade need for explanation and use in their work." Afghānī begins his article with an introduction that tries to show the significance of his subject in terms of man and the world in general, much in the manner of many of the medieval Islamic philosophers. In the course of this he notes that a common language is necessary to bring together scattered individuals, tribes, and groups into one nation that can work as a unit. He then goes on to express a preference for linguistic over religious ties as factors that are durable in the world:

In the human world the bonds that have been extensive . . . have been two. One is this same unity of language of which nationality and national unity consist, and the other is religion. There is no doubt that the unity of language is more durable for survival and permanence in this world than unity of religion since it does not change in a short time in contrast to the latter. We see that a single people with one language in the course of a thousand years changes its religion two or three times without its nationality, which consists of unity of language, being destroyed. One may say that the ties and the unity that arise from the unity of language have more influence than religious ties in most affairs of the world.²³

²³ *Maqālāt-i jamāliyyeh*, pp. 75-87. This article has been partially translated into French by Mehdi Hendessi, "Pages peu connues de Djamel ad-Din al-Afghani," *Orient*, 6 (1958), 123-128. The translations here are from the Persian original.

After giving examples to show that linguistic ties are more important than religious ones, Afghānī goes on to say that a language can play its vital unifying function only if it has all the terms needed for the useful knowledge and arts of civilization. If these terms are lacking they should be invented, preferably from one's own linguistic stock. He states that teaching and learning should be done in the national language, which will encourage ties to the national past and make learning accessible to more people than if teaching is done in a foreign language. Encouragement of a national language is a requisite to national unity and patriotism; thus Indians should translate modern knowledge into their own languages, especially Urdu.

At the end of his article Afghānī attacks two main targets of his Indian writings—on the one hand the religious conservatives who oppose Western learning, and on the other, Sayyid Ahmad Khān and his followers, or the *Neicheriyya*. He says that anyone who refers to the principles of the *shari'a* (Islamic law) will know that the spread of science and learning is in no way against religion; on the contrary, useful knowledge strengthens religion, since its strength comes from that of its adherents, and their strength from wealth, position, and glory. On the other hand, if some "Indian ropedancer" (*neicheri*) claims that the English must be followed in everything, including their language, this will help lose India its nationhood and bring about complete conquest by the English. English arts and industries are necessary, but they should be spread through translation into one's own language.²⁴

If one reads this article as a whole, it becomes clear that its purpose, like that of nearly all Afghānī's writings, is pragmatic rather than abstract. Within the Indian context of the time, it is quite clear why he stressed the importance of linguistic unity and the use of local languages, and deprecated the importance of religious unity. In the Indian phase of his activities Afghānī's primary anti-imperialist, and especially anti-British, purpose was best served by an emphasis on those factors that united Indians, and distinguished them from the British. Afghānī is not writing a theoretical tract on the relative weight of religion and language in human affairs, but rather an appeal to the Indians to utilize their own languages as the vehicle for the spread of modern knowledge. He is arguing on

²⁴ *Loc. cit.*

two fronts: against traditionalists who wished to maintain traditional learning in the old languages as it was, and against the modernizers who supported the British method of higher education and the spread of modern ideas through the medium of English. The remarks downgrading the importance of religious unity were probably based on a desire to see Indians of all religions united against the British. Nowhere in his writings does Afghānī appear as any kind of Muslim communalist or separatist in relation to India.

Afghānī's pragmatic approach to the problem of encouraging effective anti-imperialist activities frequently involved him in logical contradictions in his arguments. What he considered the best argument for a mixed Muslim-Hindu audience in India might be quite different from the arguments he used in his pan-Islamic writings from Paris, directed not especially at India but at the entire Muslim world. Thus we find in an article written in *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* in 1884 that Afghānī makes points almost directly opposed to those on nationality and religion in his Indian articles. Using the same word for nationality, *jinsiyya*, as he did in India, he now finds it something to blame rather than praise. He sees nationalism as a phase of tribalism that the Muslims have overcome. Muslims, he says, having passed this tribal stage, are bound by more universal ties, and are no longer concerned with racial and ethnic questions.²⁵

Afghānī's appeal while in India to Indian unity rather than to pan-Islamic sentiment is even more clearly shown in a talk he gave while in Calcutta in 1882. The content of this lecture makes it clear that it was directed to a primarily Muslim audience, but its opening passages recall the assertions of the extreme Hindu nationalists. After saying he was happy at the presence of Indian youth at his lecture, Afghānī went on:

Certainly I must be happy to see such offspring of India, since they are the offshoots of that India that was the cradle of humanity. Human values spread out from India to the whole world. These youths are from the very land where the meridian circle was first determined. They are from the

²⁵ "Pages choisies de Djamal al-din al-Afghani: La Nationalité (djinsiya) et la religion musulmane," trans. M. Colombe (from *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, no. 2, March 20, 1884), *Orient*, 22 (1962), 125-130.

same realm that first understood the zodiac. Everyone knows that the determination of these two circles is impossible until perfection in geometry is achieved. Thus we can say that the Indians were the inventors of arithmetic and geometry. Note how Indian numerals were transferred from here to the Arabs, and from there to Europe.

These youths are also the sons of a land that was the source of all the laws and rules of the world. If one observes closely, he will see that the "Code Romain," the mother of all western codes, was taken from the four *vedas* and the *shastras*. The Greeks were the pupils of the Indians in literary ideas, limpid poetry, and lofty thoughts. One of these pupils, Pythagoras, spread sciences and wisdom in Greece and reached such a height that his word was accepted without proof as an inspiration from heaven.

[The Indians] reached the highest level in philosophic thought. The soil of India is the same soil; the air of India is the same air; and these youths who are present here are fruits of the same earth and climate.²⁶

The appeal to Indian Muslims to take pride in the Hindu past was, in the situation of the time, no stranger than Afghānī's earlier appeal to Egyptian Muslims to take pride in, and inspiration from, pre-Islamic Egyptian greatness. In both instances Afghānī was appealing to what appeared to be the most effective basis for solidarity against the foreigner. In Egypt, and even more in India, a stress on Muslim unity alone would have been more a divisive than a uniting factor in the antiforeign struggle.

It is within the context of pragmatic anti-imperialist and anti-foreign goals that one can make sense of Afghānī's contradictory writings on national versus religious ties. The Indian writings are one of the major pieces of evidence indicating that Afghānī was a late convert to pan-Islam, not a lifetime devotee. Like other Persian sources on Afghānī, these writings have scarcely been utilized in arriving at an assessment of his life and ideas.

If the encouragement of nonreligious nationalism is the most unexpected feature of Afghānī's Indian writings, it is not the only ele-

²⁶ See pt. 2, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning," pp. 101-102.

ment that sheds light on his thought in addition to that which comes from his better-known Arabic writings. The second major feature mentioned above is Afghānī's stress on the benefits of modern science and philosophy. Here the picture of Afghānī that emerges is quite different from what a superficial reading of the "Refutation of the Materialists" and other "pro-Islamic" writings would indicate. Insofar as Afghānī speaks of Islam in these articles, unless it is as a source of anti-imperialist solidarity, it is in an effort to prove that true Islam is favorable to philosophy and science. The effort is clearly to convince nineteenth-century religious conservatives that they should favor modern science and philosophy; not, as in superficially similar articles written in a much more recent context, to convince modern Westernizers that Islam is in accord with their scientific values. Afghānī's arguments, however close to those of modern apologetics, have quite a different goal.²⁷

In his 1882 lecture in Calcutta, "On Teaching and Learning," the opening of which is cited above, Afghānī's main stress was on the importance of modern science and philosophy. After praising the Indian past, Afghānī states: "If someone looks deeply into the question, he will see that science rules the world. There was, is, and will be no ruler in the world but science."²⁸ Afghānī goes on to state that all great empires have been supported by science, up to and including the European conquerors of the present. Ignorance is always subjugated by science, which is the basis of advanced technology in all fields. Afghānī then takes up the medieval philosophers' concept of philosophy as the organizing soul of the sciences:

Thus a science is needed to be the comprehensive soul for all the sciences, so that it can preserve their existence, apply each of them in its proper place, and become the cause of the progress of each one of those sciences.

The science that has the position of a comprehensive soul and the rank of a preserving force is the science of *falsafa* or philosophy, because its subject is universal. It is philosophy

²⁷ The contrast between Afghānī's concern to arouse the Muslims to act in new ways and the apologists' desire to restore admiration for Islam is illuminated by the excellent characterization of contemporary Islamic apologetics in Wilfred C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 85-89.

²⁸ See p. 102.

that shows man human prerequisites. It shows the sciences what is necessary. It employs each of the sciences in its proper place.

If a community did not have philosophy, and all the individuals of that community were learned in the sciences with particular subjects, those sciences could not last in that community for a century, that is, a hundred years. That community without the spirit of philosophy could not deduce conclusions from these sciences.

. . . I may say that if the spirit of philosophy were found in a community, even if that community did not have one of those sciences whose subject is particular, undoubtedly their philosophic spirit would call for the acquisition of all the sciences.

The first Muslims had no science, but, thanks to the Islamic religion, a philosophic spirit arose among them, and owing to that philosophic spirit they began to discuss the general affairs of the world and human necessities. This was why they acquired in a short time all the sciences with particular subjects that they translated from the Syriac, Persian, and Greek into the Arabic language at the time of Manṣūr Davānaqī.

It is philosophy that makes man understandable to man, explains human nobility, and shows man the proper road. The first defect appearing in any nation that is headed toward decline is in the philosophic spirit. After that deficiencies spread into the other sciences, arts, and associations.²⁹

The only thing for which Islam is praised here is that it prepared the way for science and philosophy, which are the real sources of knowledge. In another passage the modernized schools erected by the Ottomans and Egyptians are criticized, not for being irreligious, but on the contrary, for lacking a philosophical basis for the sciences they teach.

Afghānī goes on to a strong criticism of the Muslim ulama for its blindness and hostility toward modern science and technology:

²⁹ See pp. 104-105.

The strangest thing of all is that our ulama these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation, and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science. Men must be related to science, not science to men.

How very strange it is that the Muslims study those sciences that are ascribed to Aristotle with the greatest delight, as if Aristotle were one of the pillars of the Muslims. However, if the discussion relates to Galileo, Newton, and Kepler, they consider them infidels. The father and mother of science is proof, and proof is neither Aristotle nor Galileo. The truth is where there is proof, and those who forbid science and knowledge in the belief that they are safeguarding the Islamic religion are really the enemies of that religion. The Islamic religion is the closest of religions to science and knowledge, and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith.³⁰

To support his appeal to science, Afghānī cites the great theologian al-Ghazālī, although he does not mention Ghazālī's hostility to philosophy. Afghānī concludes his talk by saying that no reform is possible in Muslim countries until Muslim leaders and ulama have reformed their outlook, and notes that the decline of Muslim countries began with these leaders.

In an article in *Mu'allim-i Shafiq* entitled "The Benefits of Philosophy," Afghānī is even more forthright about his praise of philosophy above religion, and his view of the original Islamic revelation as a step on the road toward the higher truth of philosophy. In this article Afghānī begins with a series of questions about the meaning and aims of philosophy, ending with an interesting list of names that one may assume were included in his own philosophical knowledge: "Is complete satisfaction to be found in the works of Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Bājja, Shihāb ad-Dīn the Martyr, Mīr Bāqir, Mullā Sadrā, and the other treatises and notes concerned with philosophy,

³⁰ See p. 107.

or is it not?"³¹ He goes on to state that the difficulties and special terminology of classic philosophic texts have rendered them unknown to most people. Therefore he renounces these traditional modes, and offers this explanation:

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.³² 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.³³

In this article Afghānī comes close to a frank statement on the relations of Islam and philosophy; the revelation brought by Muhammad is seen as a necessary stage in bringing the Arabs from the ignorance and bestiality of their pre-Islamic savagery to a phase in which they were prepared to accept the higher truths of philosophy.

Significant and striking is Afghānī's criticism of traditional Islamic

³¹ Al-Fārābī, died A.D. 950, and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), d. 1037, were two of the greatest masters, commentators, and developers of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy in Eastern Islam; as were Ibn Bājja (Avempace), d. 1138, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), d. 1198, in Muslim Spain. Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī "the Executed," d. 1191, was the Persian founder of a more mystical "illuminationist" philosophy; while the seventeenth-century Persian philosophers Mīr Bāqir, better known as Mīr Dāmād, and his pupil, Mullā Ṣadrā, tried to reconcile mysticism, rationalism, and Shī'i beliefs.

³² The phrase "the virtuous city" comes from a work of that name by Fārābī.

³³ See pt. 2, "The Benefits of Philosophy," p. 110.

philosophy. Although his terminology and detailed arguments are often obscure, particularly to one without advanced training in Islamic philosophy, the main points are clear enough. The Muslim philosophers are criticized for accepting the arguments of the Greeks as absolute and final, which the Greeks themselves did not do. The Muslim thinkers thus accepted blind imitation, whereas, Afghānī states, philosophy and science are continually growing and developing subjects. Afghānī in an earlier passage bases this infinite growth of philosophy on the mystical idea of the infinity of meanings in the Koran.³⁴ Further, the Muslim philosophers are blamed for incorporating into their books some ideas that are not really philosophical, but come from the polytheistic cosmogony of the ancients, and they also incorporated some arguments that are imperfect and incomplete.

Afghānī is chiefly concerned in this article with an appeal to the ulama to apply rationalist methods to burning modern problems, instead of continuing their traditional scholastic discussions. Addressing the Indian ulama, he says:

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. . . .

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? . . .

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. . . .

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,

³⁴ See p. 114.

and when the world has changed from one state to another and he does not raise his head 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.³⁵

This article is one of several indications that Afghānī had adopted a progressive notion of the evolution of human knowledge. Islam is incorporated into this notion by saying: first, that it raised the Arabs from a state of barbarism and ignorance to one of civilization and rationality; second, that it encouraged the development of philosophy among them; and third, that since the meanings of the Koran are infinite and encompass all potential knowledge, no one stage of philosophy can be taken as final and perfect. Afghānī criticizes his contemporaries for assuming such finality and perfection for a state of knowledge that may have been appropriate to the past, but is now superseded.

In defending rationalism, reform, and science, while attacking on nationalist grounds the main defenders of these modern virtues among Indian Muslims—Sayyid Ahmad Khān and his school—Afghānī had to walk a thin and easily misinterpreted line. Like other nationalists, and like the Islamic modernists who followed him, his general argument for defending Islam, nationalism, and modernism at the same time was to claim that modern virtues originated with Islam, and that the Muslims who rejected them were acting against the principles of their own religion. Like the early modernists of many cultures, Afghānī apparently believed and hoped that the rational attitudes and scientific innovations so necessary to self-strengthening against the foreigner could be adopted without the foreigners' cultural and linguistic baggage, the acquisition of which he feared would disrupt national and religious unity and encourage passive admiration for foreign conquerors.

In one of his Indian articles, "The True Causes of Man's Happiness and Distress," Afghānī includes both a call to nationalist zeal and a warning against rejection of foreign science and innovation. Afghānī begins by noting that all human qualities exist to benefit man, but if men exaggerate in any of them this leads to evils. He

³⁵ See pp. 120–122.

then praises as good, though pointing out the dangers of their excess, such qualities as human appetites, love of life, striving for superior accomplishments, love of renown, the desire to serve humanity, the desire to know about other peoples and the history of the world, and the desire to know the causes of events and the properties and influences of things. Coming to the virtues of patriotic and religious zeal, and the dangers of their excess, Afghānī says:

The desire to protect fatherland and nationality (*watan wa jins*) and the wish to defend religion and coreligionists, that is, patriotic zeal, national zeal, and religious zeal, arouse man to compete in the arena of virtues and accomplishments. They cause the adherents of religions and the members of nations, tribes, and peoples to strive to raise themselves. They make each of them employ his own effort and striving to attain the bases of greatness and glory and the means to power and majesty.

It is this desire that leads nations and the followers of religions to climb the steps of nobility, and to acquire, through striving, all the distinctions of the human world. It is this desire that kindles the fire of zeal in souls. It is this desire that does not permit men to be satisfied with baseness. It is this desire that unites multifarious groups to erect the castle of glory and honor. It calls man to the preservation of public rights and arouses him to the protection of the fatherland and the defense of the honor of religion.

But this sacred desire must not become the motive for the nullification of rights and the cause of oppression and injustice toward others. Nor should it become the cause of improper hatreds and useless enmities, since the heart was not created in order to be the house of hatred and the temple of enmity.

Having reached this point, I wish to say with a thousand regrets that the Muslims of India have applied the desire to defend religion, or religious zeal, in a very bad way. For they have carried zeal, through misuse, to a point where it has become a cause of hatred for knowledge and the sciences, and a reason for aversion toward industries and innovation. They believed they must, out of religious zeal, hate and abominate what was connected with the opponents of faith, even though these things were sciences and arts.

Whereas, what was incumbent upon them from religious zeal was, whenever they saw a virtue, an accomplishment, a science, or a piece of knowledge, knowing themselves to be the first and rightest, to strive and make efforts to acquire it, and not to allow the opponents of the Islamic true religion to take precedence over them in any one among the virtues and accomplishments. A thousand regrets for this misuse of religious zeal, which finally will result in destruction and overthrow! I fear that the misuse of religious zeal by the Muslims of India has reached the point that the Muslims will, entirely washing their hands of life, abandon living because the opponents of the Islamic faith live in this world!³⁶

In addition to its recommendation of simultaneous attachment to one's own culture and willingness to borrow from others where this is useful, Afghānī's article is interesting for the explicit equivalence it expresses between patriotism and religious faith. Both are seen as leading to the same virtues. Indeed, after Afghānī's first sentence, which already implies equivalence between the "desire to protect fatherland and nationality and the wish to defend religion," both sentiments are treated as a single antecedent in Afghānī's subsequent references to "this desire." Here is one of many hints suggesting why it was so easy for Afghānī to pass back and forth among the defense of local nationalism, pan-Islam, and zeal for the defense of the Islamic religion.

It is within the context of Afghānī's anti-imperialist nationalism on the one hand, and his philosophic rationalism on the other, that the true import of his attack on Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān—the third point stressed in his Indian articles—can be understood. The attack was not, as is sometimes thought, on Ahmad Khān's rationalism, reformism, and scant orthodoxy, all of which Afghānī shared. It was actually directed against Sayyid Ahmad Khān's belief in cooperation with the British rather than in nationalist opposition, and against his willingness to borrow as much as possible from the British and openly to abandon much of the Indian Muslim heritage, thus ridiculing the Indian Muslims of a source of nationalist, anti-imperialist pride.

The nationalist and anti-imperialist thrust of Afghānī's attacks on

³⁶ *Maqālāt-i jamāliyyeh*, pp. 130-131.

Sayyid Ahmad Khān is clearer from Afghānī's Persian and Arabic articles about him than it is from the "Refutation of the Materialists." Afghānī's longest Persian article about Ahmad Khān was called "A Description of the Aghūrīs." The Aghūrīs were a small, despised Indian sect, and Afghānī applied the name to the followers of Ahmad Khān as a piece of vituperation. According to one story, Afghānī inquired to find the name of the most despised sect in the Hyderabad area in order to apply it to the followers of Ahmad Khān.³⁷

In this article, after an introduction saying that the blind, ignorant, and traitorous consider themselves clear-sighted, wise, and courageous, Afghānī goes on to a specific attack on those who wish to harm their brothers in the interest of foreigners. "Why should someone who destroys the life-spirit of a people be called their well-wisher; why should a person who works for the decline of his faith be considered a sage? What ignorance is this?"³⁸ Afghānī queries.

In an oblique but clear attack on those who would follow the British path in education, Afghānī then asks whether one whose interests lie in the ignorance, corruption, and blindness of someone else would try to educate him to wisdom and cure his blindness.

Afghānī goes on to say that there are three types of education. First, a man can be educated to be part of a nation (*qaum*), and to serve its social order, which in turn will be his guardian. Second, education can be based on the interests of the individual, with no regard for the nation. And finally, education can be based on the interests of foreigners, of benefit to a group of which the pupil forms no part. With the third type, can one imagine that a man would learn to serve his nation and community? It would be a thousand times better to have no education at all than to have one that harms one's own nation. Only from the first kind of education can national unity be produced. In view of this it is impossible to imagine that foreigners [i.e., the British rulers of India] would support the first, national, type of education; they have certainly not come in order to strengthen the nationalism and community feeling (*jinsiyya* and *qaumiyya*) of others.

Returning to his attacks on the Ahmad Khān group, who are never named directly, Afghānī says that someone who embraces the killers

³⁷ Qāzī Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghaffār, *Āṣār-i Jamāl ad-Dīn Afghānī* (Delhi, 1940), pp. 122–123, citing a man in Hyderabad who remembered Afghānī's stay there.

³⁸ "Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i Aghūriyān bā shaukat wa sha'n," *Maqālāt-i jamāliyyeh*, p. 28.

of his brothers is the worst type of person. One sees such men putting out great efforts to strengthen the Christians by confirming the truth of the Torah and the Gospel.³⁹ These men teach slavery instead of freedom, and hence are obstacles to the progress of their people. They have no religion, and no interest other than to fill their own bellies. They use education only as a means to worldly goals. Here as elsewhere, Afghānī exaggerates the irreligion of Ahmad Khān's school, and vilifies them as "materialists" in the vulgar as well as philosophic sense.

In a passage that recalls Ibn Khaldūn and some of the other Muslim political philosophers, Afghānī goes on to say that when a community or nation is in a healthy state, it is under unified government, and all classes contribute their separate talents to the whole, like the various members of the human body. When that community's unity of thought is weakened, however, discord, division, vices, and corruption will ensue, and the society will become prey to foreign conquest and rule. Men who sow the seeds of disunity must thus be dealt with harshly.⁴⁰

Afghānī then states that good habits can only be inculcated in a people through centuries of continuous education, and that interruption of this education with foreign ways can never produce the virtues found among foreigners, but can only be disruptive. The Aghūrīs in the schools are teaching the abandonment of virtues, disunity of the community (*umma*), and breaking the laws of humanity. They are opening the way of slavery to foreigners. They are like a dog who goes to a stranger rather than his own master just to get a bone. It is no cause for wonder that they act this way, but it is strange that others do not understand their acts and base aims. They try to call others to the road of perdition, claiming it is the road to salvation.⁴¹

In this article the nationalist basis of the attack on Sayyid Ahmad Khān and his school is clear. The group is attacked for undermining the unity of the community, and often it is even unclear whether the Indian community as a whole or the Indian Muslims are intended. The defense here is not, as it is in the "Refutation," of Islam as a religion, but of local customs as a shield against submission to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33. The reference is to Ahmad Khān's unorthodox effort to show that the Bible was not, as Muslim doctrine stated, falsified.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-52.

foreign ways, which can only encourage slavery to foreigners. With almost no change of wording the entire article could apply to any group favoring wholesale introduction of the education and ways of foreign rulers in any colonial country—there is little reference to religion, much less to Islam specifically.

Afghānī's attack on the *neicheris* is thus essentially pragmatic, not doctrinal; Afghānī accuses them primarily of harming the Muslim community. It would in fact have been difficult for Afghānī to present a doctrinal argument, for his own ideas on religious reform, including greater rationalism, a return to the purer Islam of the early days, and a reopening of the door of interpretation, were very close to those of Ahmad Khān.⁴² Blunt indicates that many of Afghānī's followers in India were associated with the Ahmad Khān school. The Government of India's Thagi and Dakaiti Department, which took some pains to gather information about Afghānī, reported regarding this period:

He was in Hyderabad for about 20 months, and during his stay he associated chiefly with the rising generation of free-thinkers, the followers of Sayad Ahmed of Aligarh. But in spite of all their kindness and hospitality towards him, he published a book in Persian against their doctrines.⁴³

Indeed, Afghānī may have written the book partly because he was associated by others with the *neicheris*. Certainly it provided an ideal opportunity to try to cover up his own reputation for unorthodoxy.

The real basis for Afghānī's opposition to the Ahmad Khān school was political. Ahmad Khān worked for Muslim cooperation with

⁴² For a detailed comparison showing the great similarity between the religious reform views of Afghānī and those of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, see al-Mujāhid, *op. cit.*, chap. iv. For a comparison with different emphases see Aziz Ahmad, "Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Jamāl al-dīn al-Afghānī and Muslim India," *Studia Islamica* XIII (1960), 55-78; a shorter version of this article appears in his *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), chap. iv.

⁴³ FO 60/594, memorandum by the Government of India, Thagi and Dakaiti Department, 1896. The accuracy of this report is doubted by Aziz Ahmad on the grounds that Aḥmad Khān had only a few followers in Hyderabad at this time, and they were not followers of Afghānī. Whatever the truth of this, the contemporary report from Sayyid Ḥusain Bilgrāmī, quoted in chap. i, n. 34, refers to Afghānī as a freethinker and radical westernizer.

the British, and implied that emulation of the British was necessary for reform. Such identification with the British lessened the possibility for an anti-British ideology, and tended to split the Muslim community. In fact, the neicheris were being listed as a separate sect on the Indian census. The political basis of Afghānī's attack is also shown in the article he wrote a few years later in *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, "The Materialists in India," in which he specifies the objects of his attack much more directly than in the "Refutation." Here he says, in language very appropriate to the minds of the "people of rhetoric," as the philosophers called the masses:

But Aḥmad Khān and his companions, just as they invited people to reject religion, [also] disparaged to them the interests of their fatherland and made people consider foreign domination over them a slight thing, and strove to erase the traces of religious and patriotic zeal. . . .

These materialists became an army for the English government in India. They drew their swords to cut the throats of the Muslims, while weeping for them and crying: "We kill you only out of compassion and pity for you, and seeking to improve you and make your lives comfortable." The English saw that this was the most likely means to attain their goal: the weakness of Islam and the Muslims.⁴⁴

The identification of religious and patriotic zeal was natural at a time when religious ideology was the main intellectual distinction between the Muslims and their foreign rulers, and in view of the long background of identification of the whole "Abode of Islam" as an entity against the "Abode of War." Afghānī was not the only Muslim of his period to combine nationalist and pan-Islamic ideals—both could be seen as part of the same coin of anti-imperialism.

In the same article Ahmad Khān is accused of *openly* casting doubt on Islamic dogma, which Afghānī did not do. Ahmad Khān was seen as weakening the Muslims' cohesion and resistance to the English.

The same point is made in another of Afghānī's articles directed against Ahmad Khān, this one written in the same period as the "Refutation" and the other Indian articles. It is called "Commen-

⁴⁴ See pt. 2, "The Materialists in India," pp. 178-179.

tary on the Commentator" (a reference to Ahmad Khān's commentary on the Koran), and is translated below. In this article Afghānī speaks of the need for a sage and renewer who will save the Muslims from their current condition of decline and corruption:

There is no doubt that in the present age, distress, misfortune, and weakness besiege all classes of Muslims from every side. Therefore every Muslim keeps his eyes and ears open in expectation—to the East, West, North, and South—to see from what corner of the earth the sage and renewer will appear and will reform the minds and souls of the Muslims, repel the unforeseen corruption, and again educate them with a virtuous education. Perhaps through that good education they may return to their former joyful condition.⁴⁵

Though Afghānī claims to have looked to Ahmad Khān (not named, but clearly indicated) as such a potential renewer, there seems little doubt that he actually pictured himself in this role. Afghānī is probably being frank when he goes on to object to Ahmad Khān's high evaluation of human nature; Afghānī here stands with the Muslim philosophical tradition. He does so also in his main point, that certain social benefits can only be assured by religious belief on the part of the masses:

Even stranger is the fact that this commentator has lowered the divine, holy rank of prophecy and placed it on the level of the *reformer*. He has considered the prophets to be men like Washington, Napoleon, Palmerston, Garibaldi, Mister Gladstone, and Monsieur Gambetta. . . .

Does he not understand that if the Muslims, in their current state of weakness and misery, did not believe in miracles and hell-fire, and considered the Prophet to be like Gladstone, they undoubtedly would soon abandon their own weak and conquered camp, and attach themselves to the powerful conqueror. For in that case there would no longer remain anything to prevent this, nor any fear or anxiety. And from another standpoint the prerequisites for changing religion now exist, since being like the conqueror, and having the same religion as he, is attractive to everyone.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See pt. 2, "Commentary on the Commentator," p. 125.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Anything that undermines faith in Islam is thus seen as leading Indian Muslims to identification with their British conquerors, and it is this that Afghānī wants to avoid at all costs. Convinced of the political evils that would arise from the Muslims' following Ahmad Khān on his pro-British path, Afghānī could easily believe that all means, including the insincere rhetoric sanctioned by his tradition, were legitimate to discredit Ahmad Khān and his school.

The "Refutation of the Materialists"

WITH this background in mind, it is possible to take a fresh look at the "Refutation" itself. The main point to be noted throughout is its thoroughly pragmatic and this-worldly defense of religion. The virtues claimed for religion are purely social virtues. Like the philosophers, Afghānī repeatedly claims that religion is good for the people because it supports the social fabric, while the *neicheris*, like other sectarians, bring dissension and finally political ruin to the community.

Afghānī begins his work with a refutation of materialism as a theory of science. This section seems to be based partly on arguments traditional in the Muslim world and partly on often inaccurate things that Afghānī had heard about Darwin. Though his arguments against Darwin now seem foolish, it is worth remembering that at the time (1881) equally foolish arguments against Darwin were being made by educated people in the West.

Then Afghānī comes to his main argument. His first summary of his position is so close to the views and even the language of the philosophers on the utility of orthodoxy for the majority, and the harm brought by sects, that it is worth quoting at length:

The materialists, or *neicheris*, have appeared in numerous forms and various guises among races and peoples, and under different names. Sometimes they have become manifest under the name of "sage," sometimes they have appeared adorned as those who remove oppression and repel injustice. Sometimes they have stepped into the arena dressed

as those who know the secrets and uncover the mysteries of truth, and as the possessors of esoteric knowledge. Sometimes they have claimed that their goal is the removal of superstitions and the enlightenment of peoples' minds. For a time they came forth as the lovers of the poor, protectors of the weak, and well-wishers of the unfortunate. Sometimes to fulfill their evil aims they have laid claim to prophethood like other false prophets. Sometimes they called themselves the educators, teachers, and benefactors of the community. But among whatever people they appeared, and whatever guise or name they bore, they became—because of their evil premises and false principles, their harmful teachings, deadly views, and fatal sayings—the cause of the decline and collapse of that people and the annihilation of that community. They destroyed the social order of those peoples and scattered their members.

For man is very cruel and ignorant. And to this treacherous, greedy, bloodthirsty creature there were supplied beliefs and qualities in the earliest period by means of religions. Tribes and peoples learned these beliefs and qualities as an inheritance from their fathers and grandfathers, and they adjusted their behavior accordingly, avoiding the evil and corruption that are the destroyers of the social order. As a result they enlightened their minds with that knowledge which is the cause of happiness and the foundation of civilization. Thus there was produced for them a kind of stability and continuity.

The sect of *neicheris*, among whatever people they appeared, tried to nullify those beliefs and corrupt those qualities. From them destruction penetrated the pillars of the social order of that people and headed them toward dissolution, until they were suddenly destroyed.⁴⁷

The subsequent pages make clear that the heterodox sects are grouped with the materialists as being essentially the same and equally harmful to the community. The points of the above statement, which were shared by the Islamic philosophical tradition, are: (1) Those who spread religious doubts among the people, by claim-

⁴⁷ See pt. 2, "Refutation of the Materialists," pp. 140–141.

ing to be sages, saviors from oppression, repositories of hidden truths, or prophets, are the same in their effects because they undermine the social structure. (2) Most men are by nature evil and can be directed to virtue and social stability only by religion. Some of Afghānī's arguments might be put forth by the orthodox, but the emphasis throughout is purely pragmatic and not religious.

Afghānī goes on to discuss three important beliefs and three virtues imparted by religion, "each of which is a firm pillar for the existence of nations and the permanence of the social order." The first is the belief that man is the noblest of creatures. The second is each man's certainty "that his community is the noblest one, and that all outside his community are in error and deviation." Afghānī was surely not blind to the fact that not every community could be the noblest; again, it is the utility of this view, not its truth, that is important. Then, in a description of the afterlife that is more in line with Neoplatonic philosophy than orthodox ideas, Afghānī goes on:

The third is the firm belief that man has come into the world in order to acquire accomplishments worthy of transferring him to a world more excellent, higher, vaster, and more perfect than this narrow and dark world that really deserves the name of the Abode of Sorrows.

One should not neglect the important effect of each of these three beliefs on the social order, their great advantages for civilization, and their many contributions to order and the relations among peoples.⁴⁸

None of the three beliefs has much connection with what is usually considered religion, and none of them concerns God: both their nature and utility are human and social.

Afghānī then discusses the virtues arising from each of the three beliefs. From the first belief, that man is the noblest creature, comes intellectual perfection for the chosen few, again described in terms recalling the philosophers. Man ascends the ladder of civilization and

proceeds in proportion to his progress in the intellectual sphere, until he becomes one of those civilized, virtuous

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

men whose life with brothers who have reached this rung of civilization is based on love, wisdom, and justice. This is the ultimate goal of sages and the summit of human happiness in the world.⁴⁹

The notion of a kind of mystic fraternity of the philosophical elite who have reached the highest human phase is found in Avicenna and in the more philosophical heretical sects, notably the Isma'ilis.

Just as the first belief, that man is the noblest of creatures, is seen to lead to an essentially philosophic conclusion, so too do the second and third beliefs. Afghānī may have had in mind an essentially evolutionary view of religion (an assumption supported by some of his other writings and talks that more openly express such a view), whereby revealed religion marked a stage in the progress of men from barbarism to civilization and gave them an important impetus to social cohesion and material progress. From the religiously based community there then could arise philosophic and scientific developments that went further in comprehending the true nature of the world than did literalist belief in revealed religion. Just as the "Islam" that is praised at the end of the "Refutation" is clearly not the Islam that had existed for many centuries, so it seems the "religion" praised in the earlier parts of the essay means something very special to Afghānī.

The second belief, the knowledge of every man that his own community is the noblest, is what pushes nations to achieve the extremes of civilization, science, and the arts. It stimulates peoples to compete with each other in knowledge, achievements, and progress. Again religion is seen as culminating in a philosophical virtue—the achievement of science and knowledge—by inculcating pride in one's own community and a desire to keep ahead of others. Here as elsewhere Afghānī may have had in mind his own idealized picture of the early Islamic community, and must have been well aware that the Muslim world of the nineteenth century presented no such picture.

The third belief, in rewards and a future life, is described, both the first time it is mentioned and in relation to the results flowing from it, entirely in the philosophical and intellectualist terms that had been rejected for centuries by Muslim orthodoxy. Even his terminology is of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic type used by the philosophers:

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

One of the inevitable consequences of the [third] belief, that man has come into the world in order to attain the perfections needed to transfer him to a higher and vaster world, is that when someone acquires this belief he will of necessity always strive to improve and enlighten his mind with true science and sound knowledge. He will not leave his intellect idle, but will bring out of concealment and into the light of the world what has been deposited in him of active power, lofty sentiments, and great virtues. In all stages of his life he will try to rid his soul of impure features and will not stint in the adjustment and improvement of its qualities. . . .

Thus this belief is the best impulse toward civilization, whose foundations are true knowledge and refined morals. It is the best requisite for the stability of the social order, which is founded on each individual's knowledge of his proper rights, and his following the straight path of justice. It is the strongest motive for international relations, which are based on truthful and honest observation of the bounds of human intercourse. It is the best basis for the peace and calm of the classes of humanity, because peace is the fruit of love and justice, and love and justice result from admirable qualities and habits. It is the only belief that restrains man from all evils, saves him from the vales of adversity and misfortune, and seats him in the virtuous city on the throne of happiness.⁵⁰

The "virtuous city" is the terrain of al-Fārābī and later Muslim philosophers, as is the effort to rid the soul of impure qualities and to expand the sparks of virtue and knowledge that have been deposited in man. Afghānī's description, given before the above passage, of the superior world for which men are preparing themselves is entirely that of the philosophers—a world of the intellectually and spiritually perfect; and it is even ambiguous whether this world is not essentially the achievement of intellectual perfection on earth.

In discussing his three beliefs and the results that flow from them, Afghānī thus says that religion is good both because it leads to human and social virtues, and because it leads some men to philosophical and scientific conclusions. This is either, as suggested above, an

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

evolutionary view of religion which really has the Islam of the earliest centuries in mind or it is something even less frank—the attribution to religion of virtues that his enlightened and attentive readers would see were really rather the virtues of philosophy.

After describing the three beliefs of religion and their results, Afghānī goes on to the three virtues he says are produced by religion: Shame, Trustworthiness, and Truthfulness. Again he shows not how these three arise from religion but how necessary they are to the proper functioning of the social order. His description of the good social state produced by their presence, and the ruin brought by their absence, seems more likely to point up the lack of these qualities in any existing state with Muslim rulers than to prove the superiority of such states.

Afghānī then specifies the social harm brought by the materialists. They undermine the belief that one's own religion is better than others, thus leading men to evil actions. They attack each of the three beliefs and three habits imparted by religion, teaching that all religions are false. This discourages men from practicing virtue, encourages the most bestial vices, and undermines the social order. They attack belief in the Day of Judgment and the habit of shame, which are the foundations of trustworthiness and truthfulness. They also spread a harmful equalitarianism, which will make the lower classes unwilling to perform menial jobs. Afghānī continues:

In addition, this group has placed the foundation of their belief on license and communism, and has considered that all desirable things should be shared, and has regarded privileges and distinctions as usurpation, as shall be noted. There will no longer be a place for the attribution of treachery, since if a man chooses trickery to obtain his right to share things, that would not be treachery, and if he uses lying it would not be considered shameful. Therefore it is clear that the teachings of this group are the motive force of all treachery and lies, the cause of all evils, meanness, baseness, and wickedness.

. . . The final goal and ultimate object of this group is that all men should share in all desires and delights; that privileges and distinctions should be abolished; that nobody should have superiority or a surplus of anything over another; and that all should be absolutely equal. If it be-

comes like that, naturally every person will refuse to perform hard and menial tasks and economic life will be disordered; the wheel of dealings and relationships will stop moving; and finally this weak species will be brought to the vale of perdition and will disappear completely. . . .

The real cause of the superiority of man is his love for privilege and distinction. When privilege and distinction are removed, souls are stopped from the movement toward eminence and minds neglect to penetrate the truth of things and to discover the subtleties of life. Men would live in this world like beasts of the desert, were it possible for them.⁵¹

This quite traditional belief in the necessity and utility of social distinctions, which must be bolstered by religious teachings, is consistent with Afghānī's intellectual elitism and his pessimism about human nature, both of which he shares with the philosophers.

When materialism spreads, egoism overcomes individuals and social solidarity is lost:

The quality of *egoism* consists of self-love to the point that if a personal profit requires a man having that quality to let the whole world be harmed, he would not renounce that profit but would consent to the harm of everyone in the world. This quality makes man put his personal interest above the general welfare, and makes him sell his nation for a paltry profit. Gradually, because of this base life, fear and cowardice overtook man, and he became content and happy with meanness, baseness, slavery, and abasement in his life.

When the state of individuals reached this point, the bond of fusion and interdependence was broken; the unity of the species was annihilated; the power of preservation and the means of survival were lost; and the throne of greatness, glory, and honor was overthrown.⁵²

There is a striking resemblance between these ideas and those of Ibn Khaldūn, who also, as Muhsin Mahdi has shown, had his roots in the neo-Aristotelian philosophical tradition. Religion promotes

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

solidarity and its decline is accompanied by harmful individualism.⁵³

There follows an account of the "materialist" sects in East and West which have caused the decline of nations, an account that includes the main Islamic sects. The Islamic sects attracted men into illegitimate allegorical interpretations and denial of the sacred law and religious duties. Their teachings drew men away from the general interests of the community toward their selfish desires and prepared the way for foreign invasions. Afghānī then criticizes Ottoman modernists as traitors in the recent Ottoman war against the Russians. In Europe materialism has culminated in the evil doctrines of socialism, nihilism, and communism.⁵⁴

Afghānī reiterates his arguments in a discussion of Oriental materialists, and goes on to an interesting discussion of the possible ways of enforcing justice in the world. One of these is to count on the nobility of the human soul; but, he says, in passages again recalling the philosophers, each nation and class has its own standards of nobility, and the higher classes in particular consider themselves bound only by what they can get away with. Once again there is philosophic pessimism about ordinary human nature. After refuting the other means of securing justice, Afghānī says:

Thus, no force remains for restraining men of passions from their transgressions and oppression other than the fourth way. That is the belief that the world has a Creator, wise and powerful; and the belief that for good and evil deeds there is a fixed recompense after this life. In truth, these two beliefs together are the firmest foundation for the suppression of passions and the removal of external and internal transgressions.

. . . For the final cause of all acquired qualities and free acts, as was said above, is man himself; and when a person does not believe in recompense and requital, what else will bar blameworthy qualities to him and call him to good behavior? Especially when a man realizes that being characterized by bad qualities will not result in any loss for him in the world, nor will having good qualities bring him any benefit. . . .

⁵³ See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History* (London, 1957). Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 13 n. 14, points out the similarities of Afghānī's and Ibn Khaldūn's views on solidarity.

⁵⁴ See pt. 2, "Refutation of the Materialists," pp. 160-163.

Thus, from all we have expounded, it becomes clear in the most evident manner that religion, even if it be false and the basest of religions, because of those two firm pillars—belief in a Creator and faith in rewards and punishments—and because of the six principles that are enshrined in religions, is better than the way of the materialists, or *neicheris*. [It is better] in the realm of civilization, the social order, and the organization of relationships; indeed in all human societies and all progress of mankind in this world. . . . The nature of a great man, according to his God-given intelligence, which is an effect of the universal intelligence, will not accept these men [the *neicheris*].⁵⁵

As in the article "Commentary on the Commentator," Afghānī is relatively indifferent to the truth of a religion—it is its social utility that concerns him.

The bulk of Afghānī's tract consists of a defense of religion as such, and only in the last few pages is he concerned to argue the superiority of Islam among religions. Islam is superior for several reasons: First, its insistence on the unity of the Creator, which excludes incarnation or any sharing of divine powers; second, its lack of inherent race or class distinctions; and third, its rejection of beliefs that do not rest on proofs.

In this section Afghānī, without saying so, is speaking of his ideal Islam, which may have existed in the past, but which he knew was far from the Islam of his own day. Under the second point, the lack of class distinctions, he speaks critically of the power of the priesthood in Christianity, probably with an eye to the power of the ulama in later Islamic history. On the third point, the necessity for proofs for religious beliefs, Afghānī's characterization of Islam is in the sharpest contrast with what he said about it elsewhere, notably in the "Answer to Renan." The presentation of Islam here surely represents a *desideratum* and not what Afghānī believed existed in his time. The whole passage is more an implied criticism than the encomium it appears to be on the surface:

[The third foundation of human virtues] is that the members of each community must found their beliefs, which are the first things written on the slates of their minds, on certain

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 166–168.

proofs and firm evidence. In their beliefs they must shun submission to conjectures and not be content with mere imitation (*taqlid*) of their ancestors. For if man believes in things without proof or reason, makes a practice of following unproven opinions, and is satisfied to imitate and follow his ancestors, his mind inevitably desists from intellectual movement, and little by little stupidity and imbecility overcome him—until his mind becomes completely idle and he becomes unable to perceive his own good and evil; and adversity and misfortune overtake him from all sides.

It is no wonder that Guizot, the French minister, who wrote the history of . . . civilization of the European peoples, said as follows: One of the greatest causes for European civilization was that a group appeared, saying: "Although our religion is the Christian religion, we are seeking the proofs of the fundamentals of our beliefs." The corpus of priests did not give permission, and they said that religion was founded on imitation. When the group became strong their ideas spread; minds emerged from their state of stupidity and dullness into movement and progress; and men made efforts to achieve the perquisites of civilization.

The Islamic religion is the only religion that censures belief without proof, and the following of conjectures; reproves blind submission; seeks to show proof of things to its followers; everywhere addresses itself to reason; considers all happiness the result of wisdom and clear-sightedness; attributes perdition to stupidity and lack of insight; and sets up proofs for each fundamental belief in such a way that it will be useful to all people. It even, when it mentions most of its rules, states their purposes and benefits. (Refer to the Holy Koran.)⁵⁶

The argument that the Koran enjoins logical proofs and demonstrative reasoning is a favorite one of the Muslim philosophers. The favorable reference to the founders of Protestantism is one of several such references by Afghānī, who seems to have hoped to play the role of a Muslim Luther. He was convinced by Guizot's attribution of much of the West's progress to Protestantism, and his interest in

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–172.

Protestant reform was far more worldly and pragmatic than theological. The above passage, as other words by Afghānī indicate, is really an injunction to the Muslims to turn away from a stultifying imitation of their predecessors and toward a more rational and less restrictive faith that would allow room for progress and innovation. That Afghānī is talking not about the Islam he knew in his own day, but as he imagined it to have been in the past, is indicated at the end of his treatise:

If someone says: If the Islamic religion is as you say, then why are the Muslims in such a sad condition? I will answer: When they were [truly] Muslims, they were what they were and the world bears witness to their excellence. As for the present, I will content myself with this holy text:

"Verily, God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly."⁵⁷

Afghānī was apparently the first to cite this Koranic passage as an admonition to modern change and progress. It has since become a favorite of the modernists.

The "Refutation" has not seemed to Western readers a particularly convincing argument for anything; yet it has had and continues to have considerable reputation among Muslims. It would seem that with it Afghānī accomplished several goals simultaneously: (1) He suggested to intellectuals the dangers of going too far in their open criticisms of Islam, since religion had the practical virtues of tying together the community and keeping men from vice. (2) To the same group he suggested a way of reform, through stressing certain passages of the Koran and certain parts of the Islamic tradition. (3) He combated the pro-British influence of Ahmad Khān and his followers by identifying them with the harmful materialists. (4) He suggested limits to politico-economic as well as religious reform. (5) To the less intellectual reader in particular he strengthened pride in Islam as the best religion, providing him with a useful counterweight to the British claims of cultural superiority. It would seem that Western disappointment in the book stems from an expectation of finding in it what we would call a "religious" document. It appears rather to be an expedient, political tract; not necessarily expressing

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

the real opinions of the author, but written in order to accomplish certain goals.

In the ordinary sense of the word, I do not think the "Refutation" can even be classified under "Apologetics." Afghānī was concerned, as his whole activity shows, not with awakening passive admiration of Islam, but with harnessing Islamic sentiment to certain goals. In the course of time, however, as more and more people began to doubt Islam, the book began in fact to be read as an apologetic tract.⁵⁸ The "Refutation" is certainly not an attempt to "rethink" Islam, and, as has been suggested earlier, any consistent rethinking might in itself become sectarian, which was just what Afghānī wanted to avoid.

The Exchange with Ernest Renan

THAT the "Refutation" is a combination of philosophical doctrine on human nature, expedient rhetoric aimed at the "many," and hints for the "few" is suggested not only by internal evidence, but also by some of Afghānī's other writings. Most important is his "Answer to Renan," published in French in a French journal, and not intended to meet the eyes of the pious. The "Answer to Renan" was written the year *before* "The Materialists in India" and other similar articles, and so it cannot be explained by saying that live contact with Europe caused Afghānī to change his views on Islam.

The "Answer to Renan" was written in Paris in response to a lecture by Ernest Renan on "Islam and Science," first given at the Sorbonne and published March 29, 1883, in the *Journal des Débats*. Afghānī's answer was published in the same journal on May 18, 1883. Renan published a rejoinder the next day which spoke of the great

⁵⁸ When in Iran in 1959-60 I was told by several religious Iranians to read the "Refutation" as one of the best works proving the superiority of Islam. This indicates how in accord with certain Islamic traditions Afghānī was in considering pragmatic and political arguments a sufficient defense of Islam.

personal impression Afghānī had made on him, granted the justice of many of Afghānī's points, and praised him as a fellow rationalist thinker and infidel.⁵⁹

In the Muslim world the discussion between Afghānī and Renan has been distorted by those who have not read Afghānī's response to Renan and assume that since Renan had called Islam hostile to science, Afghānī must have said that Islam was friendly to the scientific spirit. No part of Afghānī's actual argument can be construed in this sense, as a reading of the whole answer easily shows. Afghānī was just as categorical as Renan about the hostility of the Muslim religion to the scientific spirit; his quarrel with Renan rested on quite different points, points that were in large measure accepted by Renan in his rejoinder.

Renan in his lecture had stated that early Islam and the Arabs who professed it were hostile to the scientific and philosophic spirit, and that science and philosophy had only entered the Islamic world from non-Arab sources. The science and philosophy that are often called Arab are really Greek or Persian. Only one of the great Islamic philosophers was an Arab by birth, and to call their philosophy Arab, just because they wrote in Arabic, makes no more sense than to call medieval European philosophy Latin. Renan's argument, as Afghānī noted in his "Answer," has two major points. The first is a racist one: the Arabs by nature and temperament are hostile to science and philosophy, and these subjects were only advanced in the Islamic world by non-Arabs (in fact, though Renan does not here say this, mainly by people of Indo-European or "Aryan" origin). The second is that Islam is essentially hostile to science. This hostility was dominant when the Arabs ruled, and later under the Turks; it was temporarily and precariously overcome only during the short period when Greek and Persian influences were strong. Although it is true that Renan was hostile to all religious dogma and not only to Islamic dogma, it is not true, as has been claimed, that he was only saying of Islam what he would have said of any other religion. On this he is explicit. Islam, because it unites the spiritual and temporal realms and makes dogma rule in both, is "the heaviest chain that humanity has ever borne."⁶⁰

Afghānī's "Answer to Renan" was apparently written first in

⁵⁹ See pp. 91-93.

⁶⁰ Ernest Renan, *l'Islamisme et la science* (Paris, 1883), p. 17.

Arabic and then translated into French.⁶¹ We must assume the same of all his French articles, or at least that their style was corrected, since there are numerous witnesses to the fact that his written and spoken French was quite imperfect. There is no reason to think the French translation inaccurate, however, since Afghānī soon came to read French quite well, and never made any recorded complaint about the way the "Answer" was translated.

A remarkable point about Afghānī's answer is that in many ways it seems *more* in line with twentieth-century ideas than Renan's original argument. It rejects Renan's racism and puts in its place an evolutionary or developmental view of peoples. Renan, says Afghānī, states that the Muslim religion is opposed to science. But, Afghānī points out, no people in its earliest stages accepts science or philosophy. This "modern" view is then buttressed by arguments coming straight from the most skeptical of the philosophical thinkers of the Islamic world. All peoples in their first stages were incapable of being guided by pure reason, or of distinguishing good from evil so as to achieve their own welfare. There then arose prophets—here called "teachers" or "educators"—who, unable to make such primitive peoples follow the dictates of pure reason, found a means to civilize men and make them obedient to authority by attributing their own ideas to a supreme God:

And, since humanity, at its origin, did not know the causes of events that passed under its eyes and the secret of things, it was perforce led to follow the advice of its teachers and the orders they gave. This obedience was imposed in the name of the supreme Being to whom the educators attributed all events, without permitting men to discuss its utility or its disadvantages. This is no doubt for men one of the heaviest and most humiliating yokes, as I recognize; but one cannot deny that it is by this religious education, whether it be Muslim, Christian, or pagan, that all nations have emerged from barbarism and marched toward a more advanced civilization.⁶²

⁶¹ Kedourie, *op. cit.*, p. 41, citing the *Journal des Débats*' statement that it was presenting a translation of Afghānī's words.

⁶² "Réponse de Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani à Renan," in Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, *Réfutation des matérialistes*, trans. A. M. Goichon (Paris, 1942), pp. 176-177.

Continuing the evolutionary argument, Afghānī goes on to recognize the great superiority of the modern Western intellectual climate, but attributes it to the fact that Christianity had an evolutionary head start on Islam:

All religions are intolerant, each one in its way. The Christian religion, I mean the society that follows its inspirations and its teachings and is formed in its image, has emerged from the first period to which I have just alluded; thenceforth free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, whereas Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion. Realizing, however, that the Christian religion preceded the Muslim religion in the world by many centuries, I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilization after the manner of Western society. . . . I plead here with M. Renan not the cause of the Muslim religion, but that of several hundreds of millions of men, who would thus be condemned to live in barbarism and ignorance.

In truth, the Muslim religion has tried to stifle science and stop its progress.

Christianity, Afghānī notes, has done the same, and the Catholic church still tries to do so. On the justness of Renan's view of the believing Muslim as a slave to dogma Afghānī has no quarrel—if anything he expresses himself in even stronger terms:

A true believer must, in fact, turn from the path of studies that have for their object scientific truth. . . . Yoked, like an ox to the plow, to the dogma whose slave he is, he must walk eternally in the furrow that has been traced for him in advance by the interpreters of the law. Convinced, besides, that his religion contains in itself all morality and all sciences, he attaches himself resolutely to it and makes no effort to go beyond. . . . What would be the benefit of seeking truth when he believes he possesses it all? . . . Wherefore he despises science.⁶³

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

Afghānī then notes, very briefly, that Muslims, at one time, had had a taste for science and philosophy.

On Renan's second point, the innate hostility of the Arabs to science and philosophy, it would seem to most readers today that Afghānī gets the better of the argument. He notes, quite justly, that the Arabs assimilated with amazing rapidity the Greek and Persian sciences that had been developed over several centuries, and that under Arab rule science and philosophy continued to develop and were later passed to the Christian West. While granting that people who spoke and wrote another language, like the Persians, should not be called Arabs, Afghānī notes that to deny the name Arab to those whose first spoken and written language was Arabic, and to identify them instead with remote ancestors, would be contrary to all usual or sensible practice. Afghānī also notes that many of the Hellenized, philosophically minded peoples conquered by the Arabs were Semites and hence related to the Arabs even before they became Arabized.

If Afghānī rejects the racist side of Renan's argument, and brings in an evolutionary argument, he is, nonetheless, at least as severe as Renan on the hostility of the Islamic religion to science and reason. In conclusion, Afghānī states:

It is permissible, however, to ask oneself why Arab civilization, after having thrown such a live light on the world, suddenly became extinguished; why this torch has not been relit since; and why the Arab world still remains buried in profound darkness.

Here the responsibility of the Muslim religion appears complete. It is clear that wherever it became established, this religion tried to stifle the sciences and it was marvelously served in its designs by despotism.

Al-Siuti tells that the Caliph al-Hadi put to death in Baghdad 5,000 philosophers in order to destroy sciences in the Muslim countries down to their roots. Admitting that this historian exaggerated the number of victims, it remains nonetheless established that this persecution took place, and it is a bloody stain for the history of a religion as it is for the history of a people. I could find in the past of the Christian religion analogous facts. Religions, by whatever names they are called, all resemble each other. No agreement and

no reconciliation are possible between these religions and philosophy. Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part. How could one therefore hope that they would agree with each other? . . . Whenever religion will have the upper hand, it will eliminate philosophy; and the contrary happens when it is philosophy that reigns as sovereign mistress. As long as humanity exists, the struggle will not cease between dogma and free investigation, between religion and philosophy; a desperate struggle in which, I fear, the triumph will not be for free thought, because the masses dislike reason, and its teachings are only understood by some intelligences of the elite, and because, also, science, however beautiful it is, does not completely satisfy humanity, which thirsts for the ideal and which likes to exist in dark and distant regions that the philosophers and scholars can neither perceive nor explore.⁶⁴

This article is one of the most striking of the many proofs that Afghānī was far from being the orthodox believer he claimed to be before Muslim audiences. The "Answer" also contains within itself the explanation of why Afghānī chose to put on this orthodox religious guise. The masses are moved only by religious arguments, while the more truthful rational and scientific arguments can appeal only to a small elite (and hence not be politically efficacious). Reflecting the views of the traditional Islamic philosophers, Afghānī presents religion as useful to keep the masses moral and obedient.

Adumbrated in the "Answer" is Afghānī's knowledge of the fate of the medieval Islamic philosophers. Even though they were willing to grant the utility of orthodoxy for the masses, they were not permitted to pursue truth, but were attacked by rulers, theologians, and the orthodox. Afghānī, who even exaggerates the persecution suffered by Muslim philosophers, is pessimistic about the ultimate triumph of pure freedom of investigation. It is persecuted by those who place faith above reason and by their temporal allies; it is understood only by the elite, while the masses will always want to speak of otherworldly things that are inaccessible to reason. It can be hoped, however, that the Muslim religion may eventually be reformed as was Christianity to lessen the stifling power of anti-

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-185.

scientific dogma, while the masses presumably will be left with enough religious faith and injunctions to satisfy their cravings and keep them in line.

This is not to say that Afghānī was entirely consistent. Even within the "Answer" there is some variation between the optimism of the reformer or revolutionary in the early passages, and the pessimism at the end of the article, which voices the traditional philosophers' view of the very restricted circle who can understand truth and science. But contradictory tendencies within one complex individual, thrust from the medieval into the modern period and facing problems that were probably insoluble in his own time, are not to be wondered at, and can themselves be explained. If Afghānī was pessimistic about the possibility of appealing to the masses in the name of anything except religion, and, like the philosophers, thought that rational demonstrative argument could be understood only by the "few," this helps explain why he made what were essentially political appeals in the name of religion. The "Refutation" stresses the worldly achievements of Islam, while the "Answer" stresses another aspect—its stifling dogmatic rigidity. In a sense, it might be said, Afghānī is in each instance giving a one-sided presentation that is, however, accurate within limits. It seems quite true that the religious-ideological impetus given by early Islam was an important factor in the early flowering of its civilization, but that, on the other hand, the rigidification of dogma helped bring about decline and continuing stagnation.

Until very recently nearly all discussions of Afghānī have ignored, or treated as a temporary lapse, this "Answer to Renan," and have sought Afghānī's true beliefs in his writings aimed at a broad Muslim public or in 'Abduh's apologetic account. It is quite true that Afghānī's writings in defense of Islam have a much greater total bulk than have items like the "Answer to Renan." Yet, as seen in analyzing the "Refutation of the Materialists," even the writings defending Islam have very little content that can justly be called religious, and are designed rather to create political unity and solidarity. Besides this, it should have been proved sufficiently by now that for Afghānī, as for many philosophers and heretics in the Muslim world, it was quite proper to speak and write something other than one's true beliefs if this would lead to a desirable goal. It is in the spoken words to his closest followers and disciples and in writings directed to an elite audience that the true beliefs of such a man are to be sought. The "Answer to Renan" was directed to precisely such an

elite Western audience, and it is significant that no translation appears to have been published in an Eastern language, and that it is nearly always misrepresented in Eastern languages as a defense of Islam. If the "Answer to Renan" does not represent Afghānī's true beliefs, it is almost impossible to imagine why he should have opened himself up in print to possible further attack from orthodox Muslims. Afghānī could quite easily have limited himself to noting the glory of Muslim Arab scientific achievement in the past and to maintaining that true Islam had been distorted in more recent centuries, but he chose rather to attack the Muslim religion in strong terms.

Aside from its explicit content, there are other circumstances surrounding Afghānī's "Answer to Renan" which indicate Afghānī's estrangement from Islamic orthodoxy. For instance, Renan's rejoinder to Afghānī, published in the *Journal des Débats* on May 19, 1883, indicates that Afghānī impressed this eminent rationalist and freethinker as a man of his own stripe. Renan granted the improvement that Afghānī had made on his argument by ridding it of the implication that Islam was somehow an even worse religion than Christianity. Muslim authors are accustomed to quoting from this rejoinder only a few sentences of general praise of Afghānī; but it is far more instructive to quote Renan's remarks almost in their entirety. (The first line is from the publication of Renan's *Islam and Science* in book form.)

A remarkably intelligent Afghan Sheikh having presented observations on the above lecture, I answered the next day, in the same journal, as follows:

We read yesterday with the interest they merited the very judicious reflections that my last lecture at the Sorbonne suggested to Sheikh Jemmal-Eddin. There is nothing more instructive than studying the ideas of an enlightened Asiatic in their original and sincere form. It is by listening to the most diverse voices, coming from the four corners of the globe, in favor of rationalism, that one becomes convinced that if religions divide men, Reason brings them together; and that there is only one Reason.

Renan says he met Afghānī about two months previously, which would have been in March, 1883, shortly after his arrival in Paris, through a collaborator (on the *Journal des Débats*), M. Ghanim. He goes on:

Few people have produced on me a more vivid impression. It is in large measure the conversation I had with him that decided me to choose as a subject for my lecture at the Sorbonne the relations between the scientific spirit and Islam. Sheikh Jemmal-Eddin is an Afghan *entirely divorced from the prejudices of Islam*; he belongs to those energetic races of Iran, near India, where the Aryan spirit lives still so energetically under the superficial layer of official Islam. He is the best proof of that great axiom we have often proclaimed, namely, that religions are worth the same as the races that profess them. The liberty of his thought, his noble and loyal character, made me believe while I was talking with him, that I had before me, restored to life, one of my old acquaintances—Avicenna, Averroes, or another of those great infidels who represented for five centuries the tradition of the human mind. For me there was an especially vivid contrast when I compared this striking apparition with the spectacle presented by the Muslim countries this side of Persia—countries in which scientific and philosophic curiosity is so rare. Sheikh Jemmal-Eddin is the best case of ethnic protest against religious conquest that one could cite. . . .

In the learned article of the Sheikh I see only one point on which we are really in disagreement. . . . Everything written in Latin is not the glory of Rome; everything written in Greek is not Hellenic; everything written in Arabic is not an Arab product; everything done in a Christian country is not the effect of Christianity; everything done in a Muslim country is not a fruit of Islam. . . . These sorts of distinctions are necessary if one does not wish history to be a tissue of approximations and misunderstandings. . . .

One point on which I may have appeared unjust to the Sheikh is that I did not develop enough the idea that all revealed religions manifest themselves as hostile to positive science, and that Christianity in this respect is not superior to Islam. This is beyond doubt. Galileo was no better treated by Catholicism than Averroes by Islam.

Renan then says his opinions on this point are well known, and that he has often stated that the

human mind must be freed of all supernatural belief if it wishes to work on its essential work, which is the construction of positive science. This does not imply violent destruction nor brusque rupture. The Christian does not have to abandon Christianity nor the Muslim Islam. The enlightened parties of Christianity and Islam should arrive at that state of benevolent indifference where religious beliefs become inoffensive. This has happened in about half of the Christian countries, let us hope it will happen in Islam. Naturally on that day the Sheikh and I will agree in applauding. . . . There will be distinguished individuals (though there will be few as distinguished as Sheikh Jemmal-Eddin) who will separate themselves from Islam, as we separate ourselves from Catholicism. Certain countries, with time, will more or less break with the religion of the Koran; but I doubt that the movement of renaissance will be made with the support of official Islam.

Finally, Renan notes quite justly that Afghānī has provided additional arguments in favor of his own basic points:

Sheikh Jemmal-Eddin seems to me to have brought considerable arguments for my two fundamental theses: During the first half of its existence Islam did not stop the scientific movement from existing in Muslim lands; in the second half it stifled in its breast the scientific movement, and that to its grief.⁶⁵

Equally significant in proving that Afghānī's "Answer to Renan" represented his esoteric doctrine, as voiced to elite audiences, is a letter from 'Abduh in Beirut to Afghānī, written a month after Afghānī's "Answer," on June 14, 1883. It is photographed in the Afshār-Mahdavi *Documents*, and has been summarized and partially translated by Elie Kedourie, who writes:

It is of some interest to follow the fortunes in the East of the exchange between Renan and Afghani. A letter from 'Abduh in Beirut to Afghani in Paris dated 8 Sha'ban 1300

⁶⁵ Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres complètes*, I (Paris, 1947), 960-965.

and reproduced in the *Documents* is of extreme importance in shedding light not only on this matter but on the nature of Afghani's esoteric teaching. The letter begins with those expressions of idolatry of which I have given . . . a characteristic specimen. Then 'Abduh goes on to say that news had reached him of Afghani's answer to Renan in the *Journal des Débats*; he had thought that a translation would serve to edify the believers and had asked a man of religion (*ba'd al-diniyyin*) to be ready to undertake it on receipt of the French text. But immediately afterwards, 'Abduh writes, he received two numbers of the *Journal* (presumably of 18 and 19 May 1883, containing Afghani's commentary and Renan's observations), together with a letter from Afghani. He goes on:

"We then praised God Almighty that the numbers of the *Débats* had not been available before the receipt of your letter. We acquainted ourselves with these two numbers. . . . We then dissuaded our first friend from making the translation, alleging that [the] Arabic text was going to be sent, that it would be published then, and that therefore there was no need for a translation. Thus misfortune was averted (*fa'ndafa'a al-makruh*), God be praised."

Since Afghani's commentary was a powerful attack on traditional Islam, it is not surprising that neither Afghani nor 'Abduh desired its dissemination in Islamic countries. But the sentences which immediately follow are even more significant:

"We regulate our conduct," writes 'Abduh, "according to your sound rule: We do not cut the head of religion except with the sword of religion (*nahnu al-an 'ala sunnatika al-qawima la naqta'** *ra's al-din illa bi-saif al-din*). Therefore, if you were to see us now, you would see ascetics and worshippers [of God] kneeling and genuflecting, never disobeying what God commands and doing all that they are ordered to do. . . ."⁶⁶

It may be significant, as one more of the Middle Eastern attempts

⁶⁶ Kedourie, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45. *An alternate reading is *la taqta'*.

to distort Afghānī's "Answer to Renan," of which Kedourie gives some examples, that the Persian summary of this letter in the *Documents* distorts and obfuscates its meaning.⁶⁷

More important is what the letter shows 'Abduh knew of Afghānī. He nowhere indicates doubt that the French text correctly gives Afghānī's thought, or hope that the sending of Afghānī's original Arabic text would change the sense of the article. He also speaks explicitly of Afghānī's followers keeping to his "sound" external religious practices in order to "cut off the head of religion." In view of this rule, there is little wonder that 'Abduh was so upset by Salīm al-Anḥūrī's biography of Afghānī, written shortly after this incident. The biography pointed to Afghānī's rationalist and evolutionary view of religion, which 'Anḥūrī had heard of in and from Egypt and which he describes in terms very similar to those used by Afghānī in the "Answer to Renan."⁶⁸ Just as 'Abduh hastened in 1883 to stop a translation that would have damaged Afghānī's religious reputation, so he hastened in 1885 to talk 'Anḥūrī into retracting his account, and to publish his own highly apologetic biography, which stressed Afghānī's devotion to the Muslim religion.⁶⁹

It should not be forgotten, of course, that the "Answer" was directed toward, and calculated to impress, a European audience, and that this explains some of its emphases. It appears, however, to have been a document more sincerely expressive of Afghānī's beliefs than the "Refutation," not only because it is directed at some of the "elite" rather than at the "people of rhetoric," but because Afghānī might have taken various different lines of argument in Europe, and by putting this one in print was opening himself to possible further attack from orthodox Muslims.

⁶⁷ *Documents*, pp. 66-67, letter no. 220. The Arabic original is in *ibid.*, photos 138-140. Most of the other Arabic letters dealt with by the volume's Persian translator, and translated in their entirety, are without similar distortion.

⁶⁸ 'Anḥūrī's account is translated in chap. i, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁹ Kedourie, *op. cit.*, p. 17. 'Anḥūrī's account of the encounter with 'Abduh is in Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-ustādh al-imām* (Cairo, 1931), I, 50. In his original biography, *ibid.*, p. 48, 'Anḥūrī noted the great change in Afghānī's religious image which occurred in the early 1880's, and to which I have called attention above. Regarding his first contact with Afghānī after Egypt, through *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, 'Anḥūrī says he "realized from its tendencies that he [Afghānī] had come back to adherence to the straight faith and had taken a new course that would gain for him the favor and acceptance of the Muslim world."

Conclusion

IT is striking that in Afghānī we find, in embryo at least, various ideological arguments that both in the Middle East and in the rest of Asia are usually associated with different points of view and stages of national development. There is aggressive cultural defensiveness: The traditional center of our culture, Islam, is better than the traditional Western center, Christianity, and the West became great only by borrowing from our culture. There is the nationalist pride (of the Arabs in the "Answer" but of Persians and Indians elsewhere): The *Arabs* developed science and philosophy, which the West had to borrow, while the religious dogmatism of Islam is here seen more as an excrescence of theologians and despots than an expression of the Arab essence. The "Answer" has an even more "modern" way of expressing the equivalence of East and West, namely, evolution: Christianity took x centuries to develop from dogma to free inquiry and science, and the Muslims could not be expected to do it in centuries less time. This final argument might impress Westerners but was hardly suitable for rallying the religious masses to combat the West. The conflict between a recognition of the urgent need to adopt Western techniques and the equal need to combat dumb admiration of the West and feelings of inferiority accounts for many of Afghānī's contradictions.

In none of the above am I trying to say that Afghānī had no religion. It appears likely that he was some kind of "Islamic deist," a believer in a Creator who set the world in motion and made it operate according to natural law. In this he would be following many of the Islamic philosophers, who believed in natural law and in God as the First Cause or Unmoved Mover. Afghānī may also have believed that a purified Islam would be a more rational religion than Christianity, since Islam was free of the irrational elements of Christianity. These irrational elements, named in Afghānī's "Commentary on the Commentator," include such dogmas as incarnation, the Trinity, and transubstantiation. Finally, he may have believed, as he said, that

the Koran's hidden meaning is infinite, and hence encompasses all advances in human knowledge.

To the reconstruction and dissemination of a rationalized Islam, however, Afghānī devoted little time or effort. His main role was rather to use Islam as an ideology—to strengthen its position as a focus of identity and solidarity against the attacks of the Christian West, and to use it as a rallying point for the repulsion of Western conquerors. To young men with a traditional religious education he also showed a way to adopt political and scientific ideas from the West without abandoning their religious identification or pride in their own traditions. Whatever later historians may conclude about his exact influence, his position as a precursor and early teacher of anti-imperialism, nationalism, solidarity against the West, and self-strengthening reform—all of which causes have grown and flourished since his lifetime—seems secure.

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